



## A proposed model for “Competition” factor as moderator on the influence to English language learning quality of students - A Case of higher education in Vietnam

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### APA Citation:

Diep, L.T.N., Hieu, T.C., Hieu, V. M. (2021). A proposed model for “Competition” factor as moderator on the influence to English language learning quality of students - A Case of higher education in Vietnam. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 17(3), 1498-1512. Doi: 10.52462/jlls.108

Submission Date:13/05/2021

Acceptance Date:20/08/2021

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### Abstract

Resulting from the Industrial Revolution 4.0, English is evolving into a global language and is detected from multi-aspects consisting of technological, scientific, and business aspects, and completely, English language learning quality must be enhanced. Thus, this paper focuses on constructing a conceptual framework in which competition is presenting as a moderator on the influence on the English language learning quality of students in the context of higher education in Vietnam. To achieve this objective, the paper employs a qualitative approach through tools of the meta-analysis, systematic review, from 86 publications as research papers, theses/dissertations, books, and other relevant publications in the focused subject from prominent and reliable databases, including Google Scholar, Research Gate, Scopus, Web of Science, EBSCO, Cengage and Springer, etc. and direct observation with 55 English language classes, 5 interviews are conducted by using a semi-structured questionnaire with 135 students and 55 lecturers and 5 educational/ English teaching experts. The paper hopes to contribute to English learning quality enhancement and extends its contribution to the educational quality in higher education.

**Keywords:** Competition; English Learning Quality; Learning Environment; Quality of Teaching Facilitator; Teaching Curriculum; Students’ Objectives

JEL classification: M00, M10, I20, I23

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### 1. Introduction

In Industrial Revolution 4.0, the radical transformation of the internet infrastructure, innovative products, automation, and digitalization influence the multi-facets of human life (Hariharasudan & Kot, 2018; Halili et al., 2021). That transformation creates not only opportunities for development but also challenges and uncertainty in the global context (Labas, Éva & Nagy, 2016). In this context, higher education (hereinafter referred to as HE) more and more proves and plays its crucial role in human life by producing quality human resources, which fuels all nations’ development (Bagley &

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Portnoi, 2014; Lee, 2017; Le et al., 2020). Indeed, the sophisticated and continuous changes of technology, economy and societal relatedness intensify competition which insists on the development and transformation of higher education institutions (HEIs) (Bagley & Portnoi, 2014; Labas, Éva & Nagy, 2016). Education has interfered with the educational process allowing the improvement of learning and teaching process supports, references search, and information sources (Syakur, Junining & Sabat, 2019; Syakur, Fanani & Ahmadi, 2020). Also, higher education quality is enhanced due to the implementation of E-learning (Syakur, Junining & Sabat, 2019). On the other hand, HEIs attempt to diversify their activities to handle the increasingly competitive context. Significantly, e-learning has been agreed as the appropriate solution for retaining teaching and learning efforts while social distancing because of the pandemic crisis (Alodan, 2021).

More of that, in the globalized context, English is evolving into a global language and is detected from multi-aspects consisting of technological, scientific, and business aspects (Chang & Goswami, 2011; Hariharasudan & Kot, 2018; Syifa, 2020). In studies, English language comprehension has been identified as an influential employment skill for both about-to-graduated students and graduated peers (Marginson, 2004; Mainardes, Ferreira & Tontini, 2011; Le et al., 2020). And for non-English speaking countries, the English language is accepted as a comparative advantage, especially for higher education students. Thus, Khuong (2015) points out that Vietnamese students are approaching excessive opportunities with comprehensive English language (Kumar, T. 2021) skills. Furthermore, in practice, Vietnamese HEIs perhaps accommodate English as the compulsory subject in the higher education curriculums, in turn, English is also to meet the international standardization for graduate students fostering international cooperation programs, scholar research, and international student exchange programs (Tran, 2013; Van, 2013; Nguyen, Warren & Fehring, 2015). Toward this perspective, HEIs determine that ongoing improvement of foreign language acquisition is significant for the enhancement of education quality (Harman, Hayden & Nghi, 2009). However, many detrimental factors impact the quality of English language learning following by over-crowded class, the distinctive gap among students, limited referenced resources, and over-dependent grammatical knowledge (Tran, 2013). Additionally, students' pre-existing linguistic capability and self-confidence are related to the quality of English language learning (El-Omari, 2016; Truong & Wang, 2016). Besides, plenty of approaches have innovatively discoursed for the enhancement of English learning, namely including competition-based, task-based, problem-based, and cooperative approaches (Zarei & Layeq, 2016; Hussain & Al-Bahadili, 2014) or the competition-based approach is accepted to effectively influence students' motivation and active learning that relates to the quality of student learning (Cantador & Conde, 2010; Shah, Al-Badri & Hasan, 2015; Coronado et al., 2018; Liao et al., 2018). As such, the quality of English learning is accepted as a rising research concern aiming toward the educational quality improvement and enhancement in higher education as discussed in studies (Ngoc & Iwashita, 2012; Tran, Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021; Maican & Cocoradă, 2021). However, the studies are limited by its scope to a specific university and/or typical students rather than a broad scenario (Loi & Hang, 2014; Bui & Dang, 2018; Phuong, Vo & Tran, 2019; Ha & Thao, 2020; Nguyen & Duong, 2020). Also, competition's impacts on educational quality are noticeable, whereas limited studies have been discussed in the Vietnam context (Webster, 2011).

In the Vietnam context, for years, the increasing competitiveness of Vietnamese tertiary education has stayed as the primary focus of the Vietnamese government (Tran, 2013). Following the growth, English language education significantly impacts higher education vision to integrate with international standards (Truong & Cuong, 2019). Consequently, Vietnamese HEIs attempt to enhance their educational quality by applying innovative approaches in teaching and learning, program curriculum, engaging international cooperation, and searching for quality human resources (Tran, 2013, Nguyen, 2018). Despite considerable efforts, graduate students' English language

comprehension is shown a distinct gap with international peers (Nguyen, 2018). In the study of Truong and Cuong (2019), English competency is the fundamental requirement for both students and teachers in tertiary education. Thus, this paper focuses on constructing a conceptual framework in which competition is presenting as a moderator on the influence on the English language learning quality of students in the context of higher education in Vietnam with the hope to contribute to English learning quality enhancement. In addition, the paper is extending its contribution to the educational quality in higher education.

## 2. Literature Reviews

### 2.1. *Concept of Quality and Quality in Education*

In the provision of higher education, student's choice of university is determined as the high-risk decision from which quality is employed as evaluative criteria by students (Sultan & Wong, 2013). According to Barofsky (2011), the concept of quality is diversely determined since it depends on the industry's nature. Toward this perspective, the quality term in higher education is the relatedness of consistent delivery of the education system and academic value toward students and/or learners (Jain & Prasad, 2018). More of that, higher education is accepted as one of the most sophisticated service providers that share mutual characteristics with others (i.e., Intangibility, Heterogeneity, and Inseparability) and its uniqueness (Gupta & Kaushik, 2018; Ho & Law, 2020). For explication, quality is multi-dimensional is related to the attributes of excellence in process, product, and service performance, and quality is defined following specific industry criteria (Barofsky, 2011; Thompson, 2019). As such, Sultan and Wong (2013) address that university is customer-oriented which is accepted to be a customer-led service firm. According to Elassy (2015), the notion of quality is related to meeting the standardization of procedural assessment. Therefore, quality is an interconnectedness with an assurance scheme that evaluates multi-facets of the educational institution and its relatednesses such as quality teaching curriculum, academic infrastructure, educational management, fiscal management, and functional management capability (Ulker & Bakioglu, 2019). Additionally, quality is accepted to be the prevention and/or mitigation of the deficiencies in work, process, and organization action (Eldin, 2015). Thence, the intersection between benefits (i.e.products and service) and the expectation of users are matched, resulting in the perceived quality (Sallis, 2014). In this perspective, quality is referring to product and/or service attributes and their excellence (Barofsky, 2011). Thus, quality has functioned as the customer's objectives between the expenditure and the perceived value (Felix et al., 2020). For instance, HEIs are strived to enhance service quality which leads to customer retention (Khoo, Ha & McGregor, 2017). From the stakeholders' perspective, the efforts to deliver a fit-to-demand product, value for money product, service (Eldin, 2011; Felix et al., 2020). Thus, quality is accepted as a sustainable competitive advantage that proposes distinctiveness from the competition (Papanthymou & Darra, 2017). Indeed, Jain & Pasad (2018) address that quality is using interchangeably with efficiency, effectiveness, equity. Also, quality is accepted as a transformational conception which is the holistic reflection of the quality assurance process (Farooq et al.,2017).

From an educational management perspective, academic, learning, and quality determine educational development (Jain & Prasad, 2018). And, the development of educational institutions is interconnected to quality enhancement and is pursuing sustainable development in a long-term perspective (Musselin, 2018). However, the notion of educational quality is conceived from multi-dimension and is a complicated process (Paharia, 2019). As such, quality in education is depicted by the conglomerate of teaching and academic goals, learning and teaching capability, management system, and its outputs (Petrovskiy & Agapova, 2016; Polyakova & Azizova, 2020). Furthermore, the

concept of quality in education interfered with (1) students/ learners' performance, (2) academic instruction, (3) support services, and (4) the administrative scheme (Schindler et.al., 2015). Toward this perspective, the learning quality of students and/or learners is recognized as crucial in defining educational quality (Buzdar & Jalal, 2019). Additionally, educational curriculums, teaching, and learning environment, policies, and reference resources are accepted to influence educational quality in higher education institutions (Paharia, 2019). To ensure good quality, HEIs are constructing blended-learning, which is eligible for online education, e-learning, and better online references material (i.e., open accessed scientific e-journal, google scholar database, Research gate journal, etc.) (Baber, 2021). Also, the quality in education is defined following inputs, processes, outputs, and systems, namely employment procedure, management, pedagogic principle, stable research scheme (Petrovskiy & Agapova, 2016; Prisacariu & Shah, 2016). Moreover, quality HE affords the standardization of teaching and learning quality (Kilova, 2020). Thus, quality management in higher education is determined in multi-perspectives including academic, managerial, pedagogical, and employment dimensions (Stensaker, Hovdhaugen & Maassen, 2019). For explication, standards are related to measurable achievement or standardized outcomes, whereby the educational sector is standardized by students' academic attainment and level of competence, research works, related service standard, and the organization standards itself (Harvey, 2002). To what extent, quality assurance and educational development primarily focus on fostering the learning experience in higher education by providing sufficient support for teaching departments (Gosling & D'Andrea, 2001). As such, the determinants of higher education quality is recognized in numbers such as policies, learning environment, academic approaches (i.e., teaching methods, learning strategy, training capacity), research and training capacity, infrastructure development, functioning procedure, and managerial relatedness (Pham, 2018; Hanna, 2018; Stensaker, Hovdhaugen & Maassen, 2019; Kilova, 2020). According to Pham (2018), 80 HEIs have acquired the accreditation for quality regarding Vietnam's Ministry of Education and Training quality assurance scheme. Hence, it is the requirement for higher education management and the institutional governance policy to follow the amended criteria or a standard of quality assurance (Van Vught, 2008). Indeed, quality assurance affords the involvement of internal and external stakeholders, including staff, students, other educational institutions, reference groups, companies and organizations, and governments, thus holistically increasing the quality and standard of higher education (Pham, 2018; Gosling & D'Andrea, 2001).

## *2.2. Concept of Competition*

As known, competition is perceived as a universal term that is existing in natural life for every species (Gane, 2020). The rivalry between individuals, groups, or parties is perceived as competition (Listra, 2015). In agreement with the mentioned concept, competition is existing as the social structure of humankind (Marginson, 2004), and competition is attached to individual objectives (Listra, 2015). Thus, competition is the situation in which a specific contestant is striving to attain self-objectives or the ending achievement (Mustafa & Al-Atyat, 2015; Liu et. al., 2018). Thus, the impulsive effort to determine superiority over others relates to the competition concept (Grum & Grum, 2015; Tsiakara & Digelidis, 2021). In studies, social comparison is ascribed restricted to competition the extent to which competition is driven by individual and situational factors (Garcia, Tor, & Schiff, 2013; Tsiakara & Digelidis, 2021). Also, the social comparison is attached to ending achievement regarding educational perspective (Chan & Lam, 2008). Furthermore, competition exists in multi-layers in firms, locations, clusters, and countries from which the competitive environment influences participants to strive for a competitive advantage (Listra, 2015). Hence, multi-level competition is detected in higher education, such as student-to-student, student-lecturer, and institution-to-institution (Krücken, 2019).

### 2.3. *The notion of Competition in educational quality*

Due to the increasing knowledge economy and internationalization, HEIs are driven by intensifying competition (Rust & Kim, 2012) and, competition in higher education is identified as intellectual competition and status competition (Naidoo, 2018; Hearn, 2021). Therefore, HEIs invest great efforts to enhance reputation on the global ranking system (Bagley & Portnoi, 2014). To what extent, the reputational institution has the advantage to retain key stakeholders such as students and quality employees (Lepori, Seeber & Bonaccorsi, 2015; Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2019). As such, the efficiency of HEIs activities is enhanced (Rocens, 2014), and the efficiency in education is related to the productivity in fostering students' academic (Gagnidze & Maglakelidze, 2017). Higher education puts crucial effort to enhance educational quality to create excellent programs, conduct scientific research, learning, and teaching quality (De Wit, 2019). Also, curriculum, evaluation approaches, pedagogical approaches, teaching facilitators, reference resources, and educational technology are determinants of educational quality (Damirchili & Tajari, 2011). In the knowledge economy, research publication is stated as a crucial element that impacts HEI's ranking and reputation (Marginson, 2006; De Wit, 2011). In addition, highly scientific research universities are considered to have magnetic effects attracting international students (Marginson, 2006). Simultaneously, intellectual competition of higher education is depicted as the effectiveness and diversification of learning strategies (Wariyo, 2019). Furthermore, higher education is associated with delivering educational opportunities with academic standards, in turn, the final achievement is awarded a qualification (Felce, 2019). To gain a competitive advantage, higher education institutions standardize curriculum, enhance accountability, human capital investment, and lifelong learning, and more importantly, English has a crucial role in acquiring international standards (Nunan 2003; Portnoi & Bagley, 2011; Šimić & Štimac, 2012). For instance, the English language has been identified as a compulsory subject in educational curriculums (Ca & Danh, 2021). As the discussion, competition influence the higher education quality.

### 2.4. *The Moderating effects of competition in education settings*

As presented above, in studies, the competitive-based approach is accepted as one of the effective methods for students' learning quality enhancement, especially in the English language. Following the mentioned approach, students are engaging in competitive situations; in turn, soft skills are acquired (Sukiman et al. 2016). Due to competition pressure, students clearly define learning goals and enhance the final outputs (Lam et al., 2004). And learning environment is accepted as one of the influential elements of learning quality, for instance, student's learning experiences are increasing within a productive environment (Sağlam & Salı, 2013). According to Cantador & Conde (2010), healthy competition in class consolidates students' learning experience. In studies, a competitive learning environment interferes with student's achievement (Sheridan & William, 2011; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Furthermore, the increasing international competition leads to standardization of curriculum and continuous updates (Portnoi & Bagley, 2011; Noaman, 2015). Due to the increasing international standard, the program curriculum is adapted to meet the requirement of labor marker and international quality accreditation (Šimić & Štimac, 2012). In addition, competition requires HEIs to deliver a consistent quality of teaching, wherein teaching facilitators have crucial influence (Al-Issa, 2017). Additionally, teaching facilitators influence student's learning motivation when adding competition into the classroom (Murray, 2019). Significantly teaching facilitator's role is perceived as having a crucial impact on the students' English language acquisition process (Khan & Rahaman, 2017). Competition influences teaching staff, since Ladd and Edward (2003) address that competition impacts negatively on teaching staff job satisfaction resulting in job quitting. Optimistically, internal competition is also perceived as a collegial relationship that collaborates effort for achieving mutual

goals (Monoranu, Munteanu & Jijie, 2008). Moreover, employees with high-level job satisfaction improved performance, commitment, and organizational objectives achievement (Khan, Malik & Janjua, 2019). In the contrast, the detrimental effects of competition in education are sorted out in various studies that the competition indeed negatively impacts students and learning experience. Nonetheless, studies also point out that competition and education are a co-existing relationship wherein the competition elements afford appropriate control. For instance, either physical classroom or e-learning extent that the competition retains students more time studying than non-competitive environment (Worm & Buch, 2014).

### **3. Methodology**

This paper employs a qualitative approach through tools of the meta-analysis, systematic review, direct observation in the practical classroom, interviews with lecturers and students, and expert consultation with both secondary and primary data in the study:

The meta-analysis and systematic review methods have been employed to collect, review, and analysis data from different sources to produce the richness of information in the research papers, theses/ dissertations, books, and other relevant publications in the focused subject from prominent and reliable databases, including Google Scholar, Research Gate, Scopus, Web of Science, EBSCO, Cengage and Springer, etc. From which, 86 publications have been found eligible for this study.

Additionally, authors have conducted direct observation with 55 English language classes in universities in Ho Chi Minh City. The observations are taken placed in both physical classroom, and online classroom, and videos are recorded. Also, the observation sheet and semi-structured questionnaire have been strictly designed by adapting from previous studies (Tran, 2013; Loi & Hang, 2014; Bui & Dang, 2018; Nguyen, 2018; Phuong, Vo & Tran, 2019; Truong & Cuong, 2019; Ha & Thao, 2020; Nguyen & Duong, 2020; Diep, 2021).

Researchers participate in the class to observe and fill the observation sheet the learning activities of students, student behaviors and attitudes, reactions, and another relatedness. Then, 5 interviews have been conducted by using a semi-structured questionnaire with 135 students and 55 lecturers.

More of that, the authors have met and consulted with the 5 educational/ English teaching experts who own many years of experiences in terms of teaching and administrating the HEIs' English teaching programs on the related issues. This process is to confirm and crosscheck with experts to confirm if the competition exists and moderates the English language learning quality in the Vietnam context.

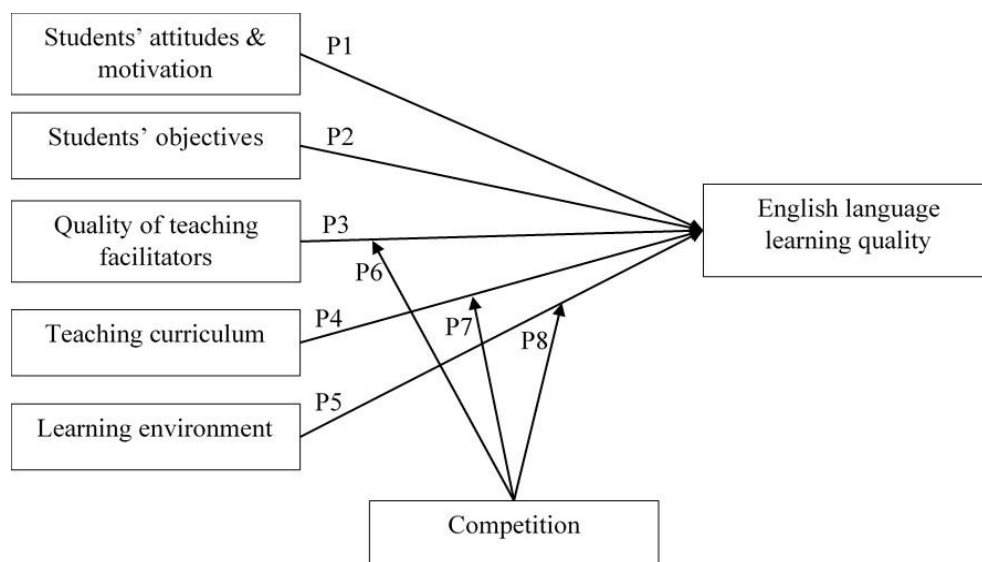
### **4. Findings and Recommendations**

Due to the analysis results of the observation, interviews, and survey, the primary findings are unearthed and discussed for the proposed conceptual framework. Based on the analyzed result, Vietnamese students remain muted response when being asked questions. In agreement with the study of Truong and Wang (2019), insufficient self-confidence is a barrier to English language acquisition. Whereas self-motivation, self-confidence, or metacognitive state significantly influence the quality of language learning (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017; Guslyakova & Guslyakova, 2020). Also, that indicates learning English of university students is perceived to meet the graduation requirement instead of developing English language comprehension. Also, in the study, Diep (2021) addresses to pass tests, assessment, or graduation requirement is the priority for university students in Vietnam. To enhance the English learning quality, students are encouraged to be autonomous learners who acquire a clear objective, plan, monitor, self-determination, and evaluation (Phuong, Vo & Tran, 2019). In addition, from the observation, students are more engaging in the lesson through a game or competition.

Moreover, students answer that they perceived more comfortable and productive learning through the game. Indeed, the learning environment is influencing students in multi-perspective, namely self-motivation, and concentration during learning time. Also, the productive learning environment motivates the student's cognitive state, including autonomy, resulting in encouraging learning experience, and learning quality (Diep, 2022). In current pandemic circumstances, the learning is happening online through an e-learning system that the analysis indicates that students perceived it is difficult to be fully compatible with online-based learning. Interestingly, in a study, Al-Samarraie et al. (2017) exert that users perceive that e-learning positively enhances their performance. In addition, due to the analysis result, the level of engagement between teaching facilitators is crucial for students' learning efforts and outcomes. In line with the result, the language comprehension of teachers allows the effective engagement with learners, in turn, influencing the quality of learning outcomes (Phuong, Vo & Tran, 2019). More of that, Leong and Ahmandi (2017) address that having better relationships with students encourages learning enthusiasm and efforts; in fact, students' self-confidence increases with engaging teachers. As such, opportunities for the learner to engage in meaningful interaction including games or competition, whereby the foreign language learning is enhanced (Phuong, Vo & Tran, 2019). Moreover, the interviews of teachers and students indicate that the teaching curriculum for English language (Lazebna, N., & Prykhodko, A. 2021) learning aims to develop four essential skills for students; however, the effectiveness is still limited. From this perspective, the teaching curriculums are influential elements for enhancing English language learning; thus, diversification, resilience, academic knowledge, and standardization define the appropriateness of the teaching curriculum (Tran, Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021).

From the above findings, English language learning quality is associated with the HE quality in Vietnam. While the quality of student's learning is influenced by various factors such as (1) students' attitudes; (2) students' objectives; (3) quality of teaching facilitators; (4); teaching curriculum; (5) learning environment. In addition, competition moderates its effects on the quality of students' learning quality. Thus, the authors propose a conceptual framework as followed:

#### 4.1 Proposed conceptual framework



Source: Authors (2021)

P1: Students' attitudes and motivation influence English language learning quality

P2: Students' objectives influence English learning quality

P3: Quality of teaching facilitators influences English language learning quality

P4: Teaching curriculum influences English language learning quality

P5: Learning Environment influence English language learning quality

P6: Competition impacts the relationship of teaching facilitators and English learning quality

P7: Competition impacts the relationship between teaching curriculum and English learning quality

P8: Competition impacts the relationship between of learning environment and English learning quality

## 5. Conclusion

Due to the increasing competition, HEIs in Vietnam participate in a race to pursue quality improvement from a multi-perspective. In line with that, the role of student's English learning quality is increasingly significant for quality enhancement in Vietnamese universities/ institutions. Interestingly, competition also impacts the quality of students' learning quality. By reviews previous studies on quality in education and competition and its influence on HE quality, this paper review proposed a conceptual framework and research propositions of English learning quality in higher education. Therefore, the study contributes to the knowledge of educational quality management as well as English language learning in HE levels. For further research, the proposed conceptual framework requires empirical studies to confirm whether the proposed framework exists or is adjusted for practical implementation.

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