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Teachers' and Students' Perspectives of Using Mother Tongue in EFL Classes at a Higher Education Institution in Vietnam

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Abstract

The use of mother tongue to teach a second language has been a controversial issue in the field of second language acquisition. This study aims to compare the effectiveness of using mother tongue (Vietnamese) to teach a foreign language (English) under the pressure of the implementation of an English-only policy at the tertiary level in Vietnam where English is taught as a foreign language. The mixed-methods approach was conducted to contrast the perspectives of 11 teachers participating in semi-structured interviews, and 255 students answering 5-point Likert scale questionnaires. These research instruments were carefully designed by the researchers adopting the factual and behavioural criteria proposed by Dörnyei and Taguchi (2009). The results show that the minimal use of Vietnamese is utilized as a necessary pedagogical tool to teach English. The empirical results propose that the English-only policy can be effective if the actions such as more English learning time, English entry tests, English materials and teaching aids with techno-facilities are seriously taken into consideration. To adopt the English-only policy in EFL classes, school administrators have to renovate the foreign language regulations while teachers must adapt their teaching methodology to meet the requirements of the learner-centered approaches.

Keywords: *English-Only Policy, Mother Tongue, Learner-centered Approaches, Perspectives, Pedagogical Tool, English as a Medium of Instruction, EMI*

Introduction

English as a medium of instruction (EMI) is defined as: “The use of the English language to teach academic subjects in countries or jurisdictions where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English” (Dearden, 2015, p. 4). Specifically, EMI is used as a term to refer to the use of English as a medium to teach other specialized subjects in higher education institutions. With the trend of globalization in higher education institutions, EMI programs are quickly becoming a growing trend in the world. Some of the following reasons were given by Tsou and Kao (2017) to explain why the EMI program can attract such attention

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from educators and researchers because English is considered as the most popular use of languages globally, it is not only the language of global business communities but also the language used officially in prestigious scientific publications. Currently, universities are trying to upgrade their rankings in today's globalized higher education; thus, effective development of EMI programs can help educational institutes to attract international faculties and students, and improve scores in QS World University Rankings. Besides, the development of EMI programs also helps higher education institutions have a multicultural environment. Students from different countries who come to study also bring diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds and income support to the host higher education institutions. The fact that English proficiency significantly increases employment opportunities has become a strong driving force for universities, because they are responsible for training human resources for the knowledge labor market. In particular, job opportunities also include mobility in the context of increasing international cooperation and global trade, so English proficiency is essential to find a job, or advance in the workplace. In reality, society influences people's attitudes towards language, leading to the tendency to adopt or abandon a language. Regardless of policy direction, if individuals do not agree with a particular practical context, policy imposition remains ineffective. Education plays an important role in promoting diversity and cultivating tolerance, so the practice of multilingualism at institutions of higher education should be a model for society as a whole. The level of EMI application varies greatly depending on the overall development of higher education, and the government's ability to provide resources and the level of people's investment in learning. There is no magic solution to the obstacles mentioned above when adopting EMI. Furthermore, this process needs to be continuously evaluated for its potential long-term impact on knowledge systems and higher education.

Macaro et al. (2018) surveyed 55 countries and nearly 400 EMI instructors and put forward seven key controversy points, namely the demand of EMI, the introduction and promotion of EMI, the option of choosing standard EMI, the impact of EMI on English proficiency, EMI maintaining standards in academic subjects, cross-cultural EMI, the collaboration of EMI and EFL (English as a foreign language) teachers. These controversial issues cannot be settled as the educational emphases, purposes, resources, and contexts vary from one country to another. Diverse global EMI programs should be consulted to design one to meet the local needs. It is necessary to clarify the relationship between EMI and content and language integrated learning (CLIL) in higher education. EMI is used for English-taught subject courses in non-English-speaking countries, while CLIL is an educational approach where an additional language is used for both academic content and second/foreign language instruction (Cenoz, Genesee, & Gorter, 2014). In this scope of this study, the CLIL should be the focus of the investigation as it plays an important role in formulating the elite educational framework for the common policy of multilingualism in terms of bilingual education and content-based instruction.

The controversies over the inclusion or exclusion of the mother tongue, so-called first language (L1) from a second (L2) or foreign language (FL), commonly referred to as English foreign language (EFL) classes have been focal attention of many researchers and educators in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) all over the world (e.g., Chomsky, 1976; Krashen, 1982; Larsen-Freeman, 2000). This heated topic is typically raised among the countries in the expanding circle according to the well-known classification of Kachru's Three

Concentric Circles Model (1985). The contentious issue of how to teach and learn English in EFL classes has generated an immense literature, which is incorporated by a diversified mixture of assertion, theory, observation, and experience. Besides, the burning issue is also based on different standpoints, namely psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, and pedagogy. Dating back to the late nineteenth century (Breetvelt, 2018; Cho, 2012), the usual assumption relating to this literature has been argued that it is best to acquire a new language monolingually without the presence of L1 language for the purpose of teacher instruction, explanation, testing and assessment, translation, classroom management or general communication within the setting of EFL classes (Agai-Lochi, 2015). According to the theory of SLA, language acquisition is considered as an international activity, especially the need to have a global language (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). In this sense, English has become the most popular language out of six official languages of the United Nations (UN), particularly Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish. To get the most efficiency in English language teaching and learning (ELT), many European and Asian countries have promulgated the guidelines for minimizing the occurrence of the mother tongue in EFL classrooms to cherish the ambition that learners immerse themselves deeply in the English language environment, or so-called English-only policy in EFL classes (Agai-Lochi, 2015; Li-Shih, 2013; Sa'd & Qadermazi, 2015).

Historically, in the late nineteenth century, researchers who favour the exclusion of the L1 assert that everything occurring in L2 classes should be conducted in the target language because L2 is more efficient to acquire naturally, a process which resembles L1 acquisition (Fahrianya & Haswani, 2017; Krashen, 1982). They account for the use of L1 as a hindrance in SLA, so they embrace the idea that an English-only policy creates more chances for learners to be immersed in an English language environment in which learners have an increased possibility to practice English. As for countries in the expanding circle, they adopt the concept of using English as a tool of teaching in EFL classes, especially at the tertiary level. Currently, the increase of the most notable phenomenon of English-only policy is highly expectant for learners to acquire better English proficiency, which, in turn, leads to their extremely prominent future. In fact, many educators and professionals concerning SLA have praised the implementation of the monolingual approach or English-only policy in EFL classes (Breetvelt, 2018; Cho, 2012; Maurice & Mukamazimpaka, 2021). They assert that the use of this approach develops learners' intrinsic motivation to do their best to master L2 for their own sake. They are even worried about the presence of L1 in EFL classes as the use of L1 is more detrimental than beneficial for the students' progress and achievements of L2 during the process of SLA. Throughout the history of ELT, it is notable to acknowledge from Direct Method to Audio-lingual Method to Task-based learning that the notion of abandoning L1 in EFL classes contributes to the success of L2 acquisition (Li-Shih, 2013). Under its theory, the practicality of L1 in EFL or ESL classes is regarded as an impediment and it is best to avoid the use of L1 to teach L2. However, there has been a recent pendulum shift towards multilingual and pluralist approaches appreciating optimal or judicious use of mother tongue as a facilitative tool for L2 acquisition (e.g., Abdullah & Abdurrazzag, 2020; Neokleous, Krulatz, & Xu, 2022; Tiwari, 2020; Tsagari & Griannikas, 2020). The influence of using L1 to teach L2 can be affected by the views of SLA in regards to teaching ESL or EFL in the host or foreign environments,

respectively. This perspective has a greatly theoretical interest in the study of interlanguage and language transfer, which is necessary to formulate the basis of bilingual approach. Language transfer involves the concurrence of positive and negative language transfer; nonetheless, negative language transfer is thought to be more influential in ELT (Bardovi-Harlig & Sprouse, 2017; Skehan, 2008).

The inclusion of L1 in L2 learning basically refers to two circumstances: firstly, L2 classes are organized in the host environment where many native languages are used in an English setting; thus, this requires the universal nature of SLA. Secondly, L2 learning is conducted in a context where learners use the same or a single dominant language, which calls for the same acquisitional sequences as the native language. English-only approach thereby seems to be appropriate to the first case, while the inclusion of L1 is possibly beneficial to the second context with regard to L2 acquisition. More recently, the monolingual approach has been gradually challenged alongside a reassessment of the merits of using L1 to teach L2, commonly referred to bilingual approach in ELT. Throughout the history of SLA, the role of the mother tongue has been widely recognized as a valuable teaching resource in EFL classes. Some researchers (e.g., Ching-Wen et al., 2014; Tsagari & Giannikas, 2020; Zulfikar, 2018) have also acknowledged the importance of a middle policy in ELT. Mularsih and Satyarini (2022) emphasize that the harmonization of L1 and L2 in EFL classes should be a priority to contribute to the learning context, especially in countries in expanding or even outer circles.

Currently, Vietnam is on the path to integration, Vietnamese human resources must move forward to meet global requirements. Therefore, considering English as a second language will be an important lever and means to promote the global integration of Vietnam's socio-economic, scientific, and prestigious status. Currently, universities are focusing on improving the quality of English training with the great efforts to transform from EFL (English as a foreign language) to ESL (English as a second language) higher education institutions. This orientated approaches directly support the career development process of students after graduation. Up to now, there are two types of EMI programs being applied in Vietnam, namely collaboration programs awarded degrees by foreign accredited higher education institutions, and high quality programs applying international curriculum framework awarded by educational institutions in Vietnam. However, Li (2013) states that the rapid adoption of EMI programs in Vietnam is seen as a timely response to current development needs, the successful results have been achieved; however, the actual application of these programs is still not considered to achieve the expected goals because of the English proficiency of learners and teachers (Doiz, Lasagabaster, & Sierra, 2013). At present, there are many studies (e.g., Knezevic, 2019; Neokleous, Krulatz, & Xu, 2022; Xu, 2018) evaluating the impact of L1 use in EFL classes, but there is still a lack of research on the influence of L1 (Vietnamese) on L2 (English) in Vietnam, where English is still taught as a foreign language in EFL classes. Despite some studies conducted in Vietnam (e.g., Cao & Badger, 2023; Nguyen, 2022; Tran & Dang, 2021; Trinh, 2016), a close investigation on the role of mother tongue in EFL classrooms reveals several gaps and shortcomings. Therefore, this study's primary aim was to investigate further Vietnamese university teachers' and students' perspectives and their reasons for favouring or avoiding L1 use in EFL classes. The following questions are presented to highlight the corpus of this study:

RQ1: What are teachers' and students' perspectives toward using Vietnamese in EFL classes?

RQ2: What should be done to advocate the English-only policy in EFL classes?

To address the two questions above, the mixed-methods approach was employed to find out whether the use of L1 is appropriate in EFL classes. The results can serve as a resourceful reference for those countries adopting EFL, including Vietnam, to reconsider an English-only policy in education, especially at the tertiary level.

Literature Review

The Role of L1 in EFL Classes through the History of L2 Teaching Approaches

Generally, language teaching methods date back to the early part of the twentieth century. Since then, they have evolved, which has led to the changes in L1 use in L2 teaching approaches. Richards and Rodgers (2014) classify ELT methods into three major trends, namely traditional, current, and alternative approaches. Firstly, the traditional methods refer to the Grammar Translation Method; the Direct Method; and the Audiolingual Method. Secondly, current methods include Communicative Language Teaching; Content-Based Instruction and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL); Whole Language; Competency-Based Language teaching, standards, and the Common European Framework of Reference; Task-Based Instruction; the Lexical Approach; Multiple Intelligences; and Cooperative Language Learning. Thirdly, alternative methods comprise of the Natural Approach; Total Physical Response; the Silent Way; Community Language Learning, and Suggestopedia. Recently, L2 teaching approaches have evolved into two trends, namely monolingual and bilingual teaching, which causes controversies over whether the use of L1 in L2 in EFL classes is beneficial or not.

Studies that Support L1 Use in EFL Classes

As for exploring the beneficial role of L1 use in L2 learning, there are many studies examining teachers' and students' perspectives at the tertiary level, and the interference of L1 use to promote L2 acquisition (e.g., Anyadiegwu & Nwode, 2023; Debrelı & Oyman, 2016; Tanjia, 2018). In this regard, strategic use and views on the role of using L1 in L2 learning in EFL classrooms will be carefully examined in the following sections. Some relevant studies are cited thereafter to highlight these previous viewpoints.

Bingjun (2013) conducted a review of the role of L1 in L2 learning regarding 6 different areas, namely (1) the behavioural theory, (2) the interaction of SLA, (3) the cognitive theory, (4) the nativist theory or biological theory, (5) the learner and learning strategies, and (6) L1 transfer in L2 acquisition of phonetics, lexicology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. Although the study overviews the theoretical framework influencing the use of L1 in L2 learning, it centralizes the language transfer between L1 and L2 regarding phonetics, lexicology, and pragmatics. Based on these three language transfers, L1 is included in the L2 acquisition process. Another study carried out by Tanjia (2018) investigating the usefulness of using mother tongue in FL classrooms reveals that L1 is used in L2 learning because it is considered an effective pedagogical tool. The result is obtained from the teachers' and students' interviews; however, the study is conducted with a limited number of participants and subjective standpoints towards the similarities and differences between mother tongue and FL

in ELT should be considered. Anyadiegwu and Nwode (2023) recognize great importance of rational and judicious use of L1 in EFL classes. Their qualitative study focuses on clarifying the concepts of mother tongue, language of immediate environment, and code switch and code-mixing. They declare that minimal use of the mother tongue in EFL classes should be implemented to give instructions, explain abstract concepts, teach grammar, and discuss cross-cultural issues. The drawback of this study is that it does not rely on any theoretical framework, it merely originates from the researchers' own experience in ELT in one EFL environment. For a distinctive comparison between teachers' and students' attitudes towards L1 use in EFL classes, there is a study carried out in two countries implemented by Shuchi and Islam (2016), they conclude that judicious and moderate use of L1 is considered as an effective pedagogical tool to help learners improve their learning outcomes of ELT. Although their study employs a mixed-methods approach, the results hardly reflect a clear distinction between teachers' and students' opinions on L1 use in L2 learning. In addition, their conclusion does not actually come from the results they obtain from their respondents' data. In short, the use of L1 in L2 learning has recently gained many supportive perspectives from different researchers all over the world in the field of ELT.

Studies that Abandon L1 Use in EFL Classes

The dark side of using L1 in L2 learning accounts for those who strongly insist on the English-only policy in ELT to create more chances to avoid learners' reliance on L1, and to increase exposure and practice L2. Many studies (e.g., Breetvelt, 2018; Maurice & Mukamazimpaka, 2021; Li-Shih, 2013) have complained about the negative impact of excessive use of L1 in EFL classes, which deters the natural L2 learning progress. They argue that the English-only policy enables learners of English to have a high exposure to ELT. They even claim that students with the English-only policy feel more motivated, and become focused in EFL classes. With the exclusion of L1 in L2 learning, learners get used to immersing themselves in an English environment where they have to use English to understand, communicate, and socialize in an English-speaking setting to help them become proficient in using English. Nguyen (2022) blames the habit of using learners' mother tongue to teach English in EFL classrooms for hindering the L2 learning process. Moreover, the overuse of L1 is likely to result in limiting L2 language development in terms of lexical ability, cross-cultural communication or critical thinking and reasoning skills. It is necessary for teachers of English in EFL classes to replicate a fully L2-speaking place so that learners have a chance to maximize the benefits of immersing themselves in a wide range of contexts where L2 acquisition is expected to take place in a series of mooted circumstances using English-only environments. In reality, the use of the mother tongue in EFL classrooms deprives learners of the chance to get exposed to a rich English language environment. Cristina (2012) indicates that multi-contextual use of L2 within EFL settings necessitates learners of English as they have little chances to use L2 language outside EFL classrooms. Similarly, Agai-Lochi (2015) thinks that it is efficient for learners of a L2 in EFL language to master the proficiency of English in an English-speaking environment only when they are forced to overcome their awkwardness and anxiety to use English during the process of SLA. They conclude that it is necessary to get students out of their comfort zone of using their mother tongue to acquire English because it interferes and possibly hinders students'

English learning. Breetvelt (2018) asserts that the practice of L2 learning at the tertiary level proves to have a positive impact on learners' English proficiency only if the exclusion of mother tongue is strictly imposed. As such, an English-only policy creates more chances for L2 learners to maximize their exposure to the target language.

Studies that Propose a Judicious Use of L1 in EFL Classes

There are many studies (e.g., Almusharraf, 2021; Inal & Turhanli, 2019; Tiwari, 2020) favouring the judicious use of learners' mother tongue in EFL classes. In the same vein, there have been ongoing innovative approaches addressing the trends of SLA, notably EFL or ESL language teaching methods throughout the history of ELT. They claim to have made use of the learners' L1 as a pedagogical aiding tool to improve the proficiency of L2 acquisition. Paker and Karaagac (2015) investigated the use and functions of the mother tongue in EFL classes, they contend that L1 use is regarded as an inseparable part of ELT because moderate and judicious use of the mother tongue contributes to the achievements of L2 acquisition. Likewise, Xu (2018) believes that it is advisable for the mother tongue to be a facilitative, supportive, and compensatory teaching tool in to teach English in an EFL environment for introducing new words, explaining complicated grammar, and improving learners' reading comprehension skills. Furthermore, the co-existence of English presence in EFL classrooms facilitates teachers in terms of L1 use for the purpose of utilizing L1 as a teaching tool and classroom management. This must happen under one condition: that a cautious and limited use of L1 should be taken into consideration (Inal & Turhanli, 2019; Suhayati, 2018; Zulfika, 2018).

Method

Research Design

The current research conducted an analytical and descriptive study of the use of Vietnamese in ELT at the tertiary level in Vietnam – A country in which English is considered a foreign language. The descriptive study used a mixed-methods approach to find out the views of teachers and students on the use of Vietnamese in English classes. Because of the constraints of time and money, this study was confined to one higher education institution. The population of this study is 3.000 students at Hanoi Law University (HLU). The researcher utilized Cochran's (1977) formula with $e = \pm 5\%$ to select the expected sample of 341 respondents. However, only 255 students fully answered a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire on paper after the process of data screening for the reliability and accuracy of the data. The screened data was analyzed by the IBM SPSS v.25 statistics application. For the semi-structured interviews of 11 voluntary teachers, the interview recordings were transcribed and interpreted by using ATLAS.ti qualitative application for the liability of the unbiased data. From the analysis of the results, conclusions were made to clarify the viewpoints of lecturers and students about the use of Vietnamese in EFL classes at the university level.

Research Sample

Concerning the teachers' participation, 11 teachers agreed to participate in the semi-structured interviews, allowing the interviews to be recorded. Specially, there were 2 male teachers accounting for 18.2%, and 9 female teachers equivalent to 81.8%. Regarding the

highest level of education, all 11 teachers had a Master's degree in English language teaching, which which represents 100% of the teachers. In general, experienced lecturers participated in the semi-structured interviews, of which 4 lecturers had less than 10 years of experience (36.4%), and 7 teachers with about 15 years of teaching English accounted for the majority (63%). As for students' participation, the majority of participants was female (163 students), equivalent to 63.9% of the sample, while 92 male students accounting for 36.1% involved in this study. In regard to their residence, 118 students similar to 46.3% came from urban areas, 109 students (42.7%) were from rural locations, and only 28 students or 11.0% lived in mountainous places. Regarding how long the students have been learning English, all of 255 students have been learning English for less than 15 years. Furthermore, most of students ($n = 191$; equivalent to 74.9%) sometimes used English. 47 students (18.4%) rarely had a chance to use English, and 17 students accounting for 6.7% often used English for their part-time jobs. When examining whether students understood the importance of fluent English speakers and expected to study well this subject at school presently, the results indicated that most of students ($n = 170$; equal to 66.7%) confessed that they were aware of the value of good speakers of English, but they would study it after going to work for the suitability of work positions. While 67 students (26.3%) stated to understand the importance of English and planned to study it well now; however, only 18 students (7.1%) do not care about this matter.

Research Instruments and Procedure

The study used two sets of researcher-made questionnaire instruments. For the teachers' semi-structured interview questionnaire, 9 themes were proposed, validated and fine-tuned by three experts on education. Beforehand, the researcher sought for the teachers' consent to record the interview for the sole purpose of this research. Regarding the student questionnaires, it included two parts. In particular, part 1 examined the student profile, and part 2 investigated student perspectives towards the teachers' use of Vietnamese to teach English and facilities reserved for teaching English by a five-point Likert scale, namely (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutrally, (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree. The questionnaires were first constructed according to the factual and behavioural criteria recommended by Dörnyei and Taguchi (2009), then implemented a dry-run to check the confidence level. The researcher selected the reliable statements ($\alpha = 0.84 - 0.90$; Cronbach, 1951). When the final version of the questionnaires was ready, they were distributed among participating students. After screening the answered questionnaires, the researcher chose 255 suitable ones for the data analysis.

Data Analysis

The screened, reliable data were addressed by electronic manipulation. Specially, the teachers' semi-structured interview recordings were transcribed and interpreted by ATLAS.ti qualitative application for the frequency count and percentage. Simultaneously, the student questionnaires were tabulated and manipulated by using IBM SPSS v.25 statistics application for verifying the interval scales such as strong disagreement (1.0-1.80), disagreement (1.81-2.60), indecision (2.61-3.40), agreement (3.41-4.20), and strong agreement (4.21-5.00). To compare student perspectives towards the teachers' use of Vietnamese to teach English in EFL classes, the

Independent – Sample T Test was applied, and ANOVA test was also used to determine if there was a statistical difference among students of different contexts.

Results and Discussion

The Results of Teachers' Survey on the Use of Vietnamese in English Teaching Activities in EFL Classes

The results of the teachers' semi-structured interview show that although teachers have a tendency of combining Vietnamese and English in EFL classes, they concentrate mainly on English instruction. When looking closely at Table 1, the teachers' views on the level of Vietnamese language use in English teaching activities disclose that only 1 teacher (accounting for 9.09%) said that teachers rarely use Vietnamese in EFL lessons to put pressure on students to communicate in English. Besides, 3 teachers equivalent to 27.27% sometimes use English in EFL classes. These teachers remark that it is impossible to completely depend on English because there are some grammatical points, lexical terms, idioms and proverbs in English that need to be translated into Vietnamese. Most of the lecturers regularly use Vietnamese in English lessons (5 teachers or 45.45%). Specially, 2 teachers (same as 18.18%) reveal that they always use Vietnamese to teach English in EFL classes. Thus, most of teachers reinforce the role of Vietnamese as the most useful supporting language tool in the process of ELT. This view is somewhat similar to that of previous studies (Abdullah & Abdurrazzag, 2020; Bingjun, 2013). In practice, Vietnamese plays an important role in helping students understand English more easily in ELT. Using Vietnamese in EFL classes makes students feel more confident and motivated, and understand English lessons better. For example, when learning English grammar rules, students do not have any difficulty exchanging ideas in Vietnamese, so using Vietnamese is an effective way for teachers to explain the meaning of difficult words or easily distinguish synonyms between English and Vietnamese. When considering the situations of teachers using Vietnamese in English lessons, there are 5 lecturers (equal to 45.45%) using Vietnamese to explain English grammatical points. They argue that each language has its own grammatical characteristics, so learners often find English grammar rules different from those in Vietnamese. The differences between these two languages might be problematic if teachers use English to explain English grammar rules, which possibly causes confusion for students because they do not have equivalent background information in Vietnamese language to compare and contrast. Consequently, using Vietnamese to clarify a complex grammatical point in English is thought to be an effective method. This view is similar to previous studies (Almusharraf, 2021; Anyadiegwu & Nwode, 2023; Ching-Wen, Bo-Jian, & Chen-Chiang, 2014). Besides, there are 4 teachers (accounting for 36.36%), who assume that they need to use Vietnamese to give the meaning of new English words, translate English requirements or English texts into Vietnamese, and ask students to participate in English learning activities. Furthermore, there are 5 lecturers (equivalent to 45.45%) who state that it is necessary for teachers to use Vietnamese language to explain the real meaning of complicated English concepts and ideas, in order to avoid misunderstanding its definition in English. However, 3 lecturers (27.27%) use Vietnamese for classroom management, and praising student achievements or their positive attitudes when they participate in English lessons. Finally, the majority of lecturers ($n = 8$; same as 72.72%) use Vietnamese to explain the English-

Vietnamese cross-cultural differences in English lessons. Overall, the results of the semi-structured interviews show that the supporting role of Vietnamese in ELT is necessary. Teachers even use Vietnamese for other activities such as classroom management or instruction, which can explain that the student English ability is not good enough to understand and communicate entirely in English. These findings are somewhat similar to other studies (Almusharraf, 2021; Ching-Wen et al., 2014; Debreli & Oyman, 2016) but not consistent with some authors who support the views of using English as a medium of instruction (Breetvelt, 2018; Cho, 2012; Li-Shih, 2013).

Assessing the teachers' feelings about the use of Vietnamese in ELT, the majority of teachers (6 teachers; respectively 54.54%) find it useful to use Vietnamese in the process of ELT. Only 1 teacher (9.09%) believes that it is very helpful to use Vietnamese to teach English. Additionally, 2 teachers, equivalent to 18.18%, think that using Vietnamese in ELT is beneficial. But there are 3 lecturers, accounting for 27.27%, which feel that using Vietnamese probably hinders students' English development. In general, although methods of teaching English have changed over the years, the most commonly used method at the tertiary level in EFL countries, which is widely recognized, is the grammar translation method. This is true of Vietnam, where teachers believe that using Vietnamese to teach English is effective. This view is similar to that of other authors (Debreli & Oyman, 2016; Suhayati, 2018; Tran & Dang, 2021). Actually, there is no specific method of teaching foreign languages which is optimal for all learners, because each foreign language teaching method has its own advantages and disadvantages. Teachers are, therefore, capable of selecting, combining and utilizing foreign language teaching methods harmoniously to satisfy learner's expectations. Examining in-depth use of Vietnamese in developing the 4 major English skills, the results indicate that teachers (n = 8; similar to 72.72%) use Vietnamese the most in teaching Speaking skills, then teacher's guide in Listening skills (7 teachers, equal to 63.63%). There are 6 lecturers (respectively 54.54%) utilizing Vietnamese to improve students' English reading comprehension skills. The least use of Vietnamese is found in developing Writing skills (4 teachers, equivalent to 36.36%), which is reported not to be on focus of ELT at the tertiary level for non-English major students in EFL classes, and this finding is reported in other studies (Maurice & Mukamazimpaka, 2021; Tanjia, 2018; Tran & Dang 2021; Xu, 2018). It is advisable for teachers in EFL classes to choose appropriate English teaching methods to achieve the effectiveness of using Vietnamese as a beneficial pedagogical tool to develop the 4 major English skills. Thus, the choice of monolingual or bilingual approaches heavily depends on students' English abilities. To create a positive English learning environment, teachers often tend to encourage students to use English in class. As described in Table 1, the data provides information about the teachers' permission to use Vietnamese to address issues during English lessons. Specifically, there are 2 teachers (18.18%), who stipulate that students do not use Vietnamese in English lessons to create a positive learning environment. However, the majority of teachers (8 teachers, equivalent to 72.72%) allow students to use Vietnamese during English classes to discuss issues related to English lessons. Likewise, there are 7 teachers, corresponding to 63.63%, who allow students to use Vietnamese in certain cases under the control of the teachers. Through the above results, it can be seen that the role of Vietnamese in teaching English is very necessary. This is similar to the results of some other scholars (Debreli

& Oyman, 2016; Mularsih & Satyarini, 2022; Tiwari, 2020). Students using Vietnamese language during English lessons develop the ability to present and share ideas in English. The reason may be that, when teachers ask students about a certain issue about which they do not have enough knowledge or understanding in order to present it in front of the class, they potentially tend to communicate with their friends and teachers in English. Presumably, when teachers do not ask students to interact in English, students instinctively use Vietnamese to explain everything to other classmates. In addition, if teachers regularly use Vietnamese in English classes, students perhaps get used to it and feel very comfortable when speaking Vietnamese in English classes.

As for external factors affecting the use of Vietnamese in English lessons such as the current duration of English teaching at school to meet the objectives of the expected learning outcomes, most of the teachers ($n = 10$; equivalent to 90.90%) affirm that students need more time studying English in class to improve their English abilities to overcome the output standards of the English competence for the compulsory level of the tertiary training programs. Notably, only 1 teacher (same as 9.09%) assumes that the current English learning time meets the output standard knowledge of the training program. Similarly, 8 teachers (alike to 72.72%) contend that employing native English teachers or teachers from SLA countries to teach English depends on certain major English skills and learners' English competence. Besides, 6 teachers accounting for 54.54%, support the idea of using foreign teachers, but 3 teachers (same as 27.27%) are against the above idea. Actually, when studying English with international teachers, students enjoy the chance to improve language skills, undergo authentic cultural experiences, and provide students with temporary language use. Students, nonetheless, encounter the increased tension or stressful feelings of language barriers. Moreover, foreign teachers are sometimes not good at grammar rules and lexical intricacies or troublesome British normative pronunciation. This is also reported in other studies (Cao & Badger, 2023; Anyadiegwu & Nwode, 2023; Fahrianya & Haswani, 2017). The other supporting factors, particularly English coursebooks and teaching facilities reserved for ELT, do not meet teachers' expectations. Most of the teachers ($n = 9$; equal to 81.81%) claim the need to update English coursebooks and upgrade teaching facilities, while 2 teachers (18.18%) perceive that there is no need to do so. At present, training credit programs emphasize the learner autonomy, so teachers play the role of orienting the learning content, instructing what and how to study under the ideology of promoting learner autonomy via utilizing teaching aids, and evaluating student learning achievements by instructional scaffolding. Therefore, learning materials and facilities have to keep updated accordingly. The final external factor investigates the necessity of organizing an English entry test to determine the length and the need for students to study English. The results clearly reveal that most of the teachers ($n = 10$; similar to 90.90%) think that it is essential to classify the students' English proficiency whereas only 1 teacher, accounting for 9.09%, claims that it is unnecessary to classify students. Thus, the multi-level English classes often lead to difficulties for both teachers and students in the process of ELT. While learners that have a low performance level can feel embarrassment, high performing students can experience boredom. Meanwhile, teachers see it challenging and stressful to choose appropriate English teaching methods to harmonize the multi-level English classes, so an active English learning environment is very important for students to improve their English

abilities. In practice, most students only have chances to use English at school, students with poor English proficiency are often afraid of making mistakes, they strongly protest against implementing the English-only policy, which results in a passive English environment, so the use of Vietnamese in EFL classes is inevitable.

Table 1*Teachers' Perspectives towards Using Vietnamese in Teaching English*

Teacher's perspective	Frequency	Percent	Description
The level of Vietnamese language using in English teaching activities	1	9.09	rarely
	3	27.27	sometimes
	5	45.45	often
	2	18.18	very often
Situations where teachers use Vietnamese in English classes	5	45.45	explaining complicated English grammar
	4	36.36	introducing new lexical meaning
	5	45.45	explaining vague concepts
	4	36.36	asking students to participate in learning activities
	3	27.27	praising students
	4	36.36	translating English instruction to Vietnamese
	3	27.27	classroom management
	8	72.72	explaining cross-cultural differences
Teachers' feeling about using Vietnamese in English lessons?	1	9.09	very resourceful
	2	18.18	resourceful
	6	54.54	seemingly resourceful
	3	27.27	hindering the progress of learners' English development
using Vietnamese to teach the main skills of English	7	63.63	Listening skills
	8	72.72	Speaking skills
	6	54.54	Reading skills
	4	36.36	Writing skills
Teachers allow students to use Vietnamese to exchange contents in English lessons	8	72.72	allowing
	2	18.18	disallowing
	7	63.63	in some circumstances on demand
The current English teaching period is enough for students to meet the learning outcomes.	1	9.09	Yes
	10	90.90	need more time learning English
using native teachers (from the UK, Australia, the USA) or teachers from countries that use English as a second language in English lessons	6	54.54	Yes
	3	27.27	No
	8	72.72	depending on certain English skills and learners' English competence
	8	72.72	No
	3	27.27	Yes
English textbooks, English teaching facilities meet the requirements for English teaching	10	90.90	Necessary to update English textbooks
	9	81.81	Need to invest more equipment
program entrance classification of students' English proficiency to determine the length of English study	10	90.90	Should be classified
	1	9.09	Should not be classified

Student Viewpoints on the Use of Vietnamese in English Teaching Activities in EFL Classes

The results of students' perceptions about the teachers' use of Vietnamese in ELT show that most of them find it easier to understand English lessons when teachers and students use Vietnamese to exchange information ($M = 3.88$; $SD = .834$). Students agree that their positive attitude to communicate in English stems from using Vietnamese in English classes ($M = 4.08$;

SD = .485). However, students have not expressed a clear opinion whether teachers using only English entirely in Vietnamese help students learn English better (M = 2.48; SD = .785). Similarly, many students do not think the classroom language must be English exclusively (M = 2.48; SD = .731). Besides, most students disagree that their ability to express themselves in Vietnamese would be adversely affected when studying in an entirely English environment (M = 2.05; SD = .667). When surveying students' motivation to learn English, the majority of them (SD = .575) do not believe that using Vietnamese as a teaching medium would reduce students' interest in acquiring English through English (M = 2.24; SD = .575). Students disagree that teachers using English as a medium of instruction encourages them to learn better because teachers put pressure on English-only policy in lessons (M = 2.20; SD = .784). Most students expect that during English lessons, teachers should use a bilingual approach for them to understand English easily (M = 4.50; SD = .698). Additionally, many students claim not to have a clear opinion to verify that teachers implementing English as a medium of instruction motivate students to improve their ability to use English for continuing a higher education level (M = 3.26; SD = .701). Also, external factors have a great impact on the use of Vietnamese in the process of ELT. One reason that students argue for the use of Vietnamese in English classes is that the English learning environment has not been properly invested (M = 3.96; SD = .642). For example, English practice classrooms, student study corners, English clubs, and English competitions have not received an adequate attention, which negatively affects students' English learning environments. Another reason why students and teachers use Vietnamese in English lessons is the multi-level students' English proficiency in class (M = 4.05; SD = .789). However, students do not think that the current English program is more difficult than the student's English level, which explains the reason students use Vietnamese in English classes (M = 2.37; SD = .893). When considering students' views about the effectiveness if teachers use Vietnamese in English lessons, the results show that many students expect teachers to use Vietnamese to explain complex English grammar points (M = 3.64; SD = .734). Likewise, most students agree that teachers should give the meaning of new English words in Vietnamese instead of defining new words in English and asking students to guess the meaning of words through the English context (M = 3.90; SD = .566). Most students strongly expect teachers to employ Vietnamese to explain difficult English concepts or lexical terms in lieu of explaining these terms more simply in English (M = 4.44; SD = .776). In addition, most students believe that teachers should use Vietnamese to explain the similarities and cultural differences between English and Vietnamese to help them understand a certain cultural aspect thoroughly (M = 4.05; SD = .559). Nonetheless, students do not clearly express their viewpoints on the effectiveness of whether teachers should translate directly English reading texts or listening tasks into Vietnamese for the sake of improving students' understanding in English lessons (M = 2.97; SD = .770). Students refute to accept that teachers utilizing Vietnamese to improve English listening and speaking skills possibly reduce their interest in developing these skills (M = 2.54; SD = .662). As for the teachers' use of Vietnamese for classroom management, most students have neutral viewpoints on the teachers' pedagogical practices to force students to participate in English learning activities during English lessons (M = 3.09; SD = .598). Finally, students hope that teachers use Vietnamese to praise them in the process of ELT in class (M = 3.78; SD = .757).

The 5-point Likert scale questionnaire emphasizes three main factors, namely (1) students' English proficiency level, (2) the teachers' pedagogy in teaching English, and (3) the equipment for the process of ELT, which directly affect students' perspectives towards the use of Vietnamese in English classes. From the analyzed data, it can be concluded that the most important factor to determine teacher's practical teaching approach to use Vietnamese in English lessons greatly depends on the student's English abilities. For this reason, the implementation of Vietnamese does not actually come from any enforced language policy, it is a pedagogical tool in English lessons to facilitate the usefulness of Vietnamese in the process of SLA. This finding is somehow in line with the previous studies (Denizer, 2017; Mularsih & Satyarini, 2022; Neokleous, Krulatz, & Xu, 2022) which confirm the beneficial effects of using L1 in L2 learning. For example, when teaching a multi-level English class, teachers have to consider how to use Vietnamese so students can accomplish the objectives of the English lessons. As a result, teachers cannot strictly implement the English-only policy because this policy might be effective only for a small number of students with good English proficiency whereas it demotivates those who do not have a good English ability. The reasons reflecting the students' poor English ability blame for their lack of English learning motivation and strategies, which leads to their unconcerned attitude to ESL, so they confront fears of making mistakes and desire to use Vietnamese in learning English. Another reason is a multi-level English class affecting directly teachers' choice of suitable pedagogical practices. Obviously, different English competence in a class with the main focus on developing grammar and reading comprehension while listening, speaking, and writing skills being neglected creates a passive English learning atmosphere. This state originates from students' places of origin, where learning English conditions are not the same, so it seems to be very challenging for teachers to apply some effective teaching strategies for a multi-level English class without using Vietnamese as a supportive teaching language in EFL classes. In reality, the time for teaching English at the tertiary level in Vietnam is limited. The length of time for theory and seminar lessons is not enough for students to evolve from theory to practice, in order to become a fluent English speaker. Students with a good command of English have to study English further outside the university such as English teaching centers or self-studying English through other channels like the Internet or mass media. Finally, the current testing and assessment approach is probably inappropriate because because it focuses on lexical and reading comprehension competence and neglects other skills, which demotivates the use of English. In English classes, Vietnamese is used to simplify knowledge, making it easier for students to understand English lessons, so students expect that teachers are flexible when using Vietnamese to teach English. Besides, classroom management or compliments on students' academic achievements often happen in Vietnamese language. It is advisable for teachers to use English to create an active learning environment for students to improve their English exposure. In addition, teaching aids such as projectors and Internet content are thought to be effective in reducing the use of Vietnamese in teaching English. The previous studies (Shuchi & Islam, 2016; Tzagari & Giannikas, 2020; Zulfikar, 2018) share similar results as this study. Currently, digital transformation of education is an inevitable trend in the 4.0 era, especially in times of epidemics like COVID-19 when traditional training methods face difficulties. The use of information and communication technologies (ICT) for ELT has long become a new

step to help the education quickly improve efficiency and innovate teaching quality. With the great development of the Internet, technology, and learning devices, the application of techno-education in general and, in foreign language learning in particular, has made great strides, and opened learning opportunities for everyone.

Table 2 shows data supporting the hypothesis that there is not any similar opinion between male and female students when teachers use Vietnamese in ELT in EFL classes. The results show that the Sig. in Levene's Test for Equality of Variances is all greater than .05, so based on the data assuming the same variable (equal variances assumed) in column Sig. (2-tailed) t-test for Equality of Means indicates that the values in this column are all greater than .05, thereby inferring that there is no difference among students' perspectives towards teachers' use of Vietnamese in English classes. From the above results, English teachers and school administrators do not need to have separate policies to manage and teach English in the current period.

Table 2
Comparison of Gender Differences and Attitudes toward Using Vietnamese in English Classes

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Equal variances assumed	1.290	.257	.572	253	.568
Equal variances not assumed			.593	210.10	.554
				6	

Table 3 proves the hypothesis that there are differences in English proficiency between regions where students come from, which might affect the teachers' use of English in EFL classrooms. Results in the Sig. observation value column show that the values are all greater than .05, which means that the hypothesis is correct. In other words, the use of Vietnamese in English lessons is affected by students' place of residence, so there is a need to organize the English class placement according to certain criteria.

Table 3
Comparison of Regional Differences and Attitudes toward Using Vietnamese in English Classes

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	9.805	15	.654	1.496	.107
Within Groups	104.430	239	.437		
Total	114.235	254			

Some Teachers' and Students' Comparative Viewpoints on the Use of Vietnamese in EFL Classes

After comparing the correlation between teachers' and students' views on the use of Vietnamese in teaching English in EFL classes, the results show that teachers often use Vietnamese to teach English to make things easier and improve the knowledge that students misunderstand in English. Teachers need to use the mother tongue in the process of teaching English to promote the learning process for students in class. The mother tongue plays an important role in the foreign language teaching process in terms of content and expressive

meaning. when teachers use Vietnamese in English class, students feel more confident and comfortable to exchange information and they seem to understand the lesson better, this idea is also reported in the study of Trinh (2016). When encountering some lexical terms, vague idioms or complicated grammatical structures, students have no difficulty expressing their ideas in the mother tongue. Similarly, teachers also find it effective to explain the meaning of difficult words or easily distinguish synonyms. In practice, Vietnamese has been used quite a lot in English classes, especially in classes where students have multi-proficient English levels. Although Vietnamese can be used in English classes, it might become disadvantageous if teachers and students overuse Vietnamese during English lessons. Because maximizing Vietnamese in English classes reduces pressure on learners to understand and think in English, but rather students should take advantage of the opportunity to use English in class when they interact with other people. These results are similar to those of previous studies on the use of L1 to teach English (Maurice & Mukamazimpaka, 2021; Mularsih & Satyarini, 2022; Tran & Dang, 2021). Teachers and students realize that students can easily become demotivated to learn English because of the overuse of Vietnamese in ELT in EFL classes. The use of Vietnamese in ELT not only makes students lose their chances to expose active English environments, but also demotivates them and impedes the progress of English acquisition. Besides, they agree that an English vocabulary often has many meanings according to a specific context. When translating from English to Vietnamese, for example, it is sometimes confused, leading to the misunderstandings between speakers and listeners because of the inequivalent meaning. Otherwise, when applying EMI, teachers should use easy-to-understand and simple words to instruct students what to study. They should avoid difficult words or too long explanations. If students do not understand, teachers can use Vietnamese as a tool to clearly explain what they want to convey, promoting creativity as well as the ability to learn independently for students.

This study shows that the tendency of teachers to use Vietnamese to explain the differences between the English and Vietnamese cultures is preferable. The cultural differences between the Eastern and Western cultures might be a big barrier for people to learn foreign languages in general and English in particular. If teachers use English to explain a cultural difference in English, the results may be misleading or ambiguous to English learners because this difference does not exist in one of the two cultures. Therefore, learners do not clearly understand this cultural difference when their English ability is limited or even the teachers have difficulty in expressing in English in case the teacher has no prior equivalent knowledge. Generally, language is not limited to specifically sounds or writing, also includes the meaning conveyed in it. The meaning of a word is not the general and immutable meanings that exist in dictionaries, it changes according to the context in which the objects communicate through the text and might be understood meaning of different languages under the relationships between contexts and different cultures of the objects of communication. The reason teachers use Vietnamese to explain English culture is to provide students with a contextual difference between English and Vietnamese culture. This is confirmed in the study of Larsen-Freeman (2000). Otherwise, both teachers and students expect to use Vietnamese as supportive teaching tools for classroom management. They think that the current English program duration for their bachelor's studies is not long enough for them to achieve the objectives of learning outcomes

of the English program, so there is a need to classify the students' English entry course to determine the length of their English study time.


Although students need to study English with native speakers, teachers suppose that a multi-level English class might be difficult for foreigners to teach English in EFL classes. They believe that the use of Vietnamese in teaching English originates from the way testing and assessment are conducted mostly by multiple-choice tests (Trinh, 2016). Thus, it can be said that knowledge is the basis for forming the ability to use English in specific situations, it is a resource to help learners find optimal solutions to perform tasks or have ways to apply them appropriately in complex contexts. The ability to respond appropriately to the context of real life is the most important characteristic of competence, which is obtained based on assimilation and deliberate use of necessary knowledge and skills in each situation. Thanks to the overall testing and assessment, teachers are expected to adjust their teaching methods to suit certain groups of students in EFL classes. The aim of ELT in EFL classes is to help learner develop students' English proficiency and meet their expectations from the English course. Thus, it is the teachers' roles and duties to balance and choose the most effective methods of the inclusion L1 in teaching L2 for the sake of mastering students' English at the tertiary English level of competency.


Conclusion


The teachers' choice of using Vietnamese in ELT in EFL classes greatly depends on the student English competence, and almost all teachers that were interviewed in this research conclude that the likelihood to use Vietnamese to teach English is unavoidable. Likewise, student's attitudes favor teachers' use of Vietnamese to teach English. The study denotes that the implementation of the English-only policy is not appropriate for the current situation of ELT in EFL classes. The finding indicates that the mixture of using Vietnamese in ELT helps students reduce anxiety, enhance the emotional environment for English study, and understand the characteristics and socio-cultural differences between English and Vietnamese cultures. Moreover, the use of Vietnamese into ELT is considered reasonable because it is used as a means of recognition and respect for learners in a group of multi-level English classes, which promotes the suitability of the development for learner-centered curriculum. Consequently, learners are more involved in the decision-making process for the English learning programs, and they are more likely to actively participate in English learning tasks when they understand the nature of the requirements in EFL classes. Although learners tend to prefer the use of Vietnamese in English lessons, teachers should carefully pay attention to the use of Vietnamese in EFL classes. In practice, Vietnamese is only regarded as a pedagogical tool to support English learning, so when teachers and learners apply it inappropriately, it might possibly backfire and lead to learners' overreliance on Vietnamese to learn English. Currently, there is no official regulation with pedagogical reasons for not using Vietnamese in English lessons, but it is rational, advisable, and relevant to limit the use of Vietnamese in English lessons in EFL classes at the tertiary level for the sake of student benefits in English acquisition. It is practical to limit the use of Vietnamese in clarifying concepts, explaining complex English grammar rules and technical words, or idioms. Overall, students still want teachers partially to apply the Grammar-Translation method and sometimes Direct method to teach English.

Besides, using Vietnamese in ELT functions as the basis for learners to grasp the similarities and differences in English - Vietnamese cultures. Clarifying these cultural differences certainly helps learners understand the importance of doing well in English from the university level. From the research results, it can be advised that teachers should recognize the important presence of Vietnamese in EFL classes because it functions as the role of knowledge foundation for learners to approach English in the most natural and easiest way, so the use of Vietnamese in EFL classes is inevitable. Teachers are advisable to make students aware of being good speakers of English and create their own plans to improve their English competence for their future careers.

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Ethics Declarations

Competing Interests

No, there are no conflicting interests.

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