

Issues in Language Studies

Volume 14 Number 2 (2025)

Faculty of Education, Language, and Communication
Universiti Malaysia Sarawak
94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak.
www.ils.unimas.my

e-ISSN 2180-2726

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e-ISSN 2180-2726

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Page 1: Title, author's name and affiliation, postal and e-mail address of each author. Please indicate corresponding author with an asterisk.

Page 2: Title, abstract not exceeding 200 words, 4-6 keywords. Articles not written in English should be accompanied by a title, abstract and keywords in English.

Page 3 onwards: Text in single-spacing and margins – top and bottom, left and right – should be 1.5 inches wide, Calibri 11 point.

Do not indent the first paragraph of each section. Indent the first line of subsequent paragraphs by ½ inch.

Use the five-level headings in APA style:

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Quotations. Use double quotation marks to enclose quotations of fewer than 40 words. Within this quotation, use single quotation marks to enclose quoted material. Long quotations should be placed in a block which is indented ½ inch from the left margin.

Follow APA style for table title and heading (placed above the table) and figure title and caption (placed above the figure). Examples:

Table 1

Types of Communication Strategies Used Across Age Groups

Figure 1

Frequency of Communication Strategy Used Across Age Groups

Do not use footnotes. If notes are unavoidable, use a numeral in superscript and list notes at the end of the article, before the References.

Follow APA style (7th ed.) for citation and referencing. For Malay names, use the father's name. Alternatively, you can follow the guidelines given at www.ils.unimas.my

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ALIGNMENT OF OUTCOME-BASED NURSING CURRICULUM WITH THE LANGUAGE NEEDS IN THE HEALTH SECTOR IN INDONESIA

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Manuscript received 30 March 2025
Manuscript accepted 24 November 202
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https://doi.org/10.33736/ils.9393.2025

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the alignment of Outcome-Based English for Nursing curriculum with the language needs of healthcare settings in Indonesia. Despite national curriculum reforms and the increasing global demand for nursing professionals, there remains a gap in research examining whether current curricula adequately prepare students for English mediated clinical communication. This qualitative case study employed document analysis and semi-structured interviews with seven nursing alumni and three nurse managers. Guided by Tyler's (1949) curriculum rationale and Brown's (2016) needs analysis framework, the study explored curriculum structure, stakeholder expectations, and actual communicative needs in healthcare sector. Results revealed that while the curriculum supported foundational communication skills and aligned with national nursing competencies, it needed improvement in terms of materials authenticity, international relevance, and performance-based assessment. Key gaps included insufficient integration of discipline-specific vocabulary, limited instructional time, underutilisation of task-based learning, and minimal stakeholder involvement in course design. Speaking emerged as the most essential skill, yet participants emphasised inadequate practice and the need for structured, context-rich language support. The findings underscore the need for curriculum reform that embeds authentic clinical tasks, stakeholder-

driven content, and performance-based assessment. This study offers practical recommendations for enhancing English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in nursing education, particularly in multilingual and export-oriented healthcare contexts.

Keywords: nursing curriculum alignment; healthcare communication; English for Specific Purposes; outcome-based education; professional language skills; Indonesia

Introduction

Indonesia has adopted Outcome Based Education (OBE) in nursing to strengthen higher education quality and relevance. The OBE framework emphasises clear learning outcomes integrating knowledge, skills, and professional attitudes (D'Souza et al., 2021). The Bachelor of Nursing and Professional Nursing Education programmes define five competencies: care provider, communicator, educator, manager, and researcher (Faculty of Nursing and Health Sciences, 2022). The communicator role underscores the importance of English, as nurses mediate between doctors and patients (Kwame & Petrucka, 2021), interpret medical records, access international research, and deliver health education (Havery, 2024; Henry, 2023). Aligning English education with these competencies supports clinical and communicative development in global healthcare contexts (Lewis et al., 2022). Accordingly, this study analyses the English language curriculum within the nursing programme.

Despite the central role of the OBE framework in nursing curricula, limited research has examined its alignment with the language demands of Indonesian healthcare. These demands call for a competency based English curriculum that prioritises clinical communication and international standards. While prior studies recommend integrating General English and workplace communication into English for Nursing courses (Fadliah & Sugirin, 2019; Nashir et al., 2022; Nurakhir & Palupi, 2018; Saragih, 2014), most focus on foundational programmes and offer limited insight into curriculum wide integration (Sailsman, 2021; Schimböck et al., 2024). Consequently, non-native English speaking nurses face difficulties with medical terminology, patient interaction, and interdisciplinary collaboration (Tweedie & Johnson, 2022), often without structured English support (Rajasa, 2018). Evidence also links communication competence to care quality, including a Turkish study (Kirca & Bademli, 2019) reporting a moderate correlation ($r = .50$, $p < .01$) and a scoping review identifying language barriers as persistent risks to safe care (Gerchow et al., 2021). These findings highlight the need for targeted English instruction that integrates general and discipline specific competencies for global practice.

This study investigated the extent to which the OBE based English for nursing curriculum in Indonesia aligns with the English language needs of nursing students and healthcare employers. The research questions were:

1. How is English language instruction currently embedded within the OBE nursing curriculum in Indonesia?
2. What specific English language needs for nurses in Indonesian healthcare settings?

3. To what extent do stakeholders perceive the current OBE based English for nursing curriculum as adequately preparing students for English-mediated communication in professional practice?

This study makes three main contributions. First, it uses a dual framework combining Tyler's (1949) curriculum theory and Brown's (2016) stakeholder-based needs analysis to evaluate curriculum alignment, with relevance for other ESP contexts. Second, by incorporating alumni and employer perspectives, it examines the curriculum-to-workplace transition and how well curricular goals address professional language needs. Third, in light of Indonesia's position as a nurse-exporting country, the findings offer insights for other Global South contexts and draw on examples of English integration from settings such as the Philippines (Oducado et al., 2020), the United Kingdom, and Australia (Xu, 2011) to inform English-mediated healthcare education.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on two theoretical frameworks to examine how an outcome-based English for Nursing curriculum aligns with workplace communication needs: Tyler's Rationale (1949) and Brown's (2016) Needs Analysis Framework. Tyler's (1949) model, with its focus on objectives, learning experiences, organisation, and evaluation, guided the document analysis of curricular content and structure through his four central questions on educational purposes, experiences, organisation, and attainment. Brown's (2016) framework provided a complementary lens on language needs by incorporating democratic (learner), discrepancy (current versus desired competence), analytic (requirements for success), and diagnostic (barriers to achievement) perspectives. It informed the design of interview protocols and analysis of stakeholder responses, which enables triangulation with the curriculum analysis.

Previous research on English for Nursing highlights the complex linguistic and cultural challenges facing non-native English-speaking students. Crawford and Candlin (2013) reported that EFL/EAL students struggle with fast-paced academic instruction and medical vocabulary, while Chien (2019) found that Taiwanese nursing students require strong academic reading skills, technical vocabulary, and grammatical accuracy. Similarly, Onovo (2019) documented difficulties among ESL nursing students in the United States with reading comprehension and oral interaction in clinical settings, with implications for patient care and workplace integration. Cultural factors also shape learning. Choi (2021) showed that Korean students preferred bilingual instruction and localised content, and Lu (2018) described Taiwanese nurses' coping strategies for pronunciation, vocabulary, and communication challenges, indicating misalignment in ESP coursework. In Australia, nursing programmes require students to demonstrate proficiency in English, Mathematics, and Science (Ralph et al., 2019). Evidence from international studies further reinforces the importance of language competence: academic English fluency has been shown to support students' academic success (Salamonson et al., 2021), whereas low English proficiency has been linked to ongoing difficulties in writing, listening, and patient communication (Sudusinghe & Gamage, 2023).

In Indonesia, several studies have indicated the primacy of speaking for effective nursing practice (Fadliah & Sugirin, 2019; Nashir et al., 2022; Nurakhir & Palupi, 2018), with communication for patient education, collaboration, and empathy shown to be central to clinical performance (Susandi, 2023). However, persistent gaps have been reported in medical vocabulary, grammar, and authentic language exposure (Susandi & Krishnawati, 2016), and some authors argue that a General English foundation is needed before introducing nursing-specific content (Nurakhir & Palupi, 2018). Recent literature also conceptualises ESP needs analysis as a dynamic, context-sensitive process shaped by sociocultural and professional demands (Robinson, 1991; Widodo, 2017), while Saragih (2022) proposes integrating present, target, and strategy needs. More specifically, Wibowo (2021) highlighted learner priorities in speaking, vocabulary, and grammar, and Cahyadin (2023) recommended cooperative and task-based approaches such as role plays and group work, supporting a task-based, communicative curriculum grounded in learner needs and workplace authenticity.

Together, these theoretical models and empirical studies informed the design of the research instruments, including curriculum evaluation checklists and semi-structured interview guides. They also guided the analysis process by framing the evaluation of objectives, materials, tasks, and assessments, and by structuring stakeholder input into themes that reflect practical, professional language needs.

Methodology

A qualitative case study grounded in constructivist and interpretivist paradigms was conducted to analyse the alignment between the outcome-based English for a nursing curriculum and the communicative needs in Indonesian healthcare settings. This approach enabled in-depth exploration of curriculum documents and stakeholder experiences, combining textual analysis with thematic interpretation.

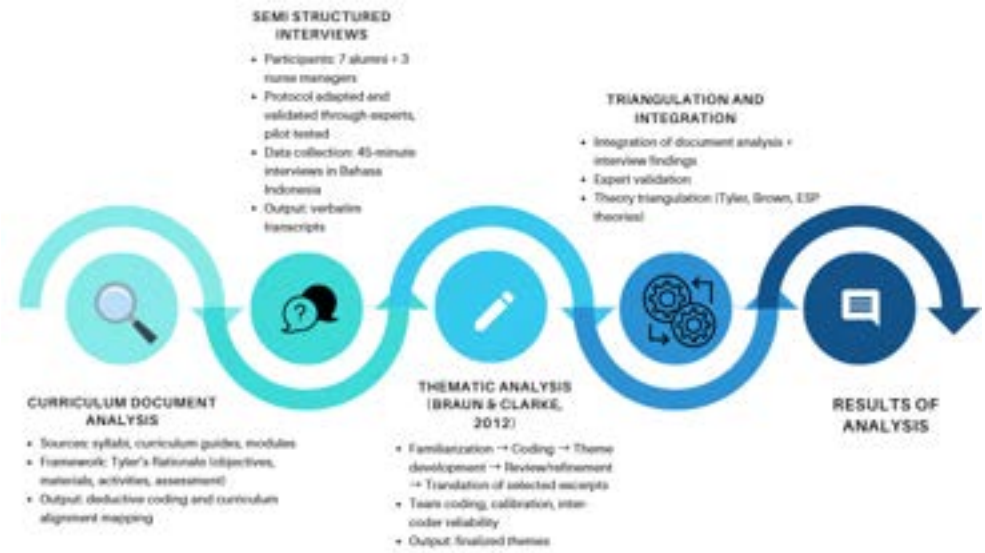
This study involved seven alumni and three nurse managers, consistent with qualitative case study designs that prioritise depth over sample size (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants were purposefully selected and data collection continued until thematic saturation. Alumni met three criteria: graduated between 2017 and 2019, employed in healthcare, and willing to join a 45-minute Zoom interview, four to six years of experience, and familiarity with the curriculum.

Recruitment occurred through Facebook alumni groups using snowball sampling. To reduce bias, eligibility was screened via a bilingual Google Form and job roles were confirmed during interviews. Nurse managers were included to provide perspectives on English use in clinical settings. All participants gave informed consent, pseudonyms were assigned, and the study was conducted in the Nursing Department of a private Indonesian university with a strong nursing programme and English provision, whose alumni work in domestic and international healthcare settings.

Data were collected through the analysis of English for nursing curriculum and semi-structured interviews. Figure 1 illustrates how the data collection and analysis procedures undertaken in this study.

Figure 1

Overview of Data Collection and Analysis Procedures



Curriculum materials, activities, and assessments were reviewed using documents such as syllabi, curriculum guides, and modules. The review was conducted by the researchers with input from an ESP instructor and a nursing lecturer to ensure validity. Analysis was guided by Tyler's (1949) Rationale and Brown's (2016) needs analysis model to examine curriculum structure and alignment with stakeholder needs. Documents were deductively coded and assessed for alignment with real world language demands. A draft summary was reviewed by ESP and nursing education experts, and findings were triangulated with interview data from alumni and nurse managers.

Semi structured interviews were conducted to evaluate curriculum relevance and effectiveness. Interview protocols were adapted from Alfehaid (2011) and Vu Thi (2022), validated through expert consultation, and pilot tested. Interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, lasted about 45 minutes, and were held online with alumni and in person with nurse managers. Alumni discussed workplace English needs and curriculum alignment, while nurse managers addressed clinical English use and future demands. Data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2012, 2020) reflexive thematic analysis (see Appendix 1), following the six-phase process and guided by their critical questions. Adopting a constructionist and interpretivist stance (Byrne, 2021), analysis involved repeated coding, memo writing, and team discussion. Coding was conducted in Indonesian and translated into English. Four researchers coded independently, followed by calibration and expert review to enhance credibility. A sample of interview analysis is shown in Appendix 2.

Results and Discussion

The document and needs analysis revealed both alignment and misalignment

between the English for Nursing curriculum and the communicative demands of clinical practice, based on triangulated interpretation using Tyler's (1949) Rationale and Brown's (2016) Needs Analysis Framework. Although the curriculum followed the Outcome Based Education framework and supported national graduate profiles, particularly the communicator role, its objectives remained narrowly contextual and did not address global or interdisciplinary communication demands.

Alignment of the Objective With National Standards but not With Global Readiness

The English for Nursing curriculum was aligned with Indonesia's Outcome Based Education framework by supporting the communicator role in national nursing graduate profiles (Faculty of Nursing and Health Sciences, 2022). This role encompasses documentation, instruction, empathic patient interaction, and interdisciplinary collaboration. In Tyler's (1949) terms, this indicates alignment with the first fundamental question on educational objectives. Course documentation stated that English for Nursing supports the communicator role by focusing on communication and documentation skills for clinical and academic contexts, which is consistent with institutional aims. Table 1 summarises the nursing graduate profiles under the OBE curriculum framework.

Table 1

Graduate Profiles of Nursing Undergraduate Programme

Graduate profile	
Care provider	Provide comprehensive nursing care in clinical, family, and community settings to meet the basic needs of individuals, families, groups, and communities which are comprehensively founded on Islamic values and evidence.
Communicator	Use a comprehensive nursing strategy based on Islamic values to effectively communicate with clients and collaborate with teams for optimal health outcomes.
Educator	Help patients attain independence in self-care, conduct education and promotion in the client system using a holistic nursing strategy based on Islamic values.
Manager and leader	Analyse comprehensive care with a focus on health and adherence to Islamic principles to achieve client goals.
Researcher	Use a scientific, comprehensive approach to nursing that aligns with Islamic belief resolving health problems

Source*:* Curriculum guide of outcome-based learning education for Bachelor of Nursing and professional nursing education programmes (Faculty of Nursing and Health Sciences, 2022).

Brown's (2016) discrepancy and democratic perspectives stress that objectives should reflect both institutional goals and stakeholder needs. The needs analysis showed that while the curriculum addressed basic communication, it lacked

orientation toward international nursing demands such as intercultural communication, global clinical terminology, and engagement with English language research. As one alumnus noted, "Communication is the most essential skill for a nurse. We need to collaborate with colleagues, doctors, and patients' families" (NN), consistent with Lewis et al. (2022) and Kwame and Petrucka (2021). This limited international focus also restricted access to research, professional mobility, and patient safety standards (Gerchow et al., 2021; Henry, 2023). Although suitable for local contexts, the emphasis on general English was insufficient for Indonesia's global nurse workforce, especially compared with the Philippines (Oducado et al., 2020). Table 2 shows that the course integrates the four language skills and lexicogrammar into nursing specific contexts.

Table 2

Course Profile of English for Nursing

Course description	Learning outcomes
This course discusses the integration of four basic English language skills, namely, speaking, listening, reading, and writing including aspects of grammar and vocabulary into the scope of nursing care both in clinical attachment/nursing community contexts and in classroom/laboratory settings.	1. Read and explain medical and/or healthcare team instructions related to medical records of patient written English. 2. Identify commands/instructions in an English conversation in class or a simulated health care setting 3. Write/document reports of nursing care activities provided to patients. 4. Communicate in English actively in classroom setting and in simulated health services contexts.

Source*:* Curriculum guide of outcome-based learning education for Bachelor of Nursing and professional nursing education programmes (Faculty of Nursing and Health Sciences, 2022).

Based on the course profile, The English for Nursing course aimed to enhance students' English proficiency in clinical contexts by integrating grammar and vocabulary with practical skills. Key outcomes included interpreting medical instructions, understanding English commands, writing care reports, and engaging in spoken communication. These objectives aligned with the nursing curriculum's emphasis on the communicator role between patients and healthcare professionals.

Insufficient Authenticity and Transferability of Learning Materials

The content of the English for Nursing course centred on themes such as "Our Body," "Nursing Instruments and Supplies" and "Vital Signs," which reflected clinical relevance for entry-level nursing communication. Tyler's (1949) principle of selecting experiences that contribute directly to achieving objectives was partially fulfilled. However, in both document analysis and needs analysis, it was noted that these

materials needed exposure to internationally accepted terminology, authentic genres, and evidence-based content. The absence of those elements hindered learners' ability to function in multilingual clinical settings or engage with international guidelines, research, and patient education tools. Table 3 provides the content of syllabus of English for nursing as mentioned in this discussion.

Table 3
Syllabus of Nursing English

Learning materials	Learning activities	Learning approach	Evaluation
1. Our Body 2. Nursing Instruments and Supply 3. The Hospital Team 4. In and around the Hospital 5. Hospital Admission 6. Dimensions of Symptom 7. Pain 8. Vital Sign 9. Medication	1. Role play 2. Speaking practice 3. Grammar exercise 4. Reading comprehension 5. Writing task	1. Task based language teaching 2. Structured learning 3. Independent learning	1. Formative: role play, writing exercise, grammar exercise 2. Summative : quiz, midterm and final exams

Source*:* Curriculum guide of outcome-based learning education for Bachelor of Nursing and professional nursing education programmes (Faculty of Nursing and Health Sciences, 2022).

On the other hand, Advanced English course offers proficiency in business communication and medical contexts, covering presentations, business English, advanced nursing topics, and TOEFL preparation. Table 4 illustrates syllabus of the course.

Table 4
Syllabus of Advanced English

Learning materials	Learning activities	Learning approach	Evaluation
1. Presentation techniques 2. English for business 3. Physical examination 4. Medical procedure 5. Diagnostic test 6. Nursing problem 7. Nursing intervention & order 8. Type of therapy	Role play, Simulation, Quiz	Task based language teaching	1. Formative: role play, writing exercise, grammar exercise 2. Summative: quiz, midterm

9. Nursing Implementation 10. Nursing Evaluation 11. TOEFL training	and final exams

Source*:* Curriculum guide of outcome-based learning education for Bachelor of Nursing and professional nursing education programmes (Faculty of Nursing and Health Sciences, 2022).

From Brown's (2016) analytic perspective, curriculum content should reflect workplace genres, lexis, and functions. Although the Nursing English and Advanced English syllabi included nursing terminology, alumni reported a gap between classroom content and workplace needs, as noted by one alumnus: "We want to be taught more about nursing vocabulary and more language practice in class" (RF). This lack of specificity weakens ESP authenticity, which requires materials to be derived from target discourse (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). Similar findings in Taiwan showed that limited exposure to authentic clinical content hindered communicative competence (Chien, 2019; Lu, 2018). This support concerns that general English underprepares non-native nurses (Sailsman, 2021; Tweedie & Johnson, 2022) and reinforces the need for ESP aligned with international documentation standards (Mitchell, 2018; Schimböck et al., 2024). In Indonesia, studies also emphasise early integration of speaking and documentation through professional genres (Fadliah & Sugirin, 2019; Nurakhir & Palupi, 2018).

Need More Actual Learning Activities Implementation

The learning activities in the syllabi, including task-based exercises, role plays, and independent study, reflected an initial attempt to apply communicative methodologies consistent with TBLT. From Tyler's (1949) perspective on organising experiences to meet objectives, these activities appeared logically sequenced. However, their pedagogical value was weakened by limited authenticity, particularly in Advanced English, where TOEFL preparation displaced clinically relevant communication tasks. Although TOEFL training supported general academic skills, it did not meet core nursing demands such as patient interaction, interdisciplinary collaboration, and documentation, creating a misalignment between curricular input and workplace output. From Brown's (2016) diagnostic view, which emphasises addressing learners' actual performance needs, this gap is problematic. As one stakeholder noted, "the learning materials fulfilled what I wanted, but the practice was lacking" (NN), echoing Onovo's (2019) finding that ESL nursing students struggle to transfer classroom language skills to clinical performance when content is abstract or decontextualised.

These findings suggest that, without grounding activities in realistic clinical scenarios, the curriculum will continue to fall short in preparing students for the communicative complexity of nursing practice. In response, Cahyadin (2023) advocates systematic use of TBLT adapted to nursing contexts, while Widodo (2017) calls for ESP curricula that address linguistic, sociocultural, and institutional demands. To foster functional communicative competence, nursing English curricula therefore need to move beyond decontextualised, general English tasks toward

experiential, performance-oriented pedagogy based on authentic healthcare communication.

Limited Performance-Based Assessment

Although the curriculum used varied assessments, including formative role plays and summative tests, the lack of standardised rubrics and performance-based measures created a serious gap. Tyler's (1949) fourth principle requires assessment to capture whether outcomes are achieved, yet the absence of structured tasks targeting clinical communication (such as patient interviews, handovers, or oral case reports) meant workplace competence was rarely evaluated. This echoes Brown's (2016) analytic and diagnostic views that ESP evaluation should be grounded in profession specific tasks, since generic or grammar focused tests can misrepresent communicative ability in high stakes settings like healthcare. One participant remarked, "Speaking and listening, as well as role play, need improvement; more role plays should be included in the classroom" (DH), signalling a mismatch between evaluation practices and practical needs. Without authentic, task-based assessment, students may graduate without essential communicative skills for safe nursing care.

Mitchell (2018) and Chetsadanuwat (2024) argue that simulation-based assessment and oral clinical reports better indicate readiness in ESP nursing contexts, while Biggs's (1996) constructive alignment framework reinforces that assessment should mirror intended learning outcomes and instruction, a coherence that appears weak in the current curriculum. Therefore, it can be inferred that reforming the curriculum's assessment approach is not merely a pedagogical improvement but a professional imperative. Embedding performance-based assessments that simulate the linguistic and pragmatic demands of real clinical interactions would enhance both the reliability of evaluations and the communicative preparedness of nursing graduates.

Inadequate Time Allocation

A recurring concern among participants was the insufficient time allocated for English instruction, with the English for Nursing course assigned only two credit units. From Tyler's (1949) perspective, this reflects misalignment between the complexity of communicative objectives and the limited instructional time. Brown's (2016) diagnostic view similarly frames this as a systemic constraint, as inadequate time restricts proficiency development regardless of content quality. One participant noted, "two credit units for the course was not enough to cover everything. I need basic speaking skill and listening" (DH). Research also confirms that professional language acquisition requires sustained and scaffolded exposure (Habók et al., 2019; Khoram & Zhang, 2019; Namaziandost et al., 2020).

In contrast, ESP programmes in Australia and the Philippines allocate multiple semesters to English for Nursing and integrate clinical communication across the curriculum (Oducado et al., 2020; Xu, 2011). The limited course duration in Indonesia therefore signals a structural weakness. These findings indicate that curriculum redesign should prioritise increased credit allocation and longitudinal integration, as

improvements in materials or pedagogy alone will have limited impact without sufficient instructional time.

Need for Enhanced Language Support Programmes

The exclusion of informal learning initiatives such as English Day, summer camps, and international internships from the formal English for Nursing curriculum represents a missed opportunity to build communicative competence through authentic, low stakes interaction. Although these activities were non-credited, stakeholders viewed them as highly beneficial. As one participant noted, "Summer Camp helped us a lot" (ER), while another recommended "more structured speaking practice, maybe like role plays and English Day" (DH). Under Brown's (2016) democratic and analytic approaches, such learner identified practices should inform curriculum revision, and from Tyler's (1949) perspective, out-of-class experiences can legitimately contribute to achieving stated objectives.

Yet the curriculum treated these opportunities as peripheral rather than integral, thereby undervaluing strategies that support real world communication in culturally diverse clinical settings. Research similarly advocates institutionalising informal learning: Choi and Brochu (2022) highlight the value of extracurricular immersion for intercultural competence and pragmatic fluency, and Widodo (2017) argues that socio pragmatic development in ESP is best fostered in context rich, real-world settings. These environments promote spontaneous dialogue, turn taking, and negotiation of meaning, all essential for healthcare communication. Consequently, such programmes should be repositioned as core components of ESP course design, formally embedded to strengthen fluency, confidence, and the capacity to manage complex interpersonal and intercultural encounters.

Stakeholder Involvement in Curriculum Design

The absence of alumni and nurse managers in curriculum development represents a critical gap in aligning the English for Nursing course with communicative needs in clinical practice. Brown's (2016) democratic model highlights stakeholder involvement as essential for relevance, shared ownership, and accountability in ESP design. Excluding those with field experience has contributed to a curriculum misaligned with the communicative demands faced by graduates in local and international settings. As one nurse manager stated, "To adapt more easily to local and international environments, nursing students must improve their communication skills" (EK). Consistent with this, Saragih (2022) and Susandi (2023) argue for participatory curriculum development in ESP for healthcare professionals, where communication directly affects patient care and safety. The findings suggest that, despite well-intentioned objectives, the current curriculum reinforces a top down, institution centred model with limited practical input, weakening its relevance and students' readiness for real-world practice.

Stakeholder exclusion also reduces responsiveness to emerging communicative needs in globalised, interdisciplinary healthcare contexts. Involving alumni and clinical educators would enable continuous feedback and integration of

up-to-date language practices in patient interaction, teamwork, and documentation. Their participation would enhance curricular legitimacy and alignment between academic instruction and professional expectations. In this sense, stakeholder engagement is a structural necessity rather than an optional addition. Embedding participatory processes would help the curriculum evolve with professional realities, narrow the academic–practice gap, and better prepare graduates with context-sensitive communication skills. Without such alignment, the programme risks producing linguistically underprepared nurses in a profession where communication functions as both a clinical tool and a safety mechanism.

Stakeholder-Driven Proposals for Curriculum Improvement

Proposals from alumni and nurse managers emphasising nursing specific vocabulary, interactive speaking tasks, small group learning, and audio-visual materials indicate a strong need to reposition the English for Nursing course toward a more participatory and professionally relevant design. These suggestions align with Brown's (2016) analytic perspective, which requires ESP instruction to be grounded in learners' real tasks and priorities. Participant comments such as "We want to be taught more about nursing vocabulary. The lecturers should have sufficient English proficiency" (RF) and "The learning should be more interactive … small group work would be more engaging" (NS) reflect a demand for dynamic, practice-oriented pedagogy beyond grammar translation. Cahyadin (2023) similarly advocates interactive, context based speaking activities, while Fleischer et al. (2009) support multimodal approaches to enhance retention and skill transfer. Collectively, these reforms signal a shift from language as content to language as practice within experiential, learner centred ESP pedagogy.

To consolidate these findings, Table 5 presents a triangulated framework of Tyler's and Brown's (2016) models, mapping curriculum alignment with workplace English needs across objectives, content, activities, and assessment. Stakeholder input informs identified gaps based on Brown's (2016) categories of necessities, lacks, and wants.

Table 5

Curriculum Alignment Map: English for Nursing Course

Tyler's Domain	Curriculum as Documented	Brown's (2016) Needs Analysis Results	Alignment of the Curriculum with the Needs of Health Sector
Objectives	Supports the *communicator* role based on OBE (e.g., documentation, basic communication).	Stakeholders wanted international communication skills, cultural competence, and ability to collaborate in multilingual teams.	Partial – National outcomes met, but international readiness missing.

Materials	Modules include "Our Body," "Vital Signs," "Instruments" – contextually relevant but general and locally oriented.	Stakeholders needed exposure to authentic clinical genres (e.g., care plans, shift reports, health promotion) and international standards.	Weak – Contextually relevant but not discipline-specific or internationally benchmarked.
Activities	Role plays and task-based learning were used. Advanced English included TOEFL prep, unrelated to nursing communication.	Stakeholders wanted immersive, simulation-based, student-centred activities tailored to clinical tasks.	Weak to Partial – Some methods appropriate, but key components missing (e.g., patient interviews, case presentations, intercultural simulation).
Assessment	Formative and summative assessments existed (e.g., quizzes, midterm, final). Needed rubrics and performance-based assessment	Stakeholders wanted structured evaluations of speaking, interaction, and documentation skills.	Weak – Evaluations were present but not aligned with course objectives or real-world communication.

Conclusion

This study examined the alignment between an Outcome-Based English for Nursing curriculum in Indonesia and the English language needs of clinical practice, using document analysis and stakeholder interviews guided by Tyler's (1949) and Brown's (2016) frameworks. While the curriculum supported national outcomes and foundational communication skills, it lacked international orientation, authentic speaking practice, performance-based assessment, and adequate instructional time. These misalignments suggested that the curriculum, though well-intentioned, underprepared students for the communicative demands of global and multilingual healthcare settings. Stakeholders emphasised the need for interactive, context-rich instruction and stronger integration of real-world tasks and informal language support. The study was limited to a single institution and sample size; future research should involve broader, multi-site investigations and explore longitudinal impacts of curricular reforms. To enhance its relevance and effectiveness, nursing English curriculum should embed authentic, stakeholder-informed content, expand instructional time, and adopt task-based, performance-focused approaches. Doing so is not only pedagogically sound—it is essential for producing linguistically competent nurses capable of delivering safe, effective care in today's global health landscape.

Ethics Approval

This study received ethical clearance from the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Nursing and Health Sciences, Universitas Muhammadiyah Banjarmasin, Indonesia, number 154/KE/III/2024. All participants provided informed consent, and confidentiality was ensured throughout the research process.

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Appendix 1

Braun and Clarke's (2020) Twenty Critical Questions for Evaluating TA Research Quality

1	Do the authors explain why they are using thematic analysis (TA), even if only briefly?	Method justification
2	Do the authors clearly specify and justify which type of TA they are using?	Method specification
3	Is the use and justification of the specific type of TA consistent with the research questions or aims?	Method–aims alignment
4	Is there a good *fit* between the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of the research and the specific type of TA (i.e. conceptual coherence)?	Theoretical coherence
5	Is there a good *fit* between the methods of data collection and the specific type of TA?	Methodological coherence
6	Is the specified type of TA consistently enacted throughout the paper?	Consistency in application
7	Is there evidence of problematic assumptions or practices around TA (e.g., treating TA as one homogenous method, combining incompatible approaches, confusing topics with themes, applying grounded theory procedures, assuming TA is atheoretical or purely descriptive)?	Awareness of methodological integrity
8	Are any supplementary procedures or methods justified and necessary, or could the same results have been achieved simply by using TA more effectively?	Justification for supplementary methods
9	Are the theoretical underpinnings of the use of TA clearly specified (e.g., ontological, epistemological assumptions, guiding frameworks), even when using TA inductively?	Theoretical transparency
10	Do the researchers strive to "own their perspectives"—their personal and social standpoint and positioning?	Researcher reflexivity
11	Are the analytic procedures clearly outlined and described in terms of what the authors actually did, rather than generic procedures?	Clarity of analytic process
12	Is there evidence of conceptual or procedural confusion (e.g., claiming reflexive TA but using codebooks, consensus coding, inter-rater	Conceptual clarity

	reliability, or treating themes as analytic inputs)?	
13	Do the authors demonstrate full and coherent understanding of their claimed approach to TA?	Methodological competence
14	Is it clear what and where the themes are in the report? Would the manuscript benefit from a list, table, or thematic map?	Clarity in theme presentation
15	Are the reported themes topic summaries rather than fully realised themes (patterns of shared meaning underpinned by a central organising concept)? If so, is this appropriate and justified?	Depth of analysis
16	Is non-thematic contextualising information presented as a theme, and if so, should it be treated as contextual information instead?	Structural coherence
17	In applied research, do the reported themes have potential to yield actionable outcomes?	Practical relevance
18	Are there conceptual clashes (e.g., claiming constructionism but invoking positivist coding reliability)?	Paradigmatic coherence
19	Is there evidence of weak or unconvincing analysis (too many/few themes, confusion between codes and themes, mismatch between data and claims, overlap between themes)?	Analytical rigour
20	Do the authors make problematic statements about the lack of generalisability of their results, or implicitly treat generalisability as statistical probabilistic generalisability?	Appropriate understanding of qualitative generalisability

Appendix 2

Sample of Interview Data Analysis Process

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
Theme (Aligned with Results & Discussion)	Sub-themes / Example Codes	Illustrative Data Extracts	Reflexive Notes (Analyst Interpretation & Development)
1. Alignment of Objectives with National Standards but Not with Global Readiness	• Curriculum supports "communicator" role • Limited focus on international communication • Emphasis on national values	"Communication is the most essential skill for a nurse. We need to collaborate with colleagues, doctors, and patients' families." (NN)	Early coding around *communication skills* evolved into a theme on *global readiness*. Researcher reflections noted tension between local curriculum goals and global professional demands, echoing Byrne (2021)'s recommendation to examine contextual positioning.
2. Insufficient Authenticity and Transferability of Learning Materials	• Locally oriented topics • Absence of international genres/terminology • Desire for authentic exposure	"We want to be taught more about nursing vocabulary and more language practice in class." (RF)	Semantic codes such as *nursing vocabulary* and *authentic content* were later interpreted as indicators of *contextual transferability*. Reflexive memos documented recognition of how authenticity shapes learner identity and perceived relevance.
3. Limited Implementation of Task-Based	• Role plays and simulations rarely applied	"The learning materials fulfilled what I	Initially framed as *lack of practice*, iterative analysis

and Experiential Learning Activities	• TOEFL focus over clinical tasks • Desire for interactive and practice-based learning	wanted, but the practice was lacking." (NN)	re-contextualised it as *pedagogical misalignment*. Following Braun & Clarke (2020), the analytic stance shifted from description to interpretation of underlying institutional priorities.
4. Lack of Performance-Based Assessment and Constructive Alignment	• Grammar-oriented testing • Few authentic performances task • Absence of standardized rubrics	"Speaking and listening, as well as role play, need improvement; more role plays should be included in the classroom." (DH)	Coding memos revealed that participants equated *assessment* with *learning*. Reflexive questioning prompted recognition that the issue lay not only in task type but in the *conceptualisation of competence* within the curriculum.
5. Inadequate Time Allocation for English Instruction	• Only two credit units • Limited exposure to English • Insufficient scaffolding	"Two credit units for the course was not enough to cover everything. I need basic speaking skill and listening." (DH)	Through recursive analysis, the sub-theme moved from *time issue* to *systemic constraint*. Analyst reflection noted how structural limitations perpetuate surface learning—a latent theme emerging across multiple interviews.
6. Need for Enhanced Language Support and Informal	• English Day, summer camps, internships • Student-initiated learning	"Summer Camp helped us a lot… We need more structured speaking	Reflexive engagement recognised these informal settings as *sites of agency*.

Learning Opportunities	• Authentic communicative exposure	practice, maybe like role plays and English Day." (ER)	Following Byrne (2021), analytic notes emphasized participants as co-constructors of pedagogical innovation, not passive recipients.
7. Limited Stakeholder Involvement in Curriculum Design	• Absence of alumni/manager input • Top-down institutional planning • Desire for participatory reform	"To adapt more easily to local and international environments, nursing students must improve their communication skills." (EK)	Researcher memoing identified this theme as the connective thread linking other gaps. Collaborative analysis reinterpreted *stakeholder feedback* as a latent call for democratisation of curriculum processes (Brown 2016 framework integrated).

EFL LEARNERS' PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE IMPACT OF INTERLOCUTOR FAMILIARITY ON THEIR ENGAGEMENT IN L2 TASK-BASED INTERACTION

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Manuscript received 13 March 2025
Manuscript accepted 24 Nov 2025
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https://doi.org/10.33736/ils.9284.2025

ABSTRACT

Many EFL educators have reported difficulties in keeping learners engaged in task-based interaction. A factor identified as a challenge for learner engagement is the level of familiarity with the interlocutor. This factor affects language learning and social interaction, whereby a deeper familiarity would typically promote effective communication, which may lead to an improvement in language competence. To determine the extent of familiarity that supports meaningful interaction, this study investigated Chinese EFL learners' perceptions. Specifically, levels of familiarity were examined through cognitive, affective, and social dimensions. The context of this study was an L2 task-based assignment. Data were collected through a questionnaire and semi-structured interview. The findings indicated that interlocutor familiarity level had significant effects on learner engagement, especially in terms of social and cognitive dimensions. The study provided pedagogical implications for teachers to focus on the beneficial impact of interlocutor familiarity level on both social and cognitive dimensions of learner engagement and foster a supportive and conducive classroom environment to enhance peer interaction during interactive tasks.

Keywords: learner engagement; interlocutor familiarity; task-based interaction;

language competence

Introduction

Task-based interaction is widely used in foreign language classrooms (Xu & Zhang, 2019) since it gives learners time to process input and output opportunities to negotiate meaning and possibly resolve communication breakdowns (Loewen & Sato, 2018). Previous research suggests that learners' high engagement in L2 task-based interactions is likely to result in greater learning outcomes (Christenson et al., 2012; Pastushenkov et al., 2021; Philp & Duchesne, 2016; Storch, 2008). In addition, researchers indicate that learner engagement can be enhanced through deliberate interventions and specific teacher behaviours (Shernoff, 2013). In light of these, researchers and L2 educators have endeavoured to promote learner engagement in classroom activities through different pedagogical strategies, including training learners to use different interactional strategies (Fuji et al., 2016; Sato & Lyster, 2012) and manipulating task features (Baralt et al., 2016; Lambert et al., 2017) and task implementation (Dao & McDonough, 2018; Qiu & Lo, 2017). However, learners' relationship has been found to act as a filter for other factors (Sato & Ballinger, 2016), and learners' ability to benefit from peer interaction is greatly affected by the group or pair dynamics (Rouhshad & Storch, 2016). As such, interlocutor familiarity, as one of the decisive factors of learners' relationship, has received increasing attention in second language (L2) research (Dao et al., 2023; Pastushenkov et al., 2021; Sampson & Yoshida, 2021). While these studies have been helpful, they have focused primarily on understanding interlocutor familiarity on learners' interaction or learners' engagement in task-based interaction from the perspective of teachers or researchers. These studies have not considered the notion of familiarity or engagement from students' perspectives.

As Kumaravadivelu (1991) states, "the more we know about the students' personal approaches and personal perceptions, the better and more productive our intervention will be" (p. 107). To expand this area of research, this current study will investigate learners' perceptions of impact of interlocutor familiarity level on their cognitive, social and emotional engagement in task-based interaction. The results of the study would help L2 researchers and educators consider the importance of familiarity level on learners' engagement, which may shape how group tasks can be conducted.

Literature Review

Learner Engagement: Definition and Dimensions

Learners' engagement in task-based interaction attracted teachers' increased attention due to the widely held assumption that learners' high engagement in L2 task-based interactions tended to result in greater learning outcomes (Philp & Duchesne, 2016). Task-based language teaching (TBLT) emphasises learning through the completion of meaningful tasks, promoting communication and interaction

among learners (Mulyadi et al., 2021). While early L2 research focused largely on learner engagement from a single dimension, including behavioural or cognitive aspect, subsequent L2 research has shifted to view learner engagement as a multidimensional construct. This was pioneered by Fredricks et al. (2004), who conceptualised engagement as a multifaceted construct, involving behavioural components such as participation, and aspects of emotion and cognition. In L2 task-based interaction, Svalberg (2009) proposed a model of engagement with language (EWL), which is "a cognitive, and/or affective, and/or social state and a process in which the learner is the agent and the language is the object and may be the vehicle (means of communication)" (p. 244). From these studies, cognitive engagement may be defined as learners' focused attention, alertness and mental effort. Affective engagement may be linked to willingness to engage, purposefulness, and autonomy. In contrast, social engagement may be defined in terms of interactiveness, support or scaffolding, and reactiveness or initiation of interaction (see also Baralt et al., 2016; Estaji et al., 2023; Svalberg, 2018).

Informed by educational psychology, Philp and Duchesne (2016, p. 51) define task engagement as "a state of learners' heightened attention and involvement" which can be manifested in four dimensions: cognitive, social, behavioural and emotional. Cognitive engagement refers to learners' sustained attention and mental effort, whereas emotional engagement refers to learners' feelings toward interaction, including both positive (e.g., enthusiasm, interest, enjoyment, willingness to communicate, feelings of connection) and negative (e.g., anxiety, frustration, boredom). Social engagement concerns learners' interactiveness, mutuality and reciprocity while behavioural engagement is perceived as learners' quantity of on-task talk (see also Dao et al., 2021; Lambert et al., 2017).

Following Philp and Duchesne's (2016) model of task engagement, the current study defines learner engagement across three dimensions, which are cognitive, social and emotional (Dao, 2021; Dao & McDonough, 2018). Cognitive engagement is operationalised as learners' sustained attention to language features and mental effort and is measured through their attention to language and task content. Social engagement is operationalised as the degree of reciprocity and mutuality between learners during task-based interaction. As such, social engagement is measured by learners' mutual help and perceived collaboration. Emotional engagement is operationalised as both positive feelings (e.g., excitement, interest and enjoyment in the topic or the task) and negative feelings (e.g., anxiety, frustration and boredom in the topic or the task) (Dao & McDonough, 2018; Mercer, 2019; Yoshida, 2022).

Learner Engagement With Task

It is widely accepted that when learners are highly engaged in L2 task-based interactions, they are more likely to achieve better learning outcomes (Philp & Duchesne, 2016). Studies on learner engagement have primarily focused on language learning tasks, revealing that one or more engagement components tend to increase during task performance when the content was learner-generated (Lambert et al., 2017), when tasks are designed or selected by learners (Dao, 2021; Xu et al., 2019), and when task topics are learner-preferred or familiar (Aubrey, 2022; Phung, 2017;

Qiu & Lo, 2017).

Lambert et al.'s (2017) study with 32 Japanese learners showed that learner-generated content tasks led to more negotiation moves, more backchannels, and more positive affect than teacher-generated tasks. Xu et al. (2019), working with 78 Chinese freshmen, found that a decision-making task elicited more dialogue, stronger interaction, and was perceived as more interesting and enjoyable than a free discussion task. Similarly, Dao's (2021) study with 32 Vietnamese undergraduates reported that a convergent decision-making task prompted more idea units, more LREs, and more responsiveness instances than a divergent opinion-exchange task, indicating higher cognitive and social engagement. Phung (2017) further observed that learners showed higher cognitive engagement, including more negotiation for meaning and form, when performing preferred tasks. Qiu and Lo (2017), in a study with 60 Chinese EFL students, found greater cognitive engagement and more positive affective responses when learners completed tasks on familiar topics rather than unfamiliar ones. In line with this, Aubrey's (2022) longitudinal study of 37 Japanese undergraduates showed that task characteristics such as task nature and purpose, task repetition, and task familiarity were associated with high levels of task engagement.

Although previous studies provided strong evidence for the impact of task conditions on fostering engagement, few of them were conducted in a Chinese classroom context and thus, their findings may not fully account for the variations in learner engagement. Despite the significant role of teaching/learning context in shaping learners' task engagement (Storch & Sato, 2020), the influence of sociocultural contextual factors related to learners must always be considered.

Impact of Interlocutor Familiarity on Learner Engagement

Learners' motivation and collaboration in conversational interactions can differ in various ways depending on their interlocutors (Lee & Young-A, 2019; McDonough et al., 2022). In a theoretical review of small group work settings, Dörnyei (1997) justified the importance of creating a team among language learners to promote interlocutor familiarity to help students build relations based on trust and assistance. When working with a familiar interlocutor, learners may feel more comfortable, which, in turn, generates less anxiety, leading to more enhanced performances (Cao & Philp, 2006; O'Sullivan, 2002). Findings of Dao et al.'s (2021) research suggested familiar dyads had significantly higher scores on all types of engagement (e.g., cognitive, social, and emotional), showing the benefits of pairing learners who were familiar with each other for facilitating learner engagement.

Fan and Xu's (2021) study on 60 Chinese undergraduate students also indicated that familiar dyads showed higher engagement in cognitive, social and emotional dimensions, compared to unfamiliar dyads. In addition, interlocutor familiarity could provide learners with a sense of security as familiar interlocutors were more willing to signal non-understanding and negotiate through discourse features, such as confirmation checks and clarification requests (Lee, 2004). Pastushenkov (2021) reported that familiar dyads (group of two learners) tended to engage more in language discussion and produced more language related episodes (LREs). Furthermore, interlocutor familiarity had been linked to the way feedback was

provided. Mackey (2012) proposed that familiarity between interlocutors might have an influence on how learners provide feedback and indicate non-understanding.

Nonetheless, familiar peer pairing did not necessarily bring positive results since there may have been considerable amount of off-task behaviour among students working together (Mozaffari, 2016). Ockey et al. (2013) found no significant differences between scores in familiar and unfamiliar groups in terms of pronunciation, fluency, lexis and grammar, and communication skills. Similarly, Lee and Young-A (2019) reported no significant influence of familiarity on the numbers of LREs produced. Furthermore, Philp et al. (2010) observed that unfamiliarity could also help some student focus on form, despite feelings of discomfort. These contradictory findings highlighted the complexity of the influence of interlocutor familiarity level on learner engagement, which highlighted the need for further investigation.

Based on Pastushenkov et al. (2021), familiarity was operationalised as whether learners in each dyad (a) were friends and classmates, or (b) had previously interacted with each other. In contrast, unfamiliarity was defined as learners in each dyad (a) knew this person but had never worked together before, or (b) did not know this person and had never worked together before. In the current study, "familiarity" refers to the extent to which learners have previously interacted and established a rapport with their interlocutor, fostering a sense of comfort and mutual understanding. "Unfamiliarity", on the other hand, denotes a lack of prior interaction or limited acquaintance, which may introduce a degree of uncertainty and formality in the interaction.

Method of Study

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to examine how learners perceived the impact of interlocutor familiarity level on their cognitive, social and emotional engagement in task-based interaction. As the focus of this study was on learner engagement at the level of task, employed Philp and Duchesne's (2016) framework of task engagement was employed. Learner engagement was operationalised as learners' involvement and participation in peer interaction as seen through cognitive, social and emotional dimensions. The mixed-methods approach comprised a questionnaire that collected students' perceptions on peer familiarity with learning engagement across three dimensions (cognitive, social, and emotional). Subsequently, a semi-structured interview was conducted to allow participants to elaborate on their perceptions regarding the impact of interlocutor familiarity level on their engagement in completing the assigned task.

Participants

The participants of this study were 45 first-year Chinese EFL undergraduates, with an average age of 19 years old, majoring in different disciplines (e.g., international trade, E-commerce, marketing). While the participants took other courses, they were enrolled in the same English class taught by the teacher who is the first researcher. Based on the participants' English scores from the College Entrance Examination, they were at a similar English language proficiency level. To determine an appropriate

sample size, G*Power (Ryan, 2013) software was utilised to conduct a power analysis for a one-way ANOVA, assuming a medium effect size (Cohen's f=0.25), an alpha level of 0.05, and two groups (familiar and unfamiliar dyads). The calculated power was 0.83, indicating that a sample size of 45 participants (see Dao & McDonough, 2018) is sufficient for detecting significant differences. Demographic information for all participants is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic Information on the Participants

Measures	Items	Demographic information	Percentage
Age		Mean=19	
Gender	Male	20	44%
	Female	25	56%
English Proficiency level	English scores of College Entrance Examination (150 points in total)	Mean=107.13 (equivalent to an IELTS Band 4.5)	
Discipline	Electronic Commerce	20	44%
	International Trade	14	31%
	Marketing	11	25%

Study Design and Data Collection

Out of 45 participants, 15 were selected to be core learners (see Pastushenkov et al., 2021). These core learners were selected by the first author based on their active participation in class. Each core learner chose a peer he or she perceived as either familiar or unfamiliar. Based on this setup, 30 dyads were formed (see Dao & McDonough, 2018, for the same pairing method).

The task chosen for this study was a picture-sequencing task, a task commonly used in second language research due to its effectiveness in eliciting rich interaction among learners (Dao et al., 2021). The task consisted of six different pictures depicting a series of activities (see Appendix 1). Task pictures were controlled for the potential impact of the topic and content. All the versions of the task pictures featured similar topics and depicted similar activities in a sequence. The task was implemented in a controlled classroom setting during the middle of the second semester (week 8). At this point, the participants already interacted with their classmates, allowing for a clear distinction between familiar and unfamiliar peers. Participants in each dyad were instructed to interact with each other to describe and sequence the six pictures. Each core learner first completed the first task with a familiar interlocutor, followed by a second task with an unfamiliar interlocutor. Both tasks were audio recorded by the participants themselves using their own mobile phones.

After completing the picture-sequencing task, all participants were asked to complete a five-point Likert scale self-report engagement questionnaire from Dao et al. (2021) through Wenjuanxing (a professional online questionnaire survey platform). The questionnaire consisted of three sections (cognitive, social and emotional

engagement), with each section containing eight items. Participants were required to choose a response ranging from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree". Items related to cognitive engagement focused on learners' self-reported attention to each other's language issues, attention to each other's opinions and contribution to task completion, justification of opinions, provision of ideas, and elaboration of ideas. Social engagement items addressed learners' involvement, collaboration, and responsiveness to each other's opinions and language problems. As for emotional engagement, items addressed learners' perceived interest, excitement, contentment, satisfaction, boredom, annoyance, discouragement and frustration during interaction. The questionnaire items were simplified and translated into Chinese to ensure comprehensibility for participants with developing English proficiency.

The adapted survey was validated through a pilot study involving 15 Chinese EFL undergraduates, aged between 18 and 20. The participants for the pilot study were selected through convenience sampling, as the researcher was also their instructor. This approach enabled quick feedback on the questionnaire and helped to refine ambiguous items and ensured clarity. As a result of the pilot test, several revisions were made to the questionnaire. For instance, the item "I attended to my own language issues during the interaction" was modified to "I paid attention to my own grammar and vocabulary during the interaction" to better align with the focus of the study on language learning. "I elaborated my ideas/opinions during the interaction" was changed to "I provided detailed explanations of my ideas/opinions during the interaction" based on participants' feedback.

A follow-up semi-structured interview with core learners was conducted after the task (Dao et al., 2021; Fan & Xu, 2021). This provided additional data to enrich the questionnaire findings and offered deeper insight into how interlocutor familiarity influenced learner engagement (Ruslin et al., 2022). The interview comprised five open-ended questions on learners' perceptions of their engagement with both a familiar and an unfamiliar interlocutor during the task (see Appendix 2). The research team reviewed the questions to ensure alignment with the study objectives and piloted them with five of the 15 core learners to check clarity (see Whitehead, 2016). Each 10-minute interview was audio-recorded and transcribed. To support comprehension, the questions were translated from English into Mandarin by a qualified translator, and participants could respond in English, Mandarin, or a combination of both. Mandarin responses were translated into English and then back-translated into Mandarin by two translators, one a native English speaker fluent in Mandarin and the other a native Mandarin speaker fluent in English. The research team compared the original Mandarin, the English translation, and the back-translated Mandarin, resolving any discrepancies to ensure equivalence of the English and Chinese versions.

Data Analysis

To investigate the perceived impact of interlocutor familiarity level on learners' engagement in task-based interaction, normalised quantitative scores for each dimension of learner engagement produced from the self-report questionnaire were compared using descriptive statistics. Qualitative data from the semi-structured

interviews was analysed using a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The entire dataset was first reviewed independently by the first and the third authors to identify and highlight segments that contain participants' comments about the impact of interlocutor familiarity level on their engagement. These highlighted segments were re-examined and initial codes were created based on key words and concepts. Subsequently, the codes were compared between the two independent coders (the two authors) to reach an agreement and ensure coding consistency. Next, similar codes were organised into potential themes. Coding examples of learner engagement are as follows:

Table 2

Coding Scheme of Learner Engagement

Dimension	Evidence	Example
Cognitive	Attention to language features	This progress could improve our spoken English.
	Mental effort (Task-related discussion)	We will discuss more to reach an agreement.
Social	Instances of mutual help	There was more mutual help during the communication process.
	Instances of collaborative interaction	The communication was more smooth.
Emotional	Positive emotions (comfort, interest, ease)	I felt more comfortable when interacting with a familiar partner.
	Negative emotions (anxiety, worry, restraint)	I was worried about making grammatical mistakes.

Findings

Learner Engagement in Task-based Interaction by Familiarity Level

To investigate how interlocutor familiarity affected learner engagement in task-based interaction, self-reported scores for the dimensions of engagement for both dyads were calculated. Descriptive statistics of raw and normalised scores of learner engagement per dyad in each dimension are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3

Participants' Perceptions on Engagement by Familiarity Level

Dimensions	Indicators	Familiar		Unfamiliar	
	Positive Emotion	**M**	**SD**	**M**	**SD**
Emotional engagement	1. I felt interested while I was doing the task.	3.65	1.18	3.30	1.17
	2. I felt excited while I was doing the task.	3.70	1.08	3.40	1.05
	3. I felt contented while I was doing the task.	3.90	0.97	3.50	1.15
	4. I felt satisfied with how well I completed the task.	3.90	1.02	3.55	1.15
	Negative Emotion				
	5. I felt bored while I was doing the task.	2.20	0.95	2.15	0.81
	6. I felt annoyed while I was doing the task.	2.15	0.99	2.45	0.76
	7. I felt discouraged while I was doing the task.	2.15	0.99	2.10	0.72
	8. I felt frustrated while I was doing the task.	2.05	0.94	2.15	0.67
Social Engagement	***Perceived Collaboration***				
	9. I involved my partner during the interaction.	4.30	0.98	3.65	1.27
	10. I felt my partner involved me during the interaction.	4.10	1.07	3.80	1.11
	11. I collaborated with my partner during the interaction.	4.30	0.98	3.90	1.12
	12. I felt my partner collaborated with me during the interaction.	4.35	0.88	3.85	0.88
	Mutual Help				
	13. I responded to my partners' opinions during the interaction.	4.35	0.81	3.80	1.06
	14. I felt my partner responded to my opinions during the interaction.	4.40	0.60	3.85	1.09
	15. I helped my partner with language problems during the interaction.	4.25	0.64	3.60	1.19
	16. My partner helped me with language problems.	4.10	0.85	3.80	1.06
Cognitive Engagement	***Attention to Language***				
	17.I paid attention to my own grammar and vocabulary during the interaction.	4.05	0.89	3.60	1.10
	18.I paid attention to my partner's grammar and vocabulary during the interaction.	4.05	0.69	3.45	1.05

19. I provided feedback on my partner's language issues during the interaction.	4.05	0.89	3.65	0.88
20. My partner provided feedback on my language issues.	4.1	0.85	3.45	0.89
Attention to Task Content				
21. I thought hard about my partner's contributing opinions during the interaction.	4.20	0.62	3.75	0.91
22. I always justified my opinions during the interaction.	3.90	0.85	3.50	0.95
23. I provided a lot of ideas to contribute to the task.	4.05	0.60	3.40	0.88
24. I provided detailed explanations of my ideas/ opinions during the interaction.	4.00	0.79	3.55	0.89

Note: M = mean; SD = standard deviation.

A one-tailed ANOVA analysis was also conducted and results showed that the level of learner engagement in the familiar dyads was significantly higher than that in unfamiliar dyads (p = .03), with a medium effect size (d = .56).

Table 4

Univariate Tests Results: Interlocutor Familiarity and Indictors of Learner Engagement

Dimensions	Indicators	Group	M	SD	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Emotional	Positive Emotion	Familiar	3.79	1.05	0.657	.421	.011
		Unfamiliar	3.44	1.11			
	Negative Emotion	Familiar	2.14	0.95	0.084	.773	.001
		Unfamiliar	2.21	0.74			
Social	Perceived Collaboration	Familiar	4.26	0.96	5.126	.027	.081
		Unfamiliar	3.80	1.08			
	Mutual Help	Familiar	4.28	0.73	6.463	.014	.100
		Unfamiliar	3.76	1.08			
Cognitive	Attention to Language	Familiar	4.06	0.82	5.541	.022	.087
		Unfamiliar	3.54	0.97			
	Attention to Content	Familiar	4.04	0.72	4.661	.035	.074
		Unfamiliar	3.55	0.90			

By comparing the mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) values of each

indicator for the familiar and unfamiliar dyads in Table 4, it can be seen that familiarity has an impact on six indicators of learner engagement: attention to language, attention to task content, perceived collaboration, mutual help, positive emotion and negative emotion. From the perspective of the three dimensions of engagement, in both familiar and unfamiliar groups (see Table 4), among the total scores of the three dimensions of learner engagement, the top two are social engagement and cognitive engagement. The scores for emotional engagement in both groups are significantly lower than the other two dimensions. More specifically, follow-up univariate analyses to examine the effect of familiarity with partners on learner engagement showed significant differences on four measures of learner engagement: perceived collaboration, mutual help, attention to language and attention to content (see Table 4).

Student Engagement Experiences of Interlocutor Familiarity

The qualitative findings indicated that interlocutor familiarity had a complex impact, where different engagement dimensions were at play. For instance, when asked whether they preferred working with a familiar or an unfamiliar partner, most participants claimed that it was more efficient to work with a familiar partner. Excerpt 1 from a core learner's semi-structured interview responses illustrated the perceived benefits of working with a familiar interlocutor in the L2 task-based interaction. The complexity of dimensions may be referred to in the excerpts below, where the codes are indicated. Of the 15 interviews analysed, approximately 60% of the responses were given in Mandarin. All the illustrative excerpts selected for this paper were translated from Mandarin.

> **Excerpt 1**
> I don't mind interacting with an unfamiliar partner. But if I have a choice, I'd rather work with a familiar partner. When working with a familiar partner, there was more mutual help [social engagement] during the communication process, and the communication was more smooth [social engagement]. That is, I needn't worry about making language and vocabulary mistakes and can speak more freely [positive emotional engagement]. Meanwhile, we were comfortable [positive emotional engagement] and had a better understanding of each other [social engagement] when interacting with a familiar partner, which made it easier to complete the task [cognitive engagement]. However, I felt restrained [negative emotional engagement] when talking with an unfamiliar partner because I was anxious about making language mistakes or having a different opinion [negative emotional engagement], which prevented me from focusing on the task [cognitive engagement]. But I provided more help [social engagement] to unfamiliar partner because I was more familiar with the task after completing the similar task with a familiar partner.

In Excerpt 1, the core learner pointed out the level of familiarity with a partner affected how she expressed herself and whether she was able to stay focused on the task. When paired with a familiar partner, she felt relaxed and completed the task efficiently, whereas she felt anxious and was hesitant to express herself, which

hindered her performance when paired with an unfamiliar partner. Another learner's response in Excerpt 2 also indicated the impact of familiarity level on learner engagement, suggesting that the process of interacting with a familiar interlocutor could enhance their friendship as well as improve her spoken English. These results supported the findings of the quantitative analyses reported above, indicating that interlocutor familiarity significantly affected learners' cognitive and social engagement.

Excerpt 2

I felt more comfortable positive emotional engagement, spoke more freely, and performed better cognitive engagement when interacting with a familiar partner. I had to watch my words cognitive engagement when interacting with an unfamiliar partner because I was worried about negative emotional engagement making grammatical mistakes. On the other hand, I was trying not to embarrass the other person by pointing out their mistakes. It is interesting positive emotional engagement to work with a familiar partner during the task. At the same time, this process can enhance the friendship social engagement between us and improve our spoken English cognitive engagement.

In contrast, two other learners reported the opposite experiences, which were reflected in the semi-structured interview responses in Excerpt 3 and 4.

Excerpt 3

In comparison to a familiar partner, I prefer to work with an unfamiliar partner positive emotional engagement. When paired with an unfamiliar partner, I can get more new ideas and hear different voices cognitive engagement from the partner because we are strangers and have little common experiences. And we will have more communication social engagement and discuss more cognitive engagement together to reach an agreement. It is helpful to finish the task cognitive engagement. However, when I work with a familiar partner, we may wander off to chat or do things that aren't related to the task since we are good friends and there is always something to talk about.

Excerpt 3 indicated that working with an unfamiliar partner facilitated learner's social and cognitive engagement (e.g., "get more new ideas", "discuss them together"). In contrast, interaction with a familiar partner resulted in interruptions through casual conversation between friends. Moreover, as shown in Excerpt 4, the learner did not feel embarrassed to speak English or express herself when working with an unfamiliar partner.

Excerpt 4

Familiarity level with partners had little influence on my engagement with task. No matter who I am paired with, I'll try my best to get the job done. cognitive engagement I prefer to work with an unfamiliar partner. positive emotional engagement I feel less embarrassed positive emotional engagement to speak English or show myself with an unfamiliar partner than with a familiar one. Besides, I'd like to

communicate with different people, [social engagement] and I don't want to establish a fixed collaborative relationship with the same person.

The findings from the semi-structured interviews highlighted the impact of interlocutor familiarity level on learner engagement. While many participants expressed a preference for working with familiar partners due to increased comfort, reduced anxiety, and enhanced mutual understanding, others found greater cognitive, social and positive emotional engagement when paired with unfamiliar partners, benefiting from diverse perspectives and structured discussions. Additionally, some learners reported that interlocutor familiarity level had little influence on their engagement, emphasizing personal adaptability and task commitment, which was consistent with the quantitative findings that showed only a slight difference in emotional engagement between familiar and unfamiliar dyads. These varying responses suggested that familiarity level influenced engagement in multiple dimensions, shaped by individual differences and the specific learning context.

Discussion

This study investigated EFL learners' perceptions about the impact of interlocutor familiarity level on their cognitive, social and emotional engagement in L2 task-based interaction. The quantitative data results revealed that familiar dyads scored significantly higher on social engagement (e.g., perceived collaboration and mutual help) and cognitive engagement (e.g., attention to language and task content), and slightly higher on emotional engagement (e.g., positive emotion). The findings suggest that familiar dyads foster better communication and deeper mutual understanding. As anticipated, learners felt more comfortable communicating with familiar classmates rather than unfamiliar ones (Cao & Philp, 2006), provided and received more support during the L2 task-based interaction (Dao, 2021) and were better able to focus on their performance and task completion without being distracted by concerns about their partner's perceptions (Poteau, 2017).

Prior research suggested that face-losing issue hindered learners' communication with their partners in peer interaction (Xu & Cao, 2012). As shown in Excerpt 1, the core learner explained she was hesitant to express herself because she was anxious about making mistakes or embarrassing the partner by pointing out her mistakes. This was inconsistent with the questionnaire responses which showed that there was little difference in emotional engagement between the two groups. The unfamiliar group scored slightly higher on negative emotions, suggesting that negative emotions may not be a major factor in learner engagement. Instead, positive emotional experiences and social interactions played a more critical role in promoting learner engagement.

However, the interviews showed that not all learners preferred interacting with familiar partners. For some working with an unfamiliar peer was more conducive to social and cognitive engagement since. Working with unfamiliar peers could offer more new ideas (cognitive engagement), encourage open communication and deeper discussion (social engagement) to fulfil the task. This finding aligns with Fan and Xu's (2021) finding that unfamiliar groups provided more feedback than familiar ones, and

unfamiliarity can also help some students to focus on form, despite feelings of discomfort (Philp et al., 2010). In contrast, close friends are likely to have small talk during the interaction, which can distract from the task. In addition, Mozaffari (2016) research found that familiarity can affect learner engagement negatively, such as leading to more digressions.

The results highlighted the significance of the social dimension in learner engagement, a finding that is particularly important in the Chinese educational context. Chinese educational practices have traditionally emphasised the cognitive dimension in second language teaching and learning (Sun & Zhang, 2021). The cultural values emphasised in China are collectivism and harmony (Rublik, 2018). Within this cultural context, social interactions and relationships play a crucial role in shaping individual identity and learning experiences. Learners at this proficiency level are often more aware of their language limitations and may be especially sensitive to feedback and interactional dynamics. However, the findings of the present study suggest that students themselves may value different elements. As young adults, their engagement levels may be influenced by a developmental stage characterised by a strong need for social interaction and a desire to form meaningful connections. This highlights the importance of foregrounding the social dimension in language learning, particularly in an educational environment such as China's, where it may be undervalued.

Conclusion

This study examined how interlocutor familiarity shapes learners' cognitive, social and emotional engagement in L2 task-based interactions. Using a mixed-methods design, 45 Chinese EFL learners completed a self-report engagement questionnaire and took part in semi-structured interviews. Findings indicate that familiar partners tend to lower anxiety and increase comfort, which can support collaboration and promote higher engagement. At the same time, working with unfamiliar interlocutors appeared to prompt more feedback and idea generation, suggesting benefits for cognitive flexibility and exposure to new perspectives. Pedagogically, teachers may wish to balance stable, familiar pairings with periodic partner rotation, supported by activities that build rapport and encourage active collaboration and feedback. As the participants shared similar linguistic and cultural backgrounds in an EFL context, the generalisability of the findings is limited. Future research should recruit more diverse samples and employ longitudinal designs to trace how evolving familiarity shapes learner engagement over time.

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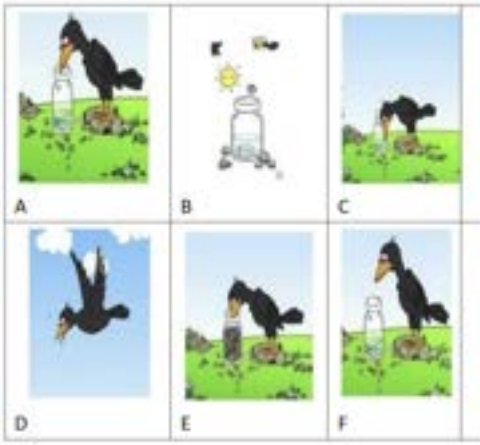
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Appendix 1

Picture Sequencing Tasks

Set 1



Set 2



Appendix 2

Interview Questions

1. Does working with a familiar partner affect your level of engagement in the task? (与熟悉的同伴搭档会影响你在任务中的参与度吗？)

2. Does working with an unfamiliar partner affect your level of engagement in the task? (与不熟悉的同伴搭档会影响你在任务中的参与度吗？)

3. If you had to choose, would you prefer to work with a familiar or an unfamiliar partner? Why? (如果只能二选一，你更愿意与熟悉的同伴还是不熟悉的同伴搭档？为什么？)

4. In future group work, would you like to work with this familiar partner again? Give your reasons. (下一次小组活动时，你还愿意继续与这位熟悉的同伴搭档吗？请给出肯定或否定的理由。)

5. In future group work, would you like to work with this unfamiliar partner again? Give your reasons. (下一次小组活动时，你还愿意继续与这位不熟悉的同伴搭档吗？请给出肯定或否定的理由。)

PEMBANGUNAN MODUL INFOGRAFIK PEMBELAJARAN FLEKSI AL-QURAN

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Manuscript received 7 April 2025
Manuscript accepted 24 November 2025
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https://doi.org/10.33736/ils.9434.2025

ABSTRAK

Ilmu i'rab atau fleksi merupakan cabang tatabahasa Arab yang kompleks dan sukar difahami kerana kebiasaannya disampaikan dalam bentuk kitab yang sukar diakses oleh pelajar. Infografik boleh dijadikan medium alternatif untuk menyampaikan maklumat kompleks dengan lebih menarik dan mudah. Justeru, kajian ini bertujuan membangunkan modul Infografik Fleksi al-Quran (i-FleQ) yang menggunakan infografik sebagai alat bantu pengajaran. Pembangunan modul ini berasaskan pendekatan Reka Bentuk dan Pembangunan, serta gabungan Model Diskrepansi, Model Pembinaan Modul Sidek, *Infographic Design Model*, dan Teori Konstruktivisme. Kajian dilaksanakan dalam dua fasa: analisis keperluan dan reka bentuk modul. Penilaian elemen dan komponen modul melibatkan sepuluh pakar menggunakan kaedah Fuzzy Delphi, manakala kesahan kandungan diuji oleh lima pakar menggunakan soal selidik. Modul yang dibangunkan merangkumi lima komponen utama, iaitu objektif, isi kandungan, reka bentuk, aktiviti pembelajaran dan penilaian. Dapatan menunjukkan bahawa modul mempunyai kesahan kandungan yang tinggi. Modul i-FleQ ini berpotensi dimanfaatkan oleh pelajar, guru, pensyarah dan orang awam dalam pembelajaran ilmu fleksi bahasa Arab. Ia membantu pelajar memahami struktur ayat al-Quran dengan lebih baik dan meningkatkan penguasaan ilmu i'rab secara berkesan.

Kata kunci: pembangunan modul; infografik; fleksi bahasa Arab; tatabahasa Arab

DEVELOPING AN INFOGRAPHIC LEARNING MODULE FOR QURANIC INFLECTION

ABSTRACT

Arabic inflection, or iʿrāb is a branch of Arabic grammar that is complex and difficult to master, as it is commonly taught through classical texts that are not easily accessible to students. Infographics can serve as an alternative medium to present complex information in a more engaging and understandable way. Therefore, this study aims to develop the Infographic Module for Quranic I'rab (i-FleQ), which utilises infographics as a teaching aid. The module development is based on the Design and Development approach, incorporating the Discrepancy Model, Sidek Module Development Model, Infographic Design Model, and Constructivist Theory. The study was carried out in two phases: needs analysis and module design. Evaluation of the module's elements and components involved 10 experts using the Fuzzy Delphi method, while content validity was assessed by five experts through questionnaires. The developed module comprises five main components: objectives, content, design, learning activities, and assessment. Findings show that the module has high content validity. The i-FleQ module can be utilised by students, teachers, lecturers, and the public for learning Arabic grammatical flexion. It helps students understand the structure of Quranic sentences more effectively and enhances their mastery of iʿrāb.

Keywords: *module development; infographic; Arabic inflection; Arabic grammar*

Pendahuluan

Setiap bahasa pastinya mempunyai kaedah dan peraturan tersendiri yang perlu dikuasai bagi memahirkan diri dalam bahasa tersebut. Kaedah dan peraturan ini dipelajari melalui ilmu tatabahasa, iaitu suatu peraturan dan sistem bagi mempelajari sesuatu bahasa dengan betul (Sulaiman seperti yang dinyatakan dalam Zuhaidi & Zainal, 2021). Di samping itu, tatabahasa juga menjadi alat untuk mengukur sejauh mana penguasaan seseorang individu terhadap bahasa yang dipelajarinya. Dalam konteks bahasa Arab, ilmu tatabahasa dinamakan sebagai sintaksis atau *nahu*. Ilmu *nahu* ialah ilmu yang dipelajari bagi menentukan kedudukan suatu perkataan melalui *i'rab* perkataan tersebut (Al-Hasyimi, 1973). *I'rab* pula berfungsi untuk menentukan baris akhir setiap perkataan serta berperanan untuk menjelaskan makna sesuatu perkataan (Sidek & Teh, 2024). Selain itu, *i'rab* juga disebut sebagai fleksi (Sidek & Teh, 2024), iaitu perubahan pada akhir perkataan yang berlaku secara *lafzi* dan zahir (perubahan baris akhir yang dapat dilihat pada perkataan) atau secara *taqdiri* (tidak dapat dilihat perubahannya secara zahir), hasil daripada wujudnya *'amil* (penyebab berlakunya perubahan) yang tertentu (Hisham, 2009).

Fenomena linguistik yang terdapat dalam ilmu fleksi atau *i'rab* merupakan satu ciri keunikan bahasa Arab yang tiada dalam bahasa lain (Harahap, 2021; Sidek & Teh, 2024; Zuhriyah, 2019). Hal ini kerana *i'rab* memainkan peranan penting dalam menjelaskan makna baharu sesuatu perkataan yang tidak dapat ditunjukkan oleh huruf asli sesuatu perkataan atau huruf tambahan yang datang selepas berlakunya

pola pada perkataan tersebut (Sidek & Teh, 2024). Meskipun cirinya unik, *i'rab* merupakan satu cabang ilmu yang mencabar untuk dipelajari dan difahami (Zuhriyah, 2019). Menurut Mualif (2019), tahap penguasaan bahasa Arab dan cabang ilmunya, termasuklah fleksi bahasa Arab masih lemah berdasarkan dapatan kajian-kajian lepas yang dijalankan terhadap pelajar sekolah-sekolah agama di Malaysia. Majoriti pelajar masih tidak mahir berkenaan ilmu fleksi bahasa Arab, iaitu mereka tidak dapat menentukan *i'rab* perkataan bahasa Arab dengan tepat (Mu'min, 2021; Zuhriyah, 2019). Selain itu, teknik pengajaran ilmu *nahu* berpusatkan guru dan hafalan juga menjadikan pelajar tidak dapat mengaplikasikan ilmu *nahu* tersebut secara kendiri setelah selesai pembelajaran (Mualif, 2019). Hal ini kerana pengajaran berpusatkan guru menjadikan pembelajaran kurang efektif berikutan pelajar sukar mengingat fakta-fakta yang dipelajari (Mohamad et al., 2019). Situasi ini berlaku kerana pelajar perlu memberikan tumpuan sepenuhnya terhadap pengajaran guru dalam tempoh masa yang lama tanpa penglibatan mereka secara aktif dalam pembelajaran.

Di samping itu, masalah keberkesanan bahan bantu mengajar dan kekurangan bahan bacaan tambahan juga telah menyukarkan proses pengajaran dan pembelajaran fleksi bahasa Arab di Malaysia (Zaini et al., 2019). Pada zaman ini, kemudahan teknologi merupakan medium yang digunakan secara meluas dalam urusan kehidupan seharian termasuklah pendidikan. Namun begitu, pemanfaatan teknologi dalam PdP bahasa Arab di universiti dan sekolah masih kurang dipergiatkan (Nurkhamimi & Sabri, seperti yang dinyatakan dalam Ghani et al., 2019). Menurut Baharum et al. (2023), bahan pembelajaran berasaskan teknologi merupakan medium yang diperlukan oleh para pelajar pada zaman teknologi yang serba canggih ini. Hal ini kerana mereka sudah terbiasa dengan penggunaan gajet dalam urusan kehidupan seharian. Oleh yang demikian, apabila kemudahan teknologi yang sedia ada tidak dimanfaatkan dengan sebaik-baiknya, PdP bahasa Arab menjadi kurang berkesan dan tidak menarik (Rahimi seperti yang dinyatakan dalam Zaini et al., 2019).

Infografik merupakan medium penyebaran maklumat dan komunikasi berasaskan teknologi yang membantu ramai pihak menyebarkan maklumat dengan lebih berkesan. Penggunaan mod bukan lisan seperti visualisasi dapat menjadikan proses penyampaian maklumat lebih cepat dan jelas melalui penggunaan peralatan elektronik seperti telefon pintar, tablet dan komputer (Fadzil, 2020; Kamaluddin & Husnin, 2022; Sabarudin & Saimon, 2021). Hal ini demikian termasuklah penggunaannya dalam pembelajaran. Kini, media berteknologi telah digunakan secara meluas sebagai alat pedagogi inovatif dalam Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran (PdP), terutamanya Pembelajaran Abad ke-21 (Saidin et al., 2024). Penggunaan infografik membantu para pelajar memahami suatu kandungan pelajaran yang kompleks, mengingat fakta dan maklumat, merungkai hubung kait antara suatu konsep yang dipelajari, memahami proses dan peristiwa serta memahami ringkasan suatu maklumat (Fadzil, 2020; Malir, 2024).

Selain itu, menurut Johar dan Murli (2022), penggunaan bahan bantu mengajar yang efektif berpotensi membantu pelajar untuk menguasai PdP bahasa Arab dengan lebih baik. Penggunaan modul berasaskan multimedia sebagai bahan bantu mengajar juga menjadikan pelajar lebih berminat untuk mempelajari dan mendalami sesuatu topik pembelajaran (Azahar & Yusoff, 2022; Shahrul seperti yang dinyatakan dalam Malir, 2024). Oleh yang demikian, pembangunan modul Infografik

Fleksi al-Quran (i-FleQ) yang dilaksanakan ini bertujuan membantu para pelajar menguasai *i'rab* melalui pengaplikasiannya dalam al-Quran. Selain itu, penggunaan media interaktif seperti modul infografik juga dapat mendorong mereka untuk mempelajari *i'rab* secara kendiri sekaligus dapat mengaplikasikan Pembelajaran Abad ke-21 (PAK21) dengan memaksimumkan penglibatan pelajar secara aktif dalam pembelajaran fleksi bahasa Arab.

Modul i-FleQ juga dapat dimanfaatkan sebagai bahan bantu mengajar yang efektif bagi meningkatkan keberkesanan pembelajaran ilmu fleksi bahasa Arab kerana modul pembelajaran berasaskan infografik masih kurang dibangunkan secara khusus untuk menyokong penguasaan *i'rab* dengan menggunakan teks al-Quran sebagai bahan utama.

Kajian Literatur

Pembangunan Modul

Pelbagai kajian telah dilakukan dalam membangunkan modul atau bahan pengajaran bahasa Arab, namun terdapat kekangan dari aspek penilaian luar dan keseragaman pelaksanaan. Uno et al. (2025) membangunkan modul ujian bahasa Arab menggunakan aplikasi *ProProfs*. Modul ini dinilai oleh pakar teknologi pendidikan dan menunjukkan peningkatan kecekapan dan kebolehpercayaan dalam penilaian. Kajian oleh Daud et al. (2020) pula menghasilkan modul *m-pembelajaran* bagi pelajar peringkat asas. Modul tersebut dinilai melalui soal selidik pelajar dan maklum balas guru, mendapati ia meningkatkan motivasi pelajar terhadap pembelajaran bahasa Arab. Sementara itu, Mohammed (2022) membangunkan kursus elektronik bagi kemahiran bertutur dan mendengar. Kursus ini dibina berdasarkan Taksonomi Bloom dan turut melibatkan penilaian luar terhadap penglibatan pelajar dan kualiti pengajaran. Dalam kajian lain, Mohammed et al. (2020) menekankan penggunaan alatan Web 2.0 dalam bilik darjah untuk TAFL (*Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language*). Mereka menegaskan pentingnya penilaian oleh pendidik luar bagi memilih dan menambah baik modul pengajaran.

Kajian oleh Ghani et al. (2024) pula menilai kebolehgunaan aplikasi mudah alih *e-Lughatul Fasli* yang dibangunkan bagi pengurusan bilik darjah bahasa Arab. Menggunakan analisis Fuzzy Delphi, penilaian oleh pakar menunjukkan kesepakatan melebihi 80%, membuktikan keberkesanan aplikasi ini sebagai alat bantu pengajaran yang relevan dengan kurikulum semasa. Sementara itu, Hamid et al. (2024) menilai penerimaan pelajar terhadap modul infografik interaktif untuk pembelajaran nahu Arab dengan menggunakan Model Penerimaan Teknologi (TAM). Dapatan kajian menunjukkan pelajar bermotivasi, bersedia dan mempunyai niat berterusan untuk menggunakan modul tersebut, sekali gus membuktikan keberkesanan pendekatan visual-interaktif dalam pengajaran bahasa Arab.

Secara keseluruhannya, kajian-kajian ini menunjukkan trend positif dalam pembangunan bahan bantu mengajar bahasa Arab, namun masih terdapat kekurangan dari segi penilaian luar, aplikasi dalam konteks berbeza dan penggunaan pendekatan infografik secara khusus dalam pengajaran fleksi. Justeru, kajian ini cuba

mengisi jurang tersebut dengan membangunkan modul i-FleQ yang berdasarkan kepada teks al-Quran dan bersifat interaktif.

Aplikasi Teori dan Model

Pembangunan modul i-FleQ melibatkan integrasi beberapa model dan teori, iaitu Model Pembinaan Modul Sidek (2005), *Infographic Design Model* (IDM) (Kibar & Akkoyunlu, 2015) dan Teori Konstruktivisme. Model Pembinaan Modul Sidek (MPMS) (Noah, 2025) merupakan suatu model yang sistematik dan berupaya membantu para penyelidik dalam menyusun langkah pembinaan modul dengan lebih teliti, berstruktur dan komprehensif (Razak et al., 2021). Pengkaji telah mengaplikasikan beberapa proses yang dicadangkan dalam MPMS, merangkumi dua peringkat pembangunan modul, iaitu penyediaan draf dan penilaian. Selain itu, pengkaji juga telah menggunakan prinsip-prinsip dalam IDM sebagai panduan untuk mereka bentuk infografik yang menarik dan efektif bagi pembelajaran fleksi bahasa Arab. Di samping itu, Teori Konstruktivisme juga telah diaplikasikan dalam pembangunan modul i-FleQ. Pengkaji telah mengaplikasikan konsep pembelajaran berpusatkan pelajar yang diadaptasi daripada Teori Konstruktivisme bagi pembelajaran fleksi bahasa Arab dalam modul i-FleQ. Selain itu, prinsip-prinsip Teori Konstruktivisme dalam aplikasi multimedia yang disarankan oleh Aris et al. (2001) juga telah dititikberatkan oleh pengkaji bagi membangunkan modul Infografik Fleksi al-Quran (i-FleQ).

Model Pembinaan Modul Sidek

Pembinaan modul berdasarkan MPMS dijalankan melalui dua peringkat. Peringkat pertama ialah fasa penyediaan draf manakala peringkat kedua ialah fasa pengesahan modul (Kandasamy & Jaafar, 2023; Othman et al., 2019; Razak et al., 2021; Rozman & Hanafi, 2023).

Langkah-langkah pembinaan modul yang ditetapkan dalam Model Pembinaan Modul Sidek ini diadaptasi dalam kajian yang dijalankan dan juga disesuaikan dengan dua fasa pendekatan Reka Bentuk dan Pembangunan yang mendasari kajian ini. Berikut merupakan cadangan langkah-langkah pembangunan modul oleh Noah dan Ahmad (2005) yang diadaptasikan dalam pembangunan modul i-FleQ.

Peringkat Pertama: Penyediaan Draf Modul

Pembinaan modul pada peringkat ini bermula dengan langkah pertama, iaitu pembinaan matlamat dan berakhir dengan penyatuan draf modul.

Pembinaan Matlamat.

Pembinaan matlamat merupakan suatu proses yang sangat penting bagi menentukan objektif dan tujuan pembinaan sesuatu modul (Rozman & Hanafi, 2023). Matlamat kajian yang dijalankan adalah untuk membangunkan sebuah modul infografik bagi pembelajaran fleksi bahasa Arab dalam al-Quran. Pembangunan modul ini

merupakan suatu usaha bagi menarik minat pelajar mempelajari fleksi bahasa Arab dengan lebih berkesan.

Mengenal Pasti Teori, Rasional, Falsafah, Konsep, Sasaran dan Tempoh Masa.

Modul i-FleQ ini dibangunkan melalui pendekatan Reka Bentuk dan Pembangunan (Richey & Klein, 2007). Selain itu, pelaksanaan kajian juga menggabungkan beberapa model dan teori, iaitu Teori Konstruktivisme, MPMS (Noah, 2005), IDM (2015) dan Model Diskrepansi (Worthen & Sanders, 1987). Langkah-langkah dan konsep dalam pendekatan, model dan teori yang dipilih disesuaikan dengan langkah dan konsep modul yang ingin dibangunkan oleh pengkaji. Kemudian, pengkaji menetapkan para guru, pensyarah, pelajar-pelajar dan orang awam yang ingin mempelajari ilmu fleksi bahasa Arab sebagai golongan sasaran. Jangkaan tempoh masa penghasilan modul juga ditetapkan selama setahun lapan bulan.

Kajian Keperluan.

Pada peringkat ini, pengkaji melaksanakan suatu kajian bagi mengenal pasti keperluan pembinaan modul infografik dalam pembelajaran fleksi bahasa Arab berdasarkan pendapat para pelajar. Kajian analisis keperluan ini dijalankan menggunakan soal selidik sebagai instrumen. Seterusnya, dapatan kajian dianalisis menerusi perisian *Statistical Package for Social Science* (SPSS) untuk mendapatkan nilai min dan sisihan piawai bagi mengukur tahap keperluan pembinaan modul.

Pemilihan Objektif, Isi Kandungan, Strategi, dan Media.

Kajian diteruskan dengan langkah yang seterusnya, iaitu pemilihan objektif, isi kandungan, strategi, dan media yang akan diaplikasikan dalam modul. Kaedah *Fuzzy Delphi* digunakan bagi mendapatkan cadangan, penambahbaikan dan kesepakatan daripada pakar berkenaan pemilihan item bagi pembangunan modul i-FleQ.

Peringkat Kedua: Menguji dan Menilai Modul

Penilaian modul dilaksanakan melalui proses kesahan kandungan yang melibatkan lima orang pakar. Pakar yang terlibat perlu melengkapkan borang soal selidik yang dibina berdasarkan borang kesahan kandungan modul yang diperkenalkan oleh Russell (1974). Dapatan kajian yang diperoleh digunakan bagi mengukur dan menilai tahap kesahan kandungan modul i-FleQ yang telah dibangunkan.

Infographic Design Model.

Infographic Design Model diperkenalkan oleh Kibar dan Akkoyunlu (2015). Model ini berperanan sebagai kerangka kerja konseptual untuk mereka bentuk sebuah infografik yang efektif dan berkesan (Kuba & Jeong, 2022). Selain itu, model IDM terdiri daripada tiga komponen utama, iaitu penjanaan kandungan, penjanaan reka

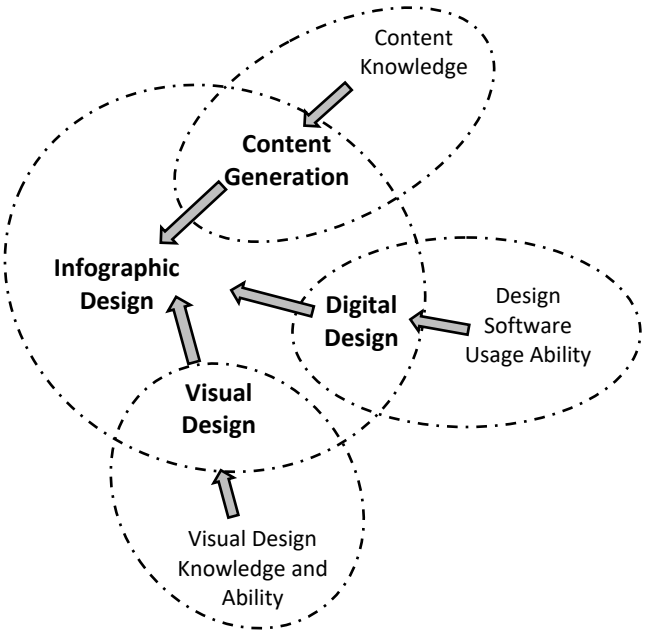
bentuk visual dan reka bentuk digital (Kibar & Akkoyunlu, 2015). Ketiga-tiga komponen tersebut merupakan kemahiran yang diperlukan untuk mereka bentuk sebuah infografik yang berkesan.

Penjanaan kandungan merujuk kepada proses untuk membangunkan dan menyusun maklumat yang akan diperkenalkan dalam modul (Kuba & Jeong, 2022). Langkah ini paling penting dalam proses reka bentuk sesebuah infografik kerana melibatkan proses penyiasatan dan penyusunan maklumat yang sistematik, penentuan hubungan antara komponen maklumat, penekanan terhadap maklumat penting serta penentuan susun atur, tajuk dan penerangan ringkas. Seterusnya, penjanaan reka bentuk visual pula merupakan proses penggunaan reka bentuk visual untuk mencipta komposisi visual manakala komponen terakhir, iaitu reka bentuk digital merujuk kepada keupayaan untuk menggunakan perisian dan alatan reka bentuk (Kuba & Jeong, 2022). Menurut Kibar dan Akkoyunlu (2015), maklumat dalam infografik mestilah difahami dengan baik untuk menghasilkan visualisasi maklumat yang berkesan selain mempunyai pengetahuan dan kemahiran untuk menggunakan peralatan digital.

Di samping itu, model IDM dibina berasaskan teori pembelajaran generatif, merangkumi aktiviti pembelajarannya serta prinsip reka bentuk maklumat (Kibar & Akkoyunlu, 2015). Berdasarkan ciri-ciri model yang telah dihuraikan, hal ini jelas memperlihatkan kesesuaian model IDM untuk diaplikasikan dalam kajian ini. Komponen yang diperkenalkan dalam model ini berperanan sebagai panduan untuk menghasilkan sebuah modul infografik yang berkesan dalam pembelajaran fleksi bahasa Arab.

Rajah 1

Infographic Design Model (Kibar & Akkoyunlu, 2015)



Teori Konstruktivisme

Teori Konstruktivisme merupakan teori yang dipelopori oleh Lev Vygotsky, Jean Piaget, Jerome Bruner, David Ausubel dan John Dewey (Kurnia et al., 2018). Teori ini berpendapat bahawa ilmu pengetahuan dibina berdasarkan pengalaman dan pengetahuan sedia ada, iaitu pelajar menyesuaikan maklumat baru yang dipelajari dengan pengalaman mereka sedia ada untuk membina pengetahuan baru (Ariffin et al., 2020; Chew et al., 2021; Tangkui & Tan, 2020; Voon & Amran, 2021). Pembelajaran berdasarkan teori ini merupakan suatu pembelajaran yang aktif. Hal ini kerana pelajar terlibat secara aktif untuk membina pengetahuan dan guru pula berperanan sebagai pemudah cara yang menyediakan sumber atau bahan pembelajaran bersesuaian serta menjadi pembimbing bagi para pelajar (Ariffin et al., 2020; Chew et al., 2021; Tangkui & Tan, 2020). Selain itu, penglibatan murid dalam proses pembelajaran juga dapat meningkatkan kualiti pengajaran (Voon & Amran (2021). Hal ini kerana penglibatan murid secara aktif dapat meningkatkan minat dan keseronokan belajar selain menjadikan mereka lebih mudah memahami suatu konsep pelajaran (Ahamad et al., 2022).

Teori Konstruktivisme ini boleh diaplikasikan melalui pembelajaran berdasarkan modul. Pembelajaran melalui modul yang mengaplikasikan Teori Konstruktivisme membolehkan pelajar membina pengetahuan baharu berdasarkan teori yang telah diajarkan oleh guru atau pensyarah di dalam kelas. Dalam konteks kajian ini, modul pembelajaran yang dibina bertujuan mengukuhkan teori fleksi bahasa Arab sedia ada dalam kalangan pelajar. Dengan pengetahuan dan teori sedia ada, pelajar dapat menambahkan pengetahuan baru melalui contoh-contoh *i'rab* yang dikeluarkan dalam ayat al-Quran. Selain itu, aplikasi Teori Konstruktivisme dalam modul pembelajaran juga menyahut Pembelajaran Abad ke-21, iaitu pembelajaran kendiri berpusatkan pelajar di samping melatih mereka berfikiran reflektif dalam proses pembelajaran (Voon & Amran, 2021). Di samping itu, teori ini juga dapat mendorong guru dan pensyarah untuk mencapai objektif PdP (Voon & Amran, 2021).

Seterusnya, Teori Konstruktivisme juga merupakan pendekatan yang sesuai sebagai asas kepada pembinaan modul pembelajaran bahasa (Muhin & Yusoff, 2021). Hal ini kerana pada asalnya teori ini merupakan teori pemerolehan dan pembelajaran bahasa (Rujiah & Yusoff, 2021). Oleh yang demikian, Teori Konstruktivisme ini merupakan teori yang bersesuaian dan tepat bagi pelaksanaan kajian, iaitu pembangunan modul infografik bagi pembelajaran fleksi bahasa Arab dalam al-Quran.

Proses pembelajaran berasaskan Teori Konstruktivisme dapat dijalankan melalui penggunaan multimedia seperti modul infografik. Pada era abad ke-21 ini, penggunaan teknologi dalam pembelajaran dilihat amat relevan dan sesuai dengan generasi kini yang banyak terdedah dengan penggunaan gajet dalam kehidupan seharian (Yusof et al., 2021). Oleh yang demikian, penggunaan multimedia dan ICT (*Information Communication Technologies*) dalam pembelajaran seperti modul infografik dapat menjadikan pelajar lebih berminat untuk mendalami ilmu yang dipelajari selain memudahkan mereka untuk mengakses bahan pembelajaran dengan pantas melalui penggunaan gajet (Wahab et al., 2020).

Terdapat beberapa prinsip Teori Konstruktivisme yang boleh diterapkan dalam bahan pengajaran berasaskan multimedia. Ciri-ciri tersebut merupakan

saranan Aris et al. (2001) yang boleh dijadikan panduan dalam pembangunan sesebuah modul pembelajaran, iaitu:

a) Memfokuskan kepada pengalaman pelajar dan menyediakan persekitaran yang melahirkan suasana ingin belajar.
b) Bahan pembelajaran yang berstruktur agar mudah diterima pelajar.
c) Reka bentuk modul mempunyai perspektif dan aspek yang pelbagai.
d) Pelajar bebas memilih topik yang ingin dipelajari, membina persoalan sendiri dan merancang pembelajaran masing-masing.
e) Bahan pembelajaran memberi sedikit kawalan kepada pengguna untuk mengawal pembelajaran mereka.

Walaupun beberapa kajian terdahulu telah membangunkan modul pembelajaran bahasa Arab, kebanyakannya proses penilaian tidak diberi penekanan. Hal ini menyebabkan hasil pembelajaran yang tidak konsisten dan sukar diadaptasi dalam pelbagai konteks pendidikan. Jadual 1 berikut menunjukkan analisis jurang kajian-kajian terdahulu serta pengembangan ilmu yang dijalankan oleh kajian i-FleQ.

Jadual 1
Analisis Jurang i-FleQ

Aspek	Pemerhatian dari Kajian Lalu	Pengembangan ilmu dalam kajian i-FleQ
Pendekatan Penilaian	Pelbagai pendekatan digunakan: Fuzzy Delphi, TAM, soal selidik. Namun, kebanyakan tiada triangulasi penilai luar dan pengguna	Kajian i-FleQ menggabungkan penilaian pelbagai pihak: pakar kandungan, pelajar, guru
Kandungan Modul	Fokus kepada kemahiran umum (mendengar, bertutur, nahu asas, pengurusan kelas)	Modul ini fokus kepada topik khusus: fleksi al-Quran, dengan dimensi tafsiran dan morfologi
Reka Bentuk Visual / Teknologi	Beberapa modul gunakan teknologi (m-learning, Web 2.0, laman web), tetapi infografik interaktif hanya digunakan dalam 1 kajian (TAM)	Modul i-FleQ menggabungkan prinsip IDM secara formal dan komprehensif
Konteks Penggunaan	Modul dan aplikasi tidak dikontekstualkan dengan kandungan agama atau al-Quran	Modul i-FleQ berteraskan teks al-Quran, relevan dengan pendidikan Islam dan Bahasa Arab (al-Quran)

Berdasarkan jurang yang dikenal pasti dalam Jadual 1, kajian ini merangka objektif yang dirumus secara langsung untuk menutup perbezaan tersebut. Objektif menyatakan hukum i‘rab bagi setiap perkataan, menyediakan terjemahan perkataan berdasarkan i‘rab yang telah ditentukan serta mengaplikasikan kaedah i‘rab dan terjemahan dalam memahami ayat al-Quran berfungsi menutup jurang berkaitan fokus kandungan dan konteks al-Quran. Dari sudut metodologi, penggunaan kaedah

Fuzzy Delphi yang melibatkan sepuluh pakar dan ujian kesahan kandungan oleh lima pakar menjadi mekanisme penilaian berlapis yang menjawab jurang kelemahan dalam penekanan proses penilaian. Selain itu, pengoperasian *Infographic Design Model* secara formal dalam pembangunan modul memastikan reka bentuk infografik bersifat sistematik dan berprinsip, seterusnya mengatasi jurang ketiadaan kerangka visual yang jelas. Justeru, objektif dan pendekatan kajian ini telah dirancang secara praktikal untuk mengatasi jurang yang telah dihuraikan dalam sorotan literatur.

Objektif Kajian

Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk membangunkan modul infografik bagi pembelajaran fleksi bahasa Arab dalam al-Quran, i-FleQ. Selain itu, dapatan kajian ini juga menjelaskan persoalan kajian berikut:

i) Bagaimanakah bentuk modul infografik pembelajaran fleksi bahasa Arab yang dibangunkan berdasarkan pandangan kesepakatan pakar?
ii) Apakah pandangan pakar terhadap kandungan modul yang telah dihasilkan?

Metodologi Kajian

Pembangunan modul i-FleQ didasari pendekatan Reka Bentuk dan Pembangunan atau juga disebut sebagai *Design and Development Research*. Kajian ini terbahagi kepada dua fasa kajian, iaitu fasa analisis keperluan dan fasa reka bentuk serta pembangunan. Kajian pada fasa reka bentuk dan pembangunan pula terbahagi kepada dua peringkat, iaitu fasa reka bentuk dan fasa pembangunan. Pelaksanaan pembangunan modul i-FleQ adalah berdasarkan dapatan kajian fasa analisis keperluan dan fasa reka bentuk. Kajian fasa analisis keperluan telah melibatkan 148 orang responden yang terdiri daripada pelajar ISM Pengajian Bahasa Arab UniSZA. Kesemua pelajar telah mengambil kursus Kajian Teks Sintaksis Ibn Aqil, iaitu suatu kursus tatabahasa bahasa Arab yang ditawarkan di UniSZA. Kajian ini bertujuan mengukur tahap keperluan pembangunan modul menerusi pendapat dan persepsi para pelajar. Seterusnya, fasa reka bentuk pula dilaksanakan bagi mendapatkan persetujuan pakar terhadap item-item yang dicadangkan dalam pembangunan modul i-FleQ. Kajian ini melibatkan 10 orang pakar yang terdiri daripada bidang Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran bahasa Arab, teknologi pendidikan, dan pembangunan kurikulum.

Seterusnya, pada fasa pembangunan, pengkaji telah menghasilkan modul Infografik Fleksi al-Quran (i-FleQ) yang terdiri daripada lima konstruk utama, iaitu objektif modul, isi kandungan modul, reka bentuk modul, aktiviti pembelajaran modul dan penilaian modul. Seterusnya, pengkaji membina rancangan pembelajaran dan melaksanakan kajian kesahan kandungan modul i-FleQ. Menurut Rashidi et al. (2023), proses kesahan kandungan memainkan peranan penting untuk mengukur sama ada sesuatu modul yang dibangunkan mencapai objektif yang ditetapkan atau sebaliknya. Oleh yang demikian, kesahan kandungan modul i-FleQ dilaksanakan bagi memastikan modul yang dibangunkan dapat membantu para pelajar menguasai ilmu fleksi bahasa Arab dengan lebih baik melalui penggunaan infografik dalam bahan Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran dan kepelbagaian contoh *i'rab* dalam ayat al-Quran.

Proses kesahan ini melibatkan lima orang pakar yang terdiri daripada bidang Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran bahasa Arab, teknologi pendidikan dan pembangunan kurikulum. Kesemua pakar yang dipilih mempunyai bidang kepakaran sekitar lima hingga 15 tahun dan ke atas, hal ini demikian selari dengan pendapat Creswell (seperti yang dinyatakan dalam Eshak & Zain, 2020), iaitu pensyarah yang mempunyai pengalaman dalam bidang tertentu bermula daripada tempoh lima hingga 10 tahun dan ke atas dikira sebagai pakar. Selain itu, instrumen yang digunakan dalam kajian kesahan ini ialah soal selidik dan dibina berdasarkan soal selidik kesahan kandungan modul Russell (1974). Sebanyak lima soalan dengan lima skala telah dibina, iaitu bermula daripada skala 1 (sangat tidak setuju), 2 (tidak setuju), 3 (tidak pasti), 4 (setuju) dan 5 (sangat setuju). Soal selidik kesahan kandungan ini dihantar kepada panel pakar melalui e-mel beserta e-buku modul Infografik Fleksi al-Quran (i-FleQ) yang telah dibangunkan.

Seterusnya, skor penilaian kesahan kandungan modul yang diperoleh dikira dengan formula berikut, iaitu jumlah skor pakar (x) dibahagikan dengan jumlah skor maksimum (y) (skor sebenar). Kemudian, jumlah yang diperoleh didarabkan dengan seratus, seperti yang dinyatakan dalam formula tersebut (Rashidi et al., 2023):

$$\frac{\text{Jumlah Skor Pakar (x)}}{\text{Jumlah Skor Sebenar (y)}} \times 100\% = \text{Tahap Penguasaan Kesahan Kandungan}$$

Sekiranya jumlah skor pencapaian kesahan kandungan yang diperoleh melebihi 70%, maka modul yang dibangunkan dikira mempunyai kesahan kandungan yang tinggi (Noah & Ahmad, 2005).

Dapatan Kajian

Pembangunan Modul i-FleQ

Berdasarkan analisis dapatan fasa reka bentuk menerusi kaedah *Fuzzy Delphi* yang telah dilaksanakan, terdapat 22 item yang telah dipersetujui oleh kumpulan pakar untuk dibangunkan dalam modul i-FleQ. Item-item tersebut berada di bawah lima komponen utama modul, iaitu objektif, isi kandungan, reka bentuk, aktiviti pembelajaran dan penilaian modul. Selain itu, item-item tersebut juga disusun berdasarkan kedudukan (*ranking*) yang ditentukan melalui purata skor *Fuzzy*. Semakin tinggi nilai purata tersebut, semakin tinggi kedudukan sesuatu item modul. Perincian item mengikut komponen adalah seperti yang tertera dalam Jadual 2 yang berikut.

Jadual 2

Komponen Utama Modul i-FleQ

Komponen	Item
Objektif	1. Mengaplikasikan kaedah *i'rab* dan terjemahan dalam memahami ayat al-Quran. 2. Menyatakan hukum *i'rab* yang tepat bagi setiap perkataan dalam ayat al- Quran.

	3. Menyatakan terjemahan bagi setiap perkataan berdasarkan *i'rab* yang telah dinyatakan.
Isi Kandungan	1. Terjemahan penuh bagi setiap ayat dalam surah. 2. *I'rab* setiap perkataan dalam surah. 3. Terjemahan setiap perkataan dalam setiap ayat. 4. Latihan tentang *i'rab* dan terjemahan perkataan.
Reka Bentuk	1. Pemilihan jenis tulisan yang mudah dibaca. 2. Penggunaan saiz teks yang mudah dibaca. 3. Modul boleh diakses melalui semua peranti elektronik. 4. Penggunaan garis dan anak panah sebagai panduan untuk menunjukkan *i'rab* bagi setiap perkataan. 5. Maklumat perlu ringkas dan padat dalam setiap halaman. 6. Maklumat dipersembahkan dalam bentuk peta minda. 7. Bilangan jenis tulisan dihadkan. 8. Penggunaan imej dan grafik yang bersesuaian dengan tema surah. 9. Paparan muka (*layout*) menarik dan sesuai. 10. Warna teks terjemahan mengikut warna *i'rab* setiap perkataan. 11. Penggunaan warna halaman yang berbeza mengikut surah. 12. Penggunaan warna teks yang berbeza mengikut *i'rab*.
Aktiviti Pembelajaran	1. Perbincangan maya interaktif berkenaan *i'rab* menerusi aplikasi Padlet.
Penilaian	1. Ujian bertulis (*I'rab* dan terjemah perkataan) 2. Ujian lisan (Menentukan baris perkataan)

Pembangunan modul Infografik Fleksi al-Quran (i-FleQ) diteruskan setelah mendapat persetujuan pakar terhadap cadangan item bagi setiap komponen modul. Proses pembangunan ini merangkumi pemilihan surah dan kitab rujukan, penggunaan perisian teknologi yang bersesuaian dan pembinaan aktiviti pembelajaran.

Bagi memastikan ketepatan *i'rab* perkataan bahasa Arab untuk setiap surah yang dipilih, pengkaji telah memilih kitab *I'rab al-Quran al-Karim* karangan Dr. Mahmud al-Qadhi sebagai rujukan utama. Kitab ini dipilih kerana huraiannya jelas, lengkap dan mudah difahami. Sebanyak 19 surah telah dipilih sebagai kandungan modul, iaitu surah a*d-Dhuha, al-Insyirah, at-Tin, al-'Alaq, al-Qadr, az-Zalzalah, at-Takathur, al-'Asr, al-Humazah, al-Fil, Quraisy, al-Ma'un, al-Kauthar, al-Kafirun, an-Nasr, al-Masad, al-Ikhlas, al-Falaq* dan *an-Nas*. Kesemua surah tersebut merupakan surah-surah pendek daripada Juzu' 30 dan dipilih bagi memudahkan pembaca mempelajari ilmu *i'rab* bahasa Arab menerusi surah-surah pendek dalam al-Quran. Pengkaji telah melaksanakan proses pemindahan maklumat daripada kitab *I'rab al-Quran al-Karim* dan merubah gaya persembahan maklumat kepada infografik statik berbentuk e-buku.

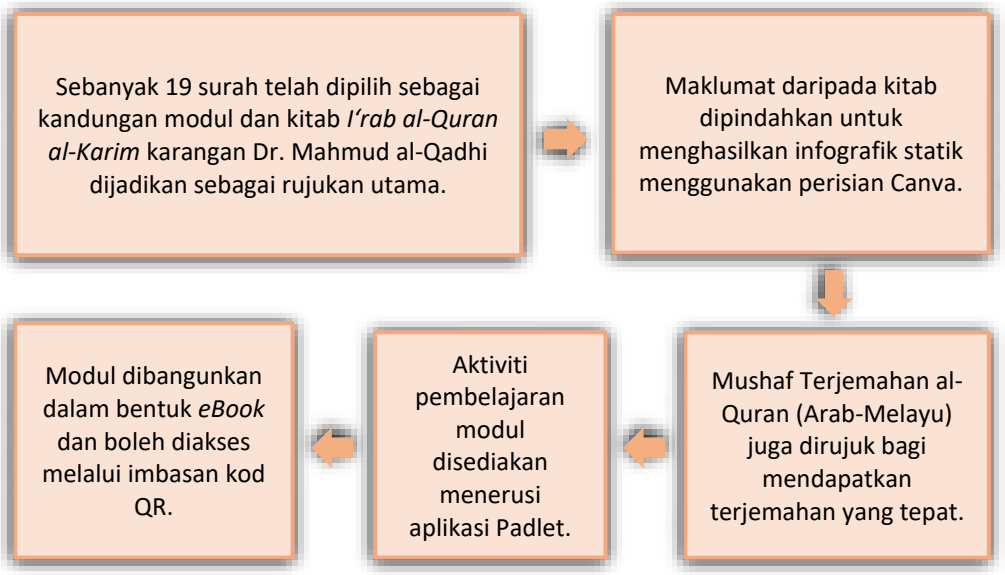
Setelah proses pemindahan maklumat selesai, pengkaji menggunakan perisian Canva bagi mereka bentuk dan menyusun maklumat untuk menghasilkan

infografik statik yang menarik dan kreatif. Proses pembangunan modul i-FleQ ini dijalankan berdasarkan persetujuan dan cadangan kumpulan pakar yang diperoleh menerusi analisis kaedah *Fuzzy Delphi* yang telah dilaksanakan. Terdapat empat komponen utama yang menjadi asas pembangunan modul i-FleQ, iaitu objektif, isi kandungan, reka bentuk dan aktiviti pembelajaran. Item-item bagi komponen penilaian modul pula akan dibangunkan kemudian bagi penilaian kepenggunaan modul. Antara ciri-ciri modul i-FleQ ialah:

a) Menerapkan konsep Pembelajaran Abad ke-21 (PAK21), iaitu pembelajaran kendiri berpusatkan pelajar.
b) Menggunakan warna yang berbeza-beza bagi membezakan *i'rab* antara perkataan bahasa Arab.
c) Dilengkapi dengan terjemahan bagi setiap perkataan serta terjemahan penuh bagi setiap ayat al-Quran.
d) Latihan secara interaktif disediakan untuk menguji kefahaman.

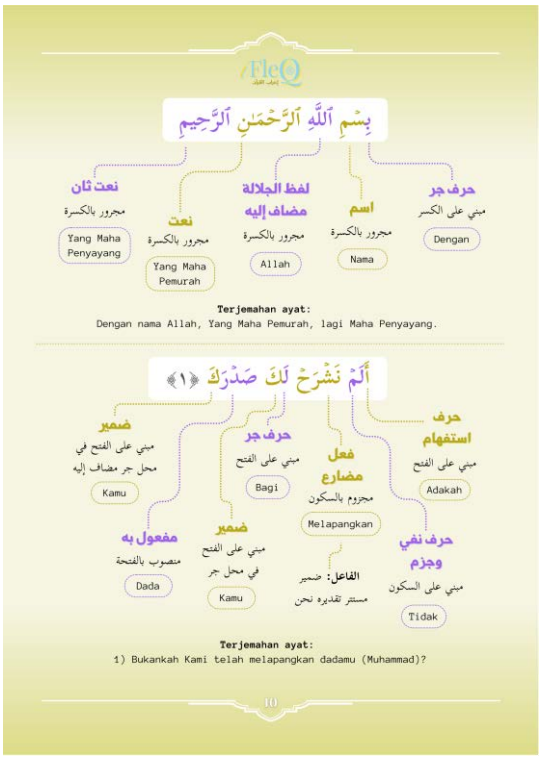
Di samping itu, pengkaji juga merujuk aplikasi Smart Quran bagi mendapatkan terjemahan yang tepat bagi setiap perkataan dan terjemahan penuh ayat al-Quran bagi setiap surah yang dipilih. Aplikasi ini merupakan aplikasi mudah alih al-Quran beserta terjemahan. Terjemahan yang disediakan dalam aplikasi ini adalah berdasarkan Tafsir Pimpinan Ar-Rahman keluaran JAKIM. Menurut Marzuki dan Ahmad (2023), terjemahan Tafsir Pimpinan Ar-Rahman adalah lebih mudah difahami dan dihayati oleh kesemua lapisan masyarakat kerana penggunaan laras bahasanya yang tepat dan jelas. Selain itu, tafsir ini juga digunakan secara meluas dalam bidang pendidikan di sekolah, dan institut pengajian tinggi. Selepas kandungan modul selesai dibangunkan, pengkaji telah menyediakan aktiviti pembelajaran menggunakan aplikasi Padlet. Perbincangan maya secara dalam talian disediakan bagi setiap surah bertujuan untuk menguji dan mengukuhkan kefahaman pelajar terhadap ilmu fleksi bahasa Arab yang telah dipelajari. Aktiviti pembelajaran ini boleh diakses melalui imbasan kod QR di akhir halaman pembelajaran fleksi bahasa Arab setiap surah dalam modul i-FleQ. Secara amnya, modul ini dibangunkan dalam bentuk e-buku dan boleh diakses dengan imbasan kod QR. Rajah 2 yang berikut menunjukkan ringkasan pembangunan modul i-FleQ.

Rajah 2
Proses Pembangunan Modul i-FleQ



Berikut merupakan contoh paparan modul i-FleQ:

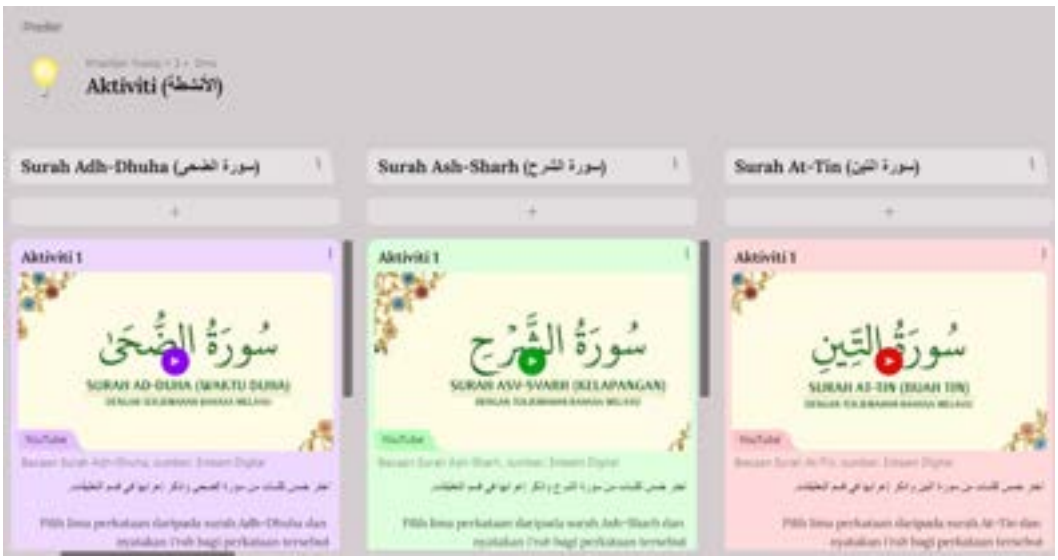
Rajah 3
Paparan Kandungan Modul i-FleQ



Rajah 4
Paparan Kandungan Modul i-FleQ



Rajah 5
Paparan Aktiviti Pembelajaran Modul i-FleQ di Padlet



Analisis Kesahan Modul

Dapatan kajian kesahan kandungan modul Infografik Fleksi al-Quran (i-FleQ) adalah seperti yang diperincikan dalam Jadual 3 berikut:

Jadual 3

Nilai Kesahan Kandungan Berdasarkan Penilaian Pakar

Bil.	Pernyataan Kesahan Kandungan	Peratusan (%)	Pandangan Pakar
1.	Kandungan modul ini menepati sasaran populasinya.	100	Diterima
2.	Kandungan modul ini boleh dilaksanakan dengan sempurna.	92	Diterima
3.	Kandungan modul ini bersesuaian dengan masa yang diperuntukkan.	96	Diterima
4.	Kandungan modul ini boleh meningkatkan prestasi pencapaian pelajar.	100	Diterima
5.	Kandungan modul ini boleh mengubah sikap pelajar ke arah lebih cemerlang.	96	Diterima

Berdasarkan Jadual 3 di atas, kesemua pernyataan dalam soal selidik mendapat respons positif daripada panel pakar dengan peratus penerimaan bermula daripada 92% hingga 100%. Pernyataan satu dan pernyataan empat mendapat peratusan maksimum, iaitu 100% manakala pernyataan tiga dan lima mendapat peratusan sebanyak 96% dan pernyataan dua memperoleh peratusan sebanyak 92%. Kesemua peratusan yang diperoleh melebihi 70% dan ini menunjukkan bahawa modul i-FleQ mempunyai kesahan kandungan yang tinggi.

Perbincangan

Hasil dapatan memberi penekanan kepada proses penilaian, fokus kandungan, reka bentuk instruksional, serta implikasi lebih luas pembangunan modul pengajaran bahasa Arab berasaskan al-Quran. Dari segi penekanan proses penilaian, kajian ini menekankan kualiti yang lebih kukuh berbanding majoriti kajian terdahulu. Penggunaan kaedah Fuzzy Delphi dengan penglibatan sepuluh pakar merentas bidang (Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran bahasa Arab, teknologi pendidikan dan pembangunan kurikulum) membolehkan penapisan dan pengesahan 22 item modul secara konsensus. Langkah ini dilengkapkan dengan kajian kesahan kandungan oleh lima pakar yang menunjukkan tahap penerimaan antara 92% hingga 100%, menandakan kesepadanan modul dari segi sasaran pengguna, kebolehlaksanaan, peruntukan masa, potensi peningkatan prestasi, dan kesan sikap. Proses penilaian berlapis ini bukan sahaja menjawab kritikan utama literatur bahawa kebanyakan pembangunan modul tidak memberi penekanan yang memadai terhadap proses penilaian, malah turut menawarkan sumbangan baharu pada aspek ketelitian penilaian dalam pembangunan bahan pengajaran bahasa Arab.

Kajian ini juga menangani jurang fokus kandungan dan konteks dengan menumpukan kepada fleksi al-Quran (i'rab) yang bersifat khusus. Penyepaduan analisis i'rab per perkataan, terjemahan per perkataan, serta terjemahan penuh ayat menghubungkan aras tatabahasa dengan pemahaman semantik dan wacana al-Quran. Penetapan rujukan autoritatif serta pemetaan sistematik antara i'rab dan makna membantu meminimumkan salah tafsir struktur, sekali gus memperkukuh justifikasi pedagogi modul ini sebagai bahan bantu pengajaran yang relevan dengan konteks pendidikan Islam. Seterusnya, dari perspektif reka bentuk instruksional, pengoperasian IDM sebagai model sandaran telah memastikan keputusan visual berlandaskan prinsip pedagogi, termasuk tipografi mesra pengguna, kod warna i'rab, peta minda, serta panduan visual seperti garis dan anak panah. Dapatan reka bentuk ini bukan sahaja menyokong teori beban kognitif dan keberkesanan visual, tetapi juga meningkatkan kebolehgunaan modul merentas peranti elektronik, sejajar dengan ciri eModul yang dinyatakan oleh Azman dan Rahman (2022). Signifikan proses penilaian dalam konteks kajian ini dan pembangunan modul bahasa Arab yang lainnya dapat dilihat dalam dua aspek utama, iaitu menjamin kesepadanan objektif, kandungan, aktiviti dan penilaian bagi topik kompleks seperti i'rab; dan juga mendedahkan kaedah penilaian dengan gabungan Fuzzy Delphi dan kesahan kandungan yang boleh dijadikan rujukan oleh penggubal bahan TAFL (*Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language*) lain. Justeru itu, kajian ini meletakkan modul i-FleQ dalam landskap penyelidikan sebagai satu model kerja yang menyumbang kepada penyeragaman amalan penilaian dalam pembangunan modul pengajaran bahasa asing.

Selain itu, dapatan juga menegaskan bahawa pembangunan modul i-FleQ berpotensi membantu pelajar menguasai ilmu fleksi bahasa Arab dengan lebih berkesan melalui aplikasi teori i'rab dalam ayat al-Quran dan penggunaan infografik sebagai medium visual. Tiga objektif utama modul, iaitu menyatakan hukum i'rab, menyediakan terjemahan berdasarkan i'rab dan mengaplikasikan kaedah tersebut dalam memahami ayat al-Quran telah disahkan oleh pakar sebagai objektif yang signifikan. Seperti dinyatakan oleh Ahmad H. Osman dan Abu Hassan (2022), penguasaan i'rab merupakan kunci kepada pemahaman dan pentafsiran al-Quran kerana perubahan baris akhir perkataan memberi kesan langsung terhadap makna. Hal ini memperlihatkan bahawa modul i-FleQ bukan sahaja menyokong pembelajaran tatabahasa, bahkan juga membantu pelajar memahami konteks ayat secara lebih mendalam. Tambahan pula, pada fasa reka bentuk, pakar bersetuju bahawa modul perlu memenuhi ciri-ciri seperti teks mudah dibaca, kandungan ringkas, paparan menarik, serta penggunaan warna dan grafik yang bersesuaian. Kesepakatan ini selari dengan pandangan Azman dan Rahman (2022) tentang keperluan eModul yang dapat menarik minat pelajar, memupuk pembelajaran kendiri dan meningkatkan kemahiran penyelesaian masalah. Begitu juga, penggunaan Padlet sebagai medium interaktif memberikan ruang untuk perbincangan maya yang moden dan kolaboratif (Jusoh et al., 2019), sekali gus mengukuhkan keberkesanan modul dalam konteks Pembelajaran Abad ke-21.

Kesimpulan

Kajian ini bertujuan membangunkan Modul i-FleQ bagi membantu pelajar menguasai ilmu i'rab dengan lebih berkesan melalui pendekatan Reka Bentuk dan Pembangunan yang menggabungkan Model Diskrepansi, Model Pembinaan Modul Sidek, *Infographic Design Model* dan Teori Konstruktivisme. Proses pembangunan melibatkan analisis keperluan terhadap pelajar, penilaian item melalui kaedah Fuzzy Delphi bersama pakar, serta pengujian kesahan kandungan yang mencapai tahap tinggi antara 92% hingga 100%. Dapatan ini menunjukkan bahawa modul i-FleQ berpotensi besar dalam meningkatkan kefahaman struktur ayat al-Quran dan boleh dijadikan model rujukan pembangunan modul pengajaran bahasa Arab berasaskan teknologi visual. Walau bagaimanapun, kajian ini terbatas kerana penilaian hanya melibatkan pakar dan belum diuji dalam konteks bilik darjah sebenar, justeru kajian lanjutan perlu melibatkan ujian lapangan, kajian kebolehgunaan pelajar, serta pengesahan rentas konteks di pelbagai peringkat pengajian. Selain itu, kajian lanjutan boleh meneroka analisis pembelajaran digital, integrasi penilaian berfokuskan pengguna, serta penerapan modul seumpama ini dalam aspek linguistik Arab lain. Secara keseluruhannya, intipati utama kajian ini ialah i-FleQ telah membuktikan kesediaan sebagai modul instruksional yang disahkan, menarik dan relevan, sekali gus memberikan asas kukuh untuk memperkasa Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran bahasa Arab berteraskan al-Quran.

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POWER OF AMPLIFICATION: LINGUISTIC BOOSTERS IN MALAYSIAN AND SINGAPOREAN PRIVATE HEALTHCARE INFORMATIVE SOCIAL MEDIA POSTINGS

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Manuscript received 11 December 2024
Manuscript accepted 24 November 2025
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https://doi.org/10.33736/ils.8456.2025

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the strategic use of boosters, a type of interactional metadiscourse, in informative social media postings within the culturally diverse contexts of Malaysia and Singapore. Drawing on Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions, this qualitative study examines 30 informative social media (*Instagram*) postings from two private medical centres: Subang Jaya Medical Centre and Mount Elizabeth Hospital. Both private medical centres strategically use boosters to highlight expertise, assert authority, and influence the public's perception, particularly in promoting advanced technology and positive health outcomes. Due to the cultural differences, the use of booster varies between these two, with Malaysia favouring superlatives and Singapore employing more affective language, reflecting the influence of cultural and market factors. This study highlights the persuasive nature of the informative social media postings and the healthcare industry's reliance on assertive language to establish credibility and influence health-related decisions. This study contributes to an understanding of how cultural differences and genre conventions intersect in shaping persuasive language within online healthcare communication.

Keywords: advertising; boosters; cultural values; informative social media postings; interactional metadiscourse

Introduction

Prioritising health is essential, as it plays a critical role in improving well-being and preventing illness. In today's fast-paced society, providing reliable health information to the public is more important than ever to support informed decision-making and promote positive health behaviours. Advertising, particularly through informative social media postings, has emerged as a powerful channel for delivering health-related knowledge to the public. These postings, also referred to advertising, are widely accessible and have become an influential part of modern health communication (Pelet & Ettis, 2022). Informative social media postings can motivate healthy choices (Hsu, 2023), empower consumers to make informed healthcare decisions (Park et al., 2023), and significantly influence public health behaviours when persuasive strategies are effectively employed (Simpson, 2017).

However, informative social media postings differ fundamentally from traditional, face-to-face communication. Unlike direct interactions, informative social media postings lack non-verbal cues such as eye contact, facial expressions, and body language, which are essential for building trust and conveying meaning (Johansson, 2018). This presents a unique challenge as the effectiveness of social media health communication depends entirely on how the message is written. To successfully engage and persuade the public, health advertisements must be carefully crafted to compensate for the absence of physical presence and personal interaction (Lee & Ande, 2023), especially when dealing with complex medical terminology that may be unfamiliar to the general audience (Gandolf, 2023).

This is where metadiscourse becomes essential. Metadiscourse refers to the linguistic strategies writers use to organise content, build relationships with readers, and shape how information is interpreted (Hyland, 2005; Love et al., 2023). When applied effectively, metadiscourse can bridge the gap between complex health information and public understanding. It helps writers engage readers, highlight important points, and guide them through the message, ultimately making the communication more persuasive and accessible (Hyland, 2005; Ibrahim, 2021). Boosters is a type of interactional metadiscourse that can foster writer-reader engagement (Qiu e al., 2024).

If informative social media postings are not written effectively, the risk of miscommunication and misleading information increases. Misleading content can have serious consequences, prompting consumers to make poor health decisions based on inaccurate or exaggerated claims (Bailey et al., 2013; Zhao et al., 2023). Such misinformation can erode public trust, contribute to ineffective or harmful health practices, and widen existing health disparities (García-Nieto et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2019). These risks were especially evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, when accurate and persuasive health communication was crucial for promoting preventive behaviours (Isalambo & Kenneth, 2020).

Although metadiscourse has been widely examined in academic writing, its role in advertising is underexplored (Lai, 2023), and scholars have called for further work across diverse genres (Ibrahim, 2021). This study examines the influence of culture on the use of boosters in informative social media postings by Malaysian and Singaporean medical centres to engage and persuade the public. By doing so, it aims

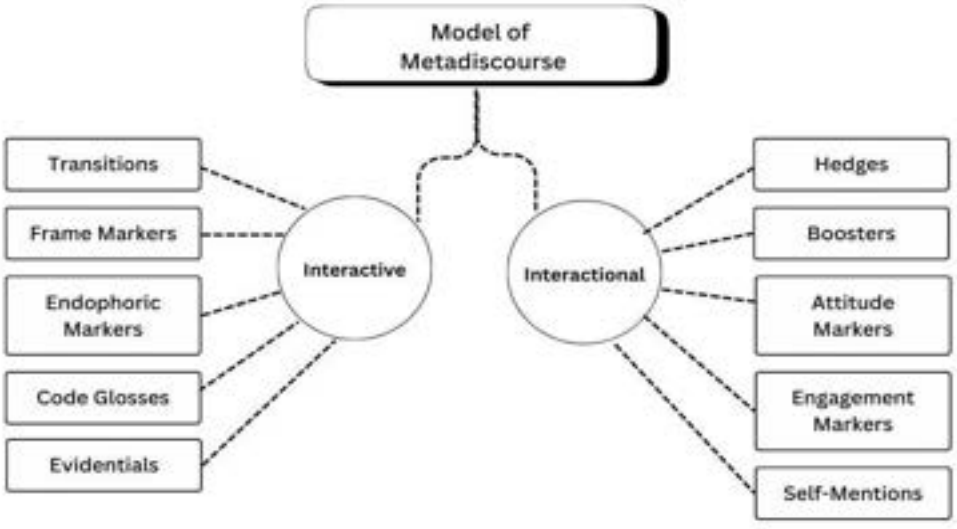
to support more effective, ethical, and trustworthy health communication on social media.

Literature Review

Interactional Metadiscourse and Boosters

Hyland (2004) categorises metadiscourse into two main categories: interactive and interactional. While interactive metadiscourse focuses on textual organisation, interactional metadiscourse fosters engagement between the writer and the reader (Hyland, 2004). Figure 1 summarises the framework.

Figure 1
Model of Metadiscourse (Hyland, 2005)



This study focuses on interactional metadiscourse, particularly boosters (certainty markers), and its role in informative social media postings where concise language and persuasive techniques are essential. Boosters, a key element of interactional metadiscourse, are linguistic devices used to add emphasis (Dontcheva-Navrátilová, 2016; Tanveer et al., 2023), strengthen claims (Hyland, 1998), reflect confidence (Carrió-Pastor & Albalat-Mascarell, 2022), balance the assertion of truth with one's perspective (Yuvayapan & Peksoy, 2023), and enhance persuasiveness and enthusiasm (Mokhtar et al., 2021). Through the use of boosters, writers can strengthen their arguments, increase the persuasiveness of their claims, and minimise potential reader doubts (Aziz et al., 2016). Given the persuasive nature of informative social media postings and the need to convey health information convincingly, this study posits that boosters play a crucial role in shaping public perceptions and influencing health-related decisions within informative social media postings.

Persuasion Through Informative Social Media Postings

Unlike other genres, informative social media postings operate within a persuasive paradigm, targeting a diverse audience with varying needs and understanding (Mohammed, 2022). This requires carefully crafted messages to persuade the public to view the advertised product or service favourably (Bex, 1993). Therefore, understanding informative social media postings as a persuasive genre and utilising genre conventions is crucial for advertisers to effectively achieve their communicative goals.

The use of social media advertising has risen sharply as it allows businesses, institutions, influencers, and followers to build relationships through engaging content (Breves et al., 2021). However, engagement alone does not guarantee persuasion (Breves et al., 2021). Informative social media postings must also be persuasive to motivate audiences to purchase products or services (Hidarto & Andrieza, 2022). Persuasion is a key aspect of social interaction and operates as a linguistic strategy to shape attitudes, reactions, beliefs, and agreement (Kashiha, 2022). Interactional metadiscourse strengthens the persuasive force of arguments (Hyland, 2005) and, in informative postings, supports not only sales but also rapport building and brand recognition (Romanova & Smirnova, 2019). Metadiscourse is therefore rhetorically significant in crafting impactful messages (Hyland, 2005), and the strategic use of interactional metadiscourse is essential for giving informative social media postings real persuasive power.

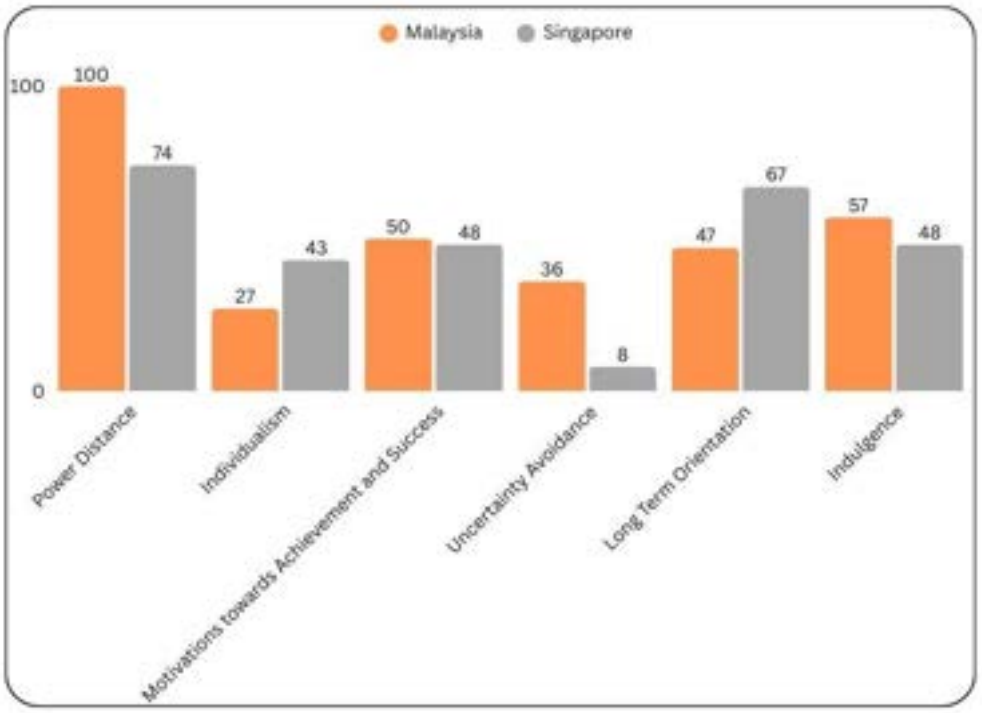
While research on metadiscourse has been prevalent in academic writing (Hayisama & Adnan, 2019; Hu & Cao, 2011; Korkmaz, 2022; Lo et al., 2021; Nugroho, 2019), studies exploring its use in advertising is limited (Lai, 2023). However, existing research across various fields, including politics (Esmer, 2017; Etemadfar & Namaziandost, 2020), literature (AlJazrawi & AlJazrawi, 2021), and advertising (Fuertes-Olivera et al., 2001; Lai, 2023; Roslan et al., 2021), highlights the persuasive power of interactional metadiscourse. Specifically, boosters are effective in expressing certainty (Hyland, 2005) and enhancing persuasion (Dontcheva-Navratilova, 2016). Thus, boosters can be particularly important in informative social media postings, where the goal is to inform and persuade (Hu & Cao, 2011; Noorian & Biria, 2010).

Malaysian and Singaporean Cultural Values

Figure 2 illustrates the values of Malaysia and Singapore across six dimensions as outlined by Hofstede et al. (2010): Power Distance, Individualism-Collectivism, Masculinity-Femininity (Motivation towards Achievement and Success), Uncertainty Avoidance, Short-Long-Term Orientation, and Restraint-Indulgence. Note that Malaysia is represented in orange, while Singapore is in grey.

Figure 2

Comparison Scores Across Cultural Dimensions for Malaysia and Singapore



(Source: https://www.theculturefactor.com/country-comparison-tool)

Firstly, concerning Power Distance, both countries exhibit high scores, with Malaysia scoring even higher than Singapore. This indicates that they not only accept but also expect hierarchies and power imbalances in their societal structures. Secondly, on the Individualism-Collectivism dimension, Malaysia leans heavily towards collectivism, which prioritises group harmony, social connections, and the well-being of the community over individual needs. Singaporeans, while still leaning towards collectivism, might be more receptive to individual acts and desires. Thirdly, on the Masculinity-Femininity (Motivation towards Achievement and Success) dimension, both Malaysia and Singapore have a balanced emphasis on achievement-oriented values. This suggests that there is a balance between striving for success and maintaining a positive work-life balance. Fourthly, in terms of Uncertainty Avoidance, Singapore shows a strong tolerance for ambiguity and flexibility. While rules are followed, this is more due to hierarchical respect than a desire for predictability (Hofstede Insights, 2023). Malaysia also demonstrates comfort with uncertainty, though to a slightly lesser degree, reflecting a preference for some structure without being overly rigid (Tehseen et al., 2021). Fifthly, the Short-Long-Term Orientation scores show a striking difference with Malaysians leaning towards a short-term orientation, reflecting a normative culture, characterised by a strong respect for tradition, a focus on quick results, and a relatively low tendency to save for the future (Haq, 2020). Normative societies, which score low on this dimension, prefer to uphold time-honoured customs and norms, often viewing societal change with suspicion, and

are concerned with establishing the absolute Truth (Hofstede Insightsm 2023). In contrast, Singaporeans demonstrate a long-term orientation, prioritising perseverance, adaptability, and future planning. Finally, the scores on the Indulgence-Restraint dimension present Malaysians as those who value life's pleasures. In contrast, Singapore demonstrates a more restrained approach with a slightly greater emphasis on prioritising practicality over immediate pleasure.

Past Studies

Lai's (2023) study investigated the role of interactional metadiscourse and its persuasive effects in 50 advertisements in 2022 for women's products. The findings indicated that boosters in these advertisements, particularly in Cosmopolitan magazine, ranked second lowest compared to other markers. However, boosters play an important role in conveying certainty about the advertised products. Furthermore, the results indicate that the use of adverbs enhances the writer's voice, thereby making it easier to gain the consumer's trust.

Another study on metadiscourse in advertising was conducted by Giordano and Marongiu (2022), focusing on 30 public posters related to the coronavirus disseminated by healthcare organisations and institutions. Unlike Lai's (2023) study, which identified a lower prevalence of boosters, Marongiu (2022) revealed a substantial presence of boosters, including adjectives, adverbs, and superlatives. The writers found that the utilisation of boosters in these advertisements enhances the credibility and authoritative stance of the message, thereby reflecting the expertise of the organisations and institutions on this critical subject. This strategy not only serves to inform the public but also fosters confidence in the information presented during a crucial time.

Using Hyland's (2005) Model of Metadiscourse, Gustafsson (2018) examined the persuasive use of metadiscourse in online makeup advertisements from 20 prominent brands, resulting in a total of 74 advertisements analysed. The study revealed that boosters were among the most commonly used markers in these advertisements. Significantly, the writer highlighted the challenges associated with interpreting boosters, given their varied forms. Nevertheless, the writer successfully identified boosters within clauses or entire phrases, where they function to convey certainty and assertiveness, thereby enhancing the writer's confidence in the information presented about makeup products.

Cross-cultural studies further emphasise the influence of cultural factors on the use of interactional metadiscourse (Farnia & Mohammadi, 2018; Incelli 2017; Nugroho 2020). This research focuses on the employment of interactional metadiscourse, specifically boosters, in informative social media postings within the Malaysian and Singaporean contexts.

Although metadiscourse has been widely studied across genres, existing research has largely focused on academic writing (Hayisama & Adnan, 2019; Korkmaz, 2022; Lo et al., 2021), with limited attention to advertising contexts (Lai, 2023). Studies by Lai (2023), Giordano and Marongiu (2022), and Gustafsson (2018) have examined boosters in advertisements, but these were mainly situated in Western print media, leaving their persuasive role in digital advertising

underexplored. Cross-cultural research has also shown that cultural values shape the use of interactional metadiscourse (Farnia & Mohammadi, 2018; Incelli, 2017; Nugroho, 2020).

To address this gap, the present study analyses boosters in informative social media postings by Malaysian and Singaporean medical centres through the lens of Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions. By focusing on this genre and cross-cultural comparison, the study aims to advance understanding of how boosters function in culturally diverse healthcare communication on social media.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative content analysis approach to explore how cultural influences shape the use of boosters in informative social media postings from Malaysia and Singapore. The aim is to understand persuasive linguistic choices through rich, contextual interpretation rather than numerical analysis (Brennen, 2021; Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019). A deductive content analysis was used, guided by Hyland's (2005) model of interactional metadiscourse. This deductive approach was suitable because the study aimed to identify theory-driven features, specifically boosters, which function to express certainty, reinforce claims, and enhance persuasiveness in health messaging (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2022; Hyland, 2005).

Thirty English-language posts were purposely selected; 15 each from Subang Jaya Medical Centre (SJMC) in Malaysia and Mount Elizabeth Hospital (MEH) in Singapore, based on their informative, non-promotional content shared on Instagram between June and December 2023 (refer to Appendices 1 and 2). Instagram was chosen for its high public engagement and the accessibility of health content (Al-Subhi, 2022). Since all data were publicly available, ethical approval was not required (Huang et al., 2023).

Each post was transcribed and organised into a dataset. The coding process involved two cycles of manual coding (see Appendices 3 and 4). In the first reading, the researchers familiarised themselves with the content. In the second, boosters were identified, highlighted, and coded based on the functions of boosters discussed in the literature. We acknowledged that some markers could perform multiple booster functions and this approach was suitable as the study prioritised understanding function over marker frequency. Each coded item included notes to justify the classification in context. A second coder reviewed a subset of the data, and intercoder reliability was measured using Cohen's Kappa, yielding a result of 0.63, which indicates substantial agreement (Cole, 2023).

While Krippendorff's (2019) framework is widely used for quantitative content analysis with large samples and statistical validation, it was not applied here due to the small-scale and interpretive nature of this study. Instead, the focus was on in-depth, context-sensitive analysis that prioritised theoretical alignment and coding transparency over statistical generalisability. This rigorous, theory-driven approach ensured trustworthy and meaningful insights into how boosters are used to engage audiences and shape public understanding in cross-cultural healthcare communication.

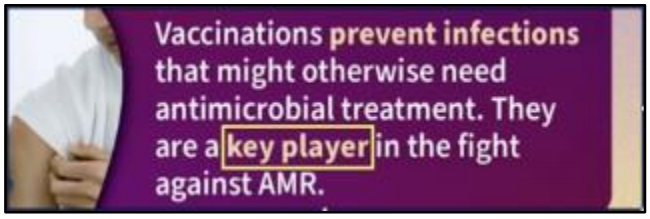
Results and Discussion

The results are organised into three sections: first, the use of boosters in informative social media postings by the Malaysian medical centre; second, the use of boosters in informative social media postings by the Singaporean medical centre; and third, a comparative analysis of the identified boosters in light of cultural-value orientations.

Boosters in SJMC Informative Social Media Postings

Example 1 was published to educate the public about the facts and myths surrounding antimicrobial resistance (AMR), which occurs when bacteria, fungi, parasites, and viruses no longer respond to antimicrobial medications. The posting employs the strategic use of the booster key player in addressing AMR. It amplifies the importance of vaccinations in combating AMR, elevating vaccinations from being one of the available solutions to a pivotal choice in addressing the health challenge. This persuasive technique injects a sense of urgency for the public to prioritise vaccinations. The words "a key player" conveys a sense of certainty, authority, and confidence.

Example 1:



Example 2, published in conjunction with World Heart Day, provides another compelling illustration of booster usage. The posting aims to educate the public about heart disease in Malaysia by comparing CT angiograms with traditional angiograms. The posting highlights the urgent need for early heart disease detection through CT angiograms by highlighting its prevalence in Malaysia. The precise figure of *1.7 million* is used as a booster to persuade readers to prioritise their health and consider early detection methods. The statistic underscores the severity of the health condition and enhances persuasive power. Similar to Example 1, it adds a sense of urgency and authority, which convinces the readers to take the health threat seriously and consider the advertised CT angiogram. Note that No. 1 is another figure identified as a booster in the posting.

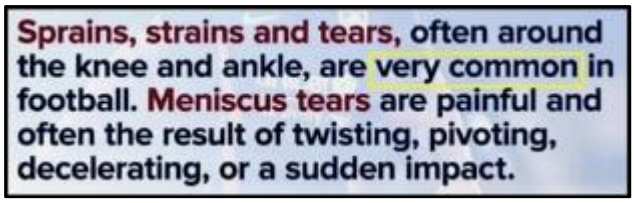
Example 2:



Published in conjunction with National Sports Day, Example 3 provides information on common sports injuries associated with badminton, diving, and

football. Example 3, which focuses on football injuries, illustrates how the booster "very" is used as a booster to emphasise the prevalence of such injuries in the sport. It amplifies the word "common" by emphasising the perceived likelihood of experiencing sprains, strains, and tears, potentially influencing readers about the risks and safety precautions. Highlighting the commonality of such injuries encourages readers to be more aware of the risks and take appropriate preventive measures.

Example 3:



Example 4 was published in support of Pink October. The posting aims to raise awareness about breast health and underscore the importance of early detection. The posting promoting breast cancer awareness capitalises on two boosters: "early" and "higher". These boosters amplify the persuasive impact of the message. Correlating "early detection" with "higher survival" underscores the critical importance of proactive screening for improving survival rates. The booster "early" highlights the significance of timely detection and intervention, while the booster "higher" emphasises the comparative positive impact on survival rates. The concise equation highlights the life-saving potential of early detection.

Example 4:



Example 5 introduces an innovation in blood glucose monitoring to enhance patients' quality of life while emphasising the government's commitment in diabetes management. The posting employs the booster "highest" to emphasise that diabetes rates among Malaysians surpass all other nations in the region. The strategic use of the booster evokes a sense of urgency and concern among Malaysians, which will prompt them to take the health concern seriously, get tested, obtain further information, or even seek preventive measures.

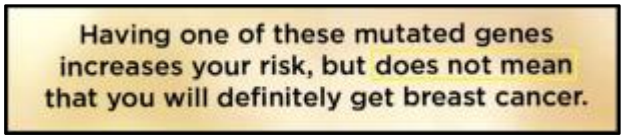
Example 5:



Boosters in MEH Informative Social Media Postings

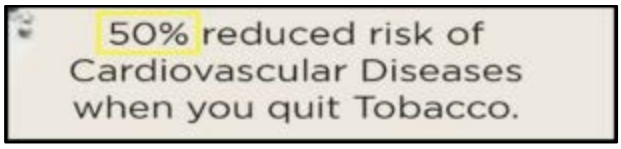
Example 6 was published to address and clarify all the common questions the public has about breast cancer. The posting strategically employs the phrase “does not mean” as a booster to highlight that while having one of these mutated genes increases one’s risk of breast cancer, it does not mean they will contract the cancer . The phrase creates a clear distinction between risk and certainty. Thus, the linguistic choice aims to alleviate potential anxiety and provide reassurance to educate the public about genetic predisposition to breast cancer.

Example 6:



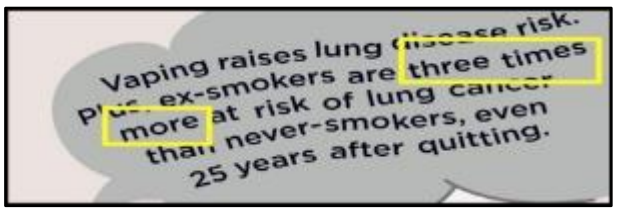
Example 7 encourages individuals to engage in proactive cardiovascular health management by implementing the practical guidelines provided by MEH and scheduling a heart screening. To encourage the public to quit smoking for heart health, the posting cites a compelling statistic: a 50% reduction in cardiovascular disease risk associated with quitting tobacco. This specific percentage, prominently displayed in the figure, supports the credibility of the claim and provides readers with a tangible sense of the benefits, making it more believable (Aziz et al. 2016). Prominently displaying this specific percentage supports the credibility of the claim, providing readers with evidence of the significant health benefits associated with quitting smoking.

Example 7:



Example 8 addresses the misconception that lung cancer primarily affects a specific gender, aiming to educate the public with accurate information about the disease. The posting utilises a precise numerical phrase “three times more” as a booster to amplify the risk of smoking and encourage smoking cessation. This strategy draws on the persuasive power of concrete, quantifiable evidence in health communication. By providing a quantifiable measure of heightened risk, a memorable metric that underscores the long-term consequences of smoking, the posting appeals to logic and fear to motivate smokers toward behavioural change.

Example 8:



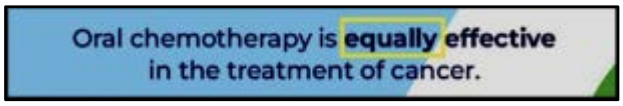
Example 9 aims to debunk common breast cancer myths and encourage early detection among women. The posting strategically employs the booster "crucial" to emphasise the importance of early breast cancer detection in achieving successful treatment outcomes. This linguistic choice elevates the perceived significance of early detection from mere importance to absolute necessity. By highlighting the critical link between early detection and effective treatment, the posting likely aims to evoke a sense of urgency among women, persuading them to prioritise breast cancer screening and potentially improve their chances of positive health outcomes.

Example 9:



Example 10 seeks to clarify misconceptions about cancer treatment, emphasising its safety and alleviating anxiety regarding treatment options. The use of the adverb "equally" functions as a booster by emphasising the comparable effectiveness of oral chemotherapy to other cancer treatment methods. This strategic linguistic choice likely aims to reassure patients about the efficacy of oral chemotherapy, particularly in comparison to more traditional intravenous methods. By explicitly stating that oral chemotherapy is "equally" effective, the posting seeks to reassure patients and instils confidence in this treatment option as a viable and successful alternative.

Example 10:



Comparative Analysis of the Boosters in Selected Informative Social Media Postings in SJMC and MEH

The analysis reveals similarities and differences in the use of boosters in the informative social media postings by both healthcare providers.

As both Singapore and Malaysia exhibit high Power Distance values, they utilise boosters to assert expertise and efficacy in their informative social media postings. This similarity stems partly from the persuasive nature of advertising itself (Breves et al., 2021), where establishing authority is paramount. Furthermore, the healthcare industry, which is often characterised by its specialised knowledge and high stakes, further necessitates assertive language to build influence and accordingly influence decision-making. Thus, boosters are strategically used to underscore specialised knowledge (Example 2), positive health outcomes (Example 7), and advanced technology (Example 4). For Malaysian and Singaporean readers who are accustomed to the more hierarchical doctor-patient relationship, boosters serve as a powerful tool for healthcare providers to establish trust and influence readers' perceptions (Mokhtar et al., 2021).

While both Malaysia and Singapore exhibit a low Uncertainty Avoidance score, suggesting a cultural comfort with ambiguity (Park & Kim, 2008), the use of boosters in the selected informative social media postings is notable (Examples 3 and 6). This contradictory finding suggests that boosters may serve functions beyond simply minimising doubts within the dynamic and competitive healthcare market (Gandolf, 2023). They are employed to highlight advanced technology and treatments as well as appeal to a wider healthcare market that may be receptive to a more assertive communication style. The private healthcare providers' strategic use of boosters in informative social media postings reflects their focus on market reach and profitability. By employing boosters, they can enhance their competitiveness and revenue generation.

While Malaysia is classified as collectivist and Singapore as individualistic, the findings of this study contrast with Pham's (2022) assertion that superlative boosters are more prevalent in individualistic contexts. SJMC postings, representing the Malaysian context, prominently featured superlatives like highest and No. 1, emphasising authority and factual claims, as noted by Yuvayapan and Peksoy (2023). Conversely, MEH postings, representing Singapore, unexpectedly employed affective boosters such as does not mean and crucial, which reflect the writer's personal stance and emotional engagement. This is particularly surprising, given Singapore's individualistic cultural orientation, which is typically associated with direct, fact-based communication rather than emotionally expressive language. This suggests that the relationship between cultural values and booster usage in informative social media postings may be more complex than previously assumed, warranting further investigation.

Both Malaysia and Singapore place moderate importance on achievement and success, although it should be noted that Singapore falls slightly on the femininity dimension (as shown by the Motivation towards Achievement and Success dimension in Figure 1). This cultural value, balancing ambition with quality of life, shapes their healthcare landscape. In this context, advertisers use boosters to subtly connect these aspirations with healthcare choices. For example, emphasising cutting-edge technology (Example 10) appeals to the desire for the best possible health outcomes, reflecting a proactive, achievement-oriented mindset. Similarly, highlighting personalised or preventative care (Example 4) resonates with the desire for control over one's well-being, aligning with a sense of agency often associated with achievement motivation. While both countries demonstrate this achievement orientation in their healthcare messaging, it's worth noting that the use of "appeal to fear", as seen in campaigns targeting smoking cessation (Example 8) and glucose monitoring (Example 5), suggests a parallel strategy that creates concern to motivate behaviour change (Simpson, 2017).

Despite Malaysia's relatively normative culture, which slightly leans towards immediate gratification, the use of boosters in informative social media postings shows similarities to those found in Singapore, a country with a more pragmatic, future-oriented culture. This could be attributed to overlapping cultural values, the universal appeal of certain persuasive techniques, or the influence of globalised marketing trends. For instance, both Malaysian and Singaporean informative social media postings employ statistics and expert opinions to enhance credibility and

persuasive power (Examples 2, 7, and 8). This demonstrates that both countries are adaptable to their current situations, which is a key characteristic of a pragmatic culture (Lee & Ande, 2023). While cultural dimensions play a role, further research is needed to fully understand how they interact with other factors to shape informative social media posting strategies in Malaysia and Singapore.

Finally, the Indulgence-Restraint dimension offers further insight into cultural differences in informative social media postings. Malaysia's higher indulgence score suggests a greater receptivity to campaigns that frame health choices as pathways to enjoyment and enhanced quality of life (Examples 1 and 4). While Singapore leans towards restraint, suggesting a preference for practicality, responsibility, and long-term benefits (Examples 7 and 9), enjoyment and leisure still hold importance. Informative social media posting operates within a persuasive paradigm, targeting a diverse audience with varying needs and understandings (Mohammed, 2022). Although appeals to indulgence may potentially be effective in both countries, Singapore may require a more tailored marketing approach.

Conclusion

This study investigates the use of interactional metadiscourse, specifically boosters, in informative social media posts by Malaysian and Singaporean private healthcare providers, using a qualitative content analysis approach. The findings show that both contexts strategically employ boosters to amplify urgency, assert expertise, and shape public perception. SJMC relies more on statistics and superlatives to project authority, reflecting a collectivist and competitive healthcare environment, whereas MEH, consistent with Singapore’s more individualistic orientation, favours emotive enhancers. Despite these differences, both institutions promote preventive care and seek to enhance the perceived trustworthiness of their health messages. Overall, booster use in both countries extends beyond uncertainty reduction, serving broader persuasive and economic purposes within a landscape shaped by cultural values, global marketing practices, and healthcare competitiveness.

Boosters influence healthcare decisions by amplifying claims, appealing to emotion, and enhancing perceived trustworthiness. Healthcare organisations should therefore prioritise ethical and transparent communication that supports positive health outcomes while still recognising financial realities. Because booster use is shaped by cultural values, institutional goals, and marketing forces, communication must be culturally sensitive and context specific. Such ethically grounded messaging is central to building public trust and supporting informed decision making, particularly in individualistic settings like Singapore. Governments also play a key role in fostering confidence in the healthcare system through open, transparent communication. Finally, effective interaction between healthcare educators and patients is vital for knowledge acquisition, discussion of risks and treatment options, and the promotion of optimal self-management practices.

To improve the generalisability of the findings, future research should use larger, more diverse samples of healthcare marketing materials. Mixed-method approaches, integrating quantitative and qualitative analyses, are recommended to provide a multifaceted understanding of booster persuasive mechanisms.

Quantitative analysis could measure the actual impact of boosters on public attitudes and behaviours. Qualitative analysis could explore public interpretations and cultural factors influencing booster effectiveness. Combining these approaches can provide a more holistic understanding of how boosters function in Malaysian and Singaporean social media. In conclusion, understanding the complex interplay between culture, marketing, and persuasive language is paramount for effective healthcare communication.

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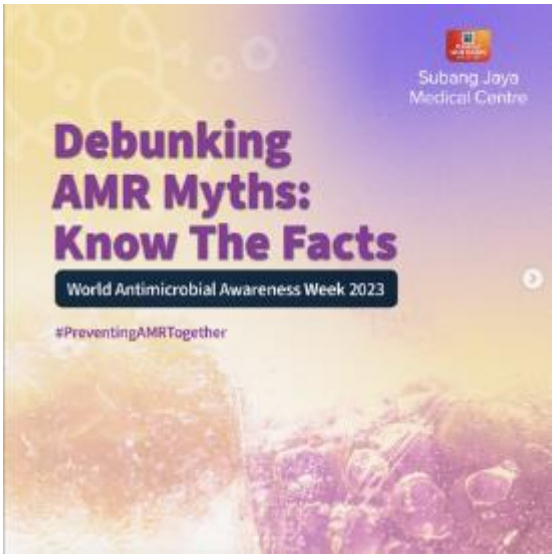
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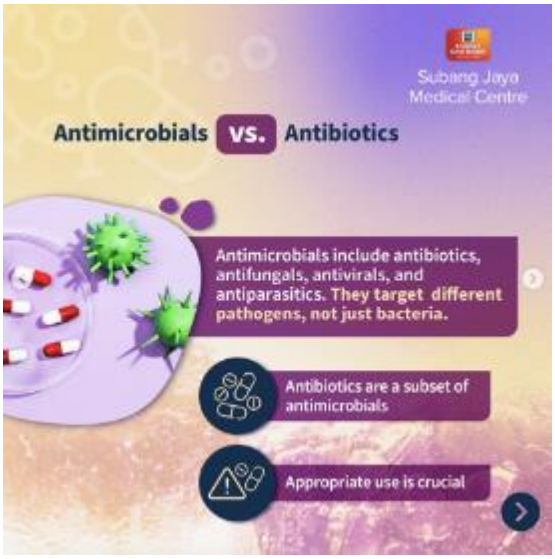
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Appendix 1

The Selected advertisements from Subang Jaya Medical Centre (SJMC)

1) SJMC 1 (18/11/2023)







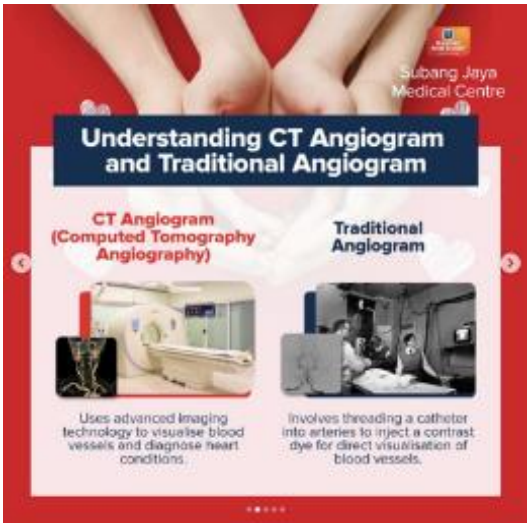






2) SJMC 2 (29/9/2023)







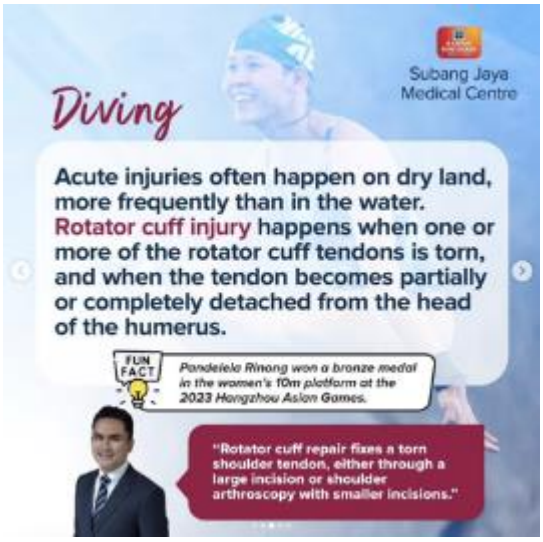




3) SJMC 3 (14/10/2023)



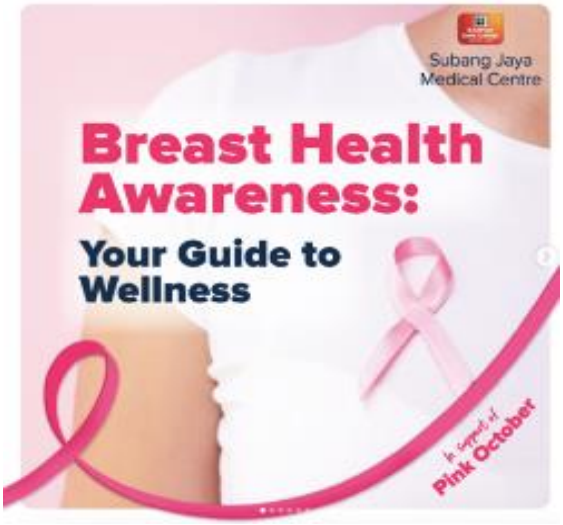


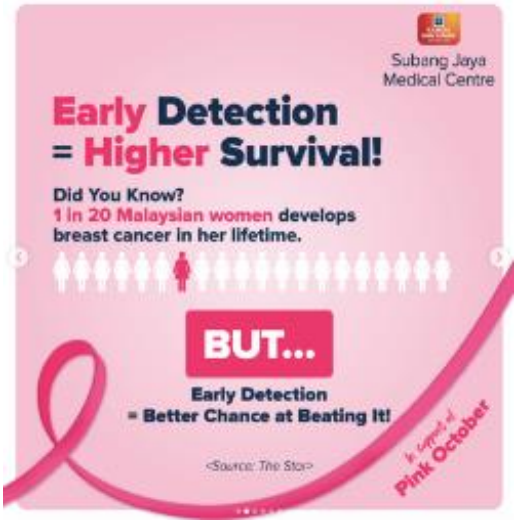






4) SJMC 4 (3/10/2023)







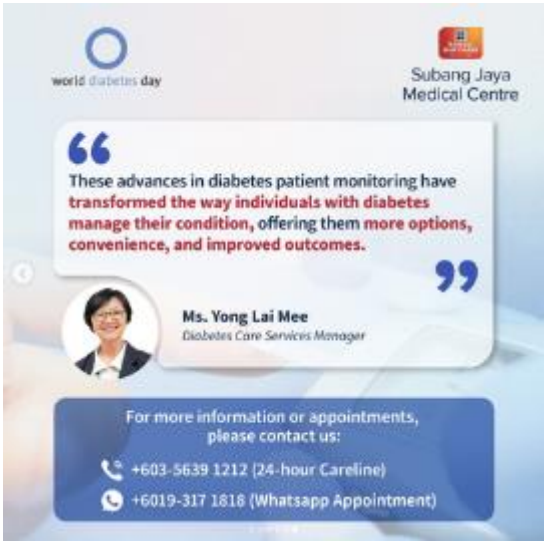
5) SJMC 5 (14/11/2023)




world diabetes day
Subang Jaya Medical Centre
Advances in diabetes patient monitoring have significantly improved the management of diabetes.
Continuous Glucose Monitoring (CGM)
Telemedicine and Remote Monitoring
Education and Support


world diabetes day
Subang Jaya Medical Centre
Diabetes management burdens patients for multiple reasons:
Complex condition
Patients need to monitor their blood glucose levels, adjust their diet, and often take medication or insulin.
Continuous Monitoring
Individuals with diabetes need to continuously monitor their blood sugar levels which require regular finger pricks.
Medication and Insulin Management
Keeping track of the timing and dosage can be overwhelming.

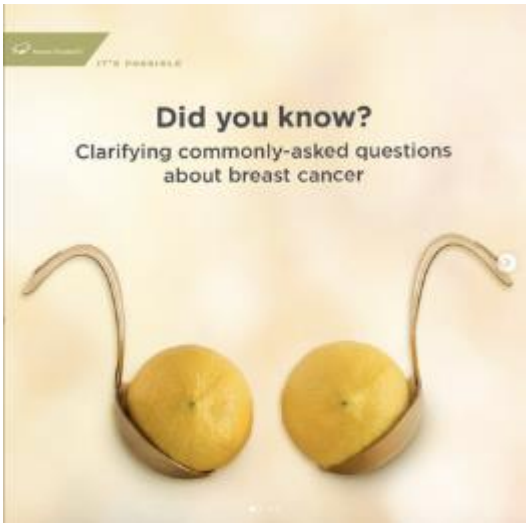

world diabetes day
Subang Jaya Medical Centre
Continuous Glucose Monitoring (CGM)
These wearable sensors continuously monitor glucose levels, providing real-time or intermittent data. They send alerts when glucose levels are too high or too low, allowing timely adjustments to a treatment plan.
Telemedicine and Remote Monitoring
Patients can share their glucose data and receive guidance without the need for frequent in-person appointments.
Education and Support
Diabetes management also involves diabetes educators, communities, and support groups who empower patients with knowledge and guidance for managing their condition effectively.


world diabetes day
Subang Jaya Medical Centre
These advances in diabetes patient monitoring have transformed the way individuals with diabetes manage their condition, offering them more options, convenience, and improved outcomes.
Ms. Yong Lai Mee
Diabetes Care Services Manager
For more information or appointments, please contact us:
+603-5639 1212 (24-hour Careline)
+6019-317 1818 (Whatsapp Appointment)

Appendix 2

The Selected Advertisements from Mount Elizabeth Hospital (MEH)

6) MEH 6 (1/11/2024)







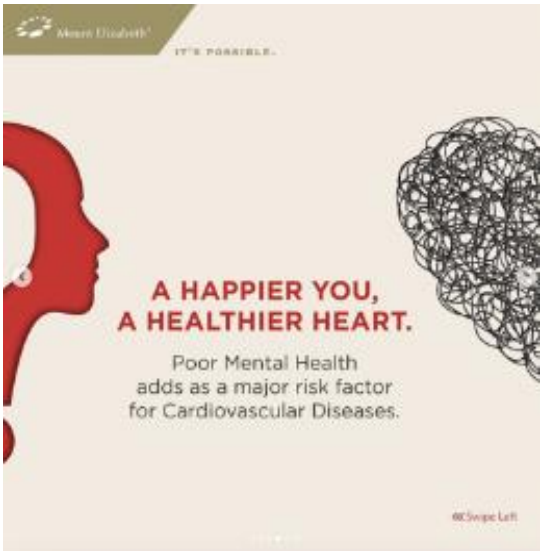


7) MEH 7 (29/9/2023)









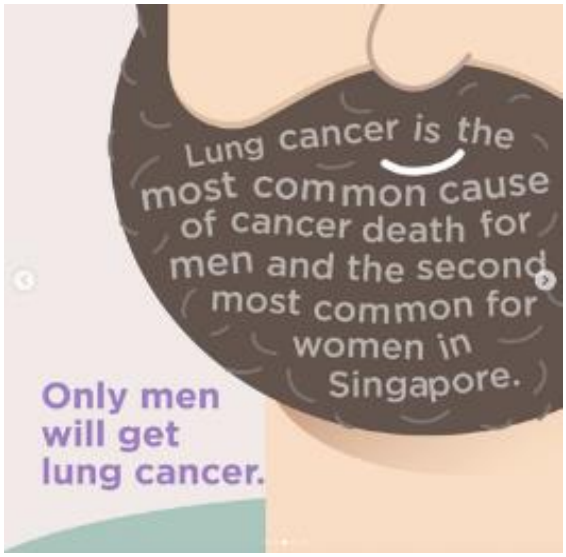




8) MEH 8 (5/6/2023)











9) MEH 9 (3/10/203)





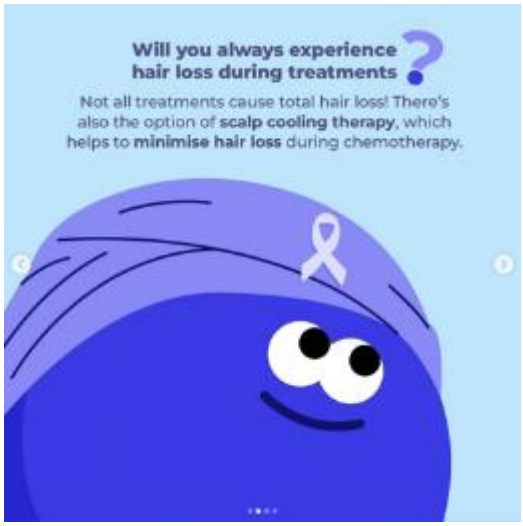


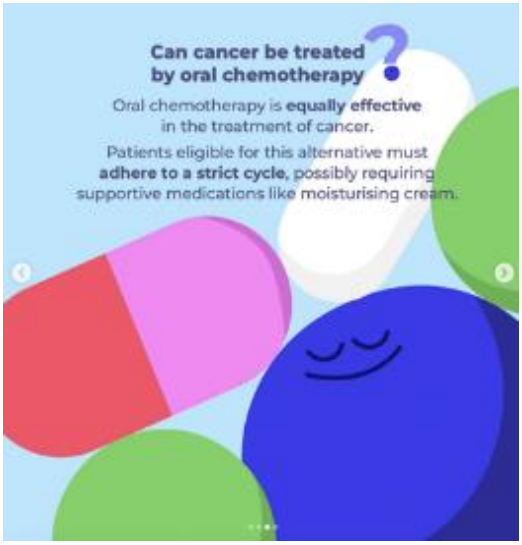


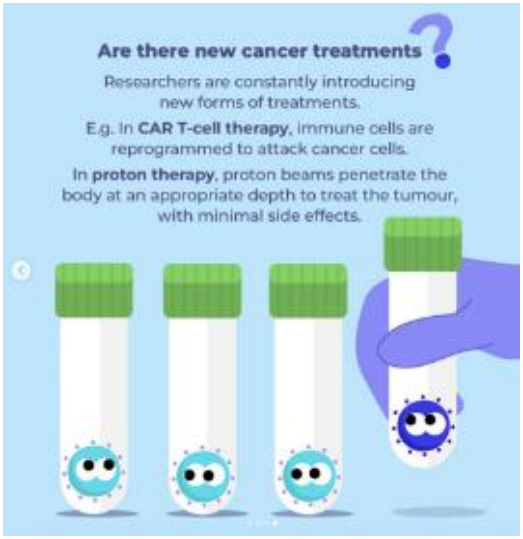


10) MEH 10 (30/12/2023)









Appendix 3

Coding Guidelines

	Coding Guidelines
1.	Study the Coding Schemes by studying the categories, examples and codes
2.	Prepare the necessary stationeries (pen, highlighters, etc)
3.	Study the Coding Guidelines by following the steps involved and tips on sections to the code and ignore
4.	Run through the date set - the advertisements
5.	Read the first posting to get overall gist of the whole posting the first time
6.	Read the first posting the second time for better understanding the whole posting
7.	Code the posting based on the coding schemes - first cycle of coding
8.	Include notes of initial impressions and important observations of the coded items
9.	Code the first posting again based on the coding scheme - second cycle of coding
10.	Examine the coded items by paying attention to the expression and context
11.	Record the coded items, if necessary
12.	Use highlighter to mark the booster markers For example: SJMC 1 Know The *Facts*.
13.	Identify items in context making sure that they are all related to each of the functions of the boosters.
14.	Note that: Every marker will have the same highlighter marker (green) at first as some of the markers might have more than one function. The functions will be explained in the data set in the 'notes' column. Then, each function will be coded based on the coding scheme in the data set. Example: TAE - To add emphasis

Coding Guidelines	
	TSC - To strengthen claims
15.	Ignore the following: a. Phone numbers: +603-5639 1212 / +6019-317 1818 b. Medical Centres' logos: Subang Jaya Medical Centre & Mount Elizabeth Hospital c. Pictures and graphics
16.	Repeat the steps on all the postings from Subang Jaya Medical Centre and Mount Elizabeth Hospital

Appendix 4

Coding Scheme

Functions of Boosters	Description	Example	Code
To add emphasis (Dontcheva-Navrátilová, 2016; Tanveer et al., 2023)	Highlight or underscore a particular point, statement, or idea.	The study *demonstrates* the possibilities of using parallel English-Czech and Czech-English corpora to reveal quantitative differences…	TAE
To strengthen claims (Hyland, 1998)	Enable writers to confidently assert a proposition, making a strong claim about a given situation.	*"One important finding of our research* is the empirical validation of the relationship between corporate associations and consumer product responses."	TSC
To reflect confidence (Carrió-Pastor & Albalat-Mascarell, 2022)	Demonstrate confidence and convey the right amount of self-assurance to readers.	"We *certainly* haven't had it throughout this campaign. Britain deserves better than people who say they've got a quick fix but won't tell you what it *actually* means for Britain".	TRC
To balance the assertion of truth with one's perspective (Yuvayapan & Peksoy, 2023),	Writers are not just presenting information; they're showing that they personally believe what they're saying is a fact.	"You *must know* that I am a wandering beggar-girl, without home, parents, or friends…" "It was difficult *to know* what to do for the best for Mary."	TBA
To enhance persuasiveness and enthusiasm (Mokhtar et al., 2021)	To persuade readers	"We *have to* remain vigilant because I *strongly* believe that our leadership and our security cannot depend on our military alone."	TEP

*Note that the functions of booster can overlap

PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' METACOGNITIVE READING STRATEGY AWARENESS AND THEIR READING COMPREHENSION PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

Although metacognition has been found to boost learners' language learning, little research has examined whether metacognitive reading strategies (MCRS) improve pre-service teachers' reading comprehension outcomes. This study investigated Moroccan pre-service teachers' awareness of MCRS and its relationship with their reading comprehension performance. A total of 180 participants from a public institution in Morocco filled in the Metacognitive Reading Strategy Questionnaire (MRSQ) and took a reading comprehension test. Mean scores were analysed to determine the frequency of metacognitive reading strategy awareness, and the Pearson product moment correlation coefficient was employed to identify the correlation between the two variables. Results indicated that pre-service teachers exhibited high awareness of MCRS. However, there was a weak positive correlation between the participants' knowledge of these strategies and reading comprehension performance, highlighting a gap between knowledge of MCRS and their application in the reading process. This suggests that although pre-service teachers showed heightened awareness of MCRS, they still did not translate this knowledge into practice. The findings indicate the importance of incorporating hands-on activities to help pre-service teachers put their knowledge of MCRS into practice to boost their

reading comprehension ability and enable them to transmit their skills to their future learners.

Keywords: metacognitive reading strategies; reading comprehension performance; pre-service teachers; reading strategy awareness; correlation design

Introduction

Reading is one of the four fundamental language skills that equips learners with a variety of tools for educational success (Ghaith & El-Sanyoura, 2019; Hedgcock & Ferris, 2018). It is a complex process that develops learners' ability to draw meaning from written words (Razkane & Diouny, 2024; Woolley, 2011). However, despite its importance for academic endeavour, understanding English reading texts remains a significant challenge for many language learners, particularly if the texts are not written in the native language of the learners. As reading comprehension is a multidimensional process, most learners usually find it difficult to decode the meaning of the text (Ahmadi et al., 2013). Additionally, Davoudi and Yousefi (2015) argued that English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners face a number of reading problems and this includes the ineffective use of background knowledge. Within the multilingual and diglossic Moroccan context (Sayeh & Razkane, 2022), trilingual learners face even more challenges in understanding and comprehending texts.

Therefore, challenges in understanding reading texts have been extensively investigated, with research suggesting that metacognitive reading strategies (MCRS) can improve the reading comprehension performance among struggling readers (Razkane & Diouny, 2024). The MCRS are techniques used by readers to overcome reading challenges and enhance their comprehension (Al-Mekhlafi, 2018; Sutiyatno & Sukarno, 2019). Studies have consistently shown that MCRS positively influence EFL learners' reading comprehension (Dew et al., 2022; Momdjian & El Chidiac, 2024; Zhang & Guo, 2019). There are three phases to MCRS which are planning, monitoring, and evaluation (Abu-Rabia, 2018; Flavell, 1979; Teng, 2023). Each phase encompasses strategies used by readers at a specific stage during the reading process, namely, pre-reading stage, while reading stage and post-reading stage. These strategies include activating background knowledge, guessing the main idea of the text, scanning, using contextual clues to recognise unknown vocabulary, re-reading, underlining, self-assessing one's reading process, and discussing text with peers (Abu-Rabia, 2019; Razkane & Diouny, 2024). Other researchers have also demonstrated that MCRS include problem-solving strategies, global reading-strategies and support-reading strategies, which help readers make predictions about the text, navigate through the difficulties of reading, and employ general knowledge about topics to support claims (Mokhtari & Reichard, 2002).

In relation to academic context, learners' reading skills are consistently evaluated to measure their proficiency level in English. In Morocco, learners have to take a variety of reading comprehension exams throughout their academic life. Unfortunately, Moroccan learners encounter challenges in reading comprehension as they find it difficult to understand written texts (Ouchen, 2019; Razkane et al., 2023).

While some studies have examined metacognitive strategies in academic writing (EL Hosayny et al., 2025; Razkane et al., 2024), only several studies have investigated the use of MCRS and its impact on reading comprehension among learners of different education levels in the Moroccan context (Msaddek, 2020; Ouchen, 2019; Razkane et al., 2023), with most studies focusing on high school or undergraduate learners. In fact, little attention is given to gauge pre-service teachers' awareness on MCRS and how it affects their reading strategies on reading tasks.

Thus, the purpose of the study was to examine the extent to which Moroccan pre-service teachers at a public higher education institution applied MCRS and whether there was any connection between their awareness of reading strategies and reading comprehension performance. We hope that this study will contribute to a deeper understanding of MCRS in the Moroccan academic context. The findings of the study also offer insights for curriculum developers, educational interventions, and teacher training programmes to enhance reading comprehension and language learning proficiency. Thus, our study addressed the following research questions:

1. To what extent are Moroccan pre-service teachers aware of the metacognitive reading strategies they employ in reading tasks?
2. To what extent does the awareness of metacognitive reading strategies among Moroccan pre-service teachers correlate with their reading comprehension performance?

Review of Literature

Metacognition and Reading Comprehension

This study is situated within the metacognition theory, first introduced by Flavell in the 1970s. Metacognition is the process where learners monitor their cognitive abilities to achieve different learning goals (Flavell, 1979, 1987). Similarly, Ahmadi et al. (2013) and Sutiyatno and Sukarno (2019) describe metacognition as the ability to observe one's awareness of mental strategies in learning. Abu-Rabia (2019) further refers to metacognition as the capacity to engage with newly learned knowledge through metacognitive strategies. One key area where metacognition is essential is reading comprehension as it helps learners to plan, monitor, and evaluate their understanding of texts at different stages: pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading stages (Abu-Rabia & Bluestein-Danon, 2012; Flavell, 1979, Razkane & Diouny, 2024). In understanding the texts, learners may apply various strategies, such as predicting content from the title, activating background knowledge, guessing the meaning of unknown vocabulary through contextual clues, evaluating mistakes, and discussing the text with peers. In short, the use of metacognition fosters deeper and effective engagement with texts.

Flavell (1979) identified two major components of metacognition: metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive experience. Metacognitive knowledge shows understanding of strategies that enhance learning, while metacognitive experience involves an interaction between planning, monitoring and evaluation (Flavell, 1979; Mahdavi, 2014). Mahdavi (2014) explains that metacognitive knowledge consists of declarative knowledge (awareness of essential strategies to

accomplish tasks), procedural knowledge (the ability to use such strategies effectively), and conditional knowledge (the understanding of when and why to employ different strategies). In a study by Abu-Rabia (2019), metacognitive knowledge was described as the ability to detect the strategies that help learners examine their understanding of texts.

The Awareness of Metacognitive Reading Strategies

Given the important role of metacognition in reading comprehension, researchers have extensively examined how readers apply MCRS to monitor their comprehension of texts. The literature on the use of MCRS has highlighted different results ranging from those who show low application of strategies, specifically problem-reading strategies (Ganji et al., 2018; Rabadi et al., 2020) to studies which revealed that problem-solving strategies are the primary choice of language learners (Annury et al., 2019; Daguay-James & Bulusan, 2020; Ghaith & El-Sanyoura, 2019; Syatriana et al., 2024; Villanueva, 2022). A similar point was made by Shah et al. (2024) who indicated that learners were aware of all strategies, with problem-solving strategies as the most employed MCRS, followed by global-reading strategies and supporting reading strategies, respectively.

Along the same lines, Klimova et al. (2024) and Naz et al. (2024) showed that learners possess high awareness of problem-reading strategies, indicating that they favour employing these skills in comparison to others. Deliany and Cahyono (2020) revealed that learners use MCRS frequently but the use varied with gender. The most frequently used strategy among male learners was problem-reading strategies, whereas female learners employed supporting reading strategies more frequently. Soeharto et al. (2024) showed that pre-service teachers demonstrated moderate awareness of MCRS.

In another study by Bria and Mbato (2019), they found that both undergraduate and postgraduate learners were high users of MCRS. They further identified that learners employed monitoring strategies at a higher rate than planning and evaluating strategies. Sari (2016) discovered that high reading achievers utilised monitoring and evaluating reading strategies more than their counterparts. However, the results also revealed that high reading achievers employed less planning strategies than low reading achievers. In Msaddek's (2024) study, learners utilised monitoring strategies the most, followed by planning and evaluating strategies. In contrast, Razkane et al. (2023) reported that learners demonstrated low application of all phases in MCRS.

Ahmed's (2020) comparative study pointed out that undergraduates across different disciplines were moderate users of MCRS. Additionally, Al-Ahdal and Alolaywi (2022) demonstrated that Saudi learners' use of reading strategies varied across reading questions. Nilforoushan et al. (2023) argued that EFL learners' application of MCRS changed according to text types. In their study, while learners employed problem-reading strategies and global reading strategies when reading narrative and expository texts, their application of support reading strategies varied across both text types. In fact, according to Msaddek (2020), the frequency of MCRS

use among Moroccan undergraduates was less than 50%, indicating a poor application of such strategies during narrative and expository reading tasks.

Based on various studies reviewed earlier, it is evident that the findings illustrate the variability in MCRS use across different contexts. Some studies described learners as high users of reading strategies while others highlighted low use. However, while these studies investigated the use of reading strategies among learners of different education levels, there remains a lack of findings with respect to the application of MCRS among pre-service teachers. Given this gap in the literature, further investigation into metacognitive reading is essential.

Relationship Between Metacognitive Reading Strategies and Reading Comprehension

Studies have consistently revealed a positive correlation between MCRS and reading comprehension performance (Do & Phan, 2021; Haling, 2022; Konda, 2020; Maryam et al., 2018; Rastegar et al., 2017; Sariçoban & Behjoo, 2017; Soodla et al., 2016; Razkane et al., 2023; Zarei, 2018). Sariçoban and Behjoo (2017) found that successful learners' use of reading strategies correlated with their reading comprehension, and Zarei (2018) similarly reported that skilled readers used MCRS, particularly problem-solving and global strategies, more frequently than struggling readers. Halim et al. (2022) and Pahrizal et al. (2024) also showed that MCRS were positively correlated with Malaysian tertiary learners' reading comprehension. Dewi and Endarto (2022) noted that only problem-solving and global strategies were positively related to reading comprehension, while Rosnaeni et al. (2020) identified a significant correlation between learners' narrative text comprehension and their MCRS.

Conversely, Sari (2016) reported no significant correlation between pre-service teachers' use of MCRS and their reading comprehension performance. This result was supported by other studies Dang, 2024; Ganji et al., 2018; Soeharto et al., 2024). Moreover, Indonesian EFL learners' MCRS use demonstrated no relationship with respect to their reading comprehension (Kusumawardana & Akhiriyah 2022).

Generally, a number of studies highlighted the positive correlation between MCRS and reading comprehension performance. Nevertheless, contradictory results indicated that this correlation may not be similar across different learner groups. Thus, investigating this relationship among pre-service teachers is needed for further insights on strategies in predicting their reading comprehension performance.

Methodology

Research Design

The main objective of this study was to examine MCRS among Moroccan pre-service teachers at public institution of higher education. The present study adopted a correlational research design to investigate the awareness of MCRS among pre-service teachers and its relationship with their reading comprehension performance. This research design was suitable for our research objectives as it enabled researchers

to examine relationships between two or more variables, using two or more scores obtained from each participant (Creswell, 2012).

Setting and Participants

A total of 180 pre-service teachers from a public institution of higher education in El Jadida, Morocco, participated in the study. They came from various cities in Morocco: El Jadida, Marrakech, Agadir, and Casablanca. They enrolled in a Reading Comprehension I course to study the necessary strategies and skills to apply when reading academic texts. The sample of this study consisted of 124 females and 55 males between the ages of 17 and 21. All the participants were categorised as English as a foreign language (EFL) learners. Based on the Rosetta Stone placement test, the participants' English proficiency levels ranged from A2 to C1 levels. Additionally, the participants were selected using convenience sampling, a method where participants were selected according to their availability (Cozby & Bates, 2012).

Data Collection Instruments and Procedure

The current research utilised the MRSQ, validated by Abu-Rabia (2019), to measure readers' planning, monitoring, and evaluating strategies during the reading process. Also, the study employed a reading comprehension test to evaluate learners' reading comprehension performance.

The Metacognitive Reading Strategies Questionnaire

The MRSQ comprised three sections: planning, monitoring, and evaluation. Each section contained between five and eight items, rated on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (I never) to 5 (I always). The questionnaire had previously been used with Moroccan high school learners and shown to be clear, comprehensible, and appropriate for this population (Razkane & Diouny, 2024; Razkane et al., 2023). It was further piloted with pre-service teachers, and no revisions were required, as all items were judged suitable for the intended participants. A reliability analysis yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.77, indicating acceptable internal consistency for research purposes (Taber, 2017). The MRSQ was administered in English immediately after the English reading comprehension test to capture learners' awareness of MCRS during the test.

Reading Comprehension Test

The reading comprehension test (see Appendix 1) was drawn from a course-pack designed for the participants and was selected for its conceptual richness, expository structure, and combination of abstract and visual information. It comprised four sections targeting specific subskills: main idea identification, literal and inferential comprehension, text–diagram relationships, and interpretation of meaning. The test was aligned with Kintsch's (2018) construction–integration model of reading comprehension, which views comprehension as building coherence between text and prior knowledge, and with the PISA framework (OECD, 2019), incorporating tasks that

required locating information, making inferences, and integrating knowledge and ideas across multiple representations.

To ensure face and content validity, two applied linguistics specialists and one educational psychologist with expertise in reading assessment reviewed the test. They confirmed the appropriateness of the texts and items for key dimensions of reading comprehension, including locating information, making inferences, and integrating knowledge and ideas, and endorsed the clarity of the item wording. For construct validity, the test was piloted with 20 learners who met criteria similar to those of the main study participants and completed the test under comparable conditions. Item performance was then analysed for clarity, discrimination, and difficulty, leading to minor revisions, specifically the rephrasing of two questions on true/false and diagram comprehension to improve clarity.

As for the procedure, the participants were informed that they had two hours to complete the reading test, and the test was based on reading comprehension testing standards in academic education. Prior to the test, the participants were asked to read the text carefully and silently. They were also reminded to respond with original answers. Finally, the participants were told that their participation was voluntary, and that no identifying information would be shared.

Data Analysis

Data in the present study were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27. Descriptive statistical procedures were used to provide details about the participants' demographic data including mean scores and standard deviations and to summarise the participants' application of MCRS. Also, among the objectives of this study were to examine the relationship between the awareness of MCRS and participants' reading comprehension performance, therefore, Pearson product moment correlation coefficient was utilised. A correlation of 0.10 indicates weak relationship, a 0.30 correlation shows a moderate correlation, and a correlation of 0.50 demonstrates a strong relationship (Cohen, 1988).

Results

This section presents the results on learners' metacognitive awareness of reading strategies and the correlation between awareness and use of the strategies.

Participants' Awareness of MCRS

Based on Oxford's (1990) classification of the mean scores of strategy awareness, there are three primary levels to describe learners' strategy knowledge: high (ranging from 3.5 to 5), medium (ranging from 2.5 to 3.4), and low (ranging from 1.0 to 2.4). The MRSQ results in Table 1 indicated that the learners demonstrated a high level of MCRS awareness. Learners' knowledge of *planning* (M = 3.77, SD = 0.650), *monitoring* (M = 3.78, SD = 0.638), and *evaluating* (M = 3.54, SD = 0.697) were relatively high. When comparing between planning, monitoring, and evaluating strategies

collectively, learners demonstrated a stronger grasp of monitoring strategies compared to planning and evaluating respectively.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of the Participants' Awareness of MCRS

Strategy	Mean	Std. Deviation
Planning	3.77	0.650
Monitoring	3.78	0.638
Evaluating	3.54	0.697

Participants' Reading Scores

Results also revealed that the mean score for pre-service teachers' reading performance was *M* = 11.59. The distribution of scores and its corresponding description are as follows: Below expectations (0-8), Needs improvement (9-11), Satisfactory (12-14), and Excellent (15-20). The purpose was to conduct a detailed scale anchoring analysis to describe reading performance at these benchmarks.

After the analysis, it was found that 31 or 17.22% learners scored below expectations (0-8). It represented about one-fifth of learners who took the reading test. A total of 53 learners or 29.44% needs improvement while 63 learners or 35% had satisfactory reading performance. Only 33 learners or 18.33% reached the advanced category, which was an excellent performance. Through these measures, 81.66% of the participants underperformed in their reading comprehension test. In short, the findings revealed that learners performed slightly below the average at the below-expectation category, with a *M* = 11.59 and *SD* = 3.05.

Metacognitive Reading Strategies and Reading Performance

Table 2 provides the model summary statistics for the Pearson correlation analysis, examining the relationship between reading performance (dependent variable) and the predictors.

Table 2

Results of Pearson Correlation Analysis

		Reading Scores	Planning	Monitoring	Evaluating
Reading Scores	Pearson Correlation	1	.168*	.209**	.040
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.024	.005	.599
	N	180	180	179	179
Planning	Pearson Correlation	.168*	1	.414**	.354**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.024		.000	.000
	N	180	180	179	179
Monitoring	Pearson Correlation	.209**	.414**	1	.399**

	Sig. (2-tailed)	.005	.000		.000
	N	179	179	179	179
Evaluating	Pearson Correlation	.040	.354**	.399**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.599	.000	.000	
	N	179	179	179	179

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

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

In Table 2, the Pearson correlation value was 0.168 which suggests a weak positive correlation between planning and reading performance ($p < 0.05$). Despite reaching statistical significance, this suggests that while planning may be related to reading skills, the relationship is minimal. Similarly, a weak positive correlation ($r = .209$) was found between monitoring and reading performance. This relationship is significant at 0.01, which indicates only a slight tendency for learners who report greater monitoring to perform marginally better on reading tasks. Unexpectedly, a very weak positive correlation was found between evaluation strategies and reading performance.

Discussion

This study revealed that pre-service teachers showed heightened levels of awareness regarding MCRS, with evaluating being the lowest and monitoring being the highest. Secondly, weak positive relations were identified between the awareness of MCRS and reading performance, with monitoring having the highest coefficient and evaluating having the lowest.

Pre-service teachers may have knowledge of MCRS and could recognise and report their awareness of these strategies when they filled in a questionnaire. This may suggest that they have theoretical knowledge of MCRS and understand their role in reading comprehension. However, their high self-reported knowledge may be affected by social desirability bias, where these participants provided responses that were in line with expected professional competencies. Furthermore, given that the data were obtained from a questionnaire rather than direct observation, there could be a gap between these pre-service teachers' perceived and actual awareness of MCRS in real reading tasks. These findings corroborated the outcomes of several studies including those of Klimova et al. (2024), Naz et. (2024), and Shah et al. (2024), whose participants reported using MCRS at high rates. Moreover, while our study reported higher level of metacognitive awareness among pre-service teachers, Soeharto et al. (2024) found moderate level of awareness of these strategies. With regard to inter-comparison within MCRS, the findings obtained in the current study perfectly matched the outcomes of Bria and Mbato (2019), who studied metacognitive strategies among undergraduate and postgraduate pre-service student teachers and reported comparable internal patterns across MCRS dimensions.

However, the present findings also contradicted other studies such as Razkane et al. (2023), who found that learners exhibited low use of metacognitive reading strategies. This difference in outcomes can be attributed to the study context

and population. Razkane et al. (2023) study was conducted among a cohort of high school learners while our study was situated within tertiary education among pre-service teachers. Due to the nature of the training received by pre-service teachers and their academic background, they could have developed a theoretical knowledge of these strategies and grasped the crucial role of MCRS in reading comprehension. Additionally, the cognitive maturity and academic expectations of the two groups differ, which may also contribute to the variation in reported strategy knowledge and awareness.

Learners' Awareness of MCRS and Reading Performance

Initially, the results of the current study showed weak positive relationship between metacognitive reading strategies and reading performance. This finding concur with Haling (2022), Saricoban and Behjoo (2017), and Maryam et al. (2018), who concluded that learners with higher use of metacognitive reading strategies tend to perform better at reading tasks. In other words, increasing learners' metacognitive awareness may positively affect their reading comprehension skills.

The weak positive correlation can be interpreted by learners' lack of effective execution of metacognitive reading strategies despite their strong awareness. This interpretation is further supported by findings from literature and theory. Based on the metacognition theory, although learners possessed declarative knowledge (being aware of MCRS), they still lacked procedural knowledge (performing MCRS). This disparity between awareness and effective utilisation of metacognitive strategies can also stem from learners lacking prior knowledge and exposure regarding these strategies.

Conclusion

The current study aimed to examine Moroccan pre-service teachers' reading meta-cognitive awareness and its relationship with reading comprehension outcomes. The findings revealed that although the pre-service teachers showed a high level of MCRS awareness, a weak positive correlation was found between the participants' knowledge of these strategies and their reading comprehension performance, highlighting a discrepancy between declarative knowledge of MCRS and their actual use in the reading comprehension process.

Given that the participants demonstrated strong knowledge of MCRS but did not perform well in the reading comprehension test, explicit reading-strategy programmes should focus on practical implementation of MCRS to help pre-service teachers translate their knowledge of MCRS into practice. This could be achieved by not only providing hands-on activities and guided practice but also by offering reflective exercises. Apart from that, pre-service teacher education training programmes should involve more scaffolding techniques and consistent practice of MCRS to guarantee that they internalise these strategies and are able to apply them effectively when reading challenging texts. Additionally, continuous formative assessments should evaluate not only pre-service teachers' knowledge of MCRS but also their effective application of these strategies. This could be achieved by using

think-aloud protocols, and self-reflection reading comprehension tasks. Furthermore, teacher training programmes should be redesigned to equip educators with the essential skills and knowledge to teach MCRS successfully, thereby enabling them to support learners' reading comprehension development. Regular training, reading-strategy-based workshops, peer discussions, and supervisors' mentoring can reinforce the application of MCRS in reading comprehension and teaching.

The study is not without limitations. One major limitation is the reliance on self-reported data and a reading comprehension test. Future research can benefit from data triangulation by using qualitative instruments, such as semi-structured interviews, and/or think-aloud protocols to gain deeper insights into learners' actual use of MCRS during the reading process. Additionally, multiple reading comprehension tests measuring various reading skills and cognitive abilities can be used in future research to identify the subtle role of MCRS on these skills and abilities. Last but not least, the study followed a correlational research design, future research can use quasi-experimental studies to investigate the true impact of MCRS on reading comprehension.

Lastly, the main takeaway from this study is that there is a disconnect between declarative knowledge and actual practice regarding MCRS. This disconnect underscores a crucial point, namely, knowing about MCRS does not guarantee learners' application of such strategies when dealing with reading comprehension tasks. Additionally, the results show that future teachers are not ready to support their future learners' reading development. That is, if pre-service teachers are unable to apply MRCS themselves, they may find it challenging to teach these strategies to their learners. This necessitates pre-service teacher programmes that integrate MRCS training into their coursework as well as practical classroom experiences, ensuring that future teachers are equipped not only to understand effective reading strategies but also to model and teach them effectively.

Research Ethics

The study was approved by the Ethics Committee on June 20, 2024 based at the Faculty of Humanities, Chouaib Doukkali University, Morocco, and all procedures adhered to the ethical standards of the institution.

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Appendix 1

The Reading Comprehension Test

The Enneagram: Understanding our personalities

No two people are the same. Even identical twins with the same genetic makeup are distinct in their thoughts, feelings, and behaviour. The differences that make us unique are referred to as personality, which the Oxford Dictionary defines as "the characteristics or qualities that form a person's character." Here are thousands of interesting personality traits, but more fascinating is what actually makes us think, feel, and behave the way we do.

The oldest theory of personality can be credited to the Roman surgeon Galen of Pergamon. Humorism, which was considered more an explanation of what causes disease, dominated Western thinking until the twentieth century, when psychology emerged and personality became the subject of scientific study. The controversial nature-nurture theory explains personality in terms of the influence of genetics (what we inherit from our parents) and our environment (our upbringing, culture, education, experiences, and so on). People have also been classified as Type A (active, outgoing, extroverted) and Type B (passive, withdrawn, introverted), or according to a five-factor model of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness.

An ancient system rooted, the Enneagram (Greek ennea for "nine" and grammos for "point"), identifies nine major aspects of being. Unlike other personality theories, the Enneagram offers a model that symbolises the unfolding of human consciousness. As individuals, we are born with one temperament or type, but we can see ourselves to some extent in all nine. Each type does not operate in isolation from the others.



As the diagram **illustrates**, each type is joined to the others by lines that indicate which types actively influence the predominating type under stressful or secure circumstances. When under stress, a Nine type, for example, will behave like a Three, and in a secure situation, like a Six. Additionally, each type has two **adjacent** wings, one of which will act as a complement to the personality. A Nine has either a stronger Eight or a stronger One wing; a Four, a more dominant Three or Five wing; and so on. In some cases, both wings exert an equal influence, and in others they may exert minimal influence, or none at all. In addition to wings, each type consists of three subtypes that relate to issues in relationships: intimate and one-to-one, social, and self-preservation.

I. What is the main idea of the passage?

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II. Determine whether the following statements are true (T) or false (F), based on the text. Justify your answers in your words.

a. The Enneagram theory argues that each personality type operates in isolation from the others.

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b. An Eight type behaves like a Five type under stress, and in secure situations behaves like a Two type.

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c. Galen of Pergamon's theory of humorism influenced Western thinking about personality until the 20th century.

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d. Wings in the Enneagram always influence a person's primary type equally.

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III. Describe the relationship between the title of the text and the diagram.

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IV. What does the author mean in the following statement:

"Unlike other personality theories, the Enneagram offers a model that symbolises the unfolding of human consciousness."

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RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEARNER AUTONOMY AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

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Manuscript received 9 December 2024
Manuscript accepted 19 September 2025
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https://doi.org/10.33736/ils.8441.2025

ABSTRACT

This study examines the level of learner autonomy and its relationship with academic performance among 420 EFL students across four academic years. Using quantitative methods, learner autonomy was measured through self-initiation and self-regulation scales, along with their subscales. Findings indicate moderately high levels of learner autonomy across all years, with Year Three students showing lower self-regulation ability than others. Spearman correlation analysis reveals a modest but positive correlation between learner autonomy and academic performance, suggesting that higher autonomy is associated with better academic outcomes. Notably, Year Two students exhibit the strongest correlations between learner autonomy and academic performance, indicating that the impact of autonomy varies across different stages of study. These findings highlight the need for action from key stakeholders. For teachers, the results support adopting learner-centred approaches that encourage goal setting, self-assessment, and motivation-driven activities to foster autonomy and improve academic outcomes. For policymakers, the study emphasises the importance of supporting teacher training programmes that equip educators with strategies to nurture learner autonomy.

Keywords: learner autonomy; academic performance; self-initiation; self-regulation; relationship

Introduction

Learner autonomy has been widely discussed in educational literature, gaining increasing attention due to a gradual shift in educational focus from teacher-centred

to learner-centred approaches (Gupta et al., 2024; Little, 2007). This paradigm shifts highlights the evolving role of students from passive recipients of knowledge to active participants in their learning process. The importance of learner autonomy is particularly significant in higher education, where it contributes to learners' comprehension and enables learners to engage deeply with educational materials, fostering critical thinking and problem-solving skills. These skills are essential for academic success and lifelong learning (Holec, 1981; Little, 1991). In language learning, particularly, the ability to self-direct study and practice plays a vital role in improving proficiency and facilitates effective acquisition of new linguistic skills (Benson, 2010; Giveh et al., 2018; Lee & Mori, 2021).

Despite the acknowledged importance of learner autonomy, studies examining its correlation with academic performance have produced mixed results. Research utilising proficiency tests to measure outcomes generally shows a positive correlation between higher levels of autonomy and better academic performance (Dafei, 2007; Myartawan et al., 2013; Sakai & Takagi, 2009). However, the study by Ezzi (2018) presents contradictory findings, challenging this positive correlation. These discrepancies have raised questions about the reliability of studies that solely rely on proficiency tests rather than Grade Point Average to measure academic performance, as proficiency tests may not fully capture the multifaceted nature of one's academic success. In contrast, other studies utilising Grade Point Average (Afshar et al., 2014; Lowe, 2009) employed the Learner Autonomy Profile developed by Confessore and Park (2004), a widely used tool for measuring learner autonomy, adding complexity to the overall picture. The Learner Autonomy Profile has several shortcomings, which might also impact the reliability of these studies. Although the Learner Autonomy Profile-Short Form instrument improves the focus on key autonomous dimensions, it may still overlook important contextual factors such as teacher support and the learning environment.

Given these mixed findings, there is a pressing need for further research to accurately measure learner autonomy and determine whether there is a strong correlation with academic performance. Such research is essential for informing educational practices and interventions to foster learner autonomy and enhance academic outcomes. The research questions guiding this study are as follows:

1. What are the students' levels of learner autonomy?
2. Are there significant differences in autonomy levels among students of different year levels?
3. Is there a significant relationship between learners' level of autonomy in learning and their academic achievement?

To address these questions, the following hypotheses are tested:

H1: Students will demonstrate varying levels of learner autonomy across the sample.

H2: There are statistically significant differences in learner autonomy levels among students at different year levels.

H3: Learner autonomy is significantly and positively correlated with academic performance, as measured by Grade Point Average.

Literature Review

Conceptualisation of Learner Autonomy

Learner autonomy is widely regarded as crucial in higher education, yet its definition remains contested. Early work often equates it with self-directed learning. Holec (1981) defines learner autonomy as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning" (p. 3), conceptualising it as a potential capacity rather than observable behaviours. This ability is not innate but can be developed through a conscious learning process. Autonomous learners can identify learning objectives and choose suitable resources and activities, exercising control over planning, monitoring, and evaluating their learning. Little (1991) reinterprets this control as self-regulation rather than self-direction and defines autonomy as "the willingness, proactive and reflective involvement in one's own learning" (p. 4). For Little (1991), autonomy depends primarily on learners' own initiative rather than external guidance. This initiative includes seeking help and collaborating with others, since "autonomous learners do things for themselves, but they may or may not do things on their own" (p. 223). In this study, learner autonomy is understood as comprising two elements: self-initiation (motivation, positive attitudes, and effort) and self-regulation (the ability to identify learning objectives, select resources, and plan and monitor learning).

How to Measure Learner Autonomy

Measuring learner autonomy is complex because it is multidimensional and shaped by culture, learning context, level, and individual experience (Benson, 2000; Little, 1991; Littlewood, 1996). To make it measurable, the construct is often divided into components that indicate its relative strength (Benson, 2000; Littlewood, 1996). A range of methods has been proposed, including teachers' observations, first-person narratives (Reinders & Balcikanli, 2011), interviews, learning journals (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012), self-assessments (Cotterall, 1995; Little, 1991), and peer assessments (Dam, 2003). Among these, self-assessment is often regarded as the most appropriate, as it offers a more direct indication of learners' autonomous capacity than external evaluations (Benson, 2000; Little, 1991).

Several instruments have been designed to operationalise learner autonomy. Guglielmino's (1977) Self-directed Learning Readiness Scale is the most widely used, yet it has been criticised for weak construct validity and is not recommended (Candy, 1991). Macaskill and Taylor's (2010) Autonomous Learning Scale includes items on independence of learning and study habits. The independence component covers responsibility, openness to experience, and intrinsic motivation; the study habits component addresses time management, learning practices, and attitudes to working alone. However, it was not developed for language learners and gives limited insight into language-specific strategies such as goal setting or social interaction (Ruelens, 2019).

The Learner Autonomy Profile by Confessore and Park (2004) is also widely used but has notable limitations. The original Learner Autonomy Profile contains 66 items, which can be burdensome and increase the risk of fatigue effects. The

shortened Learner Autonomy Profile-Short Form, with 22 items, focuses on four dimensions: Desire, Resourcefulness, Initiative, and Persistence. “Desire” refers to motivation to engage in learning, “Resourcefulness” refers to intention to seek help and use available support, “Initiative” refers to willingness to take the first step in learning, and “Persistence” refers to sustained effort despite difficulties. Although more economical, the Learner Autonomy Profile-Short Form pays limited attention to contextual factors such as learning environment, teacher support, and resource availability, which restricts its capacity to represent learner autonomy comprehensively.

Nguyen (2012) designed a scale with 31 items on self-initiation and 22 on self-regulation. While methodologically rigorous, it was developed for learners of writing and does not address autonomy across different skills or stages of language learning (Cao & Pho, 2024). The more recent Self-Efficacy Questionnaire of Language Learning Strategies (SeQueLLS) by Ruelens (2019) links self-efficacy beliefs with learner autonomy and examines cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies. However, it does not explicitly capture learners’ motivation and attitudes and includes aspects that do not align with the indicators of autonomy adopted in the present study. In light of these limitations and contextual mismatches, there is a strong rationale for developing a new, context-specific scale that better reflects the core dimensions of learner autonomy in English language learners.

Academic Performance

In educational research, Grade Point Average is often preferred to language proficiency tests as an indicator of academic performance, particularly when examining constructs such as learner autonomy. Whereas proficiency tests assess language skills at a single point in time, Grace Point Average offers a cumulative picture of long-term academic achievement across multiple subjects and over an extended period. This broader measure captures not only cognitive abilities but also autonomy-related behaviours such as time management, initiative, and persistence (Zimmerman, 2002), which proficiency tests may overlook.

Grade Point Average can also provide a more reliable index of learners’ academic outcomes. Proficiency tests reveal a snapshot of language competence but do not reflect sustained effort or performance across diverse academic tasks (York et al., 2015). In contrast, Grade Point Average reflects consistent achievement across English-related subjects and assessment types, giving a more holistic account of success. Although language proficiency is important, relying solely on test scores risks underestimating kills that autonomous learners develop, such as adapting to varied academic demands and managing learning over time (Dörnyei, 2014). Consequently, Grade Point Average is frequently a more suitable metric in research on learner autonomy, as it encompasses student-driven behaviours associated with long-term academic achievement (Harlen, 2007).

The Importance of Developing Learner Autonomy

Learner autonomy is increasingly vital in effective education, especially in language learning. Little (2007) outlines three key reasons for its importance in student development. First, autonomy boosts motivation. According to the Self-Determination Theory, autonomy is a core psychological need that fosters intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). When students feel ownership of their learning, they are more engaged and driven by internal goals rather than external pressures (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Second, autonomous learners tend to be more reflective and strategic. Their heightened metacognitive awareness enables them to monitor and adapt their learning processes, leading to more effective and efficient outcomes (Lamb, 2017). Third, in second and foreign language acquisition, autonomy is especially crucial. Communicative competence often develops outside the classroom through meaningful language use. Since no course can fully prepare learners for all real-world scenarios, those with social and interactive autonomy are better equipped to use the language independently across diverse contexts (Scharle & Szabó, 2000). In sum, these three aspects of learner autonomy, its role in fostering intrinsic motivation, reflective learning, and independent language use, underscore why autonomy is often associated with more effective learning. This connection supports the assumption that learner autonomy has a positive correlation with academic achievement.

The Correlation between Learner Autonomy and Learners' Academic Performance

Previous studies on learner autonomy report mixed findings regarding its relationship with academic performance. Several studies, including Dafei (2007), Faiz (2023), Myartawan et al. (2013), and Sakai and Takagi (2009), indicate that more autonomous learners tend to achieve higher scores on language proficiency tests. Other work challenges this association. Ezzi (2018), for instance, found no significant correlation, arguing that exclusive reliance on test scores may overlook important dimensions of learning such as persistence and self-regulation.

Studies using Grade Point Average as the outcome measure offer a different picture. Lowe (2009) and Afshar et al. (2014) used the Learner Autonomy Profile-Short Form (Confessore & Park, 2004) to assess autonomy and reported significant correlations between learner autonomy and Grade Point Average, suggesting that Grade Point Average may serve as a more reliable indicator of the long-term relationship between autonomy and academic performance than proficiency tests. However, the Learner Autonomy Profile-Short Form does not fully incorporate contextual factors such as learning environment and teacher support, which may influence these results.

Ozer and Yukselir (2023) also examined the relationship between learner autonomy and academic achievement among Turkish EFL learners, using Grade Point Average as the performance indicator and Macaskill and Taylor's (2010) 12-item Autonomous Learning Scale. This instrument focuses on learning independence and study habits and is suitable for general higher education contexts. Nonetheless, it has been criticised for omitting specific learning management strategies and neglecting goal setting and social aspects of autonomy (Ruelens, 2019). Despite these limitations,

studies that employ Grade Point Average, whether with the Learner Autonomy Profile-Short Form or other validated tools, generally provide stronger evidence for a positive link between learner autonomy and academic achievement.

Given these mixed findings, there is a need to replicate studies on the relationship between learner autonomy and academic performance using more refined measures of both constructs. Research that combines Grade Point Average with contextually sensitive measures of autonomy could clarify this relationship and yield more conclusive evidence. Such work would also inform educational interventions designed to foster learner autonomy in order to improve academic outcomes across diverse contexts and learner populations.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a cross-sectional correlational research design (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019) to investigate the correlation between learner autonomy and academic achievement. Learners' autonomy level was measured using a questionnaire. We then calculated the correlation between Grade Point Average and learner autonomy in general and between Grade Point Average and the subconstructs of learner autonomy across year levels.

Research Instrument

Building on the above review, we developed a questionnaire to investigate the learner autonomy of English-major students. The original questionnaire consisted of 26 items adapted from Nguyen (2012), Macaskill and Taylor (2010), and Ruelens (2019). It was based on two key components of learner autonomy: self-initiation and self-regulation. Self-initiation was divided into two sub-elements: motivation and attitudes and making efforts to learn. Self-regulation included two sub-elements: identifying needs and learning goals and selecting resources and planning (see Table 1).

Table 1
Structure of the Original Questionnaire

Themes	Sub-themes	Items	Number
Self-initiation	Motivation and attitudes (SIM)	Q1–Q7	7
	Making efforts to learn (SIE)	Q8–Q14	7
Self-regulation	Identifying needs and learning goals (SRN)	Q15–Q19	5
	Selecting resources and planning (SRP)	Q20–Q26	7

A pilot study was conducted with 220 students from a comparable programme. The results showed that the Cronbach's alpha for the subscales Motivation and attitudes (SIM), Making efforts to learn (SIE) and Selecting resources

and planning (SRP) would improve if the items SIM4, SIE4 and SRP4 were deleted (see Table 2).

Table 2
Reliability Statistics of the Original Likert-Scale Items

Subscales	Number of items	Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Corrected item-Total correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
SIM	7	SIM1	0.803	.515	.781
		SIM2		.612	.763
		SIM3		.587	.768
		SIM4		.332	.813
		SIM5		.558	.774
		SIM6		.615	.764
		SIM7		.546	.776
SIE	7	SIE1	0.660	.453	.603
		SIE2		.394	.617
		SIE3		.385	.620
		SIE4		.081	.709
		SIE5		.440	.602
		SIE6		.401	.617
		SIE7		.483	.588
SRN	5	SRN1	0.804	.567	.772
		SRN2		.634	.752
		SRN3		.620	.757
		SRN4		.567	.774
		SRN5		.557	.776
SRP	7	SRP1	0.741	.548	.690
		SRP2		.455	.710
		SRP3		.476	.706
		SRP4		.274	.746
		SRP5		.605	.676
		SRP6		.405	.726
		SRP7		.452	.712

Construct validity was established through exploratory factor analysis, using Principal Component Analysis with Varimax rotation. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value was .851, and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 = 2059.864$, $df = 325$, $p < .001$), indicating the data were suitable for factor analysis. The results of Principal Component Analysis also showed that the three items Making efforts to learn (SIE4), Motivation and attitudes (SIM4) and Selecting resources and planning (SRP4) should be removed from the questionnaire. The revised questionnaire thus includes 23 items.

Principal Component Analysis was rerun on the revised questionnaire, and the Rotated Component Matrix identified six factors. As shown in Table 3, the self-initiation construct was refined into four subscales, while self-regulation retained its two original subscales. Therefore, we decided to name the two new subscales appropriately. All subscales showed strong internal consistency.

Table 3

Rotated Component Matrix of the Revised Likert-scale Items

Rotated Component Matrix[a]						
	Component					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
SRN2	.747					
SRN4	.729					
SRN3	.722					
SRN1	.676					
SRN5	.563					
SRP5		.685				
SRP2		.638				
SRP6		.623				
SRP1		.618				
SRP7		.604				
SRP3		.528				
SIM2			.790			
SIM1			.781			
SIM3			.616			
SIM6				.754		
SIM5				.752		
SIM7				.638		
SIE5					.778	
SIE6					.769	
SIE7					.661	
SIE1						.855
SIE2						.825
SIE3						.598
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.						
a. Rotation converged in 8 iterations.						

Note. SRN = Identifying needs and learning goals; SRP = Selecting resources and planning; SIM = Motivation and attitudes; SIE = Making efforts to learn.

The reliability of the revised questionnaire with six subscales was then assessed, and Cronbach's alpha values were above .700 (see Table 4). This revised questionnaire, Language Learner Autonomy Scale (LLAS), was considered reliable and valid.

Table 4

Final Structure and Reliability of the Revised Questionnaire

Themes	Sub-scales	Items	α	N
Self-initiation	Motivation and attitudes (SIM)	SIM6,5,7	.778	3
	Openness to new things (SIN)	SIM2,1,3	.759	3
	Making efforts to learn (SIE)	SIE1,2,3	.714	3
	Perseverance (SIP)	SIE5,6,7	.705	3
Self-regulation	Identifying needs and learning goals (SRN)	SRN2,4,3,1,5	.804	5
	Selecting resources and planning (SRP)	SRP5,2,6,1,7,3	.746	6
	Total		.888	23

Apart from learner autonomy, we also obtained data related to the students' academic achievement. To reflect the students' most recent academic achievement, the questionnaire asked them to provide their Grade Point Averages for all the previous semester English subjects. The Grade Point Averages of the compulsory Vietnamese subjects, such as Philosophy or Economics, were excluded from this study as it aimed at investigating the relationship between language learners' autonomy and students' academic achievement.

Participants

The study was conducted at an English faculty at a major university in the South of Vietnam. As we aimed at investigating learners' learning autonomy levels, i.e., whether there are any differences between learner autonomy levels across the years, and whether there is a significant correlation between learner autonomy and their academic performance, we decided to distribute the questionnaire to all the 536 students within the faculty in the academic year 2023-2024. The total number of valid questionnaires returned was 420. Table 5 gives the demographic information of the participants.

Table 5

Demographic Information of the Participants

		Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	116	27.6
	Female	304	72.4
Year	Year 1	125	29.8
	Year 2	105	25.0
	Year 3	120	28.6
	Year 4	70	16.7

Data Collection and Analysis

The study was conducted based on the guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Ethics Review Board of the University of Social Sciences and Humanities (Protocol Code: TC2024-08, approval date: June 2024). The questionnaire, created in Google Form with an attached consent form, was distributed to all English-major students in the regular program. A total of 420 valid responses were collected within two weeks, representing 78.36% of the target population. After data collection, responses were exported to Excel, cleaned, and analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics 26. Grade Point Averages were calculated from English subject grades, while mean scores were computed for overall learner autonomy and its components (self-initiation, self-regulation) and subcomponents (motivation and attitudes, openness to new things, efforts to learn, perseverance, needs and goals, and planning and monitoring).

Cronbach's alpha coefficients were recalculated in the main study to assess the internal consistency of the two main scales and their subscales. The results are presented in Table 6. All scales and subscales yielded acceptable Cronbach's alpha values, indicating good internal reliability.

Table 6

Reliability Statistics of the Two Scales and Subscales

Scale /Subscale	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Self-initiation (SI)	12	.821
SIM	3	.761
SIN	3	.786
SIE	3	.703
SIP	3	.713
Self-regulation (SR)	11	.839
SRN	5	.805
SRP	6	.756

Note. SIM = Motivation and attitudes; SIN = Openness to new things; SIE = Making efforts to learn; SIP = Perseverance; SRN = Identifying needs and learning goals; SRP = Selecting resources and planning.

Since some of the data were not normally distributed, we used the Spearman correlation instead of Pearson correlation. Results are reported in the next section.

Results

Levels of Learner Autonomy Across Years

As shown in Table 7, the learner autonomy levels are similar across the years, ranging from 3.55 to 3.74, with the overall learner autonomy of 3.63. The learner autonomy levels are high for all four years (with the range of 3.34 to 4.15). The levels of the two scales of SI (self-initiation) and SR (self-regulation) and the subscales are also high, except for SR for Year 3 and its two subscales SRN (Identifying needs and learning

goals) and SRP (Selecting resources and planning), also for Year 3, falling in the range of 2.61 to 3.4, which are at a moderate level.

Table 7

Means and Standard Deviations of Learner Autonomy Scale and Subscales across Years

Year		LA	SI	SR	SIM	SIN	SIE	SIP	SRN	SRP
1	Mean	3.61	3.70	3.51	3.57	3.73	3.73	3.78	3.43	3.58
	SD	.482	.519	.584	.688	.781	.733	.701	.691	.634
2	Mean	3.68	3.78	3.57	3.55	3.69	3.93	3.94	3.54	3.60
	SD	.525	.541	.612	.796	.798	.640	.748	.681	.694
3	Mean	3.55	3.74	3.34	3.41	3.58	3.87	4.10	3.34	3.34
	SD	.484	.535	.561	.690	.808	.724	.655	.709	.627
4	Mean	3.74	3.90	3.58	3.75	3.85	3.86	4.14	3.48	3.66
	SD	.440	.450	.589	.730	.783	.604	.646	.729	.611
T	Mean	3.63	3.77	3.49	3.55	3.70	3.85	3.97	3.44	3.53
	SD	.490	.521	.592	.730	.795	.690	.703	.702	.653

Note. LA = Learner autonomy; SI = Self-initiation; SR = Self-regulation; SIM = Motivation and attitudes; SIN = Openness to new things; SIE = Making efforts to learn; SIP = Perseverance; SRN = Identifying needs and learning goals; SRP = Selecting resources and planning.

Table 8 shows the results of the Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Tests for the null hypotheses on the distribution of learner autonomy and its elements across years.

Table 8

Distribution of Learner Autonomy Scale and Subscales across Years

	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
1	LA distribution is consistent across Years.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.063	Retain H_o
2	SI distribution is consistent across Years.		.080	Retain H_o
3	SR distribution is consistent across Years.		.009	Reject H_o
4	SIM distribution is consistent across Years.		.021	Reject H_o
5	SIN distribution is consistent across Years.		.200	Retain H_o
6	SIE distribution SIE is consistent across Years.		.089	Retain H_o
7	SIP distribution SIP is consistent across Years.		.000	Reject H_o
8	SRN distribution is consistent across Years.		.209	Retain H_o

9	SRP distribution is consistent across Years.	.002	Reject H_o

The significance level is .050.
Note. LA = Learner autonomy; SI = Self-initiation; SR = Self-regulation; SIM = Motivation and attitudes; SIN = Openness to new things; SIE = Making efforts to learn; SIP = Perseverance; SRN = Identifying needs and learning goals; SRP = Selecting resources and planning.

As shown in Table 8, there was no significant difference between the learner autonomy levels across the four years. While overall self-initiation remained consistent, significant differences emerged among Motivation and attitudes (SIM) and Perseverance (SIP) levels across the years. Similarly, significant differences were also found between the self-regulation levels in general and the ability to plan and monitor the learning process (SRP) in particular across the years.

To further examine these, a post-hoc analysis was conducted. Table 9 presents the significant results from the Pairwise comparisons of Year for Motivation and attitudes (SIM), Perseverance (SIP), Self-regulation (SR) and Selecting resources and planning (SRP).

Table 9

Pairwise Comparisons of Year for SIM, SIP, SR and SRP

	Pairwise Comparisons of Year					
	Sample 1-Sample 2	Test Statistic	Std. Error	Std. Test Statistic	Sig.	Adj. Sig.[a]
SIM	Year 3-Year 4	-55.707	18.069	-3.083	.002	.012
SIP	Year 1-Year 3	-53.369	15.326	-3.482	.000	.003
	Year 1-Year 4	-65.251	17.902	-3.645	.000	.002
SR	Year 3-Year 2	51.793	16.201	3.197	.001	.008
SRP	Year 3-Year 1	40.919	15.463	2.646	.008	.049
	Year 3-Year 2	52.190	16.169	3.228	.001	.007
	Year 3-Year 4	-55.471	18.197	-3.048	.002	.014

Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and 2 distributions are the san
Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is .05.
a. Significance values have been adjusted by the Bonferroni correction for multi| tests.
Note. SIM = Motivation and attitudes; SIP = Perseverance; SR = Self-regulation; SRP = Selecting resources and planning.

As shown in Table 9, the SIM (Motivation and attitudes) level of Year 3 students is the lowest (M=3.41) while that of Year 4 students are the highest (M=3.75). Regarding Perseverance (SIP) level, Year 1 has the lowest mean (M=3.78), and it is significantly less than both Year 3 (M=4.10) and Year 4 (M=4.14). The self-regulation level of Year 3 (M=3.34) is significantly lower than that of Year 2 (M=3.57). While there are no significant differences between the ability to identify needs and learning goals (SRN) across the years, there are significant differences between the three SRP (Selecting resources and planning) levels, namely, Year 3-Year 1, Year 3-

Year 2, and Year 3-Year 4. As shown in Table 9, the SRP level of Year 3 (M=3.34) is much lower than those of the other years.

Correlation Between Learner Autonomy and Academic Achievement

The Spearman correlation test result shows that there is a significant correlation between the students' Grade Point Average and learner autonomy level (r = .105, sig. = 0.031 < 0.05) (see Table 10).

Table 10

Result of Spearman Correlation Test of Grade Point Average and Learner Autonomy

Correlations

			LA	GPA
Spearman's rho	LA	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.105*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.031
		N	420	420
	GPA	Correlation Coefficient	.105*	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.031	.
		N	420	420

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

Note. LA = Learner autonomy; GPA = Grade Point Average

Table 11 summarises the results of Spearman correlation tests of self-initiation, self-regulation and the subscales of learner autonomy (i.e., Motivation and attitudes (SIM), Openness to new things (SIN), Making efforts to learn (SIE), Perseverance (SIP), Identifying needs and learning goals (SRN), Selecting resources and planning (SRP)) and Grade Point Average. The table presents the overall correlation along with correlations for each year level.

Table 11

Results of Spearman Correlation Tests of Elements of Learner Autonomy and Grade Point Average

Year		LA-GPA	SI-GPA	SR-GPA	SIM-GPA	SIN-GPA	SIE-GPA	SIP-GPA	SRN-GPA	SRP-GPA
1	CC	.106	.131	.069	.172	**.258***	-.004	.051	.028	.086
	Sig.	.240	.144	.447	.055	.004	.963	.575	.756	.339
2	CC	**.304***	**.320***	**.243***	**.348***	.154	.161	**.304***	**.240***	**.196***
	Sig.	.002	.001	.013	.000	.117	.101	.002	.014	.045
3	CC	.132	**.192***	.034	.153	.087	.121	**.191***	.097	-.039
	Sig.	.150	.036	.713	.095	.347	.187	.037	.292	.673
4	CC	.178	.217	.077	.040	.032	.175	.204	.060	.065
	Sig.	.140	.072	.527	.739	.790	.148	.090	.621	.591

T	CC	**.105***	**.179****	.015	**.145****	**.111***	.078	**.197****	.030	.011
	Sig.	.031	.000	.755	.003	.022	.109	.000	.544	.825

Notes. CC: Correlation Coefficient; **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
LA = Learner autonomy; GPA = Grade Point Average; SI = Self-initiation; SR = Self-regulation; SIM = Motivation and attitudes; SIN = Openness to new things; SIE = Making efforts to learn; SIP = Perseverance; SRN = Identifying needs and learning goals; SRP = Selecting resources and planning.

Overall, a significant positive correlation exists between learner autonomy and academic achievement at the 0.05 significance level. The more autonomous the students are, the better their academic performance. The self-initiation level also has a very strong correlation with Grade Point Average (p =.000). Among the sub-elements of SI, there is no significant correlation between SIE (Making efforts to learn) and Grade Point Average. However, SIN (Openness to new things) positively correlates with Grade Point Average at the 0.05 level, and the other two sub-elements have a very strong correlation with Grade Point Average. The correlations between SIM (Motivation and attitudes) and SIP (Perseverance) with Grade Point Average are highly significant at the 0.01 level (p =.003 and .000, respectively). The test results show no significant correlations between self-regulation level in general, the two sub-elements SRN (Identifying needs and learning goals) and SRP (Selecting resources and planning), and Grade Point Average.

There were some interesting findings when the correlations for each year were examined. Results showed high correlations between learner autonomy, Self-initiation (SI), Self-regulation (SR) and almost all of the sub-elements of Self-initiation and Self-regulation and Grade Point Average for Year 2 students. However, there were no significant correlations between learner autonomy and Grade Point Average for Year 1, Year 3 and Year 4 students. Similar patterns were found with self-initiation level and Grade Point Average (except for Year 3) and self-regulation level and Grade Point Average across Year 1, Year 3 and Year 4. As for the sub-elements, there were almost no significant correlations between the six sub-elements and Grade Point Average for Year 1, Year 3 and Year 4 students. The only exceptions are the strong correlation between SIN (Openness to new things) and Grade Point Average for Year 1 students (p =.004) and between SIP (Perseverance) and Grade Point Average for Year 3 students (p =.037).

Discussion

The present study aimed to assess levels of learner autonomy across different year levels in a university setting, focusing on two primary dimensions: self-initiation and self-regulation. The results indicated that overall, learner autonomy remains high across all four years, with no statistically significant differences in the general learner autonomy scale across years. The high autonomy levels in this study align with Holec's (1981) foundational view of autonomy as a developed skill rather than an innate characteristic. The results suggest that these learners have generally cultivated

autonomy throughout their university experience, likely due to conscious efforts and the development of self-directed learning habits.

However, a closer examination of the two dimensions reveals nuanced differences, particularly in self-regulation. Year 3 students showed notably lower levels of Self-regulation (SR) and its subscale SRP (planning and monitoring the learning process) compared to other year levels, suggesting a potential dip in learner autonomy in this cohort. This finding aligns with Nguyen's (2012) model, which posits that self-regulation is crucial in achieving learner autonomy but can fluctuate due to academic demands throughout a student's educational journey. The Year 3 cohort may experience additional challenges, such as transitioning to more advanced or specialised coursework, which could impact their confidence and control over planning and monitoring the learning process. The lower self-regulation scores in Year 3 students suggest that a decline in Self-regulation (SR) may negatively affect academic performance if left unaddressed. By encouraging Year 3 students to engage more actively in planning and monitoring their learning activities, educators could help bridge this gap, thereby fostering stronger academic outcomes.

The findings of this study support the recommendation of Benson (2000) and Littlewood (1996) to utilise robust and contextually sensitive autonomy measures, such as the Language Learner Autonomy Scale, which accommodates both self-initiation and self-regulation aspects. Although previous scales like the Learner Autonomy Profile-Short Form (Confessore & Park, 2004) and Nguyen's (2012) model have been informative, they were found to be inadequate in accounting for the fluctuations in autonomy across different educational stages, as seen in the Year 3 cohort. This underlines the value of tools like Language Learner Autonomy Scale in providing a more comprehensive understanding of learners' motivational and regulatory profiles.

The findings also show that there is a significant correlation between learner autonomy and Grade Point Average. Autonomous learning behaviours can enhance academic performance, confirming that learner autonomy is a key factor for success in higher education (Faiz, 2023; Myartawan et al., 2013; Ozer & Yukselir, 2023; Sakai & Takagi, 2009). However, this correlation is relatively modest, suggesting that while learner autonomy plays a role, other factors may contribute significantly to academic success. A closer examination of the sub-elements of learner autonomy reveals that self-initiation, specifically motivation, attitudes, and perseverance, has a robust association with academic performance. These findings support Little's (1991) emphasis on the proactive engagement of learners, indicating that motivated and resilient students are likely to perform better academically. This aligns with existing literature highlighting motivation and perseverance as critical components of learner autonomy, which foster a proactive approach to learning (Little, 1991; Nguyen, 2012; Ruelens, 2019). The lack of a significant correlation between self-regulation and Grade Point Average overall, however, suggests that while identifying needs and learning goals and planning and monitoring the learning process are valuable, they may not directly translate to measurable academic outcomes, especially in the current context.

Interestingly, the study shows that learner autonomy's influence on Grade Point Average varies by year level, with Year 2 students displaying particularly strong

correlations between autonomy and academic performance. This trend likely reflects the academic pressures unique to Year 2, where students must ensure satisfactory performance to qualify for specialisation courses. During this time, increased autonomy is expected as students adapt to more rigorous academic expectations. The stronger association between self-initiation and self-regulation elements and Grade Point Average among Year 2 students suggests that these students actively engaged in planning and monitoring to meet the demands of their coursework.

The study shows that learners display a moderately high level of autonomy overall but also reveals critical areas such as self-regulation where targeted support for Year 3 students may be needed. This underscores the importance of monitoring and scaffolding autonomy development, particularly at key transitional stages. The findings further indicate that the relationship between learner autonomy and Grade Point Average is complex and shaped by individual, academic, and contextual factors specific to each year level. Consequently, stage-sensitive support is essential for enabling students to use their autonomy effectively across their academic trajectories.

Pedagogical Implications

The study's findings on learner autonomy and academic achievement have several implications for English language teaching. The positive association between higher autonomy and better academic outcomes underlines the importance of autonomy-supportive learning environments. Teachers can incorporate learner-centred practices such as structured goal-setting activities, guided self-assessments, and project-based tasks to encourage students to take greater responsibility for their learning and, in turn, strengthen performance.

At institutional level, policies and curricula may need to shift away from purely test-oriented or teacher-centred models towards more flexible, learner-directed approaches. Revising assessment practices to include formative, self-reflective components alongside traditional examinations can provide opportunities for students to develop self-regulation, which is likely to support both autonomy and achievement.

The observed association between learner autonomy and academic success also suggests that barriers to autonomy, such as restricted access to resources or rigid regulations, should be systematically addressed. This may involve expanding access to learning tools, embedding technologies that support self-directed learning, and offering teacher development focused on autonomy-supportive pedagogy, including the promotion of self-study and independent learning habits.

Finally, enhancing internal factors such as motivation, personal interest, and positive attitudes is crucial for fostering learner autonomy and academic performance. English Language Teaching programmes can integrate authentic, real-world tasks and topics that connect with learners' interests and future goals, while explicitly encouraging goal setting to strengthen commitment and reinforce the reciprocal relationship between autonomy and achievement.

Conclusion

This study has provided valuable insights into the levels of learner autonomy among English major learners and their relationship with academic achievement. Findings indicate that learners have a moderately high level of learner autonomy, and higher autonomy often correlates positively with academic success, underscoring learner autonomy as a significant contributor to improved academic outcomes. This suggests that fostering autonomy in English as a Foreign Language settings can encourage learners to take greater responsibility for their progress, supporting both language acquisition and overall academic performance. These findings are consistent with existing literature advocating for learner-centred approaches in language education, which promote active and self-directed learning behaviours. Future studies could explore specific strategies or interventions that can effectively cultivate autonomy, such as peer collaboration or digital learning tools. By addressing these areas, potential studies can contribute to more effective pedagogical practices that support learner autonomy and academic success in diverse English as a Foreign Language settings.

Acknowledgements

This article is part of a research project, coding TC2024-08, which the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City funded.

Declaration of Conflict of Interest in Research

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

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Appendix

LA Questionnaire

Self-initiation

	Code	Motivation & attitudes
1	SIM1	I have a willingness to learn.
2	SIM2	I have positive attitude towards learning English.
3	SIM3	I motivate myself to learn without external factors.

	Code	Openness to new things
4	SIN1	I am open to new ways of doing familiar things.
5	SIN2	I enjoy new learning experiences.
6	SIN3	I enjoy being set a challenge.

	Code	Making efforts to learn
7	SIE1	I am able to work cooperatively in pairs or groups.
8	SIE2	I am able to seek help or support from my peers.
9	SIE3	I am able to take part in classroom interactions and discussions.

	Code	Perseverance
10	SIP1	I am able to stick with tasks even when they are difficult.
11	SIP2	I am able to meet deadlines.
12	SIP3	I am able to take responsibility for my learning.

Self-regulation

	Code	Identifying needs & learning goals
13	SRN1	I am able to set my own learning goals
14	SRN2	I am able to identify my own needs (e.g., why I want to learn English)
15	SRN3	I am able to identify my own learning problems and means of addressing them
16	SRN4	I am able to identify my strengths and weaknesses and structure my learning accordingly
17	SRN5	I am able to evaluate to what extent I have achieved my learning goals

	Code	Planning & monitoring the learning process
18	SRP1	I am able to work with a variety of materials and resources to enhance learning.
19	SRP2	I am able to find information about new topics on my own.
20	SRP3	I am able to identify and develop learning strategies (e.g., learning words by association, repeating words or sentences, or organizing a table of important grammar rules)
21	SRP4	I am able to develop the ability to study by myself.
22	SRP5	I am able to plan where I want to learn (e.g., in/outside the classroom, at home…).
23	SRP6	I am able to develop daily/weekly learning plans.

RETHINKING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE: EMPLOYERS' PERSPECTIVES OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE USE IN PROFESSIONAL SETTINGS

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Manuscript received 25 August 2025
Manuscript accepted 24 November 2025
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ABSTRACT

In today's globalised and competitive job market, graduates must meet the rising industry expectations for effective real-world communication skills, alongside technical expertise. In the era where English proficiency often defines employability, employers increasingly prioritise graduates with strong language proficiency and effective communication skills as key indicators for employability. However, the specific communicative competencies required in professional settings is still not well-understood. Using Canale and Swain's (1980) framework, this study investigates the employers' perception of communicative competence perceived as important for effective communication in the workplace. Data were collected through a questionnaire analysed using descriptive statistics. Findings revealed that sociolinguistic competence was most valued as it emphasises the importance of contextually appropriate language use in workplace communication. This study highlights the significance of adopting established second language framework beyond academic contexts to better align language education with industry expectations hence offering an alternative language curriculum for educators and policymakers to enhance English language training and graduate employability.

Keywords: communicative competence; employers' perception; English language; graduate employability; language at workplace

Introduction

In today's increasingly competitive and globalised job market, new graduates face mounting challenges in meeting evolving employer demands as they seek to align with professional expectations. As English has gradually become the dominant language of globalisation and industrialisation, it has emerged as a key competency sought by employers. English proficiency and strong communication skills, alongside technical or job specific abilities, are now regarded as essential for effective workplace contribution (Matsuoka & Mihail, 2016). Research indicates that Malaysian employers prioritise graduates who can express themselves clearly in English, both orally and in writing, with language accuracy playing an important role in hiring decisions (Hamid et al., 2014; Zainuddin et al., 2019). Consequently, the ability to communicate effectively in English remains a critical factor in enhancing graduate employability in Malaysia. This growing demand has placed pressure on higher education institutions worldwide to ensure that graduates are equipped with competencies required for the modern workforce (Yorke, 2006). However, although various efforts have been made to strengthen undergraduates' English language competency for employment, these initiatives have primarily focused on improving general language skills.

Similarly, many studies conducted on employers' perspectives on graduates' language competence in the workplace have also mainly focused on general language skills rather than the specific communicative competencies required in the professional settings (Jawing & Kamlun, 2022; Ne'matullah et al., 2023; Rahman et al. 2019; Singh, 2021). For instance, Jawing and Kamlun (2022) examined how English proficiency affected the employability of Social Science graduates from a Malaysian public university, using data scores from 7,025 graduates on their employment status, English course results and MUET scores. Ong et al. (2022) investigated employability and communication skills such as listening, speaking, reading, writing and general workplace skills to ascertain the types of employability skills perceived as important for employment by students, lecturers and employers in Sarawak.

Drawing from previous research, Zainuddin et al. (2019) highlighted that terms such as "proficient" and "competent" in English as perceived by employers are also often used with no clear definitions. In this context, competence can also extend beyond language ability to include communicative skills such as presenting ideas effectively and confidently in both oral and written form, as well as practical abilities such as constructing clear sentences, giving instructions and asking questions. Given the overlapping meanings of what encompasses language proficiency and communicative competence in the workplace, it is important to examine the role of English in relation to employability, with particular emphasis on communicative competence skills, as it provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how language skills enable individuals to navigate their professional interactions and achieve the organisational goals.

Building on this understanding, there is a crucial need to investigate how such competence can potentially be enhanced through established second language acquisition theories. One such framework is Hymes' (1972) concept of communicative competence, which emphasises the contextual and functional use of language beyond grammatical accuracy (Kanwit & Solon, 2022). While the theory is predominantly applied within the classroom-based SLA contexts, it holds untapped potential for informing pedagogical approaches that are aimed at equipping graduates with the necessary communicative competence for professional environments. Accordingly, it is critical to investigate how the communicative competence theory can be effectively leveraged to bridge the gap between academic language training and linguistic demands of workplace environments.

In line with this, the aim of this study was to identify the aspects of English language communicative competence that employers consider most important in professional settings.

Review of Literature

Communicative Competence

Communicative competence refers to individual's ability to use language effectively and appropriately in various social contexts. Beyond linguistic skills, it also involves the ability to understand and use sociocultural norms and pragmatic rules to achieve successful communication (Lillis, 2006). Originally developed by Hymes (1972), the theory identifies several key sub-competencies such as linguistic competence, encompassing knowledge of grammar, vocabulary and syntax; sociolinguistic competence, reflecting awareness of the social and cultural contexts in which language is used (Vorwerg, 2015); pragmatic competence, involving the use of appropriate language forms for specific communication purposes; as well as discourse competence, referring to the ability to construct coherent and cohesive texts and conversations (Walker et al., 2018). In other words, this theoretical perspective views language not merely as mastery of linguistic abilities alone, but also as a primary means of communication that integrates both cognitive and social abilities that enable individuals to interact meaningfully in diverse contexts.

Canale and Swain (1980) expanded on Hymes' (1972) concept of communicative competence by developing a more detailed and practical model widely applied in language teaching. The framework, which forms the basis of this study, identifies four main components:

- Grammatical Competence: Aligns with Chomsky's (1965) linguistic competence and involves knowledge of syntax, morphology, phonology, and semantics to enable accurate sentence production and comprehension.
- Sociolinguistic Competence: Derives from Hymes' (1972) work, and involves understanding the social rules of language use, such as appropriateness, cultural norms and politeness in different contexts.

- Strategic Competence: Refers to the ability to use communication strategies to overcome difficulties or breakdowns in communication, such as paraphrasing, requesting clarifications, or using gestures.
- Discourse Competence: Involves the ability to construct, interpret and understand coherent texts and conversations, extending beyond individual sentences to larger units of language (Canale, 1983).

Building on this foundation, Celce-Murcia (2007) emphasises that discourse competence, or the ability to produce and comprehend extended texts and conversations with coherence and cohesion, is central for authentic real-world language use. Additionally, the framework also incorporates strategic competence, which focuses on using appropriate strategies to manage the communication challenges, overcome potential misunderstandings and maintain smooth and effective interaction. Subsequently, this adapted framework is considered more practical and highly relevant for real-world language use, as it equips learners with essential skills that go beyond grammatical accuracy to include purposeful, effective and context-sensitive communication (Celce-Murcia, 2007).

The term communicative competence has since been widely used within the context of language education or more broadly in the field of applied linguistics (Davies, 1989). It not only shifted the focus of language teaching to emphasise the importance of practical language use in real life situations (Wang et al., 2025) but also reshaped the understanding of language proficiency that encompasses both linguistic as well as cultural and social dimensions (Batziakas, 2016).

While the communicative competence framework has been predominantly explored in pedagogical and language learning contexts, research on how this concept is specifically perceived in professional settings may be limited. In particular, there is little understanding of graduates' language readiness for the workplace. Accordingly, this study aims to investigate the key competencies most valued by employers in professional settings using Canale and Swain's (1980) framework. By applying a well-established framework in a workplace context, this research seeks to inform curriculum design and provide practical guidance for graduates and institutions on the communicative proficiency expected in the workplace.

Communicative Competence among Malaysian Graduates

Communicative competence studies among graduates in Malaysia have been extensive, encompassing a broad spectrum of research that examine pedagogical and learning strategies (Layagan, 2024; Radin & Ismail, 2025; Rahman et al., 2022) and highlighting the importance of English communication skills demanded by the workplace (Kamil & Anuar, 2022; Singh, 2021; Ting et al., 2017).

Previous research has highlighted a clear gap between the communication skills taught in tertiary-level English courses, and what the employers expect. Based on the need to align academic training with workplace expectations, Talif and Noor's (2009) study investigated the relevance of tertiary-level English language proficiency curricula to workplace communication demand. Data collected involving 86 final year students from four Malaysian public universities revealed that there exist inadequate

language skills offered in existing English language courses at tertiary level to meet the demand of workplace communication. Structured interview data also revealed that students continued to struggle with task-specific activities such as report writing, minute taking and professional oral communication.

Ting et al. (2017) examined employers' perceptions of English proficiency and communication skills in the workplace and found that both are key competencies that significantly contribute to graduates' employment readiness. The study also showed that employers were willing to hire candidates with only moderate language proficiency if they demonstrated strong communication skills. Semi-structured interview data from 10 private sector employers further revealed that effective communication skills strongly influenced employability and career advancement, underscoring the need for Malaysian universities to strengthen communication-focused and practical training in their curricula.

Another study examined the perspectives of Malaysian employers and students regarding English proficiency and workplace communication. Singh's (2021) study involved 68 interns undergoing their eight-week internship. Although the interns frequently engaged in workplace communication tasks such as emails, team discussions and telephone interactions, they reported difficulties in using English fluently and effectively in real-life situations. The findings highlighted the persistent issue that university training does not adequately equip students for real-world communication demands, revealing the urgent need for collaborative efforts by industry stakeholders to enhance the English language programmes and better reflect the evolving linguistic demands of the workplace.

The Study

The study employed a questionnaire to ascertain which aspects of English language communicative competence among university graduates are most valued by employers. Data were collected from 34 employers across various industries to evaluate their perceptions of different components of communicative competence, including sociolinguistic, strategic, discourse, and grammatical competence.

Participants

A total of 34 employers completed the questionnaire, out of the 41 who were invited to participate. These employers participated in the study based on their involvement with the university's internship program. During the data collection process, they were directly supervising the university's interns, which gave them firsthand insight into the English language competencies expected of graduates. They represented a variety of industries, including public and private sector companies in finance, healthcare, engineering, IT, retail as well as education.

Most participants held supervisory or managerial positions and were directly involved in human resource functions, such as interviewing job applicants and overseeing interns, which further informed their perspectives on workplace communication expectations. All participants had a minimum of five years of professional experience. They were purposively selected for their ability to provide

professionally grounded insights specifically on the use of English in professional communication.

Research Instrument

An online questionnaire comprising 21 items was developed to assess communicative competence across various social and workplace contexts. The questionnaire was based on Hymes' (1972) SPEAKING model which provided a comprehensive framework for analysing language use in specified contexts, such as social roles, settings, goals and cultural norms. The questionnaire underwent several rounds of revisions and was reviewed by two ESL experts to ensure its content validity. Participants rated each item using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (least important) to 5 (most important), allowing them to indicate the importance of different communicative behaviours from their perspective.

The questionnaire focused on four components of communicative competence consisting of sociolinguistic, strategic, discourse, and grammatical competence. Sociolinguistic competence highlights how graduates are expected to use English appropriately in workplace situations. Employers were asked about the importance of graduates' ability to adjust their communication style to suit different contexts, such as casual conversations with colleagues and formal meetings with clients. The questions also explored employers' expectations for graduates to select language that fits their communication purposes, for example, requesting information or clarifying instructions, reflecting the graduates' awareness of social and professional norms.

Grammatical competence focuses on language accuracy and appropriate use of grammatical forms across different communication contexts. In this case, employers were asked about the importance of graduates' ability to adapt grammatical structures based on audience and purpose, such as using formal grammar with clients or senior management and simple, clear language in emails and instructions. The questions also addressed how graduates are expected to use appropriate grammar to achieve communication goals, for instance, keeping language concise in emails or instructions, and more elaborate in reports and presentations.

Discourse competence examines how effectively messages are organised and conveyed in different workplace situations. In this section, employers were asked about the importance of graduates' ability to adjust their tone and style to suit different settings and audiences, and to use the language purposefully, such as in persuasion, or negotiation. The questions also considered the importance of graduates communicating clearly and appropriately across various platforms, while demonstrating awareness of workplace communication norms in different professional settings.

Strategic competence considers how individuals adapt communication strategies to manage challenges in professional interactions. In this section, the questionnaire focused on employers' expectations for graduates to adjust their communication in different workplace contexts. Employers were asked about the importance of graduates' ability to modify their language style and tone, adapt to different situations, whether formal or informal, and use clarification techniques to

prevent or resolve misunderstandings, helping them communicate clearly and effectively.

The questionnaire provided valuable insights in capturing the employers' perception of how language features are used across diverse workplace communication scenarios. In doing so, it offered a window into how language and context specifically shaped the communication practices in professional settings.

Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis

Employers from a range of industries were purposively selected to provide a broad and diverse perspective on workplace communication. All participants took part voluntarily. They received detailed information about the study and provided informed consent before completing the questionnaire. Participants also had the opportunity to contact the researcher directly if they had questions or needed clarification regarding any aspect of the study. The questionnaire was distributed at the conclusion of the university internship program, and they were given a month to complete it.

Descriptive statistical analysis was employed to determine these employers' perceptions of the importance of different components of communicative competence for effective workplace communication. Mean scores and standard deviations were calculated for each component to identify the trends in employers' preference.

Results and Discussion

Based on the 34 employers' responses gathered, Table 1 revealed that sociolinguistic competence was the most preferred category (M = 3.77, SD = 0.241), in comparison to strategic competence (M = 3.61, SD = 0.49), discourse competence (M = 3.58, SD = 0.58). Grammatical competence was perceived as the least important (M = 3.41, SD = 0.56).

Table 1

Employers' Perceptions of Communicative Competence Components: Descriptive Statistics

Communicative Competence Component	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Sociolinguistic competence	M = 3.77	SD = 0.241
Strategic competence	M = 3.61	SD = 0.49
Discourse competence	M = 3.58	SD = 0.58
Grammatical competence	M = 3.41	SD = 0.56

In essence, sociolinguistic competence, which encompasses the ability to adjust language appropriately across numerous social settings or contexts in the workplace, was rated as the most critical communication skill for graduates at the early careers stage. Linguistic accuracy alone is perceived as insufficient for effective communication to take place. In other words, while understanding and producing correct utterances is valued, the ability to use language appropriately in different

social contexts is much preferred in professional settings. Hence, successful communication in the workplace using the English language is deemed achieved if the speaker can effectively interpret the social context and strategically adjust the linguistic choices in line with the communicative norms.

The strong preference for sociolinguistic competence over grammatical competence also reflects the practical reality of daily communication, which is often shaped by complex contextual and situational factors. Hence, mere knowledge of linguistic rules is not sufficient to achieve the effective communicative goals intended. Instead, competent communication should meet the appropriate social and cultural factors that exist in a given situation, such as tactfulness or politeness and the avoidance of violating social and interpersonal norms, rules, and expectations (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989).

The results indicate a greater emphasis on the functional aspects of communication. However, it is noteworthy to highlight that the results show only a slight difference between strategic competence (M = 3.61, SD = 0.49) and discourse competence (M = 3.58, SD = 0.58). This finding further supports employers' strong preference for the ability of the speaker to manage communication breakdowns, overcome communication difficulties and ensure cohesion in form as well as clarity in the meaning of the messages conveyed (Ali et al., 2025; Kamil & Anuar, 2022; Ong et al., 2022). It also indicates that employers value both competencies almost equally by recognising the importance of managing communication gaps while maintaining cohesion and clarity in interactions. Collectively, these findings reinforce the broader trend observed in the results which indicate a greater emphasis on functional aspects of communication, as reflected in sociolinguistic and strategic competence, over structural aspects of communication that is represented by discourse and grammatical competence.

The employers' preference for functional over structural dimensions of language further reiterates the findings of previous studies, highlighting the importance of communication as a key factor in organisational success, particularly in enhancing organisational performance and decision-making (Yusof & Rahmat, 2020). Accordingly, it is natural for employers to value appropriateness and adaptability in workplace communication to achieve organisational goals. Given the multifaceted nature of workplace communication involves exchanging information among various parties and across multiple communication channels, such competence helps to mitigate potential internal or external conflicts.

Finally, the preference for sociolinguistic competence (M = 3.77, SD = 0.241) and strategic competence (M = 3.61, SD = 0.49) aligns with key findings from previous research (Gan et al., 2017; Kamil & Anuar, 2022) and further highlights their importance in workplace communication. In practice, this means that employers value graduates who can clearly understand their own responsibilities, provide constructive feedback and build and maintain relationships. Graduates with these skills are seen as effective communicators and valuable assets to any organisation as they play a vital role in engaging with others and achieving professional success (Zulkeifli et al., 2023). From a theoretical perspective, these findings can be interpreted through the lens of communicative competence. Sociolinguistic competence reflects the ability to communicate appropriately while showing

interpersonal sensitivity. Strategic competence, in comparison, enables individuals to manage communication gaps or disruptions, and discourse competence entails the ability to construct cohesion in communication.

Conclusion

Findings from this study provide a valuable insight into the elements of communicative competence preferred by employers, grounded in a robust and well-established theoretical framework. Data analysis from the findings revealed that sociolinguistic competence was the most highly valued aspect of communicative competence among employers, surpassing the strategic, discourse and grammatical competences. This preference implies that greater emphasis is placed on graduates' ability to use the language appropriately in social and cultural contexts, which is crucial for effective workplace communication.

The study has several pedagogical implications. Firstly, it highlights the need to integrate the components of communicative competence into the language curricula to ensure that students are adequately prepared for real world professional communication. Studies have reported that students often face challenges with fluency, as well as self-confidence (Kho & Ting, 2024), and may fail to make positive impressions during collaborative activities (Khamis & Wahi, 2021). Subsequently, these insights suggest that language teaching needs to go beyond grammar and vocabulary to foster students' confidence, social skills, and communicative abilities to enhance their ability to use English more effectively in real-world contexts.

The findings also concur with previous studies emphasising the importance of training strategies that focus on communicative competence. For example, Gan et al. (2017) found that strategy training centred on communication activities can significantly improve learners' English language competency, while also noting that merely providing communicative practice is insufficient to meaningfully enhance learners' oral communication skills. Similarly, Kamil and Anuar (2022) highlighted that employers value strategic competence to minimise communication breakdowns caused by language barriers. Such strategies enable fresh graduates to recognise their own weaknesses and identify opportunities to improve interactions with others. Importantly, the results obtained from this study also echo the main concerns raised by employers in Malaysia, who report that many local graduates struggle to communicate fluently and effectively in English, the primary medium of communication in most companies across the country (Ong et. al., 2022; Osman et. al., 2025; Yahaya & Miskam, 2024). It highlights the need for higher education institutions to take proactive measures such as integrating targeted communication training and workplace-relevant English language activities to better prepare graduates for professional environments.

However, as the findings of this study are based on questionnaire responses, in-depth insight into the employers' perceptions may not be fully comprehensive, as data may not capture the context of how these competencies are applied in real-world professional settings. To address this limitation, future research could incorporate qualitative methods, such as interviews, to gain understanding regarding the employers' preference for such language competencies. In addition, future

research could investigate learners perceived communicative competence to help address the persistent mismatch of English language skills needed at workplace. This would allow exploration of students' perspective on the specific communication and language skills required in the workplace, with the aim of understanding how they assess their readiness to use English meaningfully and appropriately in professional contexts. Such research could help reduce the mismatch between employers' expectations and graduates' self- assessed skills, a gap that has long contributed to employers' frequent complaints regarding lack of effective English communication skills in the workplace.

Communicative competence is a multifaceted construct that is essential for effective communication across various contexts. Hence, it is crucial for instructional approaches to integrate linguistic knowledge with sociocultural understanding and practical application. By adopting comprehensive approaches that address both the linguistic and sociocultural dimensions of communication, language teaching can better prepare students to navigate real-world workplace interactions and enhance their confidence. In doing so, it not only shifts the focus of language proficiency within the context of language teaching and learning but also responds to the practical language demands of the workplace.

Funding Acknowledgement

This research was funded by Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (Grant Number: PPPI/USIM/FPBU/USIM/112923).

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WEB-BASED APPROACH TO IMPROVE ACADEMIC VOCABULARY OF PRE-UNIVERSITY ESL LEARNERS

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Manuscript received 6 March 2025
Manuscript accepted 17 September 2025
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https://doi.org/10.33736/ils.9220.2025

ABSTRACT

Mastering academic vocabulary is crucial for post-secondary English as a Second Language (ESL) learners as academic language plays a key role in their academic success. However, many Malaysian ESL learners struggle to acquire and use academic vocabulary effectively, often due to the limitations of traditional instructional approaches. This study examines the effect of a web-based learning resource on the learning of academic vocabulary among 33 pre-university ESL learners from a Centre of Foundation Studies in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. A one-group pre-test post-test research design was employed over an eight-week intervention programme. Results, analysed using the Wilcoxon signed-rank test, revealed an improvement that was statistically significant in academic vocabulary scores ($z = -4.25$, $p < 0.005$) with a large effect size ($r = 0.52$). Key features of the web-based resource, which include sentence-writing activities, explicit instruction, and a flexible learning environment, have likely contributed to these outcomes. This study showcases the potential effectiveness of web-based learning tools in enhancing the learning of academic vocabulary among post-secondary ESL students by offering engaging and interactive learning opportunities.

Keywords: academic vocabulary; ESL learners; vocabulary learning; web-based learning

Introduction

The mastery of academic English vocabulary is essential for pre-university English as a Second Language (ESL) learners as they transition into academic study. Academic vocabulary consists of specialised words commonly used across disciplines and is crucial for understanding and producing academic discourse (Coxhead, 2021; Dang, 2022; Lawrence et al., 2022; Nation, 2022; Skjelde & Coxhead, 2020; Therova, 2021). Empirical evidence shows that depth of academic vocabulary knowledge significantly influences academic success (Alsahafi, 2023). However, many Malaysian post-secondary learners struggle with both understanding (Amir & Sulaiman, 2024; Khan & Ariffin, 2023; Lee et al., 2017; Sulaiman et al., 2018) and using academic vocabulary (Aziz et al., 2021; Ibrahim et al., 2019).

These challenges are often linked to the limitations of traditional instructional methods (Fisal & Said, 2023; Srivani et al., 2022), which tend to prioritise memorisation over meaningful use. Practices such as rote learning and vocabulary notebooks may support short-term recall but offer limited support for deep processing and long-term retention (Shi & Li, 2021). As a result, learners often retain word meanings without being able to use them effectively (Guo et al., 2023; Zai, 2023). Such methods do not sufficiently support the progression from initial exposure to productive use of vocabulary (Brown & Payne, 1994; Ma, 2015). This contributes to a persistent gap between receptive knowledge and productive ability among Malaysian ESL learners.

Web-based learning tools have become increasingly prominent in vocabulary instruction due to their multimodal and interactive features (Xodabande et al., 2022; Zhang, 2021). These tools complement traditional instruction, particularly in ESL contexts where additional support is often required (Knežević et al., 2020; Tan & Goh, 2020). Web-based learning can facilitate academic transition by extending learning beyond the classroom (Zhang, 2021) and offers flexibility, interactivity, and personalised experiences (Kassim et al., 2024; Nhan, 2024; Sani & Mohamad, 2023). Evidence also shows improvements in engagement, motivation, and vocabulary gains (Alhujaylan, 2021; Krishan et al., 2020; Knežević et al., 2020; Tan & Goh, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic further reinforced the importance of accessible online resources (Tahir et al., 2021a; Vu, 2021). When designed effectively, web-based tools can support learner autonomy and provide extended exposure needed for internalising academic vocabulary (Xodabande & Atai, 2020; Xodabande et al., 2022).

Extended exposure to English instruction has not translated into sufficient command of academic vocabulary among ESL learners, especially in terms of active use. Malaysian ESL learners are particularly affected given their minimal prior exposure to academic vocabulary (Othman, 2024), limited access to academic English in conventional classrooms, and few opportunities to practise the language beyond classroom settings (Amir & Sulaiman, 2024; Fisal & Said, 2023; Amir & Sulaiman, 2024; Sulaiman et al., 2020). Although web-based vocabulary tools have been widely examined, few specifically address academic vocabulary learning among Malaysian pre-university ESL learners.

This study investigated the effectiveness of a web-based learning resource designed to enhance their academic vocabulary learning. Specifically, it sought to

answer the following research question: Is there a significant difference in the academic vocabulary scores of pre-university ESL learners before and after using the web-based English academic vocabulary learning resource? If yes, it is to what extent?

Literature Review

Implicit and Explicit Vocabulary Learning

In this paper, the term "vocabulary learning" is used instead of "vocabulary acquisition" as the study aligns itself with the structured, intentional approach used in the web resource. While language acquisition refers to the subconscious and natural development of language through exposure and interaction (Nation, 2022), language learning involves conscious effort and deliberate study of linguistic elements.

Vocabulary learning involves acquiring and understanding words and their meanings through repetition and quality mental processing (Nation, 2022). It progresses along a linear path, from encountering words in receptive contexts to gradually using them productively in writing and speaking (Ma, 2015; Nation, 2001; Teng & Xu, 2022). This process deepens learners' knowledge of words, including meaning, usage and grammar.

Vocabulary can be developed through two key approaches: implicit learning and explicit learning. Implicit learning occurs incidentally, such as inferring word meanings while reading or listening. Though reading academic materials is commonly perceived as the primary source of lexical exposure (Therova, 2021), it alone may not be sufficient for ESL learners to acquire academic words (Aldawsari, 2017; Sulaiman et al., 2018). The common reasons include materials exceeding learners' proficiency (Wei, 2021) and learners' limited metacognitive awareness of word importance and frequency of use (Kaur, 2020). Furthermore, textbooks recommended by institutions may not meet learners' academic vocabulary needs. Many offer limited word forms and contextual usage (Faraj, 2015), resulting in non-interactive and ineffective vocabulary lessons. ESL learners report dissatisfaction with the lack of vocabulary practice found in class textbooks (Fisal & Said, 2023). Without repeated exposure, learners struggle to retain and retrieve new words.

In contrast, explicit learning can enhance vocabulary learning. For instance, Tahir et al. (2021b) found that explicit vocabulary instruction increases learners' enthusiasm for learning and knowledge of vocabulary. According to Sulaiman et al. (2020), early, specialised academic vocabulary instruction in post-secondary education is pertinent to improving comprehension of academic materials. Explicit strategies such as direct instruction, repeated exposure, and active word use are more effective for ESL learners to assimilate word meanings (Beck et al., 2013; Gallagher et al., 2019; Nation, 2001; Schmitt, 2008, 2010). Multiple exposures through hearing, seeing and using words foster a deeper processing and ultimately long-term internalisation of the vocabulary, while associating new words with familiar ones such as synonyms or descriptions activates prior knowledge and strengthens comprehension (Wei, 2021). Activities like creating sentences, highlighting unfamiliar words and interacting meaningfully with vocabulary further promote retention (Zucker et al., 2021).

Given the limited opportunity for Malaysian ESL learners to use academic vocabulary productively (e.g., Aziz et al., 2021; Ibrahim et al., 2019), this paper highlights active usage in digital environments as an important strategy. As argued by Othman (2024), obstacles in learning academic vocabulary can be overcome by using contextual clues and active engagement. Contextualised interactions and summary writing can encourage vocabulary use (Sulaiman et al., 2018; Wei, 2021). Writing practices, in particular, help learners transform receptive knowledge into productive use and enhance retention of higher-level vocabulary (Teng & Xu, 2022). Numerous studies also confirm the positive impact of language use on vocabulary learning (Pichette et al., 2012; Teng & Xu, 2022).

Previous Studies on Academic Vocabulary Instruction

Traditional instruction approaches for academic vocabulary involves vocabulary notebooks, picture cards, contextual definitions (August et al., 2020), and map organisers (Gallagher et al., 2019). While beneficial, these approaches face challenges like poor long-term retention, limited retrieval, and low intrinsic motivation among learners (Farjami, 2018; Shi & Li, 2021). Instruction focused solely on pronunciation, form, and meaning without context can lead to monotony and reduced learner interest (Guo et al., 2023). Although rote memorisation may aid retention, it does not promote practical vocabulary use (Zai, 2023), which is vital for vocabulary learning.

In contrast, technology-integrated vocabulary instruction provides interactive and engaging environments that reduce anxiety and increase motivation. Online tools such as learning websites, digital dictionaries, and games support active vocabulary use and are often more effective than traditional methods (Mundir et al., 2022). Multimodal approaches integrating text, audio, and visuals help bridge the gap between vocabulary knowledge and application (Zai, 2023). Online resources with customisable learning paths, adaptable pacing, accessible materials, and interactive feedback can enhance vocabulary learning (Cantos et al., 2023). Furthermore, technology also fosters self-directed learning, giving learners greater opportunities and autonomy in practising academic vocabulary (Ankeny, 2019; Li et al., 2017; Simanjuntak, 2020; Xodabande & Atai, 2020).

Numerous studies confirm the effectiveness of digital tools in improving academic vocabulary (Alhujaylan, 2021; Ankeny, 2019; Knežević et al., 2020; Li et al., 2017; Simanjuntak, 2020; Xodabande & Atai, 2020). For instance, Dizon (2016) reported significant academic vocabulary gains using Quizlet, while Ali (2018) demonstrated a positive correlation between learners' perceptions of the effectiveness and usefulness of Hot Potatoes exercises. Ashcroft et al. (2018) highlighted the value of non-linear navigation, immediate feedback, varied activities, and increased learner autonomy in developing metacognitive awareness. Similarly, Tan (2018) found gamified instruction with Kahoot improved retention. Digital flashcards also outperformed traditional paper-based methods for vocabulary learning (Mohammadi et al., 2024; Xodabande et al., 2022; Zarrati et al., 2024). Nonetheless, Mohammadi et al. (2024) emphasise the need for complementary methods to enhance productive use of vocabulary through more interactive tasks.

Web-Based Vocabulary Learning

Web-based learning has improved learners' performance and perceptions. Common tools include learning websites (Alhujaylan, 2021; Altiner, 2019; Bashori et al., 2021; Knežević et al., 2020). Hajebi et al. (2018) reported vocabulary gains from the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) websites, while Knežević et al. (2020) found Moodle-supported websites improved academic vocabulary among ESL undergraduates. Alhujaylan (2021) successfully established a web-based learning environment by introducing numerous vocabulary websites, while Bashori et al. (2021) reported increased vocabulary gains and enjoyment. These studies collectively support the affordance of web-based approaches in promoting the learning of academic vocabulary.

Web-based learning is also impactful in flipped and blended classroom models common in post-secondary institutions. Fayaz and Ameri-golestan (2016) observed better vocabulary gain and retention in active web-based environments. Likewise, Knežević et al. (2020) attributed higher vocabulary gains to pre-class engagement, which reduced mental effort. The reduced reliance on teacher-centred instruction allows greater time for independent practice, enhancing engagement (Alhujaylan, 2021; Knežević et al., 2020) and motivation (Al-Johali, 2019; Hussain, 2018), extending learning beyond the classroom. These findings indicate that web-based tools can encourage faster task completion and learning. Besides, they provide extra support in the initial stages of vocabulary learning, such as the learning of academic vocabulary at post-secondary level, where reinforcement of definitions, synonyms, and pronunciation are crucial (Hussain, 2018). According to Zhang (2021), web resources can supplement classroom learning by providing additional opportunities for knowledge and practice.

When the world faced the COVID-19 pandemic, the role of web-based learning tools became even more pronounced. The demand for remote learning necessitated a shift to digital instructions. This transition accelerated the integration of online platforms and reshaped vocabulary instructions. Instructors adapted by incorporating online formative assessments, flashcards, and self-directed study habits (Shamsan et al., 2021; Vu, 2021). For instance, Vietnamese EFL learners using interactive web platforms retained more vocabulary than peers in traditional teacher-centred environments (Vu, 2021). Similarly, Saudi EFL learners using Quizlet and online games developed a greater reliance on technology and independent learning strategies (Shamsan et al., 2021). However, Al-Jarf (2022) discussed decreased motivation among learners lacking self-regulation during the shift and recommended diverse digital tasks to maintain engagement. Additionally, Tahir et al. (2021b) emphasised the importance of explicit vocabulary instruction tailored for online learning via contextualised and interactive digital activities.

The pandemic-driven adoption of web-based vocabulary learning brought lasting implications for language instruction, facilitating personalised learning and flexible access to resources (Tahir et al., 2021a). While challenges persist, hybrid approaches, which combine digital and in-person learning, continue to evolve (Vu, 2021).

Methodology

Design

The one group pre-test-post-test design (Cohen et al., 2007; Cook & Campbell, 1979; Sekaran & Bougie, 2016; Shadish et al., 2001) was employed. The differences in test scores obtained before and after the intervention help determine the potential effect of utilising the web resource on improving learners' academic vocabulary.

Participants

One intact class of 33 pre-university ESL learners from a Foundation Studies Centre in Kuala Lumpur was selected. The learners were enrolled in Semester Two of a one-year Life Sciences Foundation Programme (2022/2023), in which they took a compulsory English Proficiency Course aimed at developing academic reading, writing, and vocabulary skills in preparation for undergraduate studies. This course served as the instructional context for the web-based academic vocabulary intervention. All learners had achieved at least a B in the Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM) English paper, indicating an upper-intermediate level of proficiency. This homogeneity in language proficiency allowed a clearer assessment of the web resource's effect on academic vocabulary development, as it reduced variability and enhanced the internal validity of the findings (Creswell & Guetterman, 2021). Additionally, the learners' transitional stage into post-secondary education aligned with the research that highlighted the critical role of academic vocabulary in supporting the sudden shift towards academic English (Coxhead, 2021).

The majority of ESL learners who participated in this study were female (69.7%, n=23), and 30.3% (n=10) were male. Given the same academic cohort origin, 90% (n=30) of the respondents are 19 years old, while 9.1% (n=3) are 18. All respondents (100%, n=33) identified as Malays and Muslims. In the class group, 36.4% (n=12) obtained the topmost grade of A+ in the SPM examination, while 45.4% (n=15) achieved an A grade. The remaining 18.2% (n=6) obtained the lowest score of A-. This distribution demonstrated that the respondents had similar upper-intermediate to advanced level of English language proficiency, highlighting their command of general vocabulary. This prerequisite sufficiently prepared them for learning academic vocabulary on the web-based learning resource.

The class was conducted by a Malay female teacher holding a Master's degree in Education (MEd) and possessing 11-15 years of lecturing experience at the Centre. Her familiarity with the learners and curriculum supported smooth integration of the web-based resource, including weekly reminders and testing assistance. Having contributed to an earlier learner needs analysis, her involvement ensured alignment with classroom practices with minimal disruption.

Instrument

The academic vocabulary section of the Vocabulary Levels Test (Schmitt et al., 2001) was used as the pre-test (Version 1) and post-test (Version 2) to measure learners' knowledge of receptive academic vocabulary. The tests were in parallel forms, meaning they assessed the same construct using different sets of items of equivalent difficulty, so they could be used interchangeably in longitudinal studies (Xing & Fulcher, 2007). This feature allowed both versions to be used with the same group of learners on two occasions without any memory effect confounding results (Kremmel & Schmitt, 2017). The tests employed a multiple-choice format, whereby test-takers matched target words to their definitions or synonyms. Both versions contained 10 clusters, each containing six target words and three definitions, constituting 30 items per version. The words were selected from the Academic Word List (AWL) (Coxhead, 2000), with the two tests collectively covering 60 out of 570 AWL word families (10.5%). Most importantly, all word items in both versions were covered within the web-based learning resource to ensure alignment between the learning content and the assessment.

The reliability of the instruments was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, a coefficient ranging from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating greater internal consistency (Conroy, 2021). The Vocabulary Levels Test is validated with high internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha values of 0.958 (Version 1) and 0.960 (Version 2) (Schmitt et al., 2001). A pilot test with 33 learners confirmed the instruments' local reliability, yielding Cronbach's alpha values of 0.708 (Version 1) and 0.751 (Version 2) when analysed using SPSS V26. As values above 0.70 were considered acceptable (George & Mallery, 2003), these results indicated acceptable internal consistency for the context of this study.

To assess the normality of the data distribution, a Shapiro-Wilk test was conducted using SPSS V26, given the small sample size (n<50) (Mishra et al., 2019; Shapiro & Wilk, 1965). The results of the normality test on both scores are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1
Normality Test

	Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	Df	Sig.
Pretest Score	.817	33	.000
Posttest Score	.846	33	.000

The results revealed a significant departure from normality for both pre-test scores (W= 0.817, p <0.005) and post-test scores (W= 0.846, p <0.005), indicating that the data were not normally distributed. Hence, a non-parametric test, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test, was conducted to find out if there is a significant difference in the academic vocabulary scores of pre-university ESL learners before and after using the web-based English academic vocabulary learning resource. Then, the effect size was

calculated using this formula: r = Z/sqrt(N) (Fritz et al., 2012; Rosenthal, 1991), where N was the number of observations in total (Coolican, 2013; Pallant, 2007). The effect size utilised Cohen's (1988) guideline for interpreting *r*, as recommended by previous scholars (Coolican, 2013; Field, 2018; Fritz et al., 2012; Pallant, 2016) when conducting the Wilcoxon test. Table 2 shows Cohen's effect size interpretation.

Table 2
Cohen' Effect Size Guideline for r

R	Interpretation
0.1	Small
0.3	Medium
0.5	Large

Data Collection Procedures

The study involved an eight-week intervention using a self-instructed, web-based academic vocabulary learning resource developed by the researchers. The resource contained interactive exercises featuring 170 AWL items selected based on learners' needs and aligned with the Vocabulary Levels Test. While the details of the design and development of the web resource are beyond the scope of this paper, the implementation procedure is outlined here.

At the start of the study, learners completed the academic vocabulary section of Vocabulary Levels Test Version 1 as a pre-test to measure their existing knowledge of academic vocabulary. After completing the pre-test, the researchers introduced the web resource and guided learners on its use. A tutorial video (Figure 1) was provided to scaffold independent learning by demonstrating key features of the web resource, such as the Homepage (Figure 2). Learners could revisit this video as needed to reinforce their understanding of the interface and task expectations.

Learners were instructed to use the web resource independently over eight weeks. Weekly in-class reminders were provided by the English teacher mentioned earlier to encourage consistent engagement. At the end of the period, learners completed the academic vocabulary section of Vocabulary Levels Test Version 2 as a post-test, which was administered by the researchers. Each test session lasted 30 minutes and was conducted in class with the teacher's assistance. Test responses were marked and tabulated for analysis by the researchers.

Prior to participation, informed consent was obtained from all respondents, ensuring voluntary participation and confidentiality.

Figure 1
Tutorial Video



Figure 2
Homepage



Results

Effects of Web-Based Learning Resource

An analysis of a Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used to determine if there was a significant difference in academic vocabulary knowledge among pre-university ESL learners as a result of utilising the web resource. The null and alternative hypotheses tested were:

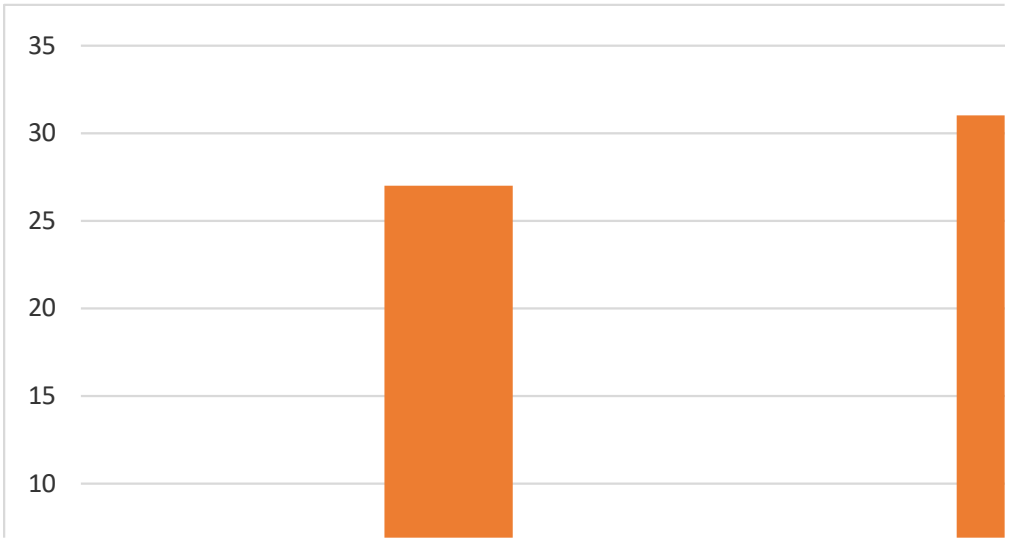
H_0: There is no significant difference in learners' academic vocabulary score before and after using the web-based English academic vocabulary learning resource.

H_1: There is a significant difference in learners' academic vocabulary score before and after using the web-based English academic vocabulary learning resource.

The current study stipulates that a learner must gain a minimum score of 83% (25/30) to reach the mastery level for the academic section of the Vocabulary Levels Test, following existing literature (Abmanan et al., 2017; Skjelde & Coxhead, 2020; Tan, 2018). Figure 3 illustrates the mastery level reached by the participants for the pre-test and post-test scores.

Figure 3

Mastery Level of the Academic Vocabulary (Pre-test vs Post-test scores in Vocabulary Levels Test)



As seen in Figure 1, during the pre-test, 27 participants (81.82%) achieved the 83% threshold, while six participants (18.18%) did not reach the recommended mastery level. In contrast, in the post-test, the number of participants who reached the 83% mastery level increased to 31 (93.94%), with only two (6.06%) participants falling short. This finding indicates a 12.12% increase in the number of participants who successfully achieved the 83% threshold for academic vocabulary in the post-test

of Vocabulary Levels Test compared to the pre-test. To confirm this finding, an inferential statistic was conducted. Table 3 and Table 4 present the results of the Wilcoxon signed-rank test.

Table 3
Ranks of Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test

		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Posttest Score - Pretest Score	Negative Ranks	3[a]	9.33	28.00
	Positive Ranks	27[b]	16.19	437.00
	Ties	3[c]		
	Total	33		

a. Posttest Score < Pretest Score

b. Posttest Score > Pretest Score

c. Posttest Score = Pretest Score

Table 4
Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test Statistics

Test Statistics[a]

	Posttest Score - Pretest Score
Z	-4.247[b]
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

b. Based on negative ranks.

As seen in Tables 3 and 4, the results revealed that the academic vocabulary test scores were statistically and significantly higher after the intervention (Mdn = 29) compared to before (Mdn = 27), $z = -4.25$, $p < 0.005$, with a large effect size ($r = 0.52$). Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. These findings support the conclusion that participants' knowledge of academic vocabulary improved as a result of utilising the web-based learning resource during the treatment period.

Discussion

The potential effectiveness of the web-based learning resource in enhancing pre-university ESL learners' academic vocabulary, as evidenced by the test results, can be attributed to three interconnected features, namely the emphasis on productive vocabulary use, the incorporation of explicit instructional strategies, and the flexible learner-centred environment.

Firstly, the inclusion of sentence-writing activities within the web-based resource encouraged active and meaningful engagement with academic vocabulary. By prompting learners to write original sentences using target academic words and respond to contextualised questions containing them, the web resource guided learners from comprehension to production, which is a transition essential for comprehensive vocabulary learning (Ma, 2015; Teng & Xu, 2022). These writing tasks reflect Brown and Payne's (1994) vocabulary learning stages, particularly their emphasis on contextualisation, construction and use. Repeated exposure and varied engagement with word forms, meanings and collocations likely contributed to both short and long-term retention. This finding concurs with previous studies highlighting that language use facilitates vocabulary acquisition more effectively than receptive exposure alone (Pichette et al., 2012; Teng & Xu, 2022). By integrating these principles, the web-based resource helps close the well-documented gap between receptive and productive academic vocabulary knowledge. Khalilova (2023) stated that although learners may become familiar with academic words, they often struggle to use them actively in oral and written communication. Thus, productive vocabulary tasks enhance academic vocabulary learning outcomes (Sulaiman et al., 2018; Wei, 2021; Zucker et al., 2021).

Secondly, the web resource integrates explicit instructional strategies to deepen learners' understanding of academic vocabulary. By separating complex words into manageable parts, providing contextualised explanations, and associating academic words with synonyms, general English vocabulary, and familiar structures, the web resource supports learners in internalising word meanings beyond surface-level definitions (Nation, 2022). Associating new word with synonyms activates learners' prior knowledge and facilitates comprehension (Wei, 2021). These key features made abstract academic words more accessible and easier to remember. Additionally, the inclusion of interactive exercises across five structured learning stages ensured multiple word retrievals across various contexts, further enhancing the assimilation process of newly acquired vocabulary. Rather than relying on learners to identify and study academic words independently, the web resource explicitly guided their attention to specific words, ensuring consistent exposure and deliberate practice (Alhujaylan, 2021; Ali, 2018; Knežević et al., 2020; Xodabande et al., 2022). These combined strategies appear to facilitate a shift from unconscious to conscious language processing, allowing learners to internalise academic words more effectively, contributing to the increased test scores shown in the findings.

Thirdly, the web resource offers a flexible and learner-centred environment that accommodates different learning preferences and pace. By removing time and geographical constraints, learners can engage with the materials independently and revisit them as needed. This autonomy appears to promote intrinsic motivation, reduce classroom-related anxiety, and support a more personalised learning experience. Moreover, the non-linear structure of the web resource allows learners to select vocabulary sublists based on their needs. The flexibility of the resource facilitates goal-oriented learning and self-regulation. Learner choice and autonomy in web-based platforms can increase vocabulary gains, motivation, engagement and enjoyment (Ashcroft et al., 2018; Bashori et al., 2021).

In addition, the present study showed a decrease in the number of learners scoring below the mastery level after the intervention, suggesting that the flexible nature of the web resource helped to narrow the gap between lower-proficiency students and their higher-proficiency peers. Ashcroft et al. (2018) also found that digital tools can support metacognitive growth and vocabulary development across proficiency levels. Web-based instructions have a positive effect on academic vocabulary learning (Alhujaylan, 2021; Aswad et al. 2022; Tan, 2018). The customisability of the web resource across devices makes it practical to use as a convenient and pedagogically robust tool that effectively facilitates differentiated learning.

Conclusion

This study shows that a web-based learning resource can effectively enhance academic vocabulary among pre-university ESL learners by integrating sentence-writing activities, explicit instruction, and a flexible learning environment. These features encourage active engagement, independent learning, and repeated practice, helping learners bridge the gap between knowing academic words and using them appropriately. The approach not only complements traditional instruction but also supports learner autonomy and motivation, particularly for Generation Z, and adds to evidence that web-based instruction is a valuable means of developing academic vocabulary at the post-secondary level.

This study contributes to web-based academic vocabulary research by illustrating how an online environment can move learners beyond receptive knowledge towards productive use. However, the findings are limited by the specific learner group and short intervention period, which constrain generalisability and do not capture long-term retention. Future research could involve more diverse samples, longer intervention periods, and the inclusion of control groups to provide a clearer understanding of the resource's impact.

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