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Higher Education Students' Perceptions of Psychological Aspects Following the Creation of T-Shirt Slogans

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Abstract—It has long been observed that pupils who speak Spanish feel more at ease expressing their thoughts and emotions in a language other than their native tongue. Following their completion of a project in which slogans were created for t-shirts, 142 students from a Peruvian higher education institution provided their opinions for the current study. To achieve this, the students completed a survey that employed a structural equation model to quantify the impact of the latent variables Autonomous Learning (AL), Self-Efficacy (SE), Technology (T), and English Competencies (EC) on Psychological Aspects (PA). One of the most noteworthy results was that students' PA may be favorably and considerably influenced by SE and EC (0.60 and 0.73, respectively). In contrast, the other two variables have either a positive but insignificant impact (T: 0.16) or an inverse influence (AL: -0.45). In terms of the qualitative component, it emphasizes the possibility of conveying sentiments and emotions in the finished production, as well as the favorable perceptions of improved productive English language proficiency. Learning the grammar and syntax of a language that is entirely different from Spanish, as well as the potential time required to become proficient in it, presents one of the challenges faced by the pupils.

Index Terms—T-shirt slogan, English productive skills, self-efficacy, autonomous learning, technology

I. INTRODUCTION

The positive impact of educational experiences on students' psychological well-being has been well-documented. Consequently, enhancements in self-esteem, motivation, willpower, self-efficacy, and our interpersonal relationships are notable outcomes of personality that are observed following recent and significant learning experiences (Fandos-Herrera et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2013). It has also been demonstrated that one of the most crucial elements in enhancing the previously described psychological aspects is the development of learning activities. Therefore, the teacher's preparation, implementation, and oversight of new learning can also play a critical role in guaranteeing that the aforementioned are done (Eysenck, 1996). The primary personality traits of Spanish-speaking pupils can improve as a result of learning English. In particular, they are more likely to feel more secure speaking English, be more motivated to master other subjects in this language, or even have higher self-esteem (Mandokhail et al., 2018). Other elements that might affect the psychology of the English learner have been taken into account in this study.

We will begin by discussing Autonomous learning. According to Boonma and Swatevacharkul (2020), the first step in achieving this is to develop projects that encourage autonomy and are pertinent to the student's context. Encouragement of reflection on the pupils' finished creations is the next stage. Students will feel proud and satisfied upon completing this project, and they will begin creating assignments independently. It is crucial to note that learning autonomy may be viewed as the final stage of the teaching-learning process and is typically attained after a considerable period, which can take several months. Psychological expressions such as self-esteem, motivation, hope, thankfulness, and even a higher level of interest can be observed in students once they possess this competency, which is viewed as one of their strengths (Macaskill & Denovan, 2013).

According to Bandura's theory, self-efficacy—the second latent variable in this study—is the belief that one can accomplish certain activities, including academic ones. Rahemi (2007) suggests that pupils need to be taught English using creative and practical approaches. They can be repeated. This situation enables pupils to increase their confidence and communication abilities significantly. Teachers are recognized for helping students develop self-efficacy by supporting them when they take on new academic difficulties. This includes consistently responding to questions that, in some circumstances, hinder students' development or lead them to quit when there is a significant likelihood that they will struggle and fail the course. In this way, students who attain self-efficacy see that there are methods to enhance their academic performance and that learning involves ups and downs, which they view as opportunities for growth rather than as negative experiences (Martin & Mulvihill, 2019). The student's mental health benefits greatly from this condition as they start to realize that they can create more challenging academic tasks, which boosts their drive and self-esteem (Otondo-Briceño & Medina-Hicks, 2023).

On the surface, technology enables any student to access current, high-quality knowledge. The internet's numerous platforms and apps have enabled the instantaneous collection of vast volumes of data. Since the student is aware of their

academic accomplishments because of these internet tools, it appears that this provides them with some emotional stability. Although there are many opportunities to enhance academic performance, it is also true that employing this technology can make a person feel stressed and demotivated, which can ultimately result in anxiety and dissatisfaction. However, it has been demonstrated that all of the aforementioned computer tools can be distracting (Taha & Abdulrahman, 2023). Since software and applications have never previously played such an active role in students' academic lives and learning, technology and user psychology are very complicated subjects these days. As a result, it is recommended that they be used sensibly in conjunction with particular pedagogical concerns, including the encouragement of creativity, motivation, and self-efficacy—all of which are not necessarily the outcome of utilizing these digital tools (Salomon & Almog, 1998).

Numerous scientific studies have discussed the link between a learner's psychology and their ability to acquire a foreign language. In addition to meeting other prerequisites, such as speaking with native speakers or managing anxiety when presenting in front of an audience, mastering a language requires a strong drive to acquire and enhance both receptive and productive skills in the language (Shishova, 2020; Roslan et al., 2017). Once a student reaches a particular level of proficiency in English as a foreign language, they also exhibit a variety of emotions, many of which are positive. As a result, there has been a greater propensity to maximize different language proficiency and a feeling of well-being when academic and communication skills have improved (Li, 2019).

Although the beneficial effects of education on students' personalities and psychology have been extensively documented, few published studies have assessed how an academic activity involving the creation of t-shirt slogans affects students' psychological aspects while accounting for concepts such as autonomous learning, self-efficacy, technology, and English competencies.

II. METHODOLOGY

In this study, a group of students from a higher technology university was asked to rate the impact of four latent factors on psychological effects (PE): autonomous learning (AL), self-efficacy (SE), technology (T), and English competencies (EC). Similarly, research was conducted from March to mid-July this year.

It is for this reason that the following null hypotheses were proposed:

H01: The SEM, which measures how AL, SE, T, and EC affect students' PA, is not appropriate.

H02: AL does not significantly influence the PA of the students.

H03: SE does not significantly influence the PA of the students.

H04: T does not significantly influence the PA of the students.

H05: EC does not significantly influence the PA of the students.

Design and approach

To this end, a non-experimental design has been considered. Likewise, the approach was mixed, meaning that the first part (quantitative) aimed to validate a Structural Equation Model (SEM). In contrast, the second part (qualitative) sought to categorize the responses given to a proposed open-ended question.

Participants

Of the 142 students who took part in the current study, 77 were female (54.2%) and 65 were male (45.8%). They were between the ages of sixteen and forty-five. There were 81 students studying accounting (57%), 26 students studying administrative support (18.3%), 22 students studying automotive mechanics (15.5%), and 13 students studying electrical engineering (9.2%), in order of their professional career interests. They all finished the first level of the foundational English course. Furthermore, it is crucial to note that these kids are native Spanish speakers with an intermediate level of ability. These students' signatures on an informed consent form made it possible for this study to be published.

Features of the research

The current investigation consisted of four phases, which were carried out using the facilities of a public institute in the northern Peruvian city of Piura. The students enrolled in the foundational English course during the first phase. After three weeks of theoretical instruction, they decided to create a project called "Slogan on my t-shirt," where they would use Spanish to rapidly communicate thoughts, sentiments, emotions, or any other expression they often do not write or share due to fear of ridicule or interrogation. In the second stage, the students recorded videos in which they appear wearing the polo and reciting the respective slogan, briefly explaining why they chose to write that slogan and providing reasons in the English language. In the third stage, the students created social media accounts (Facebook, WhatsApp, and a YouTube channel) to upload their respective videos and comment on their classmates' videos. As we can see, in this project (which was chosen by the students among other projects), the development of productive competencies in the target language was fostered. A survey comprising the aforementioned latent variables was completed by 142 of the 150 students who took part in the project's final phase.

Instrument

A survey developed by the author, based on the theoretical elements of previous studies, served as the data collection tool for this study. This took into account three elements. In the first, the participants' age, sex, and occupation were among their sociodemographic details. Six latent variables were thought to be measured by the second 40 Likert-type items. Autonomous learning (AL), Self-efficacy (SE), technology (T), comments (C), English competencies (EC), and

psychological aspects (PA). I should point out that not every participant left a remark on their peers' videos; therefore, this construct was not taken into account for the sake of this study. The six components that made up the AL variable were dependent on what Du (2020) stood for. The seven things that made up the SE variable were dependent on what Zheng et al. (2010) had said. The seven elements that made up variable T were based on Harper's (2009) suggestions. The variable EC, on the other hand, included seven things and was based on Archer and Nickson's (2012) recommendations. The six components that made up the variable PA were based on Qureshi et al.'s (2020) proposal. There are two open-ended questions in the third section of this poll. In this section, the project's benefits and drawbacks are discussed. Lastly, to protect each participant's privacy, the survey was anonymous. Additionally, because it makes the process of filling it out faster, it was written in Spanish, which is their native tongue.

Data analysis

Four steps were involved in the data processing once the survey was finished. The SPSS version 27 software was utilized first. Here, Cronbach's alpha, the KMO, and Bartlett's test were used to determine the instrument's dependability. We can evaluate the consistency of the survey's results using the first metric. The following two steps include assessing whether a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) is feasible. The JASP software was then used to perform the CFA. The matching structural equation model (SEM) is run in the same application after the fit indices in the CFA fall within the proper range. Classifying the students' answers to the survey's open-ended questions is the fourth and final stage in processing the collected data. It is worth noting that the classification was completed manually.

III. RESULTS

The great majority of the films created (Appendix) dealt with life guidance (56%), family and happiness (38%), and sports and preferences (6%). These were posted on WhatsApp, YouTube, Facebook, and other social media sites.

The findings that demonstrate the applicability of the modified model are presented below. The EFA would come first, followed by the CFA, before the SEM, which is the primary goal of this endeavor, takes over. In this way, Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the data collection instrument's reliability (0.927), and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's sphericity test were used to determine the viability of doing a CFA. They were 0.881 and 2,607.797, respectively, with 780 degrees of freedom and a p-value of <0.001. These indicators demonstrate the survey's high reliability, and the second results—which are a component of an EFA—indicate a high likelihood of doing a CFA. We shall then examine the CFA's primary adjustment measures.

TABLE 1
MAIN FIT MEASURES

X ² /df	CFI	TLI	IFI	RNI	GFI	NNFI	RMSEA
1.14	0.978	0.973	0.979	0.978	0.907	0.973	0.032

X²: Chi-Square; df: degrees of freedom; CFI: Comparative Fit Index; TLI: Tucker Lewis Index; IFI: Bollen's Incremental Fit Index; RNI: Relative Noncentrality Index; GFI: Goodness of Fit Index; NNFI: Bentler-Bonett Non-normed Fit Index; RMSEA: Root Mean Square Error of Approximation.

Since the chi-squared (X²/df) fit of the preceding table is less than 3, we can conclude that it is sufficient overall. The fit indices listed below, namely CFI, TLI, IFI, and GFI, should exceed the bounds of a decent model fit (Taasoobshirazi & Wang, 2016). Additionally, as demonstrated by the findings of the accompanying study, measures RNI and NNFI are markers of the coherence between latent and observable variables (Yaşlıoğlu & Toplu Yaşlıoğlu, 2020). It is also important to note that the factor loadings are above 0.4, ranging from 0.676 to 0.911, suggesting a suitable model. The properties of latent and observable variables are shown in the following table.

TABLE 2
VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY OF OBSERVABLE VARIABLES

Autonomous Learning (AL)	Indicator	KMO	Factor Load	Coefficient α	Coefficient ω	AVE	CR
I have sought additional information to ensure that the slogan communicates exactly what I want.	AL1	0.879	0.703	0.681	0.677	0.357	0.82
I have been assessing my English language skills while working on this project (t-shirt slogan).	AL2	0.916	0.891				
I have received timely guidance from my English teacher to help me complete this project.	AL3	0.903	0.68				
I have been able to collaborate with other colleagues on tasks related to the project.	AL4	0.870	0.620				
Self-Efficacy (SE)							
With this project, I have realized personal skills that I was not aware of before (for example, organization, planning, creativity, and others).	SE1	0.898	0.784	0.783	0.781	0.423	0.85
Now I know how to manage my stress better in case I have projects like this (slogan on the t-shirt).	SE2	0.855	0.785				
Now I can make a better decision about whether to choose a slogan for another t-shirt.	SE3	0.903	0.757				
I feel that after this project, my ability to persuade and convince has improved.	SE4	0.922	0.784				
I created the published slogan.	SE5	0.917	0.676				
Technology (T)							
I have used various applications to design my final product for this project.	T1	0.800	0.636	0.575	0.558	0.309	0.75
I am convinced that technology enables you to transform your idea into something amazing.	T2	0.864	0.697				
I have access to basic technology equipment, such as a cell phone or a computer, which allows me to create a very creative final product design.	T3	0.826	0.802				
English Competencies (EC)							
The slogan project on the t-shirt has allowed me to improve my writing in English.	EC1	0.842	0.911	0.809	0.796	0.581	0.887
The slogan project on the polo has allowed me to improve my oral expression in the English language.	EC2	0.855	0.826				
The slogan project on the t-shirt has allowed me to improve my English grammar.	EC3	0.837	0.821				
Psychological Aspects (PA)							
The slogan project on the t-shirt has allowed me to activate my creativity expressed in English.	PA1	0.864	0.823	0.713	0.720	0.459	0.767
The slogan project on the t-shirt has allowed me to express thoughts that I would hardly share in my mother tongue (Spanish).	PA2	0.914	0.729				
The slogan project on the t-shirt has allowed me to be satisfied with what I have learned in the English language.	PA3	0.930	0.832				

Coefficient α : Coefficient alpha of Cronbach; Coefficient ω : Coefficient omega of McDonald; AVE: Average Variance Extracted; CR: Composite Reliability

The KMO values are above 0.7, as shown in the preceding table, indicating that the data is appropriate for factor analysis, or can be condensed into a small number of factors. Second, the items' factor load is more than 0.4, ensuring that the most relevant information from the data is utilized. Thirdly, the technology variable is the only one where the dependability values provided by α and ω fall short of the desired level (0.7). Therefore, a thorough evaluation would be advised for future research. Fourth, we can see how the observable and latent variables are convergent based on the AVE statistics. Reviewing the AL and T variables might be wise in that regard. Lastly, all the observable variables, along with their corresponding latent variables, exhibit a highly sufficient CR condition; in other words, there is optimal internal consistency.

TABLE 3
HETEROTRAIT-MONOTRAIT RATIO

	EC	PA	T	SE	AL
EC	---				
PA	0.880	---			
T	0.380	0.563	---		
SE	0.537	0.757	0.847	---	
AL	0.538	0.561	0.726	0.807	---

The HTMT results clearly show that none of the latent variables has discriminant validity, meaning that each one is a separate or independent component from the others. This is based on the findings (less than 0.9) (Henseler, 2017). As indicated by both tables, we may reject H01 using the findings from Tables 1, 2, and 3 to conclude this section of the results; the SEM created from the data is, in fact, suitable.

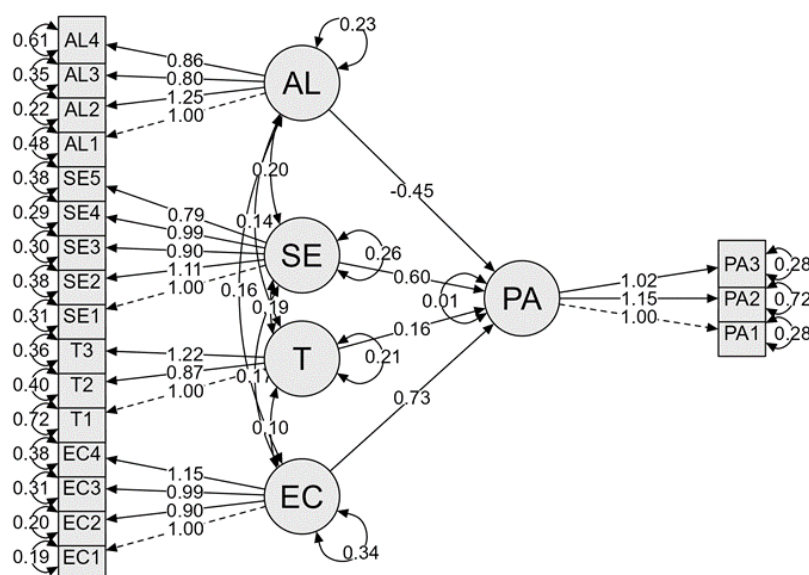


Figure 1. The Current Study's Path Diagram

As can be seen in this picture, the latent variable AL has a relatively substantial inverse relationship with PA (-0.45). This means that even when students are given autonomy over their learning outcomes, they still experience stress or anxiety. While SE has a favorable and considerable impact on PA (0.60), it also gives pupils the impression that they can accomplish learning objectives since they are nearly convinced of their skills. The impact of T on PA (0.16) is the other noteworthy statistic in this graph. This may be understood as T's potential to make PA feel worried and stressed. Lastly, it can be seen that EC has a significant effect on PA (0.73). This may be seen as the beneficial effects that controlling one's receptive and productive English language skills can have on motivation and creativity, in particular. Given everything indicated above, we may accept H02 since AL has no discernible effect on the pupils' PA. Since SE has a significant and favorable effect on the pupils' PA, we may thus reject H03. On the other hand, we can reject H04, as T does influence, albeit very limitedly, the PA of the students. And finally, we must reject H05, as possessing EC positively and significantly influences the PA of the students.

The students' answers to the survey's final open-ended question about the benefits and drawbacks of the completed program have been categorized for the qualitative portion of this study.

Productive skills in English after completing the t-shirt slogan project.

Let us begin this section by noting that a slogan has the potential to evolve into a powerful message that readers will find memorable (Kohli et al., 2007). Furthermore, to achieve that effect, slogans also serve as writing prompts, as the student (in our example) expands their vocabulary in the process of identifying the best phrases. This simultaneously allows him to expand on how he might convey his intended message (Odell & Katz, 2009). The research participants also stated that creating a video in which they explained the origins of the t-shirt's slogan had helped them enhance their oral communication skills. The fact that the video was shared on the three social media sites that students use the most these days—YouTube, Facebook, and WhatsApp—and that this led to an improvement in oral abilities is unquestionably the second noteworthy aspect of this section. This is a result of the student's desire to do well in front of

an audience that will observe and offer feedback (Huancayo, 2025). Expressions like these can be found in the context described:

"I improve my English writing. I can also communicate and make others understand me." (student 10).

"It is, on the one hand, a rewarding and enlightening experience in many ways. For example, I may enhance my ability to interact with individuals from around the world by expressing my ideas and emotions in a language other than my native tongue. Additionally, writing in English helps me improve my spelling, grammar, and vocabulary—all of which are essential in both academic and professional settings." (student 15).

"Writing in another language, in this case English, is good because I learn new words and also become familiar with the grammatical structure, which helps me speak better." (student 16).

"One of the primary benefits is that it makes it possible to enhance English language skills in a useful and significant way. Real grammatical structures and emotive terminology are employed while writing ideas and feelings, which promotes correctness and fluency. Additionally, communication is possible when speaking English." (student 21).

"One of the primary benefits is that it makes it possible to enhance English language skills in a useful and significant way. Real grammatical structures and emotive terminology are employed while writing ideas and feelings, which promotes correctness and fluency. Additionally, communication is possible when speaking English." (student 26).

"It allows me to have mastery of the English language, helps me think differently, and develop creative writing skills." (student 30).

"One benefit is that I can use the language in a more meaningful and intimate way. Writing about my thoughts and feelings, such as my love of the outdoors, allows me to express my emotions and improve my language skills. It also aids in my writing improvement and vocabulary growth" (student 40).

"Since most individuals are hesitant to speak in front of others, writing allows us to communicate ideas and thoughts that we may find difficult to articulate. This can be due to our fear of criticism or simply our shyness and reluctance to speak out or voice our opinions." (student 48).

"Above all, learn more about this language and how to utilize it. It is crucial, in my opinion, for someone who wants to travel the world to be able to communicate with others and, with practice, sound more natural rather than robotic." (student 52).

"Writing down my thoughts and feelings in English helps me get better at the language and express myself more clearly. It also aids in my acquisition of new Spanish vocabulary and expressions that I do not already utilize. Additionally, I will find it simpler to interact with individuals from different nations if I ever wish to." (student 117).

"Writing what you think and feel in English improves your vocabulary, helps you think in English, boosts your confidence, organizes your ideas, and allows you to express yourself better in another language."(student 129).

I can convey sentiments, emotions, and other psychological expressions in the t-shirt slogan that I could not in my mother tongue.

One element that guides the design of slogans on t-shirts is that they can convey a range of thoughts, emotions, and other psychological expressions that influence the readers (Pogner et al., 2014). Another crucial aspect is the idea of communicating emotions and wants in a language other than your own, as if you wished to encrypt the message so that most people would not understand it. For a Spanish speaker, this is accomplished when the message is delivered in English (Viafara, 2016). The following are phrases about the previously mentioned:

"I am not self-conscious about what other people think of my ideas. I enjoy learning new English words and phrases, and I am fascinated by how my thoughts and feelings are expressed in writing and speech." (student 3).

"Throughout the project, I was provided with the chance to express myself freely and to discuss my ideas with other people." (student 4).

"It is ideal for those who tend to keep their feelings to themselves since putting them in writing, especially in a foreign language, allows them to communicate with their teachers and peers more effectively." (student 6).

"It is, on the one hand, a rewarding and enlightening experience in many ways. For example, I may enhance my ability to interact with individuals from around the world by expressing my ideas and emotions in a language other than my native tongue. Additionally, writing in English helps me get better at spelling, grammar, and vocabulary—all of which are critical in both academic and professional settings." (student 9).

"I have the benefit of being able to write what I believe, while I was previously unable to express myself much due to my fear of criticism." (student 22).

"One benefit is that I can use the language in a more meaningful and intimate way. Writing about my thoughts and feelings, such as my love of the outdoors, allows me to express my emotions and improve my language skills. It also aids in my writing improvement and vocabulary growth." (student 34).

"Writing in English about my feelings and ideas may be an effective way for me to learn about myself and grow as a person. It enhances my English language proficiency, allows me to analyze my feelings more objectively, and introduces me to new possibilities and cultural viewpoints." (student 44).

"Writing down my feelings is beneficial since it allows me to understand better who I am and what I am experiencing. It was fantastic to put my emotions into a phrase." (student 48).

"There are some benefits to writing in English, even if it is not your first language, about your thoughts and feelings. It facilitates improved language comprehension, encourages creativity, facilitates emotional processing, and may even be used therapeutically. It also enhances English spelling, grammar, and recall." (student 54).

"Writing down my thoughts and feelings has several benefits, like helping me become a better communicator, allowing me to express myself without fear or insecurity, improving my mood, and maybe even helping me learn more about the language and grow." (student 58).

"Writing what I think and feel in English helps me practice the language in a more personal and real way. Not only do I learn grammar or vocabulary, but I also manage to express emotions and thoughts in another language, which improves my fluency, my confidence, and prepares me to communicate better." (student 73).

"I am ecstatic and delighted; in fact, it has been a great chance to share something I do not always talk about or that others are unaware of about me. Sharing my early years with my peers is a charming experience. I am grateful for this wonderful chance." (student 76).

To be unsure whether the slogan's grammar accurately conveys the student's true meaning.

Many students find that their initial encounters with a new language can be unpleasant, especially when they are still learning the grammatical rules and trying to decide what to write. To facilitate rapid learning, it is therefore best to choose themes that are contextualized for the student (Rizal et al., 2022). In that regard, phrases like these are highly likely to be found:

"Making grammatical and lexical errors might be the cause if one's mastery of the language is not fluent. The potential loss of linguistic nuances and subtleties is another drawback. It can be challenging to translate one language into another, as every language has unique subtleties and traits. Furthermore, compared to writing in one's native tongue, writing in English might be slower and more difficult. Words and phrases may need to be looked up in dictionaries or online translators, which might disrupt the writing process." (student 11).

"The fact that I could find it hard to express the spirit and feeling of my culture and experiences in a language that is not mine is, I believe, a drawback." (student 16).

"A drawback may be the restricted vocabulary and grammar, particularly if one is not yet proficient in the language. This may lead to misconceptions or make it challenging to convey sentiments accurately. Furthermore, the original message's emotional depth or subtleties may be lost throughout the translation process. Writing in a foreign language can occasionally cause annoyance or nervousness if the appropriate expression is not discovered." (student 24).

"A disadvantage is that sometimes I do not know how to exactly express what I feel because I lack words or structures in English." (student 32).

"Many times, what we feel is closely connected to our native language. When writing in English, you might not connect with your emotions as deeply, as if you were using a filter or emotional barrier." (student 36).

"Writing in English about my feelings and thoughts might have certain drawbacks, albeit being helpful for practice. Misunderstandings or less efficient communication may result from the expression's potential lack of precision or fluidity compared to your native tongue. Furthermore, the process might become slower and less spontaneous when ideas must be translated into English. The last concern is that the English language's grammatical structure or word choice would not adequately convey the nuanced nature of ideas or feelings, which would reduce the expression's authenticity." (student 42).

"Misunderstanding risk: Depending on the cultural setting and the reader's level of language proficiency, English literature might be interpreted differently. A person from a different culture or with a different level of English proficiency may not understand what is being said." (student 54).

"Frustration because, as a result of my poor language skills, I frequently feel that I am unable to articulate my ideas clearly because I am unable to find the appropriate words. As a non-native English speaker, my language can sometimes come across as emotionally detached. This is a result of my difficulty expressing my feelings in words." (student 67).

"I sometimes struggle to find the perfect words to accurately convey my innermost thoughts and feelings when I write them down in English. I feel like my writing seems simple or does not fully express what I truly want to say because it is not my first language." (student 96).

IV. DISCUSSION

The primary objective of this study was to assess the opinions of a group of college students from Peru after they completed a project that involved devising English slogans for t-shirts. Using a SEM, it was confirmed how four latent variables—autonomous learning (AL), self-efficacy (SE), technology (T), and English competence (EC)—influenced another latent variable, psychological aspects (PA). We will talk about these findings below.

AL has a moderately detrimental impact on the PA of this student group.

Once students can organize, carry out, and assess their learning processes independently, it is evident that AL has a good impact on their PA. Thus, academic maturity is a condition that depends on several factors, including the amount of time spent with an adult, the student's mastery of developed subjects, and the proper use of critical thinking. When asked if they can study without a teacher's assistance, it is clear that a student who has not achieved the aforementioned academic standing may experience stress or some adverse psychological effects (Masouleh & Jooneghani, 2012). The

benefit of the current project (slogan on a t-shirt) is that it encourages creativity while also being a fun activity. These are important components for MehdiYev (2020) in developing autonomy in learning the English language, but it is a journey that takes time. The instructor encourages independent learning through activities created both within and outside the classroom, as a summary of this first section. According to Hsieh and Hsieh (2019), learning activities that are mostly completed at home are crucial in helping students achieve the autonomy they so desperately need. In our finished project, that is precisely what was encouraged.

SE considerably and favorably impacts PA.

A student with self-efficacy in their studying is driven and confident in their ability to succeed in future studies. To foster self-efficacy in our students, educators must support competencies that give them the self-assurance they need to take on progressively more challenging assignments. The English teacher's encouragement and ongoing feedback on their pupils' achievements provide them with the self-assurance to pursue new academic objectives (Mahyuddin et al., 2006). Authors such as Dogan et al. (2013) have examined the intimate connection between self-efficacy, happiness, self-esteem, and well-being, supporting a link between these aspects of an individual's psychological makeup.

T influences PA in a favorable and negligible way.

Although some reports suggest that technology can improve students' well-being during the learning process (Bravo & Gámez, 2021), there is also evidence of the stress that using technology can cause, given that there are constantly new applications available in various formats and that not all of them are open access, which can lead to frustration and discouragement when thinking about technology (Lei & Zhao, 2007). It is also important to note that technology has, for the most part, created a virtual reality that differs from the natural learning environment students encountered twenty years ago and beyond. The student may experience stress in that situation since they are surrounded by alternatives and programs that provide them instant access to information. However, some of the individuals who live with them have a natural aptitude for academics. When utilizing technology, the two situations may lead to paradoxes and a poor feeling of well-being (Al-Bataineh et al., 2016; Romero-Ruiz et al., 2017).

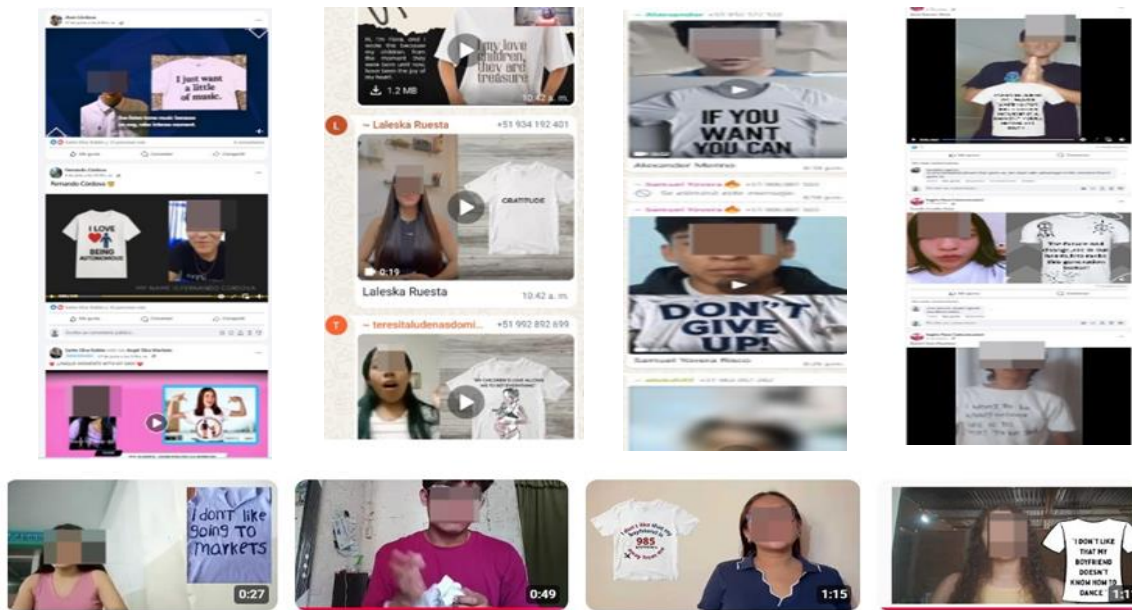
EC significantly and favorably impacts PA.

Numerous studies have shown that EFL students who are proficient in English can communicate across borders, become familiar with cutting-edge science and technology, learn about various cultures, and, most importantly, become more motivated and creative when speaking a language other than their mother tongue. According to Gutiérrez-Huancayo (2022), pupils who are proficient in English are more likely to be motivated by both internal and external factors, as well as by their self-worth and creativity. Additionally, being proficient in English enables pupils to communicate with people from diverse cultural backgrounds and broadens their knowledge of academic subjects. It is also true that an English class's ability to be emotionally positive depends on the activities that are conducted in the classroom or at home; that is, by considering the context and interests of the students without pressuring them to learn things that they do not find appealing or enjoyable (Parra et al., 2014).

V. CONCLUSIONS

This study's SEM suggestion in this study is suitable. It concludes that AL had no discernible impact on PA (-0.45), primarily because t-shirt slogans, although useful for English language acquisition, were insufficient to provide students with the autonomy they needed to master the target language. Similarly, the suggested model favored PA (0.6) and found that the students had enough SE to create projects similar to the one in this study. On the other hand, the model suggests that T has a minimal influence on students' PA (0.16), likely because, despite students' strong relationship with T, it can also promote stress and distraction, hindering effective learning. Lastly, the suggested model indicates that EC has a significant effect on PA (0.73). This method is predicated on the idea that speaking a foreign language well not only enables pupils to communicate with others but also boosts their motivation, self-esteem, and other positive psychological traits. Regarding the qualitative results of the present study, it is highlighted that the developed experience allowed students to express emotions and feelings while improving their English language skills. Likewise, the main limitation of our work is that fewer than 200 students—the number required to conduct a SEM—completed the survey.

APPENDIX SCREENSHOT OF THE VIDEOS POSTED TO VARIOUS SOCIAL MEDIA SITES



In these films, the kids explained how the slogans they created came to be.

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Speech Rate in Adult Syrian Arabic Speakers: Preliminary Data

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Abstract—Research studying the speech rate in the Arabic population is scarce. This study aimed to establish a preliminary normative speech rate of Syrian Arabic speakers and identify speech rate differences between females and males within the Syrian population. Sixty-five Syrian Arabic-speaking adults (33 females and 32 males) were recruited from Syrian universities. Data collection was performed in the speech clinics within the universities. Approximately 10-minute conversational speech and reading samples were taken from each participant. Speaking rate during conversational speech and reading tasks and articulation rate were measured in terms of words per minute (WPM) and syllables per minute (SPM). Additionally, the duration of silent intervals and pauses was measured. The normative speech rate results for Syrian Arabic speakers for speaking and reading indicate that female speakers exhibited significantly higher rates in reading tasks but reveal no significant difference between females and males in conversational speech tasks. On the contrary, silent intervals and pauses were significantly higher in males than females in reading tasks but not in spontaneous tasks. Speech rate therefore varies depending on the task and gender in the normal population. As speech rates may be vastly different between languages and even dialects of a specific language, further studies may be needed to identify the normal speech rate in other Arabic dialects.

Index Terms—Arabic language, normative data, speech rate

I. INTRODUCTION

The rate of speech is defined as the speed at which an individual produces articulatory movements to generate speech, measured in units such as phones (or phonemes), syllables, or words made by the speaker over some time (Goldman-Eisler, 1956; Pellowski, 2010; Robb et al., 2003).

Speech rate data is highly valuable in identifying and treating speech-timing disorders as the speech rate highly affects language comprehension (Blanchet & Snyder, 2010; Robb et al., 2004). Many disorders cause disturbances in speaking rate, such as stuttering, cluttering, motor speech disorders, and hearing impairment (Kent, 2000). Pellowski (2010) argued for speech-language pathologists to measure speech rate during assessment and evaluation, as speech rate plays a major role in the onset, development, and maintenance of stuttering. Controlling speech rate is considered a treatment strategy for stuttering (Max & Caruso, 1997). In addition, a common therapy technique is to decrease the speech rate in patients with hypokinetic dysarthria, where a rapid speaking rate is prominent and the speaker loses control of the articulatory movements (Robb et al., 2003). Blanchet and Snyder (2010) described speech rate control techniques in dysarthria treatment, reporting that a slower rate helps increase the speaker's articulatory precision and provides time for the listener to process the received message. Furthermore, speech rate and its effect on intelligibility were discussed in other populations, such as early implanted cochlear implant users (Freeman & Pisoni, 2017).

The most general units of measuring speech rate are words per minute (WPM), syllables per minute (SPM), and syllables per second (SPS) (Robb et al., 2004). Measuring speaking rate with WPM is less precise than using SPM or SPS, as words have variable numbers of syllables. There are a variety of different factors to consider when evaluating speech rate, such as the speaker's education, age, language, culture, and the listener (Sullivan, 2016). For example, although Australian and American English speakers produce 100 WPM, Americans speak 10 SPM more than Australians (Andrews & Ingham, 1971).

Cross-language differences relate to languages' phonological features, such as the complexity of the syllable structure, in that languages with a simpler syllable structure are spoken at a faster rate (Amino & Osani, 2015; Trouvain & Möbius, 2014). However, Cangi et al. (2020) found that cross-language differences are linked to differences in rhythm, such that syllable-timing languages such as Turkish and Spanish are faster than stress-timing languages such as English and French. Culture may also play a role in determining speech rate. Lee and Boster (1992) found that faster speech rates are perceived to promote credibility amongst American and North Korean speakers. No study has yet examined cultural influence on speech rates among Arabic speakers.

Two of the most used methods to measure speech rate are the speaking rate (SR) and articulation rate (AR) methods. Speaking rate measurements include silent intervals, pauses, and disfluencies, whereas these are omitted in articulation rate measurements to examine the articulation behavior only. However, the cutoff threshold between an articulation and a non-articulation pause has not been agreed upon. Robb et al. (2004) reviewed the literature regarding this threshold and stated that although 150–250 ms is a broadly acceptable threshold, the 50-ms threshold may also represent the articulation event. Some researchers set the threshold at 50 ms (Rob et al., 2004; Plug et al., 2022) while others choose the 150-ms threshold (e.g., Mahr et al., 2021; Redford, 2014). Measuring speech rate using speaking rate includes the effect of the speaker's emotions and the situation the individual is in, while the articulation rate measures the time of speech execution (Hall et al., 1999; Lee & Doherty, 2017; Miller et al., 1984). In the present study, the authors measured speaking rate and articulation rate in terms of SPM and WPM.

As mentioned, the speech rate measured by SPM varies depending on several factors, including spoken language (Iwasaki et al., 2002), culture, and inter-individual and intra-individual differences (Ward & Nakagawa, 2002). Intra-individual differences occur when a person varies his/her speech rate depending on conversation partner, acoustic situation, content, health, or mood (Duran et al., 2023; Freud et al., 2018).

Age is an essential factor in speech rate. Although speech rate varies depending on sampling method (Pindzola, 1989), speech rate tends to get faster as children grow as a part of the speech development process (Mahr et al., 2021; Pindzola, 1989). As for adults, however, studies have consistently found faster rates of speech among younger adults, regardless of sampling method, in conversation (Horton et al., 2010; Verhoeven et al., 2004), reading (Jacewicz & Wei, 2010), and reading and conversation (Amino & Osanai, 2015). Slower rates in older adults can be attributed to different reasons. Amino and Osanai (2015) connected speech rate to social differences. Jacewicz and Wei (2010) connected reading rate to varying reading abilities between younger and older adults, while Verhoeven et al. (2004) and Horton et al. (2010) linked speech rate to the neurological effects of aging and processing abilities that become slower in older adults.

Gender is another essential factor in speech rate. Research has shown contradictory results in the relationship between gender and speech rate. A faster speech rate in males in comparison to females was evident in some studies (Jacewicz & Wei, 2010; Lee & Doherty, 2017; Stepanova, 2011; Verhoeven et al., 2004). However, other studies found no relationship between gender and speech rate (Block & Killen, 1996; Cangi et al., 2020; Damhoureyeh et al., 2020; Kowal et al., 1975; Robb et al., 2004; Walker, 1988). Kim (2018) found that males have a higher articulation rate than females in young people between the ages of 10 and 19. However, speech rate was less influenced by gender among older individuals. Van Borsel and De Maesschalck (2008) investigated the difference in speech rate between transgender women and cisgender women and found no differences. Another aspect investigated in terms of gender's effect on speech rate is the influence of the interviewer's gender; this study found that male and female participants spoke at a slower rate when interviewed by a female compared to a faster rate when interviewed by a male (Kendall, 2009).

Speech rate and pauses have an inverse relationship (Kendall, 2013). Research has shown consistent differences between males and females in silent intervals and pauses. Lee and Doherty (2017) found that male speakers had a relatively longer total pause time than female speakers when reading and talking. The same results were found in children by Kowal and O'Connell (1980), as boys tend to take longer and more pauses than girls in out-loud reading and narrative production.

The speaking task is another important variable in evaluating speech rate. Quene (2005) argued that utterance length plays a major role in influencing speaking rate more than other factors such as age, gender, and regional dialect. Darling-White and Banks (2021) found a positive relationship between sentence length and speech rate in typically developing children from 10 to 14 years old. Jacewicz and Wei (2010) found that speech rate was higher in conversation tasks in comparison to reading tasks for American English speakers, results which were also found in Australian English speakers (Block & Killen, 1996). Other studies found the opposite result: participants had a higher speech rate in reading than in conversation in general, as in Irish English (Lee & Doherty, 2017) and in Jordanian Arabic (Damhoureyeh et al., 2020).

Within the same language, speakers from different regions may have different speech rates (Coats, 2019). The effect of the speaker's regional variant on articulation rate is not exclusively caused by extra-linguistic factors, such as the speaker's age and gender, but also by linguistic factors, such as speaking style and length of the utterance (Schwab & Avanzi, 2015).

Verhoeven et al. (2004) studied the Dutch-speaking language area in the Netherlands and the northern part of Belgium and found no effect of region on speech rate within four regions in Belgium but found that speakers in one region in the Netherlands speak faster compared to the rest of the country's regions. Dialectal differences were found to have a significant effect on speech rate in two states in the United States, North and South Carolina (Jacewicz & Wei, 2010). Clopper and Smiljanic (2015) also found that regional varieties of American English might affect speech rate.

Establishing speech rate normative data is important in clinical applications. However, such studies in Arabic are scarce. Damhoureyeh et al. (2020) reported a normative speech rate in the Arabic language.

Although the speakers exhibit different styles and patterns of speech, Jordanian Arabic and Syrian Arabic are still considered branches of the same language. This study aimed to establish normative data on speech rate in adults speaking Syrian Arabic, building on the work of Damhoureyeh et al. (2020). The current study addresses the following questions: a) What is the average speech rate among speakers of Syrian Arabic? b) Does speech rate differ in males and females?

II. METHODOLOGY

Ethical approval was granted by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Al-Ahliyya Amman University Faculty of Allied Medical Sciences (IRB # 2/13/2022-2023).

A. Participants

A total of 65 university students participated in this study: 33 females (mean age 25.4, standard deviation = 2.3) and 32 males (mean age = 25.5, standard deviation = 2.6). All participants were monolingual Syrian Arabic speakers. Participants were interviewed and assessed by a certified speech-language pathologist to rule out any communication disorders.

B. Speech Data Collection

All the speech data collections were conducted in one setting and were audio recorded. The interview process consisted of four stages. First, participants were made aware that the interview was being recorded; ethical approval was gathered from participants. Second, participants were asked to read a text of 358 words and 992 syllables in an approximate time of three minutes. The text contains all Arabic consonants with a level of reading that is convenient for college students. Third, participants were asked about their demographic information. Fourth, participants were engaged in a spontaneous conversation (topics are listed in Appendix).

C. Speech Sample

Approximately 10 minutes of conversational and reading speech samples were recorded from each participant. First, they were instructed to read an article taken from the Arabic edition of the *National Geographic* journal at their habitual level of loudness, pitch, and rate. The article contains four paragraphs with approximately 990 syllables and 358 words, including all Arabic sounds.

The participants then engaged in a 3–5 minute conversation with the researcher, as recommended by Lee and Doherty (2017). The topics were presented in the form of open-ended questions to prevent any predetermined responses that the speaker may create (Polgar & Thomas, 2011). Participants were free to talk in any manner or content they preferred.

All speech samples were recorded in a quiet room using an audio recorder application and a Samsung voice recorder version (21.3.50.34) (Samsung Voice Recorder - Apps on Google Play, n.d.). A 30-cm distance between the mouth and the recorder was maintained consistently. The recorded speech samples were then transferred to a secure computer for storage and acoustic analysis.

The reading samples of the article and the conversation samples for each speaker were analyzed using Praat (Boersma, 2007). Figure 1 provides an example of using Praat to define the words, syllables, and silent intervals in the reading task.

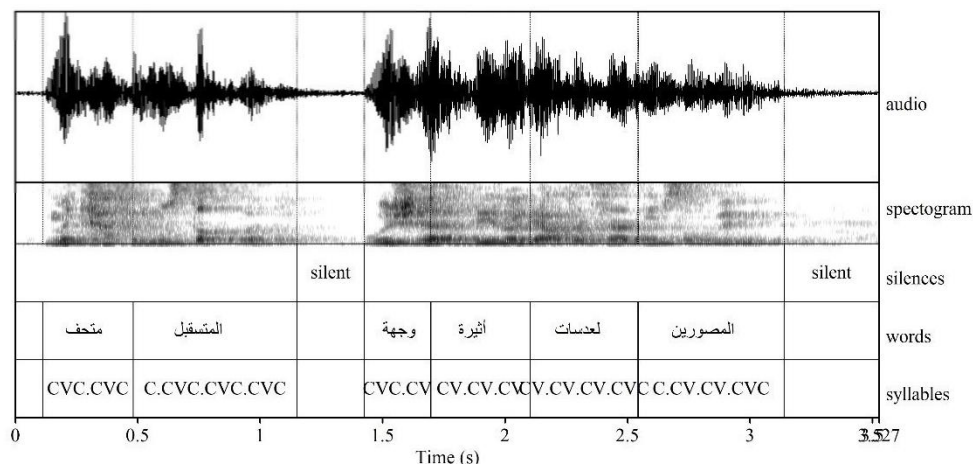


Figure 1. Reading Sample With Silent Intervals

D. Measurement of Speech Rates

(a). Speech Rate in Conversational Tasks

The conversation samples were analyzed following the methodologies of Lee and Doherty (2017) and Damhoureyeh

et al. (2020). The entire conversations were recorded in full by the third author. Three minutes were chosen for analysis, as in Schwab and Avanzi (2015). Each utterance was transcribed orthographically, and the number of syllables and words was counted. The speaking rates in SPM and WPM were determined by dividing the total number of syllables and words, respectively, by the time taken to complete speaking.

(b). *Articulation Rate in Conversational Tasks*

Articulation rates in SPM and WPM were calculated by dividing the total number of syllables/words by the time taken to produce them after the removal of silent intervals. The authors chose 150 ms as a threshold for the silent intervals using Praat software.

(c). *Speech Rate in Reading Tasks*

The start of the first syllable and the end of the last syllable in each of the paragraphs were identified and annotated based on the waveform display and wideband spectrogram. The syllable onset and offset were defined by the acoustic energy features. The time interval between the onset and offset was the total paragraph duration, measured for each speaker. Each utterance was transcribed orthographically, and the number of syllables and words was counted. To calculate the speaking rate in SPM and WPM, the total syllables and words collected from the reading samples, respectively, were divided by the duration of reading in minutes. Articulation rate in reading was measured in the same manner as conversational speech.

E. *Statistical Analysis*

Descriptive statistics were used to determine minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation values for reading and speaking tasks. In addition, a two-way ANOVA was run to find the effect of task and gender and the intercept of these independent variables on speech rate. A correlation study was done to find out the relationship between speaking and articulation rates in conversational speech and reading. As for silent intervals, descriptive statistics were used to determine pauses per minute, the total duration of these intervals for females and males, and correlations between these variables.

III. RESULTS

The normality of the data was assessed using the Shapiro-Wilk test, which revealed that the data was normally distributed ($p = 0.492$). Equality of variance was assessed using Levene's test, which revealed that the homogeneity of data assumption was met ($p = 0.876$).

A. *Overall Speech Rate Results*

Summary statistics for the overall measurement results for speaking rate and articulation rate in SPM and WPM in both reading and spontaneous speech tasks are summarized in Table 1.

TABLE 1
MINIMUM, MAXIMUM, MEAN (M), AND STANDARD DEVIATION (SD) VALUES FOR SPEAKING RATE (SPM AND WPM) AND ARTICULATION RATE (SPM AND WPM) IN READING AND CONVERSATION TASKS FOR SYRIAN ARABIC SPEAKERS

		N	Minimum	Maximum	M	SD
Speech rates during reading	speaking rate SPM	65	199.5	354.3	288.7	33.5
	articulation rate SPM	65	259.3	399.6	336.5	30.8
	speaking rate WPM	65	70.4	127.3	103.8	11.9
	articulation rate WPM	65	91.5	144.4	121.4	10.4
Speech rates during conversation	speaking rate SPM	65	171.9	336.8	244.5	33.4
	articulation rate SPM	65	242.6	383.3	317.9	29.9
	speaking rate WPM	65	83.4	165.4	117.6	15.8
	articulation rate WPM	65	122.5	191.4	153.6	15.9

B. *Male vs. Female Speakers*

Table 2 shows a summary of the means and standard deviations of speech rate in conversation and reading in SPM and WPM. In reading tasks, females averaged 303.3 SPM, 108.8 WPM in speaking rate, and 344.7 SPM, 124.8 WPM in articulation rate. Males' averages were 273.7 SPM, 98.7 WPM in speaking rate and 328 SPM, 117.9 WPM in articulation rate. While in conversation tasks, females averaged 246.3 SPM, 120.1 WPM in speaking tasks and 312.3 SPM, 152.7 WPM in articulation rate. Males averaged 242.7 SPM, 115.1 WPM in speaking rate and 323.7 SPM, 154.5 WPM in articulation rate.

TABLE 2
MEAN (M), STANDARD DEVIATION (SD), AND STANDARD ERROR MEAN (SE) VALUES FOR SPEAKING RATE (SPM AND WPM) AND ARTICULATION RATE (SPM AND WPM) IN READING AND CONVERSATION TASKS FOR SYRIAN ARABIC SPEAKERS

		Gender	N	M	SD	SE
Reading task	speaking rate SPM	Male	32	273.7	33.0	5.8
		Female	33	303.3	27.3	4.8
	articulation rate SPM	Male	32	328.0	30.3	5.4
		Female	33	344.7	29.4	5.1
	speaking rate WPM	Male	32	98.7	12.1	2.1
		Female	33	108.8	9.7	1.7
Conversational task	articulation rate WPM	Male	32	117.9	11.0	1.9
		Female	33	124.8	8.7	1.5
	speaking rate SPM	Male	32	242.7	32.0	5.7
		Female	33	246.3	35.2	6.1
	articulation rate SPM	Male	32	323.7	28.6	5.1
		Female	33	312.3	30.4	5.3
	speaking rate WPM	Male	32	115.1	13.0	2.3
		Female	33	120.1	17.9	3.1
	articulation rate WPM	Male	32	154.5	15.6	2.8
		Female	33	152.7	16.5	2.9

Regarding the mean of speech rate for male and female speakers, females exhibited significantly higher speech rates in all reading tasks (SPM $F = 15.527$, d.f. = 1, $p < 0.001$; WPM $F = 13.732$, d.f. = 1, $p < 0.001$; articulation SPM $F = 5.079$, d.f. = 1, $p = 0.028$; and articulation WPM $F = 7.938$, d.f. = 1, $p = 0.006$). No significant difference between females and males was found in any of the measured rates in the speaking task.

C. Silent Intervals

Table 3 shows the means of the total duration of silent intervals and the number of pauses per minute—in addition to the correlations between these measures—for females, males, and all speakers in both reading and conversational tasks. In the reading task, the mean duration of pauses was 30.9 seconds with an average of 15.4 pauses per minute (females' duration averaged 23.5 seconds with 14.4 pauses per minute and males' duration averaged 38.6 seconds with 16.5 pauses per minute). The number of stops per minute is highly correlated with duration (0.84 for the total population, 0.75 for females, and 0.82 for males). In the conversation task, the mean duration of pauses was 27.9 seconds with an average of 19.7 pauses per minute (females duration averaged 25.5 seconds with 19.1 pauses per minute and males' duration averaged 20.4 seconds with 20.4 pauses per minute). The correlation between duration of pauses and number of pauses per minute in speaking rate was less than that of reading, although it was high (correlation was 0.68 for the total population, 0.73 for females, and 0.56 for males). Silent intervals for males were significantly higher ($F = 20.912$, d.f. = 1, $p < 0.001$) in comparison to females in the reading task. However, although noticeable, silent intervals for spontaneous tasks did not show a significant difference ($F = 2.987$, d.f. = 1, $p = 0.089$). Table 4 summarizes the ANOVA results of females and males regarding speaking rate in reading, spontaneous tasks, and silent intervals.

TABLE 3
FREQUENCY (PER MINUTE) AND DURATION (IN SECONDS) OF PAUSES ACROSS TASKS WITH THEIR CORRELATIONAL VALUES

	Reading			Conversation		
	Pauses/min	Duration (seconds)	Correlation	Pauses/min	Duration (seconds)	Correlation
Total	15.4	30.9	.84**	19.7	27.9	.68**
Females	14.4	23.5	.75**	19.1	25.5	.73**
Males	16.5	38.6	.82**	20.4	30.5	.56**

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

TABLE 4
RESULTS OF TWO-WAY ANOVA COMPARING SPEAKING RATE (SPM AND WPM), ARTICULATION RATE (SPM AND WPM), AND SILENT INTERVALS IN READING AND CONVERSATION TASKS FOR SYRIAN ARABIC SPEAKERS

Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Speaking rate SPM	14214.6	1	14214.6	15.5	.000
Articulation rate SPM	4524.4	1	4524.4	5.1	.028
Speaking rate WPM	1646.1	1	1646.1	13.7	.000
Articulation rate WPM	773.4	1	773.4	7.9	.006
Silent intervals	115.090	1	115.1	20.9	.000
Speaking rate SPM	204.457	1	204.5	.2	.672
Articulation rate SPM	2142.525	1	2142.5	2.5	.122
Speaking rate WPM	404.916	1	404.9	1.6	.204
Articulation rate WPM	50.040	1	50.0	.2	.661
Silent Intervals	60.101	1	60.1	2.9	.089

D. Speech Rate in Different Tasks

Results from Tukey's HSD showed significant differences in speech rates (speaking and articulation) across conversation and reading tasks (d.f. = 3, $p < 0.001$).

Table 5 shows correlation results for speech rate in reading and conversation tasks. It appears that speech rate (SPM and WPM) and articulation rate (SPM and WPM) correlated well with each other in the reading task but not in the conversation task. However, the duration of pauses in reading and conversation had a relatively strong correlation ($r = .608$, $p < 0.001$). It is noticeable that speech rate in SPM is well correlated with pause duration in reading and conversation tasks. Articulation rate showed no correlation with pause duration in both reading and conversation tasks.

TABLE 5
CORRELATIONS BETWEEN PAUSES IN READING AND CONVERSATION SPEAKING RATE AND ARTICULATION RATE (SPM AND WPM) WITH P VALUES

	Pauses in reading	SR reading, SPM	AR reading, SPM	SR reading, WPM	AR reading, WPM	Pauses in conversation	SR conversation, SPM	AR conversation, SPM	SR conversation, WPM	AR conversation, WPM
Pauses in reading p value	1	-.685** .000	-.319** .010	-.673** .000	-.318** .010	.608** .000	-.367** .003	.122 .333	-.377** .002	.131 .297
SR SMP reading	-.685** .000	1	.894** .000	.991** 0.000	.885** .000	-.323** .009	.310* .012	.091 .473	.326** .008	.079 .532
AR SPM reading	-.319** 0.010	.894** .000	1	.885** .000	.961** .000	-.072 .570	.199 .112	.193 .124	.214 .087	.183 0.154
SR WPM reading	-.673** 0.000	.991** 0.000	.885** 0.000	1	.879** 0.000	-.320** 0.009	.306* 0.013	.090 .475	.315* .011	.070 .578
AR WPM reading	-.318** .010	.885** .000	.961** .000	.879** .000	1	-.054 .667	.176 .160	.180 .152	.186 .139	.163 .193
Pauses sp. speech	.608** .000	-.323** .009	-.072 .570	-.320** .009	-.054 .667	1	-.748** .000	.004 .975	-.668** .000	.092 .464
SR SPM sp. speech	-.367** .003	.310* .012	.199 .112	.306* .013	.176 .160	-.748** .000	1	.619** .000	.935** .000	.485** .000
AR SPM sp. speech	.122 .333	.091 .473	.193 .124	.090 .475	.180 .152	.004 .975	.619** .000	1	.636** .000	.891** .000
SR WPM sp. speech	-.377** .002	.326** .008	.214 .087	.315* .011	.186 .139	-.668** .000	.935** .000	.636** .000	1	.653** .000
AR WPM sp. speech	.131 .297	.079 .532	.183 .145	.070 .578	.163 .193	.092 .464	.485** .000	.891** .000	.653** .000	1

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

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

IV. DISCUSSION

This study aimed to establish preliminary data regarding the average speech rate in reading and conversation tasks among Syrian Arabic adult speakers. In addition, this study aimed to investigate gender differences in these rates. Speech rates were measured in speaking and articulation rates (SPM and WPM), through both a reading and a conversation task. In addition, pauses within these tasks were measured and reported in this study.

The only prior Arabic-language speech rate study is Damhoureyah et al. (2020) who investigated speech rate only in WPM in conversation and reading tasks in Jordanian Arabic speakers. Furthermore, a Jordanian Arabic study investigated participants almost in the same age group. In comparison to Jordanian Arabic speakers, revised literature discusses speech rate and its relationship to fluency (153.6 WPM vs. 142.83 WPM). However, Syrian Arabic speakers were slower than Jordanians in reading speech rate (103 WPM vs. 141.83 WPM) and in articulation rate (121.4 WPM vs. 161.83 WPM). This study's current results, which reveals differences in speech rates between Jordanian and Syrian dialects, are similar to findings from research conducted in other languages. Robb et al. (2004), for example, found that New Zealand English speakers spoke faster than American English speakers. Similarly, Jacewicz and Wei (2010) found that Wisconsin speakers of English were significantly faster than those from North Carolina.

Arabic is an Afro-Asian language with three different forms: 1. classical Arabic (as found in the Quran), 2. modern standard Arabic (which is the formal language found in most written forms of Arabic); and 3. colloquial Arabic (Najem & Marie, 2021). Modern standard Arabic exists always in the same form, but spoken Arabic has five main dialects—Hijazi (Arabian Peninsula and Yemen), Mesopotamian (Iraq), Levantine (Syria and Lebanon), Egyptian (Egypt and Sudan), and Maghribi (North African)—with vast differences between these dialects (Youssef, 2013). Differences in conversational speech rate between Jordanian spoken Arabic and Syrian spoken Arabic may be attributed to inter-dialectal differences. This supports the conclusion of Coats (2019) on the regional differences in rates within the same language. However, the noticeable difference in speech rates in reading tasks between Jordanian and Syrian spoken Arabic may

stem from different reasons. The reading task in the Jordanian study was not reported. The task in the present study involved a journal article, which may be a more complex read compared to the task in the Jordanian study. Further investigation of interdialectal differences in reading speech tasks may be needed using a standard reading text.

This study's findings regarding the speaking rate in Syrian Arabic reveals differences with other languages. Speech rate in the present study was found to be higher than that in Australian English in both reading and conversation tasks (Block & Killen, 1996) and higher than speech rate in SPM in American English in the reading task (Robb et al., 2004). However, the speech rate in the present study was found to be lower than that in Irish English in conversation tasks (Lee & Doherty, 2017), in American English in reading and conversation (Walker, 1988), in American English in reading (Robb et al., 2004), and in Turkish conversation and reading tasks (Cangi et al., 2020). It must be noted that languages vary in their speech rates due to differences in complexity and phonological patterns (Amino & Osani, 2015; Cangi et al., 2020; Trouvain & Möbius, 2014). Additionally, measuring speaking rates can involve various linguistic units of analysis, such as syllables per second, syllables per minute, and words per minute. Different methodologies for silent interval calculations can also be used. Some studies used 50 ms as the cutoff to calculate articulation rates (Rob et al., 2004; Plug et al., 2022), while others used 150 ms (Mahr et al., 2021; Redford, 2014). Thus, it is expected that studies aimed at examining different languages will show variances in speech rate.

It was found that Syrian Arabic speakers' speech rate in the reading task was higher than that in the conversation task. This is consistent with other studies targeting languages such as Turkish (Cangi et al., 2020; Girgin, 2008), American English (Jacewicz & Wei, 2010), and Irish English (Lee & Doherty, 2017). A possible explanation for these results may be that the cognitive effort for reading is lower compared to the effort for speaking. According to Bortfeld et al. (2001), conversation requires more planning and cognitive functioning in comparison to reading. Furthermore, Lee and Doherty (2017) found that pauses occurred more frequently in conversation than in reading, especially when answering questions. The present study's findings contradict Block and Killen (1996), who reported that Australian English speakers' reading was slower than their speaking, which they attributed to a dialectal difference.

The difference between speech rate in conversation and reading is also evident in the lack of correlation between speaking rate (SPM and WPM) and articulation rate (SPM and WPM), findings consistent with Damhoureyeh et al. (2020). On the other hand, in both conversation and reading tasks, the total duration of pauses correlates well with speaking rate but not with articulation rate. As discussed, articulation rate provides insight into articulatory behavior, whereas speaking rate is more influenced by pauses (Mahr et al., 2021).

The second purpose of this study was to determine whether speech rate varies by gender. Females and males showed no significant differences in conversation tasks, which aligns with other studies that reported insignificant differences in speech rate between genders (Block & Killin, 1996; Cangi et al., 2020; Robb et al., 2004; Walker, 1988).

The present study found a gender effect on speaking rate and articulation rate in reading and conversation, as females exhibited a significantly higher speech rate than males. Total pause duration was slightly higher in males than females in conversation, while the total pause duration in males was longer in reading, results which align with Kowal and O'Connell (1980) and Lee and Doherty (2017).

Robb et al. (2004) and Damhoureyeh et al. (2020) found no significant differences between males and females across conversation and reading tasks. The present study revealed a difference between males and females in speaking rate during reading, which shows that female speech rate was significantly higher than that of males. Faster speech rate in reading contradicts the results of other studies that found males had a slightly faster speaking rate in reading compared to females (Jacewicz & Wei, 2010). Lee and Doherty (2017) found that the speech rate in reading was higher in males than females in the second attempt at reading. The exact reasons behind the possible gender effect on speech rate is unclear (Lee & Doherty, 2017), although the gender-rate relationships may stem from anatomical and physiological changes (Hixon et al., 2008) or from sociolinguistic differences (Kendall, 2013). Given the small sample size of this study, further investigation is required to provide more insight into the gender/task effect in Syrian spoken Arabic.

V. CONCLUSION

This study offers preliminary normative data regarding the speech rate of adult Arabic speakers in Syria. The results of this study affirm that males and females differ in their speech rates, which may be useful in planning treatment for each group. The study results further affirm that speakers of different colloquial forms of a language differ in their speech rate.

APPENDIX

Translated List of subjects used for obtaining associated speech samples in spontaneous conversation.

1. Tell me about your life before you got accepted into the master's program.
2. Describe your hometown.
3. Tell me about your semester's subjects.
4. Tell me about what you do at the weekends.
5. Describe a typical week for you.
6. Tell me about the programs/series you watch. Or the last show you watched?
7. Tell me about the sport/hobby you are interested in.

8. Why do you like Latakia/Aleppo?
9. What are your plans for this coming summer?
10. What did you do last summer?

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A Gender-Based Exploration of the Perceived Importance of Learning English Among PAAET Students, Kuwait

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Abstract—Research has established a dominant connection between learners' beliefs and their attitudes towards learning in general, and ultimately, their academic performance (Barcelos & Kalaja, 2011; Block, 2012). This is why a constant revisit of what learners think about their language learning experiences should be considered as a springboard for reform in academic institutions. The current research utilises responses from a quantitative questionnaire administered to students from three vocational colleges in Kuwait to explore the key aspects concerning the nature of their language learning-related perceptions. Additionally, the study aims to investigate whether there are any gender-related differences in learners' perceptions of learning the English language, focusing on how these beliefs serve to optimise or hinder their learning experiences. Findings yield some interesting inferences regarding the differences between gender groups in their conceptualisation of the learning process, its difficulty, and their ability to approach it successfully. They also highlight the impact of the broader social and cultural context of each gender group, as well as their perceptions of their roles and responsibilities in the learning process. Such inferences provide insight into the importance of considering the learners' perceptions when preparing and enacting plans for language courses in any institution, as well as considering the unique contextual aspects in which these learners are involved.

Index Terms—gender differences, learners' perceptions, language learning

I. INTRODUCTION

The power held by human beliefs as a catalyst guiding their reactions and practices in a given situation has been recognised in the literature on the nature of teaching and learning experiences, including its impact on motivation, self-efficacy, and learning behaviour (e.g., Barcelos & Kalaja, 2011; Bernat et al., 2009; Borg, 2015; Kormos et al., 2011; Verloop et al., 2001). Kalaja and Barcelos (2013, p. 5) posit that 'learner beliefs about aspects of language learning are much more crucial than was thought before in determining how learners approach their learning of second or foreign languages and as such are complex mediational tools intertwining with learner action in complex ways'. Yang and Kim (2011) suggest that factors like learners' depiction of their goals and social interactions can influence learning outcomes. They state that failing to 'personalize' the significance of learning can lead learners to lose their purpose, eventually hindering success.

Learners' beliefs have been explored from different perspectives in the literature. These views agree that beliefs are mediators that influence the type and direction of actions, guiding learning experiences. Put simply, the beliefs about their language learning enable them to construe their current scenarios and the individuals involved, e.g. teachers and peers, significantly affecting how they approach tasks and course content (Barcelos & Kalaja, 2011; Ellis, 2008).

The relationship between beliefs and practices is dynamically bi-directional: beliefs can inform what learners do, learn, and how they learn (Yang & Kim, 2011), and can also be informed by learners' experiences, engagement with others, and actions by them and their surroundings (Mercer, 2011). This can impact their motivation (Yang & Kim, 2011; Yashima et al., 2017), learning strategies (Kalaja & Barcelos, 2013; Mercer, 2011), and autonomy and self-directed learning (Borg & AL-Busaidi, 2012). Understanding learners' beliefs and their relationship with these variables can help learners become aware of their beliefs and approach learning more effectively, abandoning ineffective methods for better ones. Yang and Kim (2011, p. 2) caution that unless beliefs have the power of imposing, normalising, or changing the course of actions, they can be deemed as 'vague ideas crafted from others' opinions, representing less successful remediation'.

Due to the complexity of defining beliefs, researchers have examined this domain from various perspectives, providing different insights into explaining the concept of learner beliefs. Ellis (2008) and Kalaja and Barcelos (2013) review key studies and highlight four main approaches: normative, metacognitive, contextual, and metaphor analysis. The normative approach is content-based and factually oriented, while the metacognitive approach considers the experiential side and the relationship between beliefs and practices as complex, involving learners' awareness of their

experiences. The contextual approach explores the learning process and the dynamic influence between beliefs and practices, emphasising the role of others in belief construction. Metaphor analysis creatively elicits beliefs related to the 'affective' aspects of learning, targeting tacit beliefs through metaphors about experiences. The normative perspective identifies trends within a context, whereas the contextual perspective views beliefs as constantly shaped by changing factors during learning.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The study examines gender differences in learners' beliefs about their English language learning experiences, challenging the depiction of learners as 'neutral, objective, and universal' (Block, 2012; Kubota & Chiang, 2013). Social differences influence how individuals see themselves and their sense of belonging to social groups like cultural, ethnic, and religious ones. Globalisation and multiculturalism impact gender roles, but people often base their gender identities on their collective sense of belonging (Pavlenko, 2002; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007). Despite ongoing 'self-reconstruction' of gender identities due to changing circumstances, attachment to social group membership persists. While research on gender differences in language learning focuses on differences in learning styles and strategies (Kormos et al., 2011; Aliakbari & Tazik, 2011), more attention is needed on how gender influences learners' beliefs and how to shape these for more effective language learning. Studying social differences helps understand how identities influence learning attitudes and behaviours. Research shows variations based on ethnic, national backgrounds (Sabatin & Ibrahim, 2013), gender (Bernat & Lloyd, 2007), and socioeconomic status (Butler & Le, 2018). These factors affect motivation (Kormos et al., 2011), learning styles (Grainger, 2012), and attitudes towards learning (Bernat et al., 2009).

Specifically, gender differences were viewed as presupposed entities based on male superiority. Recent perspectives see these differences as contextual, influenced by sociocultural, socioeconomic, and ethnic factors (Kubota & Chiang, 2013). As such, gender differences are now seen as products of discursive construction, focusing on perceptions and actions rather than inherent traits. Social hierarchies often involve unequal power, affecting interactions, decisions, and worldviews. Studying these differences is vital for understanding their impact on language learning, teaching, and policy-making. Critical linguists like Appleby (2009) and Pennycook (2010) argue that gender roles are contextually defined, practised, and normalised within specific settings. In a 'symbolic power game' (Hua & Kramsch, 2016), roles are negotiated and shaped by constructs such as religion, norms, traditions, and politics, influencing perceived rights and duties. This interaction can impact language learning, guiding teaching experiences differently for each gender and shaping gendered identities. For instance, Menard-Warwick (2008) found that a teacher's beliefs led her to 'socially position' learners based on gender, ethnicity, social class, and socioeconomic status, which influenced her instruction.

It is also worth mentioning in this realm that language teaching experiences are linked to their contexts. The relationship between gender and social constructs can lead to different scenarios and inferences. For instance, Bernat and Lloyd (2007) found gender-based differences in learners' beliefs; females attributed success to personal intelligence, while males found learning more enjoyable. Chan (2018) confirmed gender differences in attitudes, with females focusing on native speaker models, and males tolerating non-native models. Cultural and contextual factors also posed challenges, but participants often defied gender stereotypes, influenced by self-image and self-agency (Kobayashi, 2002). Gordon (2004) noted Lao female immigrants in the US felt freer and learned more English than males. Exploring these differences helps educators improve their teaching strategies.

Discussing learners' gender beliefs highlights the concept's complexity and the need for ongoing research to understand how gender influences learning perceptions and approaches. Educators should recognise and explore diversities among learners to identify issues affecting their learning. Different perspectives offer valuable insights into these beliefs, practices, and reactions. Given the gender focus of this study, a normative approach to exploring learners' beliefs about their educational experiences (Ellis, 2008; Kalaja & Barcelos, 2013) can be a vital first step in understanding these beliefs.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Questions

This study seeks to explore the following research questions:

- In what ways do students perceive their experience studying a foreign language?
- What beliefs do learners have about learning a foreign language differently based on their gender?

B. Context and Participants

The study involves three of the diploma-awarding colleges subsidised by the Public Authority of Applied Education and Training (PAAET): the College of Technological Studies (CTS), the College of Nursing (CN), and the College of Health Sciences (CHS).

These colleges were established to meet Kuwait's need for technical manpower in the technological, health sciences, and nursing fields, providing vocational training that combines academic knowledge and practical skills.

The current study's context was chosen for specific reasons. It is a general perception in Kuwait that many PAAET learners have low English proficiency upon college admission, posing challenges in studying English at a tertiary level,

as confirmed by teachers in studies across different PAAET institutions (Alazemi & Alenezi, 2022; Alotaibi et al., 2014). Among PAAET colleges, CTS, CN, and CHS are mostly popular due to better employment prospects after graduation. To maintain consistency in the targeted sample, these colleges were purposefully selected for this study because they employ an EMI plan; other colleges mainly teach discipline courses in Arabic, with some GE and ESP courses by their English units. English is considered highly important in these three colleges, with even the higher administrative personnel placing greater importance on English in their programs. Thus, the environment in these colleges promotes a higher level of awareness about learning English, though some students may still struggle with their language courses.

The statistical data confirming gender gaps in targeted colleges is shown in Table 1. Existing gender imbalances include more males at CTS and more females at CN and CHS, likely due to the nature of professions after graduation. Males tend to dominate technical and field-related professions typical of CTS, while females are more engaged in nursing. It would be interesting to explore learners' views, especially from the opposing gender in each specialisation.

TABLE 1
NUMBER OF REGISTERED STUDENTS IN THE TARGETED COLLEGES BASED ON GENDER

<i>Academic year/ semester</i>	<i>College</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>
2024- 2025 (second semester)	CHS	1290	1515
	CTS	5999	1099
	CN	803	1013
2023-2024 (First semester)	CHS	1074	1347
	CTS	6093	779
	CN	719	913
2023-2024 (Second semester)	CHS	1162	1401
	CTS	6296	1044
	CN	765	

Learners at three levels—elementary/remedial, intermediate, and ESP—were recruited from three colleges to track changes in their beliefs across different English language program levels. Convenience sampling recruited participants as researchers approached class teachers to recruit students. Learners' approval was obtained, and they were informed of their right to withdraw at any time. Students received an electronic link to the questionnaire and completed it on their own devices.

The majority of the population is Kuwaiti, with a small percentage of learners from other nationalities, such as GCC citizens or scholarship recipients from different countries. While this may not foster multicultural learning, this consistency addresses issues related to gender differences linked to national backgrounds, as identified in previous studies (Bernat & Lloyd, 2007).

C. Data Collection Methods and Analysis

Data collection occurred in the first semester of the 2024-2025 academic year. Horwitz's BALLI (Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory) (Horwitz, 1987) was used to understand learners' views on their language learning experiences and potential gender-based differences. Although BALLI is widely used to depict language learning beliefs (Alhamami, 2019; Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005; Bidari, 2021), in this study, it was employed to highlight gender-related differences in the conceptualisation of language learning.

From a quantitative perspective, questionnaires help in catering to a large number of students. Since the current research does not aim to yield generalizable findings, it seeks to generate exploratory findings that can provide valuable insights into the researched topic (Nardi, 2018).

The questionnaire had five sections: Foreign language aptitude, perception of language learning difficulty, nature of language learning, learning and communication strategies, and motivations and expectations. It included 31 items using a Likert scale. This tool was developed after reviewing regional and international ESP literature to identify key issues, especially gender and political aspects of the teacher-learner relationship. The items were translated and piloted for clarity.

IV. FINDINGS

A. BALLI Reliability & Validity

Factor analysis was used to investigate the applicability of BALLI's Arabic version in Kuwait. The factorability of students' responses was tested by Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's Test (Table 2), indicating a KMO value of 0.824 (> 0.5) (Hair et al., 1995; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Bartlett's test of Sphericity (Bartlett, 1950) provided a significant chi-square $\chi^2(210) = 2334.87$, $p < 0.001$, indicating that the matrix is not an identity matrix and therefore confirming that the factor analysis is suitable (Hair et al., 1995; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Since KMO indicates

sample adequacy and Bartlett's sphericity test shows the item correlation matrix is not an identity matrix, we can proceed with the FA (Netemeyer et al., 2003).

TABLE 2
KMO AND BARTLETT'S TEST

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	.824
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square 2334.865
	df 210
	Sig. < .001

The next step involves factor extraction and rotation. Principal axis factoring (PAF) was used to determine the underlying factors of a set of items (Burton & Mazerolle, 2011). Varimax rotation was used as an orthogonal rotational method to obtain interpretable results and because data meets priori assumptions. The results in Table 3, showing factor loadings of each BALLI item on each factor, revealed that the five-factor solution from the students' responses differs from BALLI item structure. The model included 21 valid items with acceptable communalities (h^2) and MSA. Items with communalities below 0.2 and factor loadings below 0.3 were dropped, as they do not contribute to the variance.

The first factor included items 14, 19, 23, 26, and, 27; suggesting beliefs about learning and communication strategies with motivation and expectations. It had an eigenvalue of 4.20, contributed to 9.12% of the variance, and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.695, indicating satisfactory reliability level. The second factor included items 2, 6, 8, 10, 20, and, 25, suggesting beliefs about foreign language aptitude. This factor had an eigenvalue of 2.42, explained 7.74% of the variance, and had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.608, indicating acceptable reliability. The third factor involved items 4, 12, 29, and, 30; suggesting beliefs about learning and communication strategies with motivation and expectations. This factor had an eigenvalue of 1.28, explained 7.19% of the variance, and had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.632, indicating acceptable reliability. The fourth factor involved items 7, 15, and, 16; suggesting beliefs about learning and communication strategies. It had an eigenvalue of 1.23, explained 4.45% of the variance, and had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.437, indicating low reliability. Finally, the fifth factor included items 5, 13, and, 17; suggesting beliefs about the nature of language learning. It had an eigenvalue of 1.09, explained 4.39% of the variance, and had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.549, indicating questionable reliability.

TABLE 3
FACTOR ANALYSIS OF THE BALLI RESPONSES WITH PAF & VARIMAX ROTATION METHOD

BALLI item number and its description	Factor Loadings					h^2	MSA
	1	2	3	4	5		
14. It is important to repeat and practice often.	.548					.408	.841
19. If I learn to speak English very well, I will have better opportunities to use it.	.628					.454	.845
23. If I learn to speak English very well, I will have better job opportunities.	.528					.419	.856
26. Arabs believe it is important to speak a foreign language.	.401					.284	.878
27. I would like to learn this language so that I can get to know its speakers better.	.583					.422	.851
2. Some people are born with a special ability which helps them learn a foreign language.		.576				.364	.796
6. It is necessary to know the foreign culture in order to be able to speak the foreign language.		.386				.211	.837
8. It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one.		.480				.262	.805
10. If I heard some people speaking English, I would go up to them so that I could practice speaking the language.		.373				.259	.768
20. It is easier to speak than understand a foreign language.		.421				.206	.765
25. People who are good at math or science are not good at learning foreign languages.		.396				.328	.863
4. I believe I will learn to speak English very well.			.466			.330	.806
12. I have the ability to learn the foreign language.			.615			.439	.803
29. Arabs are good at learning foreign languages.			.362			.204	.848
30. Everyone can learn to speak a foreign language.			.577			.391	.831
7. You shouldn't say anything in English until you can say it correctly.				.341		.306	.679
15. I feel shy speaking English with other people.				.471		.331	.653
16. If beginning students are allowed to make mistakes in English, it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on.				.500		.262	.816
5. It is important to speak English with an excellent pronunciation.					.420	.389	.821
13. Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of learning many new vocabulary words.					.487	.338	.856
17. Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of learning many grammar rules.					.421	.299	.835
Eigenvalue	4.200	2.422	1.283	1.225	1.086		
% of Variance = 32.893%	9.121	7.740	7.192	4.452	4.388		
Cronbach's alpha = .757	.695	.608	.632	.437	.549		

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

Based on factor analysis results, students' responses to the BALLI questionnaire were valid and reliable, with 32.89% total variance explained and Cronbach's alpha of 0.757, indicating reliability.

B. Research Question 1: In What Ways do Students Perceive Their Experience Studying a Foreign Language?

Descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages, mean, median, and the standard deviation are presented in Table 4. Overall mean of the five beliefs equals 3.57 with a median of 3.53 and standard deviation of 0.372, indicating average to good beliefs about their experience studying a foreign language. They had the highest beliefs regarding motivations and expectations, scoring a mean of 4.10 with a median of 4.17 and a standard deviation of 0.543. The lowest beliefs were about learning and communication strategies, with a mean of 3.32, median of 3.33, and standard deviation of 0.552; followed by difficulty of language learning with a mean of 3.37, median of 3.33, and SD of 0.671. Foreign language aptitude had a mean of 3.49, a median of 3.44, and SD of 0.454. Lastly, the nature of language learning had a mean of 3.51, a median of 3.50, and SD of 0.522.

TABLE 4
DESCRIPTIVE SUMMARY OF BALLI AREAS AND BELIEFS

BALLI Items	Frequency					Descriptives		
	SD	D	N	A	SA	M	Md	StD
Foreign Language Aptitude	(2.5)	(8.7)	(22.0)	(38.0)	(28.7)	3.49	3.44	.545
1. It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language.	4 (.7)	24 (4.0)	86 (14.3)	248 (41.2)	240 (39.9)	4.16	4.00	.859
2. Some people are born with a special ability which helps them learn a foreign language.	12 (2.0)	46 (7.6)	143 (23.8)	263 (43.7)	138 (22.9)	3.78	4.00	.951
8. It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one.	4 (.7)	11 (1.8)	74 (12.3)	287 (47.7)	226 (37.5)	4.20	4.00	.771
12. I have the ability to learn the foreign language.	20 (3.3)	86 (14.3)	165 (27.4)	202 (33.6)	129 (21.4)	3.55	4.00	1.078
18. Women are better than men at learning languages.	22 (3.7)	82 (13.6)	208 (34.6)	197 (32.7)	93 (15.4)	3.43	3.00	1.023
25. People who are good at math or science are not good at learning foreign languages.	11 (1.8)	25 (4.2)	175 (29.1)	259 (43.0)	132 (21.9)	3.79	4.00	.893
28. People who speak more than one language well are very intelligent.	26 (4.3)	93 (15.4)	154 (25.6)	207 (34.4)	122 (20.3)	3.51	4.00	1.107
29. Arabs are good at learning foreign languages.	22 (3.7)	80 (13.3)	123 (20.4)	203 (33.7)	174 (28.9)	3.71	4.00	1.128
30. Everyone can learn to speak a foreign language.	15 (2.5)	27 (4.5)	65 (10.8)	194 (32.2)	301 (50.0)	4.23	4.50	.981
Difficulty of Language Learning	(1.6)	(7.1)	(16.4)	(40.9)	(34.1)	3.37	3.33	.671
3. Some languages are easier than others.	1 (.2)	10 (1.7)	31 (5.1)	207 (34.4)	353 (58.6)	4.50	5.00	.688
20. It is easier to speak than understand a foreign language.	14 (2.3)	66 (11.0)	146 (24.3)	246 (40.9)	130 (21.6)	3.68	4.00	1.004
24. It is easier to read and write English than to speak and understand it.	13 (2.2)	53 (8.8)	119 (19.8)	285 (47.3)	132 (21.9)	3.78	4.00	.958
Nature of Language Learning	(6.3)	(13.7)	(21.3)	(35.9)	(22.8)	3.51	3.50	.522
6. It is necessary to know the foreign culture in order to be able to speak the foreign language.	30 (5.0)	87 (14.5)	192 (31.9)	213 (35.4)	80 (13.3)	3.38	3.00	1.044
9. It is best to learn English in an English-speaking country.	4 (.7)	22 (3.7)	75 (12.5)	317 (52.7)	184 (30.6)	4.09	4.00	.793
13. Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of learning many new vocabulary words.	12 (2.0)	12 (2.0)	70 (11.6)	215 (35.7)	293 (48.7)	4.27	4.00	.889
17. Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of learning many grammar rules.	23 (3.8)	99 (16.4)	157 (26.1)	236 (39.2)	87 (14.5)	3.44	4.00	1.047
21. Learning a foreign language is different than learning other academic subjects.	144 (23.9)	236 (39.2)	126 (20.9)	49 (8.1)	47 (7.8)	2.37	2.00	1.159
22. Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of translation.	13 (2.2)	38 (6.3)	150 (24.9)	268 (44.5)	133 (22.1)	3.78	4.00	.933
Learning and Communication Strategies	(6.5)	(18.6)	(30.0)	(26.6)	(18.3)	3.32	3.33	.552
5. It is important to speak English with an excellent pronunciation.	2 (.3)	9 (1.5)	56 (9.3)	252 (41.9)	283 (47.0)	4.34	4.00	.735
7. You shouldn't say anything in English until you can say it correctly.	42 (7.0)	149 (24.8)	213 (35.4)	145 (24.1)	53 (8.8)	3.03	3.00	1.059
11. It's OK to guess if you don't know a word in English.	85 (14.1)	92 (15.3)	285 (47.3)	63 (10.5)	77 (12.8)	2.93	3.00	1.153
14. It is important to repeat and practice often.	40 (6.6)	176 (29.2)	175 (29.1)	138 (22.9)	73 (12.1)	3.05	3.00	1.128
15. I feel shy speaking English with other people.	19 (3.2)	131 (21.8)	197 (32.7)	169 (28.1)	86 (14.3)	3.29	3.00	1.057
16. If beginning students are allowed to make mistakes in English, it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on.	48 (8.0)	115 (19.1)	156 (25.9)	193 (32.1)	90 (15.0)	3.27	3.00	1.166
Motivations and Expectations	(11.1)	(20.9)	(19.3)	(26.7)	(21.9)	4.10	4.17	.543
4. I believe I will learn to speak English very well.	- (.8)	5 (.8)	23 (3.8)	218 (36.2)	356 (59.1)	4.54	5.00	.613
10. If I heard some people speaking English, I would go up to them so that I could practice speaking the language.	58 (9.6)	155 (25.7)	174 (28.9)	126 (20.9)	89 (14.8)	3.05	3.00	1.201
19. If I learn to speak English very well, I will have better opportunities to use it.	23 (3.8)	67 (11.1)	142 (23.6)	241 (40.0)	129 (21.4)	3.64	4.00	1.055
23. If I learn to speak English very well, I will have better job opportunities.	58 (9.6)	169 (28.1)	153 (25.4)	147 (24.4)	75 (12.5)	3.02	3.00	1.188
26. Arabs believe it is important to speak a foreign language.	143 (23.8)	166 (27.6)	116 (19.3)	111 (18.4)	66 (11.0)	2.65	2.00	1.316
27. I would like to learn this language so that I can get to know its speakers better.	120 (19.9)	193 (32.1)	90 (15.0)	122 (20.3)	77 (12.8)	2.74	2.00	1.329
Total	(5.7)	(14.0)	(22.4)	(33.3)	(24.6)	3.57	3.53	.372

Note: SD=Strongly disagree, D=Disagree, N=Neutral, A=Agree, SA=Strongly agree, M=Mean, Md=Median, StD=Standard Deviation.

(a). Foreign Language Aptitude

Students had average beliefs about foreign language aptitude, with a mean of 3.49 ± 0.454 , and a range of means between 3.43 for “Women are better than men at learning languages” and 4.23 for “Everyone can learn to speak a foreign language”, indicating average to high perceptions. Percentage of agreement ranged from 48.2% for “Women are better than men at learning languages” to 85.2% for “It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one”. That is, 85.2% of students believe that it is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one. More insights about foreign language aptitude are as follows:

- 82.2% of students believe everyone can learn to speak a foreign language.
- 81.1% of students believe learning a foreign language is easier for children than adults.
- 66.6% of students believe some people are born with a special ability to learn a foreign language.
- 65.0% of students believe that people who are good at math or science are not good at learning foreign languages.
- 62.6% of students believe Arabs are good at learning foreign languages.
- 55.0% of students believe they can learn foreign languages.
- 54.7% of students believe people who speak different languages are very intelligent.
- 48.2% of students believe women are better than men at learning languages.

(b). Difficulty of Language Learning

Students had average beliefs about language learning difficulty, with a mean of 3.37 ± 0.671 , and a range between 3.68 and 4.50, indicating good beliefs. For instance, 93.0% think some languages are easier, 69.3% say reading and writing English is easier than speaking and understanding, and 62.5% believe speaking is easier than understanding a foreign language.

(c). Nature of Language Learning

Students generally understood language learning well, with a mean of 3.51 ± 0.522 . Beliefs ranged from 2.37 for “learning a foreign language is different from learning other academic subjects” to 4.27 for “learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of learning many new vocabulary words.” The analysis revealed:

- 84.4% of students think learning a foreign language mainly involves memorising vocabulary words.
- 83.2% of students believe learning English is best in an English-speaking country.
- 66.6% of students think learning a foreign language is mainly a matter of translation.
- 53.7% of students think learning a foreign language mainly involves learning lots of grammar rules.
- 48.7% of students believe knowing foreign culture is necessary to speak the language.
- 15.9% of students believe learning a foreign language differs from other academic subjects.

(d). Learning and Communication Strategies

Students had lower belief levels in learning and communication strategies, with a mean of 3.32 ± 0.552 . Scores ranged from 2.93 for “it’s OK to guess if you don’t know a word in English” to 4.34 for “it is important to speak English with an excellent pronunciation.” The following results are also found:

- 88.9% of students believe it is important to speak English with excellent pronunciation.
- 47.0% of students think that if beginning students make mistakes in English, it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on.
- 42.4% of students feel shy when speaking English with others.
- 35.0% of students believe it is important to repeat and practice often.
- 32.9% of students think they shouldn’t speak English until they can do so correctly.
- 23.3% of students think it’s OK to guess when unsure of a word in English.

(e). Motivations and Expectations

Students appeared motivated with high learning expectations, averaging 4.10 ± 0.543 . Ratings ranged from 2.65 for “Arabs believe it is important to speak a foreign language” to 4.54 for “I believe I will learn to speak English very well”. Students also held additional beliefs:

- 95.3% of students believe they will learn to speak English well.
- 61.5% of students believe mastering English will improve their opportunities to use it.
- 36.9% of students think learning English well will get them better job opportunities.
- 35.7% of students would approach English speakers to practice speaking the language.
- 33.1% of students want to learn the language to connect with its speakers better.

C. Research Question 2: What Beliefs do Learners Have About Learning a Foreign Language Differently Based on Their Gender?

To answer the second research question, an independent samples t-test was conducted to find differences between female and male students' beliefs about learning a foreign language. Results in Table 5 show no significant difference in mean scores, $t(518.38) = -.487$, $p = 0.626$. Significant differences between male and female students were found in

Foreign Language Aptitude, Difficulty of Language Learning, and Learning and Communication Strategies. No differences appeared in the Nature of Language Learning and Motivations and Expectations scores. More differences were observed in belief items, as explained below.

TABLE 5
INDEPENDENT-SAMPLES T TEST OF STUDENTS' BELIEFS BY GENDER

BALLI Items	Gender				T test			
	Female (n=219)		Male (n=383)		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig.	<i>d</i>
	M	SD	M	SD				
Foreign Language Aptitude	3.55	.439	3.46	.459	2.353	600	.019*	.199
1. It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language.	4.23	.809	4.11	.885	1.561	600	.119	.132
2. Some people are born with a special ability which helps them learn a foreign language.	3.34	1.098	3.23	1.202	1.095	600	.274	.093
8. It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one.	3.51	.930	3.38	1.071	1.507	507.34	.132	.123
12. I have the ability to learn the foreign language.	3.67	.945	3.85	.921	-2.276	600	.023*	-.193
18. Women are better than men at learning languages.	3.28	1.106	2.72	1.132	5.917	600	<.001**	.501
25. People who are good at math or science are not good at learning foreign languages.	2.39	1.096	2.36	1.195	.336	600	.737	.028
28. People who speak more than one language well are very intelligent.	3.56	1.036	3.48	1.146	.840	492.18	.401	.069
29. Arabs are good at learning foreign languages.	3.81	.850	3.78	.918	.458	600	.647	.039
30. Everyone can learn to speak a foreign language.	4.19	.994	4.25	.973	-.763	600	.446	-.065
Difficulty of Language Learning	3.24	.635	3.45	.679	-3.710	600	<.001**	-.314
3. Some languages are easier than others.	3.60	.895	3.88	.969	-3.471	600	<.001**	-.294
20. It is easier to speak than understand a foreign language.	3.16	1.046	3.36	1.056	-2.299	600	.022*	-.195
24. It is easier to read and write English than to speak and understand it.	2.96	1.192	3.11	1.205	-1.412	600	.158	-.120
Nature of Language Learning	3.48	.491	3.53	.540	-.998	600	.319	-.085
6. It is necessary to know the foreign culture in order to be able to speak the foreign language.	3.02	1.127	3.02	1.222	.045	600	.964	.004
9. It is best to learn English in an English-speaking country.	3.46	1.154	3.85	1.088	-4.071	432.27	<.001**	-.350
13. Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of learning many new vocabulary words.	4.16	.742	4.04	.819	1.788	600	.074	.152
17. Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of learning many grammar rules.	3.47	1.051	3.42	1.045	.615	600	.539	.052
21. Learning a foreign language is different than learning other academic subjects.	3.72	.909	3.81	.984	-1.149	600	.251	-.097
22. Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of translation.	3.05	.971	3.02	1.107	.452	503.77	.652	.037
Learning and Communication Strategies	3.39	.518	3.28	.567	2.331	600	.020*	.198
5. It is important to speak English with an excellent pronunciation.	3.54	1.032	3.56	1.105	-.197	600	.844	-.017
7. You shouldn't say anything in English until you can say it correctly.	3.02	1.104	3.06	1.142	-.464	600	.643	-.039
11. It's OK to guess if you don't know a word in English.	3.55	.889	3.27	1.112	3.367	537.27	<.001**	.269
14. It is important to repeat and practice often.	4.59	.594	4.50	.622	1.730	600	.084	.147
15. I feel shy speaking English with other people.	3.00	1.341	2.45	1.261	4.992	600	<.001**	.423
16. If beginning students are allowed to make mistakes in English, it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on.	2.61	1.253	2.81	1.368	-1.823	487.29	.069	-.151
Motivations and Expectations	4.09	.495	4.11	.569	-.446	600	.565	-.038
4. I believe I will learn to speak English very well.	4.20	.750	4.20	.783	.008	600	.994	.001
10. If I heard some people speaking English, I would go up to them so that I could practice speaking the language.	3.57	1.022	3.75	.989	-2.190	600	.029*	-.186
19. If I learn to speak English very well, I will have better opportunities to use it.	4.47	.679	4.51	.693	-.834	600	.405	-.071
23. If I learn to speak English very well, I will have better job opportunities.	4.27	.849	4.27	.912	-.028	600	.977	-.002
26. Arabs believe it is important to speak a foreign language.	3.62	.962	3.66	1.105	-.452	506.49	.652	-.037
27. I would like to learn this language so that I can get to know its speakers better.	4.43	.690	4.28	.755	2.449	600	.015*	.207
Total	3.55	.337	3.57	.400	-.487	518.38	.626	-.039

(a). *Foreign Language Aptitude*

The independent-sample t-test in Table 5 showed a significant difference between male and female students' beliefs about foreign language aptitude, $t(600) = 2.353$, $p = 0.019$, Cohen's $d = 0.199$, indicating a small effect. Female students scored higher ($M = 3.55$, $SD = 0.439$) than males ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 0.459$), suggesting that females hold stronger beliefs about foreign language aptitude.

At the item level, female students scored lower on "I have the ability to learn the foreign language" ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 0.945$), than males ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 0.921$), $t(600) = -2.276$, $p = 0.023$; Cohen's $d = -0.193$, a small effect, suggesting males are more confident. Conversely, female students rated higher on "Women are better than men at learning languages" ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 1.106$), than males ($M = 2.72$, $SD = 1.132$), $t(600) = 5.917$, $p < 0.001$; Cohen's $d = 0.501$, a

moderate effect, indicating higher expectations for women.

(b). Difficulty of Language Learning

The independent t-test showed male students scored higher ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 0.679$) than female students ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 0.635$) on language learning difficulty, $t(600) = -3.710$, $p < 0.001$; Cohen's $d = -0.314$, a moderate effect. Male students are more likely to believe language learning is difficult.

Testing the item beliefs, male students were found to significantly have higher mean score of "Some languages are easier than others" ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 0.969$), then females ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 0.895$), $t(600) = -3.471$, $p < 0.001$; Cohen's $d = -0.294$, indicating moderate effect. It can be concluded that male students are more likely to believe that some languages are easier to learn than female students. Moreover, male students also were more likely to believe that it is easier to speak than understand a foreign language; i.e., male students had significantly higher mean score of "It is easier to speak than understand a foreign language" ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 1.056$), compared to female students ($M = 3.16$, $SD = 1.046$), $t(600) = -2.299$, $p = 0.022$; Cohen's $d = -0.195$, indicating small effect.

(c). Nature of Language Learning

The independent t-test revealed no significant difference between male and female student beliefs about the nature of language learning, $t(600) = -0.998$, $p = 0.319$. However, there was one significant difference in one of the item beliefs. Male students had significantly higher mean score of "It is best to learn English in an English-speaking country" ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 1.088$), compared to females ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 1.154$), $t(432.27) = -4.071$, $p < 0.001$; Cohen's $d = -0.350$, indicating a moderate effect.

(d). Learning and Communication Strategies

The independent t-test showed a significant difference between female and male students' beliefs about learning and communication strategies, $t(600) = 2.331$, $p = 0.020$; Cohen's $d = 0.198$, indicating a weak effect. Female students tend to perceive learning and communication strategies more positively. More specifically, female students had significantly higher mean score of "it's OK to guess if you don't know a word in English" ($M = 3.55$, $SD = 0.889$), compared to males ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 1.112$), $t(537.27) = 3.367$, $p < 0.001$; Cohen's $d = 0.269$, indicating moderate effect. Also, female students had a significantly higher mean score of "I feel shy speaking English with other people" ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 1.341$) than males ($M = 2.45$, $SD = 1.261$); $t(600) = 4.992$, $p < 0.001$; Cohen's $d = 0.423$, indicating a moderate effect.

(e). Motivations and Expectations

The independent t-tests showed no significant differences between male and female students' beliefs about motivations and expectations, $t(600) = -0.446$, $p = 0.565$. However, two significant differences emerged in item beliefs. Male students scored higher on "If I heard some people speaking English, I would go up to them so that I could practice speaking the language" ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 0.989$), than females ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 1.022$), $t(600) = -2.190$, $p = 0.029$; Cohen's $d = -0.186$, a weak effect. This confirms the results of the learning and communication strategies, where female students were shyer about speaking English. Conversely, females scored higher on "I would like to learn this language so that I can get to know its speakers better" ($M = 4.43$, $SD = 0.690$) than males ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 0.755$), $t(600) = 2.449$, $p = 0.015$; Cohen's $d = 0.207$, a moderate effect.

V. DISCUSSION

Overall, students expressed moderately positive views about their ability to learn foreign languages. Many agreed with statements like "Everyone can learn to speak a foreign language," reflecting a general optimism. However, when looking at gender differences, female students tended to hold stronger beliefs in natural language aptitude than their male peers. This aligns with research suggesting that females often perceive themselves as more capable in language learning, possibly due to cultural and social expectations (Li & McLellan, 2021; Li et al., 2025). Interestingly, male students were more confident in their own ability to learn a language, as indicated by the stronger agreement with statements like "I have the ability to learn a foreign language." Such patterns echo Bernat and Lloyd's (2007) findings, where female learners linked success in language learning to intelligence and perseverance, while male learners often showed more enthusiasm and confidence when approaching the learning process. In different parts of the world such as China (Ma et al., 2025), Saudi (Al-Khresheh, 2024) and Iran (Namaziandost et al., 2020), female students owned a higher sense of agency in the domain of learning another language, ultimately deeming the process of language learning as a 'feminine domain' (Li & McLellan, 2021). Such findings provide evidence for acknowledging the role of gender-based identity when planning and implementing educational practices, cultivating a high sense of self-efficacy found in females while raising male learners' awareness of their language learning potentials, regardless of the stereotypical images each gender group holds.

Students' views on the difficulty of language learning were moderate. Most agreed that "Some languages are easier than others," with male students more likely to see learning a language as generally difficult. Female learners seemed to be more meticulous about the different aspects of language learning. This perception may shape how they approach learning, possibly leading to more cautious or less persistent behaviours among males. In general, the findings support the work of Kormos et al. (2011), who highlight how motivation and perceived difficulty influence language learning

choices and effort. These results could also be interpreted in light of female learners' perceptions of their self-efficacy in language learning, as shown above.

Motivation stood out as a decisive factor, with students showing high hopes for the benefits of learning English, such as better job prospects or personal growth. Gender differences were relatively minor, though male students reported being more likely to initiate conversations in English. Meanwhile, female students expressed a stronger emotional desire to connect with English speakers. These findings support Yang and Kim's (2011) emphasis on aligning learning goals with personal interests to keep students engaged and motivated. The motivational factor could also be seen in the context of learners' conceptualisations of their identities as language learners.

Students also seemed to have a stronger understanding of what language learning involves, with strong agreement on the importance of vocabulary and grammar. Both male and female students generally shared these views. However, male students were more likely to believe that "It is best to learn English in an English-speaking country," pointing to a preference for engaging in immersive experiences as a proxy for better language learning. This reflects Ellis's (2008) view that learners' beliefs are often shaped by their surrounding environment and personal experiences. As described by Kutuk (2023), the significant others surrounding learners contributed to how they approached their learning experience, considering certain language aspects (i.e. pronunciation) as more feminine and accordingly showing unwillingness towards working on the improvement of the skill. In general, and as explained by Namaziandost et al. (2020), female learners have a higher tendency towards dealing with linguistic obstacles, making them more perseverant in their language learning experiences. This, as described by Kutuk (2023), was more socially expected of female learners, as females were generally seen as more persistent. Such conceptualisation puts female learners at an advantage in achieving a more sustainable approach to learning, since they are expected to have better coping mechanisms when facing linguistic hurdles.

When it came to strategies for learning and communicating in a new language, students reported lower confidence, especially in taking risks, such as guessing words based on contextual clues. Female students were more open to guessing when unsure of a word, while male students were more hesitant. This may be linked to cultural attitudes toward risk and public speaking. Additionally, many female students reported feeling shy when speaking English. Although such findings might be convergent with those found in studies such as Al-Khresheh (2024), this highlights the importance of creating supportive classroom environments that reduce anxiety for both gender groups. Such insights also align with Mercer's (2011) notion that learners' beliefs about social interaction and self-efficacy can strongly impact their learning strategies. In the study of Kutuk (2023, p. 14) for example, female learners were seen to have "a greater sense of organization and a more systematic approach to their language learning", while Al-Khresheh (2024) reported females' superiority over their male counterparts when it comes to productive language skills (i.e. speaking). This was attributed by Kutuk (2023) to factors such as the self-image males held of themselves and the practices they have adopted to protect such image.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study sheds light on how beliefs, gender, and learning experiences interact for language learners at PAAET, Kuwait. By addressing areas where support is needed and building on students' intrinsic motivation, educators can create more inclusive and effective language learning environments. The results also contribute to a broader understanding of language learning beliefs and provide helpful guidance for shaping educational policy and curriculum in similar settings. The current study holds significant implications in the field of language learning:

First and foremost, the differences between male and female students exhibited in the study suggest that teaching strategies could be more personalised. Confidence-building activities may help female students, while male students might benefit from support in managing perceived learning difficulties. Additionally, since students were generally cautious about taking risks, teachers could design activities that make it safe and acceptable to make mistakes, such as role-plays or collaborative tasks.

As also indicated in the findings, students' interest in immersive learning opportunities highlights the value of offering options such as virtual language exchanges using multimedia tools or encouraging learning environments that utilise augmented reality tools. Given the high motivational level students have shown towards learning English, educators can connect language learning to real-world benefits by bringing in guest speakers, organising career-focused workshops, or highlighting success stories of multilingual professionals.

This study has its limitations. Relying on self-reported data means that there may be some bias, and since the context is specific to Kuwait, the results may not be applicable broadly. Longitudinal studies could be utilised to track trends in learners' beliefs over an extended period or to examine how targeted teaching interventions might influence students' attitudes toward language learning.

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The Effect of TikTok on Translation Performance Among Undergraduate Translation Students

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Abstract—This study explores the impact of TikTok use on translation performance among undergraduate translation students at Qassim University. By employing a combination of survey responses and translation assessments from 46 participants, the results demonstrate that extensive TikTok engagement is significantly associated with an increase in grammatical and spelling errors during translation tasks. Conversely, students who consciously restricted their TikTok usage exhibited substantially fewer errors and reported higher academic productivity, suggesting improved sustained attention and cognitive control. Interpreted through the lens of cognitive load theory, these outcomes indicate that habitual consumption of short-form video content may impair cognitive abilities essential for effective translation. Consequently, the study underscores the importance of implementing educational interventions focused on digital literacy and strategic management of screen time.

Index Terms—TikTok, social media, translation performance, cognitive load, mental stress

I. INTRODUCTION

TikTok's explosive popularity among university students has sparked debate about its impact on academic skills. Translation, a task requiring intense concentration and linguistic accuracy, may be particularly susceptible to the distractions and altered cognitive habits engendered by short-form video consumption. Short videos like those on TikTok can captivate students to the point that nearly 70% report losing track of time while using them (Common Sense Media, 2021; Twenge & Campbell, 2019). Researchers have observed that many students use these platforms for hours, often during evenings when they might otherwise study, and only a small minority feel their routines remain unaffected (Montag et al., 2021). This pervasive use has raised concerns that the rapid, fragmented content could erode sustained attention and careful analytical thinking. In the context of translation, which demands continuous focus and thoughtful language processing, heavy TikTok use might interfere with performance by shortening attention spans and increasing errors.

At the same time, TikTok and other similar platforms are rich with linguistic content, and some educators wonder if exposure to diverse media might have incidental benefits (such as expanding vocabulary or quickening information processing). Nonetheless, the question remains: does frequent TikTok viewing hinder or help translation abilities? This study investigates this question by examining the relationship between TikTok usage and translation performance in a cohort of undergraduate translation students. We draw on cognitive theories and prior studies of social media to frame our expectations. Cognitive load theory suggests that the barrage of stimuli on TikTok could overload students' working memory, making it harder to concentrate on complex tasks (Sweller, 2011). Furthermore, research on attention indicates that constant switching between videos may condition users to seek novelty, potentially reducing their capacity for sustained focus on a single task (Mark et al., 2018; Rosen et al., 2013). By integrating insights from the literature with new empirical data, this paper seeks to clarify TikTok's effect on translation performance, an issue of growing importance as digital habits shape academic outcomes.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Early evidence on social media and academic skills highlights both risks and nuances of social media use. Several studies report that heavy short-video consumption correlates with poorer academic performance, largely due to diminished attention spans. For example, Sha and Dong (2021) found that adolescents with TikTok use disorder exhibited increased memory problems and higher levels of depression and anxiety, suggesting that compulsive use of the app can impair cognitive functions vital for learning. In a related vein, Hu and Li (2023) surveyed Chinese college students and observed that short videos significantly disrupted study habits and time management, with over two-thirds of respondents saying they lose their sense of time on TikTok and similar apps. Only about 12% reported being completely unaffected in their daily routines. This indicates that the majority experience some degree of interference with concentration or schedule—a worrying trend for tasks like translation that require sustained mental effort.

Research specifically linking social media use to language or translation skills is still emerging. Xu et al. (2023), examining Chinese adolescents, found that students who heavily used short-video platforms like TikTok demonstrated weaker working memory, lower verbal abilities, and poorer academic outcomes. These deficits were attributed to reduced

cognitive engagement and attentional control, essential for language acquisition and translation proficiency (Xu et al., 2023). This aligns with broader findings that digital multitasking leads to shallow processing, where students struggle to filter out distractions and make mistakes in complex tasks. The fast-paced, dopamine-driven environment of TikTok may be “rewiring” attentional control in young users, making it harder for them to engage in lengthy, focused work (Firth et al., 2019; Alloway et al., 2013).

On the other hand, some studies offer a more nuanced view. Gong and Tao (2024) investigated short-video usage among elementary students and noted that when moderated appropriately by parental guidance, engagement with platforms like TikTok could foster adaptive visual attention skills. Additionally, a study by Li et al. (2024) reported that college students who maintained high levels of mindfulness were better able to mitigate the negative impacts of short-form video addiction on academic engagement and anxiety. These findings suggest individual differences and effective self-regulation can moderate the effects of social media on academic and cognitive outcomes. Nonetheless, even these researchers caution that without strong self-control, the quick, pleasurable content of TikTok can easily become a distraction that undermines deep learning (Li et al., 2024).

The literature indicates a likely negative impact of excessive TikTok use on focused academic tasks, though context and individual factors matter. Heavy use has been linked to attention difficulties, memory issues, and lower academic performance in general. For translation students, whose work demands concentration and accuracy, these findings raise concerns. The present study builds on this literature by empirically testing whether high TikTok usage is associated with more translation errors and lower translation quality. It also considers students’ own perceptions, providing a fuller picture of TikTok’s role in their learning process.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to investigate the effect of TikTok usage on the translation performance of undergraduate students majoring in translation. The research design combined a detailed usage survey, objective assessment of translation outputs, and statistical analysis to explore correlations between social media habits and translation quality.

A. Participants

Forty-six ($N = 46$) undergraduate male translation students at Qassim University in Saudi Arabia participated in the study. All participants were native Arabic speakers in the 19–22 age range and were in their third or fourth year of a translation studies program. Participation was voluntary, and all students reported that they use TikTok at least occasionally, which was important for capturing variation in usage intensity.

B. Survey on TikTok Usage

Each student first completed a comprehensive TikTok and short video usage survey adapted from a standard usage questionnaire. The survey gathered data on:

- frequency of TikTok use (e.g., “multiple times a day,” “a few times a week”);
- average daily screen time dedicated to TikTok/short videos (self-reported in ranges: < 30 minutes, 30–60 minutes, 1–2 hours, > 2 hours per day);
- timing of use (preferred viewing times, such as morning, evening, and late-night);
- content preferences and purposes (e.g., watching for entertainment, education, relaxation); and
- study habits and self-reported effects (daily study hours; and whether TikTok interferes with their studying, causes procrastination, reduces focus, etc.).

The survey included both closed-ended questions (Likert-scale or multiple choice) and a few open-ended prompts. One open-ended question asked students to describe in their own words how their TikTok usage has impacted their academic work, particularly any effects on concentration or mistakes in assignments. This provided qualitative data on their personal insights.

C. Grouping by Usage Level

Based on the daily screen time data, participants were categorized into three usage groups for comparative analysis:

- High usage: students who reported using TikTok more than two hours per day (13 students)
- Moderate usage: students using TikTok about 1–2 hours per day (22 students)
- Low usage: students who used TikTok less than one hour per day (11 students; including “<30 min” and “30–60 min” respondents)

This grouping allowed to examine differences in translation performance between heavy, moderate, and light TikTok users. The cut-offs chosen correspond to common benchmarks in digital well-being guidelines and reflected natural breakpoints in our sample’s responses (with <1 hr, 1–2 hr, and >2 hr forming distinct clusters).

D. Translation Task and Performance Evaluation

After the survey, all participants completed a translation task designed to objectively measure their translation performance. The task involved translating an approximately 150-word informative-type English paragraph into Arabic. This paragraph was at an upper-intermediate reading level, containing a mix of general and semi-technical vocabulary.

Students were given unlimited time to produce their best translation, mimicking a take-home translation assignment scenario (thus any differences would likely stem from their ability and habits, not time pressure).

Two professional translators (Arabic-English bilinguals with translation teaching experience) independently evaluated each student's translated text. They assessed translation quality through error analysis, focusing on two key error categories:

- grammatical errors: mistakes in syntax, morphology, or usage that violate Arabic grammar rules (e.g., incorrect sentence structure, improper verb conjugation or tense, subject-verb agreement errors, or misused prepositions);
- spelling and orthographic errors: mistakes in writing conventions, including misspellings of common words, incorrect use of hamza (ء) and other diacritical marks, confusion between visually similar Arabic letters, and incorrect spacing or punctuation that affected readability.

The evaluators used a standardized error typology and marking scheme. Each distinct grammatical error in the translation was marked and counted; similarly, each spelling/orthographic error was counted. If the same type of mistake occurred repeatedly in one student's text, each occurrence was counted to gauge their overall accuracy. The two evaluators cross-checked their markings and discussed any discrepancies to reach consensus. The total number of grammatical errors and total number of spelling errors were tallied for each student's translation. These quantitative error counts served as the primary performance metrics, where fewer errors indicated better translation performance.

In addition to error counts, the evaluators provided an overall quality rating for each translation (high quality, moderate quality, or low quality). This rating was based on holistic judgment of the translation's fidelity and readability, but it correlated strongly with the error counts (e.g., translations with few errors were rated high quality). For consistency, we treat this as an ordinal outcome reflecting the error analysis results.

E. Data Analysis

We analyzed the data in two stages. First, descriptive statistics were compiled for each TikTok usage group's translation performance. We calculated the mean and standard deviation of grammatical errors and spelling errors for high, moderate, and low usage groups and noted the distribution of overall quality ratings across groups. We also examined the survey responses by group to contextualize performance differences (for instance, comparing the proportion of students who reported study difficulties in each group).

Next, we conducted correlation and comparative analyses:

- A Pearson correlation was computed between daily TikTok usage (in minutes) and the total number of translation errors. Correlations with sub-categories (usage vs grammatical errors, and usage vs spelling errors separately) were also examined.
- An ANOVA (analysis of variance) was planned to test for statistically significant differences in error counts between the three usage groups. Given the relatively small sample, we also checked effect sizes (Cohen's *d* between pairs of groups) to quantify the magnitude of differences.
- We qualitatively analyzed the open-ended survey comments to capture common sentiments among heavy and light users regarding focus and performance.

All analyses were performed with the aid of statistical software (IBM SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences)), and a significance threshold of $p < .05$ was used for inferential tests. The combination of quantitative and qualitative data in this methodology provides a robust way to triangulate findings on how TikTok use might influence translation performance.

IV. FINDINGS

A. Participant TikTok Usage

The surveyed students displayed a wide range of TikTok usage habits. Daily usage times ranged from a low of 16 minutes to a high of 175 minutes (nearly three hours), with a sample average of approximately 92 minutes per day ($SD = 45$ min). By design, all 46 participants were TikTok users; however, their self-regulated use differed markedly.

Low Usage Group (<1 hr/day)

Eleven students (24% of the sample) fell into this category, using TikTok for at most an hour per day (often just a few times a week). Many in this group reported conscious moderation of their screen time. Notably, they tended to also report studying more hours per day (often 2–4 hours of daily study) and rarely experiencing TikTok-related distractions.

Moderate Usage Group (1–2 hr/day)

Twenty-two students (48%) used TikTok around one to two hours daily, typically once a day or multiple times a day in shorter sessions. They represented the median usage behavior in our sample.

High Usage Group (>2 hr/day)

Thirteen students (28%) were heavy TikTok consumers, exceeding two hours per day (with some spending nearly three hours daily). These students commonly checked TikTok multiple times a day, including late at night.

This grouping was reflected not only in the quantitative screen-time data but also in self-reported behavior and academic habits. Importantly, students with higher TikTok use overwhelmingly indicated more academic difficulties related to concentration and time management. For instance, all 13 heavy users answered "Yes, often" when asked if TikTok causes them to postpone study tasks or lose focus, whereas those in the low-use group mostly answered "No" or

“Rarely” to these questions. In their open-ended responses, heavy users frequently mentioned struggling with procrastination and reduced attention span, while light users often wrote that limiting TikTok helped them maintain productivity (as quoted earlier).

B. Translation Performance by Usage Group

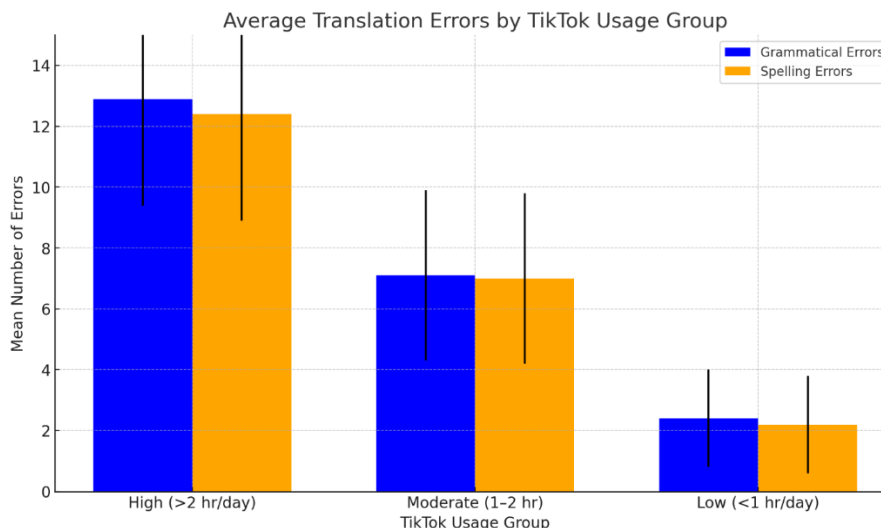


Figure 1. High TikTok Users Made Significantly More Grammatical and Spelling Errors Compared to Moderate and Low Users. Error Bars Represent Standard Deviations.

There were clear performance disparities among the groups on the translation task. Figure 1 summarizes the average number of errors per group.

High Usage (>2 hr)

This group had the poorest translation outcomes. On average, a high-usage student made approximately 12.9 grammatical errors and 12.4 spelling errors, totaling about 25 errors per translation. Virtually all translations in this group were rated “low quality” by the evaluators. Common issues in their work included serious grammatical mistakes like incorrect sentence structure and frequent misuse of modifiers or prepositions, as well as numerous spelling mistakes (e.g., inconsistent use of hamza and confusion between similar-looking Arabic letters like *ي* and *ع*). It was evident that heavy TikTok users struggled to produce accurate, error-free translations in this task.

Moderate Usage (1–2 hr)

The moderate users showed intermediate performance. They averaged 7.1 grammatical errors and 7.0 spelling errors, for about 14 total errors per translation. Their translations were predominantly rated “moderate quality.” While they made notable mistakes, they made roughly 40% fewer errors than the heavy-usage group, indicating better performance. Common errors for moderate users still included grammatical lapses (e.g., occasional tense misuse) and some spelling mistakes, but far fewer than the high usage group. This group’s work was more comprehensible overall, though still falling short of polished accuracy.

Low Usage (<1 hr)

Students with minimal TikTok use delivered the best translation performance. They made only 2.4 grammatical errors and 2.2 spelling errors on average, totaling about 4–5 errors per translation. Many low-use students produced translations that were nearly flawless; their texts were rated “high quality.” Minor errors did occur, but these were often isolated slips such as a single misspelled word or a small grammatical oversight. Impressively, some low-use individuals made as few as 1–2 total errors. This indicates that light TikTok users—or those who abstain from TikTok during study time—maintained strong translation accuracy.

The differences between groups were stark. High-frequency users made about five times as many errors as low-frequency users and roughly double the errors of moderate users. An ANOVA confirmed that the differences in total error count across the three groups were statistically significant ($F(2, 43) \gg 50, p < .001$). Post-hoc comparisons (Tukey’s HSD) showed that each pair of groups (high vs moderate, high vs low, moderate vs low) differed significantly ($p < .01$ for all). The effect of TikTok usage level on translation errors appears very large (estimated $\eta^2 > 0.70$, indicating over 70% of the variance in error rates can be associated with the student’s usage group).

C. Correlation Analyses

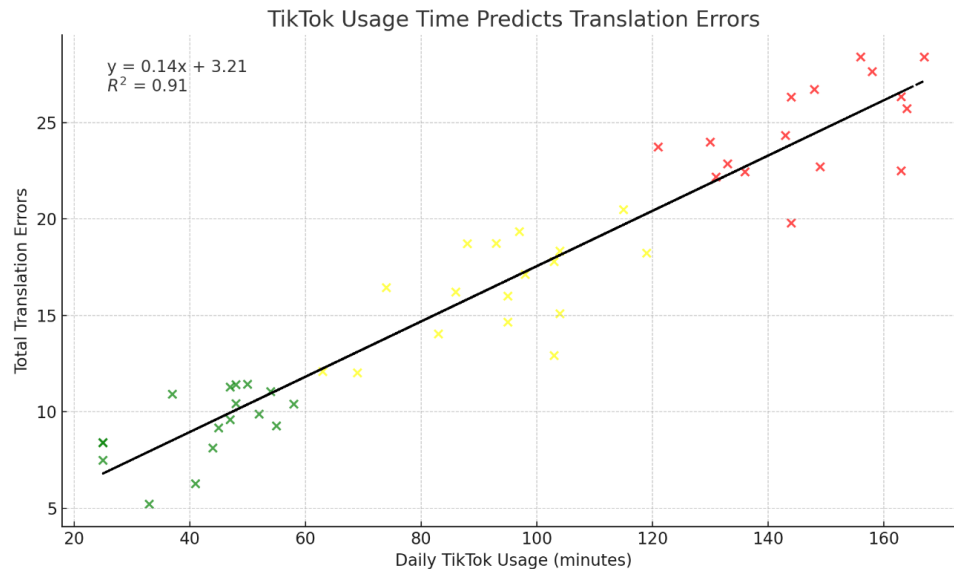


Figure 2. Daily TikTok Usage Strongly Correlates With Increased Translation Errors ($r \approx 0.96$). Each Additional Hour of TikTok Use Predicts 8-10 More Errors.

Treating daily TikTok minutes as a continuous variable, we found a strong positive correlation between TikTok use and translation errors. The Pearson correlation coefficient was $r = +0.90$ (approximately) for usage time vs total errors, which is exceptionally high. This suggests a nearly linear relationship where more TikTok minutes predicts more translation mistakes. Below is the breakdown by error type:

- usage vs grammatical errors: $r \approx +0.89$
- usage vs spelling errors: $r \approx +0.86$

All correlations were significant at the $p < .001$ level. Figure 2 shows a scatterplot of daily TikTok minutes against total errors, illustrating this tight, upward trend. In practical terms, students who spent minimal time on TikTok (under 30 min) typically made under five errors, while those at the extreme high end (around three hours) made 25–30 errors. For every additional hour on TikTok, students tended to make 8–10 more translation mistakes. While correlation does not prove causation, it can be said that the strength of this association is notable. It remains robust even when controlling for self-reported study hours and academic performance; TikTok use itself was the strongest predictor of poor translation outcomes in our data.

D. Error Pattern Analysis

Beyond the sheer quantity of errors, we examined whether the types of errors differed by usage group. Interestingly, both grammatical and spelling errors increased in tandem with TikTok use—heavy users didn't disproportionately favor one kind of mistake; they made more of both kinds. Among grammatical errors, the most frequent across the whole sample were:

- incorrect use of prepositions (e.g., using the wrong preposition in Arabic; 25 occurrences, mostly in moderate/high users)
- misplaced modifiers (e.g., incorrect word order for adjectives; 19 instances)
- incorrect sentence structure (e.g., sentence fragment or wrong clause order; 18 instances)
- improper verb tense usage (18 instances)
- subject-verb agreement errors (16 instances)

High-usage students often accumulated several of these in one translation. For example, a heavy user might misuse multiple prepositions and also form a couple of grammatically incomplete sentences. Low-usage students, by contrast, if they erred at all, usually had at most one of these issues in their text.

For spelling/orthography, common problems included:

- misspelling of common words (19 total cases)
- confusion between similar-looking letters (e.g., mixing up ٤/٥ or ٣/٤ in Arabic; 19 cases)
- missing diacritical marks where needed for meaning (18 cases) (Though use of diacritics is often optional, errors were counted when meaning was affected.)
- incorrect use of hamza (ء) (17 cases)
- incorrect spacing between words or after punctuation (13 cases)

Again, heavy users tended to exhibit several of these in each translation, indicating sloppy or rushed writing, whereas light users had perhaps a single typographical error or no errors at all. One interpretation is that heavy users not only struggle with complex grammar but may also pay less attention to detail, leading to more typographical errors. This complements their survey feedback reporting reduced focus.

E. Self-Reported vs Actual Performance

The survey's self-evaluation of translation quality ("Perceived Translation Quality") aligned closely with the objective results. All low-usage students had rated their own translation ability as "high quality" or "good" in the survey, which matched their low error counts. In contrast, every heavy user had self-rated as "low quality"—possibly aware of their difficulties—and indeed their error counts were high. Moderate users mostly self-identified as "moderate quality," which our grading confirmed. This consistency adds credibility to the performance data and suggests students have some awareness of how TikTok might be affecting them. It is telling that even students themselves recognize a drop in their translation quality with increased TikTok usage.

Finally, qualitative comments from the open-ended survey questions provided illustrative context. Common themes are described below, arranged by participant grouping.

Heavy Users

Heavy users frequently mentioned a loss of concentration. For example, one student wrote, "After scrolling TikTok late into the night, I can't focus on translating texts the next day—my mind wanders." Others noted "rushing through homework to get back on TikTok," which could explain the careless errors. A sense of regret was apparent, with many heavy users saying they "wish to reduce TikTok use" because they notice it hurting their academics.

Moderate Users

This group showed mixed feelings. Some believed TikTok provided useful mental breaks or even occasional language tips (e.g., exposure to English media on TikTok), but many still cautioned that "too much scrolling makes it hard to stay on task." A few mentioned they try to limit usage during weekdays as a strategy.

Light Users

Nearly all light users expressed that limiting social media use was a deliberate choice to protect their study time. Comments like, "I only use TikTok as a reward after finishing my work," or "I prefer not to get too absorbed; it's how I maintain my grades" were common. These students did not report significant negative impact—in fact, some credited their minimal TikTok use as a factor helping them achieve "excellent" academic performance.

The findings consistently point to a detrimental effect of heavy TikTok usage on translation performance. Students who spent more time on TikTok made substantially more translation errors and struggled with focus, whereas those who limited their use did much better. The next section will discuss these results in light of cognitive theories and prior research, exploring possible explanations for the strong link observed between TikTok and translation outcomes.

V. DISCUSSION

The results of this study reveal a clear pattern: increased TikTok usage is associated with lower translation performance among translation students. This aligns with the growing body of literature suggesting that excessive engagement with short-form video platforms can impair academic and cognitive abilities (Xu et al., 2023; Sha & Dong, 2021). The heavy TikTok users in our sample exhibited classic signs of what cognitive psychologists would describe as attention fragmentation and cognitive overload. They made numerous errors in their translations, likely because the mental faculties required—sustained attention, working memory for grammar rules, and careful proofreading—were compromised by their habitual content consumption behavior.

One useful lens to interpreting these findings is cognitive load theory (Sweller, 1988).¹ According to this theory, working memory has limited capacity, and excessive stimuli can overwhelm a learner's ability to process information. TikTok's fast-paced streams of videos could be contributing to a high extraneous cognitive load on students' minds. Every few seconds on TikTok, users must reset their attention to a new video context and parse new audio-visual information, often experiencing a dopamine-driven emotional reaction. This constant resetting and stimulation trains the brain for quick shifts, not prolonged focus. When a heavy user then sits down to perform a translation, their brain may be less adept at filtering out distractions and maintaining the thread of a complex task. The high error rates among heavy users support this; their cognitive resources might be depleted or misallocated due to their media habits. This is consistent with Bhandari and Beswick's (2025) experimental finding that adolescents made more mistakes on memory and attention tasks after a TikTok viewing session, whereas they performed better after a reading session. The TikTok condition in their study likely induced a form of cognitive overload or "spotlight" attention that couldn't be easily refocused on subsequent tasks. In our context, heavy TikTok users similarly appeared less able to muster the concentration needed for translation, echoing the idea that short-form media consumption can have detrimental short-term effects on attention and memory.

Additionally, the concept of attentional inertia and multitasking is relevant. Once students become accustomed to the multitasking environment of social media (swiping, watching, commenting simultaneously), they may develop a habitual need for constant stimulation as that may eventually affect the quality of focus in learning. Guo and Liu (2022) note that digital content often requires frequent attention switches, which might train rapid shifting at the expense of deep focus. Our heavy users indeed reported difficulty in focusing on one thing for long (responding "Yes, often" to focus difficulty items in our survey) and their translations showed evidence of lapses that could result from letting their minds wander (e.g., leaving sentences unfinished or making obvious mistakes, as if they weren't fully attending to the text). This

¹ Cognitive Load Theory (CLT), initially proposed by Sweller (1988), describes how tasks that impose heavy demands on cognitive-processing capacity can hinder learning by limiting the mental resources available for acquiring new schemas or knowledge structures (Sweller, 1988, p. 261).

suggests that overuse of TikTok could diminish a student's ability to sustain attention on a single task, a conclusion also drawn by other researchers studying the impact of short videos on learning.

The correlation between TikTok time and errors ($r \sim 0.9$) in this study is remarkably high. While one must be cautious in interpreting such a strong correlation (there could be third variables, and the sample is moderate in size), it does raise the question of causality and direction. It is plausible that heavy TikTok use causes poorer performance by the mechanisms discussed (distraction, reduced study time, cognitive overload). However, we should also consider if students who naturally struggle with translation might be more inclined to escape into TikTok (i.e., reverse causation). For instance, a student who finds translating difficult or tedious might procrastinate by scrolling videos, thus accumulating more TikTok hours. Some of our qualitative data hints at this loop: a few heavy users admitted they use TikTok as a procrastination tool to avoid challenging homework. In such cases, the relationship can become cyclical—TikTok use impedes progress, which leads to frustration and further avoidance via TikTok. Over time, this vicious cycle could significantly erode translation competence. Breaking this cycle would require interventions both on the behavioral level (reducing screen time, as many students expressed a desire to do) and on the motivational level (helping students engage more with the translation process so it feels less burdensome).

The findings also resonate with the concept of cognitive and metacognitive self-regulation. The light users in our study seem to have better self-regulatory habits—they budget their time, they consciously limit distractions, and they possibly engage more in deep work. Many light users had excellent academic records and presumably well-honed study routines. This group's success in translation tasks aligns with what we'd expect if effective self-regulation shields one from the negative impacts of social media. On the other hand, heavy users perhaps lacked such self-discipline or fell into habitual overuse. This dovetails with Li et al. (2024), who found that the impact of social media on student performance was moderated by factors like academic self-efficacy and self-control. In their study, students with higher self-efficacy could use social media (even for collaboration or learning) without suffering academically, whereas those with lower self-regulation saw performance drops. In our context, the heavy users might represent lower self-regulation, allowing TikTok to consume time and attention, whereas light users either have higher self-regulation or inherently prioritize academics.

Our error type analysis offers additional insight into how cognitive effects might manifest. Heavy users didn't just make one kind of mistake; they made more of every kind. This widespread increase in errors suggests a general decline in carefulness and cognitive precision. It's not as if they still applied grammar correctly but just had more typographical errors, or vice versa—rather, their entire translation process was less rigorous. A possible explanation is increased cognitive load and fatigue: if a student's mental resources are taxed (perhaps by late-night TikTok binges leading to tiredness, or by a mind primed for distraction), they may fail to thoroughly apply grammar rules and fail to catch spelling mistakes. It's well documented that divided attention impairs both higher-order and lower-order tasks; for example, in driving simulations, phone-distracted drivers make both strategic errors (wrong turns) and tactical errors (lane swerves) (Strayer & Johnston, 2001). Similarly, our heavy users under a form of "attention deficit" made strategic errors (grammar) and tactical errors (spelling). This broad impairment aligns with cognitive load theory's prediction that an overwhelmed working memory will lead to errors across the board, not just in one specific area (Sweller, 1988).

It is also worth discussing the role of sleep and time of day, as these might indirectly affect performance. Hu and Li's (2023) survey noted that the majority of college students watched short videos between 5 p.m. and midnight. In our sample, many heavy users listed evening and late-night as their primary TikTok times. It is conceivable that heavy TikTok users are cutting into their sleep or peak mental hours, leaving them fatigued or less alert when performing academic work. Some heavy users explicitly mentioned staying up late on TikTok. Sleep deprivation is known to harm concentration and increase error rates (Lim & Dinges, 2010). While our study didn't measure sleep, this could be an underlying factor connecting high usage to poor performance. Essentially, TikTok could be indirectly affecting translation competence by reducing the quantity or quality of study time and rest.

On a more optimistic note, our findings do not necessarily condemn all TikTok usage. The moderate group performed reasonably, and some even pointed out minor benefits (like picking up new vocabulary or getting quick breaks to refresh). This suggests a balanced use of TikTok—in moderation and perhaps with educational content—might be compatible with maintaining translation skills. The key is that usage must be controlled and not allowed to interfere with study routines. The literature supports this nuanced view; for example, some scholars argue that short video platforms might be integrated into language education as a tool, rather than simply being seen as a distraction. Gong and Tao (2024), for instance, discuss collaborative learning possibilities. However, controlling TikTok usage requires guidance and self-discipline on the student's part, to avoid the slippery slope from a "5-minute educational video" to an hour of mindless scrolling.

Our study's qualitative feedback underscores students' awareness of the issue. Many heavy users expressed a desire to curb their TikTok habits, indicating they recognize the trade-off they're making. This is encouraging, as recognition is the first step to change. Educators could leverage this self-awareness by developing workshops or advising sessions on time management and digital wellness tailored for students in demanding fields like translation. Since translation requires intensive practice, perhaps framing TikTok overuse as directly detrimental to a skill they care about (and have felt the effects of) could motivate behavior change.

In terms of limitations of our research, we acknowledge that our sample size is modest and specific to one university program. Larger studies across multiple institutions would be valuable to generalize findings. Additionally, while we established correlation, experimental or longitudinal designs would help confirm causality—for instance, an intervention

that asks students to reduce TikTok use for a semester to see if their translation performance improves relative to a control group. Another limitation is that translation performance was measured on a single task. We assumed it reflects general skill, but performance can fluctuate. Repeated measures or a portfolio of translations would increase reliability. Despite these limitations, the extremely clear-cut differences observed (with essentially no overlap between heavy and low users in error rates) give us confidence in the robustness of the effect in our sample.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study provides compelling evidence that excessive TikTok use can adversely affect translation performance in university students. Heavy daily engagement with TikTok was associated with dramatically higher rates of grammatical and spelling errors in a translation task, as well as self-reported difficulties in concentration and study habits. In contrast, students who limited their TikTok usage to less than an hour a day maintained strong translation quality and reported little to no negative academic impact. These findings contribute to the growing understanding of how short-form digital content consumption intersects with cognitive academic skills, highlighting both the potential risks and the importance of self-regulation.

The implications extend beyond translation studies. Translation here served as a proxy for tasks requiring sustained attention, complex reasoning, and detail orientation. The clear pattern of poorer outcomes with heavier TikTok use likely applies to other academic activities like writing essays, solving problems, or reading comprehension. As such, educators and students should be mindful of the opportunity costs of extensive social media use. Time spent on TikTok is not just time taken away from studying; it may also actively impair the quality of subsequent study by overloading the brain or fragmenting attention.

However, banning or demonizing TikTok is not a straightforward solution. Given the platform's popularity and potential to offer creative or educational content, a more productive approach is moderation and mindful use. Universities could offer digital literacy modules that teach students how to manage screen time and recognize signs of distraction. For translation instructors, an interesting pedagogical strategy might be to explicitly discuss with students how attention works and why translation requires a certain mental state, which constant multitasking can undermine. Our participants' awareness of their problem suggests that such conversations would be well received.

In future research, it would be worthwhile to explore if qualitative aspects of TikTok content have differential effects—for example, do students who mostly watch educational TikToks do better than those who watch only entertainment skits? Additionally, investigating long-term effects would be important (e.g., “Does heavy TikTok use over years lead to a lasting decline in language proficiency?”). Since our data and other recent studies hint at attention span as a mediating factor, interventions to improve attention (like mindfulness training) in tandem with reduced TikTok use could be tested for their impact on academic performance. Furthermore, future studies might include both genders within the sample and integrate personality assessment instruments such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI®) or CliftonStrengths assessment (Gallup®). This will help examine whether gender or personality traits moderate the relationship between TikTok usage and academic outcomes.

In conclusion, the balance between digital life and academic success is a defining challenge for today's students. This research, focusing on translation performance, underscores a simple yet significant trade-off: the more hours one scrolls short videos, the more one's careful writing and translation skills may suffer. By recognizing this trade-off, students can make informed choices about their media consumption. Moderating TikTok use, especially during weekdays, and practicing sustained focus could not only improve their translation assignments but also enrich their overall learning experience in the long run. The immediate gratification of TikTok must be weighed against the cumulative rewards of deep, undistracted study—a lesson that extends to all of us navigating the distractions of the digital age.

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Integrating Linguistic Diversity Into Kazakhstani Education: A Review of ELT Textbooks

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Abstract—This study examines the integration of linguistic diversity in English Language Teaching (ELT) textbooks used in Kazakhstan, to assess their effectiveness in reflecting the country's multilingual landscape. The research employed an analysis of English as Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks utilized in Kazakhstani educational institutions, as well as a survey conducted among educators. The objectives were to identify challenges and propose recommendations for improvement in the teaching and learning of English. The results showed: 1) an overview of all textbooks available for English teaching in Kazakhstan for grades 1-11; 2) the distinctive features of the textbooks currently used for the 11th grade by comparing them in terms of structural and linguodidactic features, their benefits and drawbacks; 3) the survey among fifty EFL teachers from local schools highlighting their insights into the usage of these textbooks. According to the survey results, contemporary FLT manuals face challenges, despite some notable advantages, such as comprehensive coverage of the four essential language skills and adherence to academic norms. The principal areas for improvement were the shortage of culturally appropriate information, especially regarding Kazakhstani history and culture, and the inadequate emphasis on speaking and using the language practically. "Action for Kazakhstan" offers culturally appropriate content that supports national assessment objectives and relates to Kazakhstani curricular standards, while "English in Mind. Level 4 for Kazakhstan" exposes pupils to a wider range of cultural viewpoints. Thus, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on enhancing educational practices in Kazakhstan, promoting an inclusive environment that values and reflects the country's linguistic richness.

Index Terms—multilingualism, ELT textbooks, language policy, education, Kazakhstan

I. INTRODUCTION

Kazakhstani linguistic landscape is marked by its rich diversity, with Kazakh, Russian, and a variety of minority languages spoken across the country (Ormanova & Anafinova, 2022). Considering this, the educational system faces significant challenges in promoting linguistic diversity, particularly in the realm of English Language Teaching (ELT) (Gerfanova et al., 2025). Moreover, the employment of English in cross-cultural interactions has risen among individuals from countries that do not primarily speak English or are not Anglophone, as a result of the expanding appeal of English as a common language and various forms of World Englishes (Mahbub et al., 2024). As English has become a global lingua franca, its integration into domestic educational curricula has been pivotal in preparing students for an interconnected world. However, the question of how to address and reflect Kazakhstan's linguistic diversity within ELT textbooks remains underexplored. In this context, the integration of local languages and cultural aspects into ELT materials is crucial, not only to enhance students' language proficiency but also to respect and acknowledge their linguistic backgrounds.

The concept of multilingualism is significant as it was included in the European Commission's policy publications, whereby pertinent concerns were discussed extensively. Reasons for commitment to multilingualism and promoting it in European society are outlined in "The New Framework Strategy for Multilingualism" (European Commission, 2005). Alongside, in Kazakhstan, the head of the country launched an initiative known as "The Trinity of Languages" in 2004 (Aubakirova et al., 2019). The President emphasized the need for Kazakhstan to be recognized as an educated nation with three operating languages: Kazakh as the state language, Russian for international communication, and English for global economic integration. Following this, the State Program for the Development and functioning of Languages for 2011–2020 was approved in 2011. The main objective of this initiative is to establish a successful language approach

that honors the linguistic variety of every ethnic community, while also encouraging the broad adoption of the official language to strengthen national cohesion (Terlikbayeva & Menlibekova, 2021).

Thus, this paper aims to review current ELT textbooks used in Kazakhstani secondary schools, analyzing their approach to linguistic diversity and offering recommendations for more inclusive pedagogical practices. By doing so, it seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on effective language education in multilingual societies like Kazakhstan. The study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the key characteristics of ELT textbooks used in Kazakhstani secondary education?

RQ2: What is teachers' perception of ELT textbooks in terms of challenges in usage and suggestions for improving?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Multilingualism in Educational Settings

Multilingualism refers to the ability of individuals to comprehend, speak, read, or write in multiple languages. In the educational context, it encompasses not only the knowledge and use of several languages but also the pedagogical practices that facilitate language learning in a diverse linguistic environment. Multilingual education recognizes and values the linguistic diversity students bring to the classroom, aiming to enhance cognitive, social, and cultural outcomes. It promotes the idea that being multilingual is an asset, fostering not only personal development but also social cohesion in increasingly globalized societies (García & Wei, 2014).

In classrooms, multilingualism can manifest through various pedagogical approaches, such as translanguaging, where students leverage their entire linguistic repertoire for learning and communication. This not only encourages language proficiency but also enhances critical thinking, empathy, and intercultural communication skills among students, preparing them for a world where multilingualism is a norm rather than an exception (Goodman et al., 2021). Effective multilingual education strategies include creating an inclusive curriculum that honours all languages represented in the classroom, implementing language support programs, and teacher training that emphasizes bilingual or multilingual teaching competencies (Cummins, 2000).

Moreover, the benefits of multilingualism extend beyond language skills. Individuals learning multiple languages frequently display increased mental capabilities, including better problem-solving abilities and enhanced creativity. They are also likely to demonstrate a deeper understanding of and sensitivity to diverse cultures, which is essential in our globally connected society. By fostering multilingualism in educational settings, educators can contribute to the development of well-rounded individuals capable of navigating and contributing to diverse cultural landscapes.

B. State Policy Regarding Multilingual Education in Kazakhstan

In Kazakhstan, the policy known as "The Trinity of Languages," introduced by the country's president, was launched in 2004. At the session of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan in 2006, the President highlighted the importance of having proficiency in three languages for the nation's future. Later in the Presidential speech "New Kazakhstan in a New World" some crucial directions were proposed as bringing in educators from outside the country and initiating the gradual rollout of trilingual education. Furthermore, in a state program "Kazakhstan-2050", the country's leader emphasized the need for high school graduates to be fluent in three languages (Aubakirova et al., 2019).

The "State Program for the Functioning and Development of Languages for 2011-2020" is being implemented based on the "Trinity of Languages" initiative and unfolds in three phases. The initial phase from 2011 to 2013 focuses on enhancing the regulatory framework and methodological foundations for language development. The second phase, covering 2014 to 2016, revolves around the adoption of teaching technologies, and methods, ensuring linguistic diversity, and practical applications. The final phase from 2017 to 2020 aims to promote the use of other languages, appreciate the necessity of the state language in public spheres, and fulfil the need for quality outcomes in monitoring systems. Currently, the documents as the Concept of Development of Preschool, Secondary, Technical, and Vocational Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2023-2029 (dated March 28, 2023, No. 249), Government Resolution (dated June 13, 2024, No. 465), State Educational Standards (SES), educational curricula and programs maintain existing structural frameworks for multilingualism in the country (Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, n. d.).

In the country, the Kazakh language serves as the primary component of the country's trilingual policy (Kazakh-Russian-English) and it is designated as the state language by the Constitution and the Law on Languages. In a survey conducted by Koptleuova et al. (2023), respondents were asked to identify their mother tongue by answering the question "What language do you consider native?" The findings indicated that 67.9% of participants identified Kazakh as their native language, while 20.1% chose Russian and 12.1% selected other languages. Among ethnic Kazakhs, an overwhelming 99.9% identified Kazakh as their mother tongue, in stark contrast to only 0.4% of respondents from other ethnic groups who reported the same preference.

The State Program for the Implementation of Language Policy in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2020–2025 states that a harmonious language policy will be conducted to modernize the Kazakh language using the Latin alphabet, enhancing language development and language culture, and guaranteeing the full-fledged use of Kazakh as the official language. By drawing comparisons between the KAZTEST multilevel language proficiency assessment system and the

British IELTS and American TOEFL, a multilevel assessment system has been developed. More than one hundred specialists have received philology and linguistics-related training at the top world universities through the Bolashak program. Moreover, most senior kindergarten groups are studying the alphabet of Kazakh, Russian, and English simultaneously to conduct the trilingual policy. According to the KAZTEST system, by 2029 the percentage of government servants proficient in Kazakh will rise to 50% (it was 35% in 2023), 94% of documents in government agencies and national businesses will be in Kazakh (91% in 2023). Furthermore, 84% of TV shows on state TV networks broadcast in the official language will be available (70% in 2023). At international conferences held in Kazakhstan and at its diplomatic posts overseas, 75% of attendees will speak Kazakh (52% in 2023). Besides, by 2029, 75% of graduates from schools where non-Kazakh languages are taught will be proficient in the state language at the B2 level, compared to 45% in 2023 (Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2023).

In secondary education organizations, where Kazakh is the medium of instruction, first-grade pupils study Kazakh, second-grade pupils are introduced to Russian, third-graders study English; while in Russian-speaking schools, first-graders study both Kazakh and Russian with English added in the third grade. The fundamental principle of education focuses on the development of four types of speech activities: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Regardless of the language of instruction, students in grades 5 and 10 are required to take a test in Kazakh. To enhance proficiency in both Kazakh and English, an additional curricular hour is allocated for English in grades 10 and 11, with students divided into groups to facilitate learning. Nonetheless, as seen by global experience, the most successful approaches to teaching English involve introducing it as a subject to study from grades 9 through 12 and then putting it into practice by increasing the quantity and calibre of instruction. International experience also suggests universities are the best places to create additional English-language academic fields (Kaiypova & Kim, 2024).

The Ministry of Education and Science regularly review the textbook selection process to ensure that Kazakhstani students have access to high-quality resources for learning the English language. Currently, Kazakhstani schools use various English language learning resources from domestic and international publishers approved by the Rules for Provision of Textbooks and Textbook Complexes to Students and Pupils based on factors such as student age, preparedness, and learning objectives. The most used English language textbook series in Kazakhstani schools include “Smiles for Kazakhstan” by Express Publishing for primary education; “English Plus for Kazakhstan” and “Excel for Kazakhstan” by Express Publishing for grades 5-9; “Action for Kazakhstan” and “Aspect for Kazakhstan” Express Publishing for grades 10-11 (Table 1). The textbooks are available at <https://okulyk.kz/category/anglijskij-jazyk/>.

TABLE 1
ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEXTBOOK SERIES IN KAZAKHSTANI SCHOOLS

Grade	Manual
Grade 1	Smiles 1 for Kazakhstan Virginia Evans
Grade 2	Smiles 2 for Kazakhstan Pupil's Book Virginia Evans
Grade 3	Smiles 3 for Kazakhstan (Grade 3) Pupil's Book Virginia Evans
Grade 4	Smiles for Kazakhstan Grade 4 Pupil's Book Dooley Jenny
Grade 5	English Plus (Grade 5) (Kazakhstan Edition) Janet Hardy-Bould; Eyes Open 1 for Kazakhstan Grade 5 Student's book Goldstein Ben; Excel for Kazakhstan (Grade 5) Student's book Virginia Evans
Grade 6	Laser A1+ for Kazakhstan (Grade 6) Student's Book Malcolm Mann; English Plus (Grade 6). Student's book (Kazakhstan Edition) Wetz Ben; Full Blast for Kazakhstan, Grade 6 Student's Book Mitchel H.Q.; English Plus for Kazakhstan (Grade 6) Workbook Janet Hardy-Bould; Excel for Kazakhstan (Grade 6) Student's book Virginia Evans; Eyes Open 2 for Kazakhstan (Grade 6) Student's book Goldstein Ben
Grade 7	Eyes Open 3 for Kazakhstan Grade 7 Student's book Goldstein Ben; Excel for Kazakhstan (Grade 7) Student's book Virginia Evans; English Plus for Kazakhstan (Grade 7). Student's book Wetz Ben; English Plus (Grade 7). Workbook (Kazakhstan Edition) Janet Hardy-Bould
Grade 8	Eyes Open 4 for Kazakhstan (Grade 8) Student's book Goldstein Ben; Excel for Kazakhstan (Grade 8) Student's book Virginia Evans; English Plus for Kazakhstan (Grade 8) Student's Book Wetz Ben; Full Blast for Kazakhstan Grade 8 Student's Book Mitchel H.Q.; English Plus (Grade 7). Workbook (Kazakhstan Edition) Janet Hardy-Bould;
Grade 9	Laser B1 for Kazakhstan (Grade 8) Student's Book Malcolm Mann. English Plus (Grade 7). Workbook (Kazakhstan Edition) Janet Hardy-Bould; English Plus for Kazakhstan (Grade 9) Student's book Wetz Ben; Think for Kazakhstan Grade 9 Herbert Puchta; Full Blast for Kazakhstan Grade 9 Student's book Mitchel H.Q.;
Grade 10	Excel for Kazakhstan (Grade 9) Student's book Jenny Dooley; Laser B1+ for Kazakhstan (Grade 9) Student's Book Malcolm Mann Action for Kazakhstan Grade 10 (Science Schools) Student's book Jenny Dooley; English Sciences Grade 10 Student's book Williams Jessica;
Grade 11	Aspect for Kazakhstan Grade 10 (Grammar Schools) Student's book Jenny Dooley; Action for Kazakhstan Grade 11 (Science Schools) Student's book Jenny Dooley; Aspect for Kazakhstan Grade 11 (Grammar Schools) Student's book Jenny Dooley; Laser B2 for Kazakhstan (Grade 10) Student's Book Malcolm Mann; English in Mind. Level 4 4 for Kazakhstan, Students book, Grade 11, Herbert Puchta, Jeff Stranks.

Currently, the younger population of Kazakhstan is being thoroughly assimilated into and affected by multilingual education as it is now included in the courses offered by universities. Regarding politics, the acknowledgement and application of multilingual education in Kazakhstan rely on the decisions made by local authorities. The legislation for a multilingual policy is already established and has been validated by the state programs.

III. METHODOLOGY

The research was undertaken in two stages.

The initial stage aimed to examine the two manuals. These are selected based on the guidelines established by the Minister of Education and Science of Kazakhstan, aligning with the national educational policy. We conducted a comparative analysis between “Action for Kazakhstan Grade 11 (Science Schools) Student’s book Jenny Dooley” and “English in Mind. Level 4 for Kazakhstan, Students book, Grade 11, Herbert Puchta, Jeff Stranks”. The reason for choosing these textbooks lies in comparing the resources from a diachronic perspective, although both are used for English classes.

In the second stage, we surveyed English language teachers to evaluate FLT manuals from the perspective of educators who use these textbooks in their classrooms. A survey was designed to gather detailed information regarding the demographics of the teachers, their experiences with current FLT manuals, and their views on the effectiveness and limitations of these resources in teaching a foreign language.

A. Survey Design

The survey was structured to cover multiple aspects of foreign language teaching, focusing on teachers' demographic information, their professional background, educational qualifications, preferences regarding language teaching materials, and their satisfaction with the current textbooks. The survey aimed to identify challenges faced by teachers and potential improvements they would recommend for FLT manuals. The questions were divided into several sections to ensure a comprehensive assessment:

- demographics: age, gender, and professional experience.
- educational background: academic qualifications.
- textbook selection: factors influencing the choice of FLT manuals.
- textbook effectiveness: teachers’ satisfaction with textbooks in achieving learning objectives, covering key language skills, and including culturally relevant content.
- digital and supplementary resources: preferences for the inclusion of digital tools, online platforms, and additional resources.
- challenges and suggestions: teachers’ perspectives on the limitations of current FLT textbooks and recommendations for improvement.

The survey was a combination of multiple-choice questions and Likert-scale items, allowing for both quantitative and qualitative data to be gathered. It was administered online via a Google Form link, ensuring accessibility for teachers across various regions. Teachers were invited to participate through email and educational networks. They were told about the purpose of the survey, the confidential nature of their answers, and the fact that participation was voluntary. The survey lasted about 5 minutes.

B. Participants

The survey targeted 50 educators involved in teaching English as a second foreign language in Kazakhstan. The sample included a diverse group of teachers with different levels of teaching experience, academic qualifications, and areas of expertise.

The research followed ethical standards during data collection like rights regarding confidentiality, and no personal details were obtained. Every response was kept anonymous, and taking part was completely optional. Educators had the choice to exit the study at any moment without facing any repercussions. The information collected was kept safe and could only be accessed by the research team for evaluation.

IV. RESULTS

A. Comparative Analysis of "Action for Kazakhstan" and "English in Mind. Level 4 for Kazakhstan"

Firstly, we analyzed the following textbooks: "Action for Kazakhstan Grade 11 (Science Schools) Student’s book, Jenny Dooley" (Dooley, 2020) and "English in Mind 4. Level 4 for Kazakhstan, Students book, Grade 11, Herbert Puchta, Jeff Stranks" (Puchta et al., 2012) by comparing their basic features (Figure 1).



Figure 1. English Language Textbooks Used for Grade 11 in Kazakhstan

The study reveals the differential characteristics of the textbooks regarding content, pedagogical approach, and alignment with curriculum standards. It provides insights into how each manual supports the targeted learning outcomes and competencies within the context of Kazakhstan's educational objectives (Table 2).

TABLE 2
COMPARISON OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING RESOURCES FOR 11TH GRADE IN KAZAKHSTAN

Feature	Action For Kazakhstan (Science Schools)	English in Mind. Level 4 for Kazakhstan (2nd edition)
Year	2020	2012
Page	173	148
Publication	Atamura, Express Publishing	Cambridge University Press
Author	Jenny Dooley	Herbert Puchta, Jeff Stranks, Peter Lewis-Jones
Translator(s)	N. Mukhamedjanova	E. Aystrakhanova, N. Mukhamedjanova
Grade	11	11
Level	Upper-Intermediate B2	Upper-Intermediate B2
Unit	9	14
Materials - Student's Book	Student's Book	Student's Book with DVD-ROM (Kazakhstan edition)
Materials - Workbook	Workbook & Grammar Book	Workbook
Materials - Teacher's Book	Teacher's Book	Teacher's Resource Book
Materials - DVD	DVD Video (PAL)	DVD (PAL), DVD (NTSC)
Materials - e-Book	e-Book software (offline for Windows, MacOSX)	-
Materials - Audio	-	Audio CDs (4)
Materials - Test resources	-	Testmaker Audio CD/CD-ROM
Materials - Activity Book	DVD Activity Book, DVD Activity Book Key	-
Additional Resources	Workbook & Grammar Book, DVD Activity Book Key	Testmaker Audio CD/CD-ROM

As for a multimedia-rich learning environment, "English in Mind. Level 4 for Kazakhstan" offers a wider range of multimedia tools and assessment materials. However, "Action for Kazakhstan" focuses specifically on offline e-book accessibility and grammar tools, which may accommodate varying learning styles and technological constraints in classrooms. This comparison highlights the different strategies used to promote English language instruction in Kazakhstani classrooms, each of which has its advantages and resources.

Both are designed for 11th-grade students at the Upper-Intermediate (B2) proficiency level with translations provided by N. Mukhamedjanova. This indicates that both textbooks address comparable content concerning grammar, vocabulary, and the development of language skills appropriate for learners at this stage. Furthermore, both textbooks have been localized for the Kazakhstani educational context. This localization reflects the cultural and educational needs of Kazakhstani learners by integrating themes and texts relevant to the local context.

The researched manuals aim to enhance learners' proficiency in English as a foreign language, concentrating on the four key language skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. A significant similarity is that both textbooks are supported by reputable international publishers - Express Publishing and Cambridge University Press. This affiliation with established publishing houses underscores their adherence to modern and well-regarded language teaching methodologies.

Despite these similarities, several key differences exist between the two textbooks. Firstly, the authorship and publication dates diverge notably. "Action for Kazakhstan" was published in 2020, suggesting it may incorporate contemporary methodologies and reflect recent updates to the curriculum in Kazakhstan. Conversely, "English in Mind. Level 4 for Kazakhstan" was released in 2012, potentially reflecting slightly older pedagogical approaches.

In terms of content focus, “Action for Kazakhstan” (Unit 9, page 173) appears to emphasize thematic units tailored to contemporary topics and issues pertinent to Kazakhstan, while “English in Mind. Level 4 for Kazakhstan” (Unit 14, page 148) adheres more closely to the global structure of the “English in Mind” series, which targets an international audience, albeit with localization for Kazakhstani students.

Another important distinction lies in curricular integration. “Action for Kazakhstan” seems to be more aligned with the national educational standards of the country, potentially incorporating recent revisions to the country's English language teaching curriculum. In contrast, “English in Mind. Level 4” may retain much of its international curriculum structure, despite its adaptation to the local context.

Finally, the emphasis of the publishers diverges between the two textbooks. Express Publishing, the publisher of “Action for Kazakhstan”, may offer a broader range of supplementary resources and materials specifically designed for non-native English speakers. In contrast, Cambridge University Press is known for its global focus on teaching English as an international language, emphasizing adherence to universal language learning standards.

(a). *Structural Features*

Both textbooks “Action for Kazakhstan” and “English in Mind. Level 4 for Kazakhstan” exhibit structural frameworks aimed at teaching the four core language skills: speaking, reading, listening, and writing. However, there are notable differences in content organization and emphasis on specific language aspects.

“Action for Kazakhstan” is structured into nine modules, each divided into six parts (a–f), with each part occupying two pages, except for part f, which is limited to one page. Each module begins with a two-page introductory “Starter” section and concludes with a “Language in Use” segment, followed by a two-page “Progress Check” that assesses reading, listening, writing, grammar, and vocabulary (totaling 100 points). This organization emphasizes systematic skill development, content coverage, and comprehensive assessment.

“English in Mind. Level 4 for Kazakhstan” is organized into fourteen units, each divided into two or three parts. Each unit starts with a four-page “Welcome Section” introducing the unit’s objectives and themes. Section length varies, with the first part usually occupying four pages, while subsequent parts span two to three pages. “Progress Checks” are administered after every two units and emphasize grammar and vocabulary, with a total of 22 points awarded. The more flexible structure may cater to learners who benefit from varied pacing.

While both curricula cover reading, listening, speaking, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation, “English in Mind. Level 4” places greater emphasis on pronunciation, reading, and listening as introductory activities but offers limited focus on writing. In contrast, “Action for Kazakhstan” prioritizes writing with a minimum of three tasks per module and includes a dedicated “D” unit focusing on various types of writing. Pronunciation instruction is de-emphasized, appearing at the end of the manual rather than within each module, while vocabulary is introduced at the beginning of each module, with the “Language in Use” section reinforcing vocabulary acquisition.

(b). *Linguodidactic Features*

The textbooks reflect distinct pedagogical approaches tailored to their target audiences.

“Action for Kazakhstan” adopts a structured, intensive pedagogical approach, integrating rigorous assessments and diverse content coverage. In addition to general language skills, it includes sections on pronunciation, vocabulary development (such as phrasal verbs, prepositional phrases, prefixes, and affixes), and British vs. American English. This level of detail makes it suitable for learners requiring a comprehensive, formal approach to language acquisition.

In contrast, “English in Mind. Level 4 for Kazakhstan” emphasizes an interactive, contextual learning experience, providing English-only definitions instead of translations to facilitate immersion. This approach encourages students to think directly in English and apply language contextually, particularly through regular assessments that are shorter and more frequent, enabling manageable progress tracking and reducing test anxiety. This structure appeals to students who benefit from continuous, immediate feedback.

(c). *Vocabulary and Pronunciation*

A significant divergence between the textbooks lies in their vocabulary and pronunciation methodologies.

“Action for Kazakhstan” emphasizes explicit vocabulary instruction, dedicating sections to phrasal verbs, prepositional phrases, and distinctions between American and British English. The inclusion of pronunciation sections highlights its focus on accurate language production and the importance of mastering formal and informal registers, as well as regional variations.

“English in Mind. Level 4 for Kazakhstan” relies on contextual vocabulary development, presenting English definitions that promote immersion without translation. Vocabulary is introduced naturally within reading and listening exercises, encouraging students to infer meaning from context and apply language in real-world situations. However, the limited emphasis on explicit pronunciation guidance may present a challenge for learners with structured phonetic support.

(d). *Assessment Methodology*

The assessment approaches of the two textbooks differ markedly, reflecting their pedagogical aims.

“Action for Kazakhstan” implements comprehensive, two-page “Progress Checks” at the end of each module, evaluating reading, listening, writing, grammar, and vocabulary. With a possible score of 100 points, these assessments provide detailed feedback on a broad range of language skills, supporting a holistic view of student progress.

“English in Mind. Level 4 for Kazakhstan” includes shorter, more focused assessments administered every two units, with a concentration on grammar and vocabulary. These assessments are scored out of 22 points, providing regular feedback in a manageable format. This method may suit students who benefit from frequent, low-stakes assessments that help maintain engagement and reduce test-related anxiety.

(e). Additional Features

“Action for Kazakhstan” includes a variety of tasks and features that foster critical thinking, communicative competence, cultural and cross-cultural understanding, and creativity. ICT-based project assignments requiring internet research are incorporated to develop student's research and analytical skills. Collaborative activities such as pair and group work further enhance teamwork and communication, while various tips and recommendations throughout the textbook encourage independent learning and problem-solving. The “Grammar Reference” section at the end of the textbook offers in-depth information on grammatical structures. Each unit also presents engaging facts relevant to the unit's theme and Kazakhstan, enhancing cultural awareness.

The national education standards of Kazakhstan, which specify the skills and learning objectives required at various grade levels, are followed in the development of both textbooks. This alignment guarantees that the resources fulfil the learning goals established by the Republic of Kazakhstan's Ministry of Education and Science. These textbooks frequently contain texts, examples, and themes related to Kazakhstani history, culture, and social issues. This localization increases students' enthusiasm to learn and helps them relate the content to their personal experiences.

Thus, “Action for Kazakhstan” provides a structured, content-rich learning experience ideal for students requiring formal, comprehensive language instruction, while “English in Mind. Level 4 for Kazakhstan” supports a more interactive, context-based learning approach suited for students who benefit from frequent assessments and immersive vocabulary development. These differences make each curriculum unique in its contribution to language learning based on student needs and educational goals.

(f). Benefits and Drawbacks

For English language learners in Kazakhstan, the presented textbooks possess benefits and difficulties. Both are made to fit the upper-intermediate (B2) level and cater to the demands of eleventh graders. “Action for Kazakhstan” offers culturally appropriate content that supports national assessment objectives and is closely connected with Kazakhstani curricular standards. Because of this emphasis, it works especially well for local students studying for national examinations and interacting with resources that represent Kazakhstani contexts and themes. “English in Mind. Level 4 for Kazakhstan” exposes pupils to a wider range of cultural viewpoints while adapting to the Kazakhstani environment and maintaining a large portion of its worldwide structure.

Additionally, it offers a variety of multimedia resources, including audio CDs and DVDs, which enhance the educational process and accommodate various learning preferences. However, “Action for Kazakhstan” places more of an emphasis on offline materials, such as a grammar book and e-books, which are appropriate for classes with little access to the internet. “Action for Kazakhstan” has a strong emphasis on vocabulary growth and disciplined grammar in its pedagogy, while also emphasizing critical thinking through regional topics. By employing English-only definitions and frequent, condensed assessments, “English in Mind. Level 4 for Kazakhstan” encourages an immersion-based strategy that lessens exam anxiety and offers ongoing feedback.

Textbooks, though, have their limitations. The absence of multimedia materials in “Action for Kazakhstan” may restrict student participation for those who gain from a variety of input formats. Furthermore, even though “English in Mind. Level 4 for Kazakhstan” incorporates multimedia, it was released in 2012 and might not accurately represent current curriculum revisions or current Kazakhstani subjects. Additionally, “Action for Kazakhstan” offers little pronunciation work and is toward the conclusion of the textbook, whereas “English in Mind. Level 4 for Kazakhstan” emphasizes writing practice and explicit pronunciation, both of which are crucial for students in a multilingual setting. In terms of assessment, “English in Mind. Level 4 for Kazakhstan” offers shorter, more frequent tests that are mostly focused on grammar and vocabulary, whereas “Action for Kazakhstan” offers thorough, in-depth tests that can be taxing and exacerbate test anxiety.

In conclusion, “English in Mind. Level 4 for Kazakhstan” offers a multimedia-rich, immersion-based experience that supports continuous progress, while “Action for Kazakhstan” offers a structured, locally relevant approach that is perfect for students who require thorough curriculum alignment. Both programs meet distinct educational needs in Kazakhstani classrooms.

B. The Survey Analysis

The data collected from the survey was analyzed using a combination of descriptive statistics and qualitative analysis to gain insights into the perceptions and experiences of foreign language teachers regarding the current FLT textbooks used in Kazakhstani secondary education institutions.

(a). Descriptive Statistics

The survey participants were predominantly female (95.2%). The age range of participants varied, with the majority (71.4%) falling between 20 and 30 years of age, followed by 14.3% in the 30-40 age range, and another 14.3% aged over 40. In terms of professional experience, a majority (61.9%) of the respondents had 2-3 years of teaching experience, nearly 25% had 10 or more years of experience, and 14.3% had between 5 to 10 years of experience. The data were analyzed to determine the highest educational qualifications of the respondents, with 50% holding a Master's degree, 28.6% holding a PhD, and less than 25% possessing a bachelor's degree. By focusing on key factors in textbook selection, the survey showed that 61.9% of teachers selected textbooks based primarily on curriculum guidelines, while fewer teachers (23.8%) made selections based on personal preference, and fewer (14.3%) followed school guidelines. So, most respondents select textbooks based on curriculum requirements, emphasizing the importance of alignment with national education standards.

Satisfaction with textbooks was assessed through multiple-choice and Likert-scale questions. Over 70% of the respondents expressed satisfaction with how well textbooks met learning objectives. Percentages were also calculated for responses related to cultural context and grammar/vocabulary coverage, revealing that 66.7% of teachers felt the textbooks addressed cultural context adequately, while 66.7% were satisfied with the coverage of key language skills (grammar, vocabulary, and skills).

Most teachers are satisfied with textbooks' effectiveness in achieving learning goals, confirming their overall usefulness in the educational process. Many also believe the textbooks adequately incorporate cultural context, which is crucial for connecting language and culture. However, some respondents are neutral or feel the cultural content is insufficient. Additionally, a significant number of teachers are content with the coverage of grammar and vocabulary, highlighting the importance of these elements in language skill development.

(b). *Qualitative Data Analysis*

The survey also included open-ended questions, which provided additional insights into the challenges teachers face and their suggestions for improving FLT textbooks.

Responses to the question "What challenges do you face in EFL textbooks?" revealed some common themes such as cultural relevance, digital resources, and practicing speaking skills. A significant number of teachers (42.9%) identified the lack of culturally relevant content as a primary challenge, particularly the absence of materials related to Kazakhstani culture and history. More than a third (38.1%) of respondents highlighted the need for increased emphasis on speaking and conversational skills in textbooks. Another key theme (9.5%) was the demand for more digital resources and interactive activities suggesting the addition of audio, video, and apps as supplementary materials. Thematic analysis also revealed that tutors preferred digital tools as additional resources in the FLT curriculum, while some expressed interest in the use of online platforms (Figure 2).

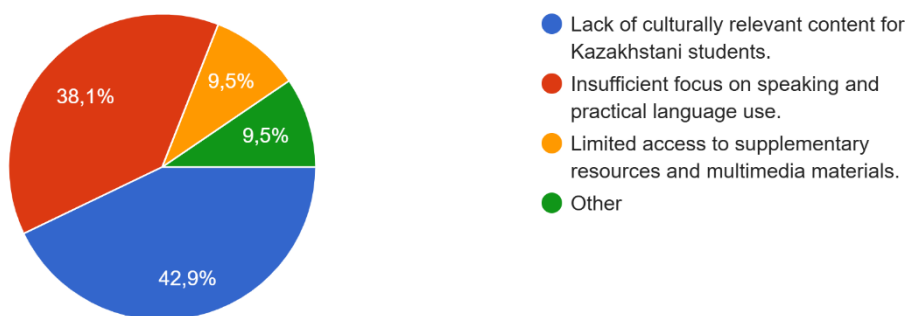


Figure 2. Challenges Faced by Teachers in FLT

Responses to the question "What changes would you suggest improving current EFL textbooks?" (Figure 3) revealed that textbooks must effectively incorporate the advances of ITC usage, cultural context, which is crucial for linking language and culture, with the focus on students' speaking skills. Almost half of the respondents (47.6%) suggest integrating more digital resources and interactive activities, such as audio, video, applications, and Internet platforms emphasizing the role of technology in learning. A third of educators (33.3%) have indicated a need for textbooks to integrate additional content on Kazakhstan's culture and history, underscoring the significance of localized material in enhancing relevance to the local context. However, some remain neutral or feel the cultural content is insufficient. Additionally, a smaller group of respondents believe more focus should be placed on developing speaking skills to enhance students' communication abilities. Other themes include critical thinking skills, time management, case study, etc.

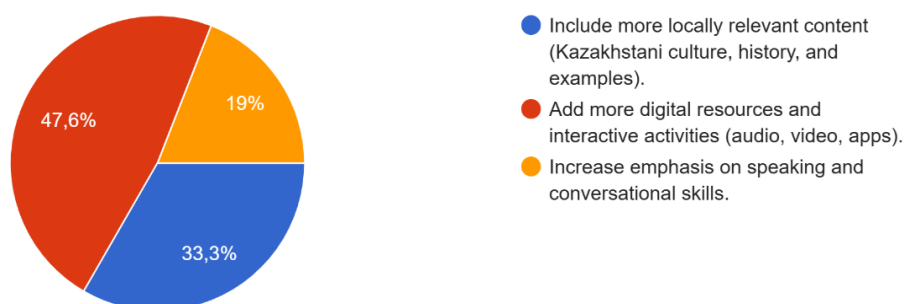


Figure 3. Suggestions for Improving FLT Textbooks

Thus, the quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated to provide a comprehensive understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the current FLT textbooks in Kazakhstani schools. For example, the satisfaction with textbooks in terms of their coverage of language skills (66.7% satisfaction) was aligned with teachers' suggestions for more interactive resources to enhance student engagement. These findings not only informed the current evaluation of textbooks but also pointed to areas for improvement, particularly in terms of cultural relevance and the inclusion of digital tools.

V. DISCUSSION

The integration of linguistic diversity in Kazakhstani education, particularly through English Language Teaching (ELT) textbooks, is crucial for fostering an inclusive learning environment. The review of current ELT textbooks reveals a significant gap in representing the multilingual realities of Kazakhstan. As noted by Klyshbekova (2025) the existing materials often prioritize a monolingual approach, neglecting the rich tapestry of languages spoken in the country. This oversight not only limits students' exposure to linguistic diversity but also undermines their cultural identity.

Furthermore, the incorporation of diverse linguistic perspectives can enhance learners' engagement and motivation. According to Rezuanova (2023), textbooks that represent the backgrounds of learners can result in improved educational results and an enhanced feeling of inclusion within the classroom. However, the challenge remains in balancing the pedagogical goals of English language acquisition with the need to acknowledge and promote local languages and dialects.

Additionally, the findings suggest that cultural context, ICT advances and speaking practice should be added more to the content of the current EFL textbooks. Similar studies (Abid & Moalla, 2022; Li et al., 2023; Saemee & Nomniam, 2021) of cultural representation in locally produced ELT textbooks asserted that there exists an imbalance in the representation of cultural elements within English ELT textbooks developed locally, which aligns with the findings of our research.

This suggests that the imbalance in cultural interpretations is a common problem highlighted in previous academic literature. This could be due to authors' specific cultural and linguistic backgrounds not adequately addressing the cultural diversity in ELT textbooks. Another potential explanation is the absence of comprehensive understanding or recognition of the significance of cultural diversity within ELT resources, resulting in inadequate representation of various cultural perspectives (Mahbub, 2024). To address this, curriculum developers should conduct more research on cultural representation in ELT textbooks to identify the root causes of the imbalance. Understanding these underlying reasons will help in developing and implementing more culturally diverse materials in ELT textbooks.

VI. CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have carried out a comprehensive review of current ELT textbooks used in Kazakhstani schools.

By answering the first research question, we defined the ELT manuals from 1-11 grades approved by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Additionally, we provided the key characteristics of the two manuals currently used for English teaching in the country. The study showed that "Action for Kazakhstan" offers culturally appropriate content that supports national assessment objectives and relates to Kazakhstani curricular standards, so it works especially well for local students studying for national examinations and interacting with resources that represent Kazakhstani contexts and themes. The textbook "English in Mind. Level 4 for Kazakhstan" is designed to provide students with a broader spectrum of cultural perspectives while simultaneously adapting to the specific socio-cultural context of Kazakhstan. It maintains a significant portion of its global framework, ensuring that it remains relevant and effective in a diverse educational environment.

The second research question revealed the teachers' insights into these manuals. Among them, there are challenges like cultural representation, digital resources, and speaking skills focus. The results highlight the significance of reviewing and updating FLT guides to make sure they satisfy the requirements of teachers and students in a multilingual setting. The usefulness of these tools would be significantly boosted by adding digital and interactive components,

emphasizing speaking and conversational skills more, and including regionally relevant content. These elements should be included in future curriculum development so that more inclusive, interesting, and useful language-learning resources can be produced. In conclusion, the success of language instruction in Kazakhstan depends on creating an environment in the classroom that encourages multilingualism and adheres to modern pedagogical ideas.

At the same time, it should be noted that there are some limitations of the study. First, a scope of textbook analysis. The review focused on a limited number of ELT textbooks, which might not represent the full spectrum of materials available in Kazakhstan. This limitation could restrict the generalizability of the findings. Secondly, the absence of student feedback on the textbooks could limit insights into how effectively the materials engage learners and address their linguistic diversity. Additionally, changes in educational policies and practices in Kazakhstan could impact the relevance of the findings over time. The study's timeframe might not capture ongoing developments in curriculum design or linguistic integration.

Further research may imply analysis of a wider range of ELT textbooks, including those from various publishers and levels, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of linguistic diversity representation. Furthermore, researchers may investigate the impact of specific professional development programs for teachers on their ability to integrate linguistic diversity into their classrooms effectively. This research could inform future training initiatives. By addressing these limitations and exploring the recommendations, future research can contribute to a deeper understanding of how to effectively integrate linguistic diversity in Kazakhstani education.

Thus, the paper aimed to present the current ELT textbooks in Kazakhstani secondary schools and the teachers' perception of them by revealing the challenges in usage and suggestions for their improvements. This study emphasized how important multilingual education and language policy are to Kazakhstan's changing educational environment. There is an obvious need for textbooks and curricula that support language acquisition in all three languages and are in line with national educational requirements as the nation works to promote trilingualism, which includes Kazakh, Russian, and English.

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Investigating Listening Comprehension Challenges in an Omani Higher Education Context

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Abstract—Listening is one of the challenging skills for students studying English as a foreign or second language. Omani students studying in the preparatory studies center face challenges in listening tests. Therefore, this study investigates the main challenges that level 2 Omani students face in listening tests conducted at a preparatory studies center in a higher educational (HE) institution in Oman, analyzing their mid-term test scores and survey responses. The study aims to identify the section that level 2 Omani students find most difficult in the listening test, the main challenges they face during these tests, and the relationship between students' test performance and their perceived difficulty. The study adopted a quantitative method. Quantitative data were collected from level 2 Mid-term listening test scores (N=459) and a self-prepared survey, which was administered to Level 2 Omani students in a preparatory studies center (N=179) of a HE academic institution. The findings from test scores revealed that students have difficulty answering section 3 (MCQs and completing the sentence). Still, the survey responses presented section 1 (True or False, MCQs, and Answering WH questions) as the most difficult. Additionally, a relationship was found between test scores and perceived difficulty, with higher-scoring groups reporting fewer difficulties than lower-scoring groups. Furthermore, the survey responses revealed several common challenges that students face in the speed of the speech, understanding the speaker's accent, and dealing with unfamiliar vocabulary. The findings underscore the need for targeted instructional strategies to enhance the listening skills and test performance of Level 2 Omani students.

Index Terms—EFL learners, listening challenges, listening comprehension, Omani students, test performance

I. INTRODUCTION

Listening skills are crucial for students to receive the messages from a speaker and to process the speech to understand the context and meaning (Sari et al., 2019). Continuous listening comprehension activities help students to master the art of communicating their messages to others. Through listening, students learn pronunciation of words, pitch, and rhythm. A good knowledge of the nuances of listening will positively affect students. However, students lacking these language inputs fail to produce any meaningful communication. Therefore, it is essential to know why students struggle to acquire listening skills.

Listening comprehension is a challenging skill for all students studying the English language. Especially, students from rural backgrounds face more challenges due to their limited exposure to authentic English (Chinnathambi et al., 2021, 2022, 2023). Although it is a challenge, the level of difficulty in completing the listening tasks varies among students, depending on their proficiency levels, which affects their understanding. They fall into low-proficiency, moderate-proficiency, and high-proficiency students. In general, students in all three proficiency levels face difficulties, though not in the same aspects of listening. Low-proficiency students struggle with unfamiliar words, the pace of speech, and have a limited vocabulary. The moderate-proficiency students face challenges related to the pace of speech and external noises, and the high-proficiency students face difficulties in external voices, unfamiliar accents, and long spoken texts. (Hardiyanto et al., 2021).

In Oman, students find “Listening” a herculean task. Students often have challenges in understanding newer accents, unfamiliar contexts, and unfamiliar words. Research carried out within the context of the study shows that Omani students face challenges when dealing with unfamiliar contexts and words (Chinnathambi et al., 2024a, 2024b, 2025). Additionally, they also encounter difficulty in following the longer speech texts and the speed of the speech. Additionally, they fail to

understand the distractors in the speech texts. The students of the General Foundation program at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Ibra, had a low score compared to other skills in two semesters. The low pass percentage in listening enunciates the fact that listening comprehension is indeed a challenging skill. This research aims to analyze the challenging aspects of listening among Level 2 students in the general foundation program, focusing on the types of listening tasks (section 1 - True or False, MCQs, and Answering WH questions, section 2 – complete the table, section 3 - MCQs and completing the sentence) and common challenges that affect students' performance. In order to find out the challenges, the study examines the Mid-term test scores (objective performance) of level 2 Omani students and explores students' perceptions of their difficulties with listening skills through a survey (subjective perceptions), which contains all three sections that are tested in the mid-term listening test and general challenges as well, to answer the following research questions.

Research Questions:

1. Which listening section, according to the Mid-term test scores, do Level 2 Omani students find most difficult?
2. Which listening section, according to the survey responses, do Level 2 Omani students find most difficult?
3. What are the general challenges that Level 2 Omani students face in listening tests?
4. Are there differences in perceived difficulty among students with different test-score levels?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Learners who are engaged in the study of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) require the possession of advanced listening skills, as these are essential for understanding spoken language, contextual nuances, and engaging in both academic and social interactions. The act of listening is often considered a skill of greater significance than other language skills, primarily because it is utilized more frequently in everyday communication (Kurita, 2012; as cited in Ghahri & Zarei, 2022).

A. Definition of Listening Skills

Listening skills are defined as the ability to receive and understand verbal messages, discourse features, and underlying intentions (Sari et al., 2019). While this definition is foundational, Field (2011) provided a more thorough framework for understanding the cognitive mechanisms involved in listening. According to this framework, listening consists of three main processes: decoding, which refers to the recognition of sounds, words, and grammatical structures; parsing, which involves the analysis of grammatical structures; and the construction of meaning, which is particularly significant in the context of academic listening. This final component includes meaning enrichment through context, inference, reference, and pragmatic interpretation; and information handling that involves selection, monitoring, integration, and the assembly of argument structure.

Scholars have examined listening skills from various perspectives, resulting in the emergence of multiple classifications. Ur (1984) classified listening based on purpose into two fundamental categories: listening for perception, which emphasizes the accurate recognition of phonetic sounds, their combinations, and the stress and intonation patterns of the target language; and listening for comprehension, which pertains to the nature of comprehension that may occur through either passive or active listening. Furthermore, Anderson and Lynch (1988) classified listening based on the degree of engagement and interaction. Reciprocal listening is one classification where the listener actively engages with the speaker through listening activities. In contrast, non-reciprocal listening, also known as one-way listening, is a passive activity where the listener receives information without any interaction, such as when listening to news broadcasts or academic lectures.

B. Listening Strategies

EFL learners employ various strategies to enhance their listening competencies. According to Altuwaresh (2016), learners utilize metacognitive strategies to facilitate language acquisition by planning listening purposes and selecting appropriate learning strategies, monitoring their understanding, and finally evaluating their overall comprehension and strategy use. In other words, language learners employ metacognitive strategies to develop effective listening techniques, actively assess their listening process, and reflect on their outcomes through the target listening activities. By employing these strategies, students can familiarize themselves with specific methodologies and understand the appropriate contexts and timing for their implementation (Daskalovska et al., 2023; Nguyen, 2020).

The second category encompasses cognitive strategies that language learners employ to acquire knowledge or skills. This category pertains to the mental processes involved in comprehending, processing, and retaining new information for subsequent retrieval, whether it resides in short-term or long-term memory (Altuwaresh, 2016; Richard, 2008). Vandergrift (1997) underscores a third category of listening strategies, which is socio-affective strategies that enable language learners to engage effectively with their peers and seek clarification from their teachers. When language learners comprehend these strategies, discern their appropriate application, and learn to evaluate their effectiveness, they transform into strategic listeners (Alutaybi & Alsowat, 2020).

In 2008, Chulim undertook a scholarly investigation examining how students from five universities in Mexico implemented listening strategies. The results revealed that the predominant strategy employed was concentrating on specific information, whereas notetaking and leveraging prior knowledge techniques were utilized the least. Furthermore,

the study did not uncover any significant disparities in the use of listening strategies among the universities. Moreover, research conducted by Mohseny and Raeisi (2009) investigated the relationship between the language proficiency of Iranian EFL learners and their use of listening strategies. The statistical findings indicated a notable positive correlation between proficiency levels and the employment of listening strategies, with cognitive strategies being the most commonly utilized by students.

C. Listening Assessment

Assessment in the EFL classroom offers a valuable measure of listening abilities for both teachers and learners. It also assists in the development of curriculum and learning objectives, and identifies the needs of learners (Nemtchinova, 2020). In addition, it is important to note that the types of assessments place varied cognitive loads on learners. Rost (2011) points out that formats such as discrete-item, task-based, and integrative assessments demand different cognitive loads, ranging from basic comprehension to higher-order skills. Among all the various forms of listening assessments, Multiple-Choice Questions (MCQs) remain the predominantly used response format, as noted by Kang et al. (2019). A frequently encountered variation of the MCQ format is one that follows the approach of "question preview" or "item preview". This approach involves allowing test takers to preview questions ahead of the listening portion (Yeager & Meyer, 2022). Empirical evidence suggests that MCQs are perceived as easier compared to other assessment formats (In'nami & Koizumi, 2009), and they are also favored by students (Cheng, 2004). However, there are concerns that MCQs and other similar question types, which require quick answers, may hinder the deeper understanding of language input (Field, 2012; Rukthong, 2021).

Listening assessments do not differ solely by item types and conversation types. In fact, listening tests might follow different approaches and instructions. One approach is called While-Listening Performance (WLP), which necessitates that participants provide responses while listening, with no additional time provided for question preview. In this approach, proficient readers might still manage to skim through the questions. On the other hand, in Post-Listening Performance (PLP) tests, participants can only provide their responses after the listening segment has ended (Wagner, 2013).

In this vein, Yanagawa and Green (2008) found that test-taking strategies used by students depend on whether they have the option to preview questions. Those who were permitted to preview had to carefully manage their approach to avoid distraction. Likewise, Aryadoust (2019) conducted a study on a listening test that allowed for double playback, revealing differing levels of gaze, where participants' eyes linger on specific areas of interest, such as a word, and fixation, which refers to moments when the eyes remain focused on an object. These behaviors were noted throughout different phases of the test. It was found that high-performing students seem to strategically determine when to focus their attention to avoid overwhelming their cognitive capacity. Hence, the scores in listening tests might not accurately reflect a student's actual listening skills, raising concerns about cognitive validity.

D. Listening Difficulties

While it is evident that listening skills are instrumental in facilitating vocabulary acquisition and enhancing overall language proficiency (Barker, 1971; Purdy, 1997), EFL students often encounter many challenges with comprehending spoken language. These difficulties mainly result from limited exposure to authentic spoken language beyond the confines of the classroom, inadequate time allocated for listening exercises in the classroom, and the lack of suitable listening exercises (Rababa et al., 2023; Ghahri & Zarei, 2022).

Stephens (2011) distinguished between lower-level and higher-level listening difficulties that language learners face. Lower-level difficulties include basic comprehension problems, resulting from limited depth and breadth of vocabulary, fast speech rate, and external factors, such as background noise or poor audio quality, which increase the difficulty of decoding and comprehending language. Conversely, higher-level challenges include difficulties in comprehending extended spoken texts and unfamiliarity with diverse language accents.

From a different perspective, Siege et al. (2025) have identified a range of obstacles that learners face in listening comprehension. One category of these challenges is content-related factors, such as difficulties arising from a lack of prior knowledge, inconsistency between existing knowledge and newly introduced material, as well as the complexity of discipline-related concepts. Sociocultural factors also influence this process, particularly the impact of listener expectations and the nuances of human interaction and discourse, which can impede the effective comprehension of spoken language.

Cognitive variables further contribute to the challenges associated with listening comprehension, such as devoting excessive time to questioning or analyzing the input, which may negatively affect the understanding of the information heard. In addition, insufficient practice of notetaking can impair information retention. Affective factors, such as disinterest, anxiety, fatigue, and diminished motivation, can also undermine listening proficiency. Lastly, multimedia-related elements, such as the availability of supportive visual aids like slide presentations, nonverbal cues including body language, and gestures, significantly influence learners' ability to comprehend spoken content (Siege et al., 2025).

Focusing on empirical evidence, Hardiyanto et al. (2021) investigated the difficulties six university students with varying levels of language proficiency encountered in developing listening skills. The study revealed that limited vocabulary, rapid speech, and unfamiliar vocabulary were problems for low-achieving students, while moderate-level students struggled with fast-paced speech and background noise. Furthermore, high-proficiency students also struggled with background noise, lengthy texts, and diverse accents.

Another investigation conducted by Arroyyani (2021) identified listening challenges encountered by a group of pharmacy students studying English as a foreign language, employing a qualitative methodological framework that incorporated questionnaires and interviews. According to the results, students experienced a moderate level of difficulty during the decoding phase, particularly when identifying sounds and interpreting accents and intonations. Students also struggled to distinguish between lexically similar phonemes during the parsing phase. Moreover, the challenges encountered in the construction phase encompassed difficulties in following the progression of speech, which affected students' comprehension and their capacity to apply the information that they had received orally in an appropriate manner.

The review highlights the research studies that have investigated listening skills, strategies, assessment formats, and difficulties in various contexts. However, no research has specifically connected learners' perceived difficulties in listening test sections with their actual performance in listening test sections. In addition, there remains a lack of focus on how factors such as speech speed, unfamiliar vocabulary, and the speaker's accent affect the performance of students, especially in the Omani higher education context. Therefore, this study aims to fill the research gaps by focusing on listening test scores across sections, perceived difficulty ratings across sections based on survey responses, perceived common difficulties in listening tests, and the correlation between perceived difficulty and actual listening performance.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Hypotheses

In order to answer the four research questions, four null hypotheses were formulated and tested.

1. There is no statistically significant difference in Mid-term test scores across Sections 1, 2, and 3.
2. There is no statistically significant difference in perceived difficulty ratings in the survey across Sections 1, 2, and 3.
3. There is no statistically significant difference in students' perceived difficulty among the listening challenges of speech speed, unfamiliar vocabulary, and speaker accent.
4. There are no significant differences among the test-score groups with regards to perceived difficulty.

B. Participants

The study adopted a quantitative method. The data were collected in two ways. First, mid-term test scores of 450 level 2 Omani students, enrolled in the foundation program of a preparatory studies center (PSC), were collected from the administration. Next, a self-prepared questionnaire was distributed to level 2 Omani students, adopting a convenience sampling method. About 175 students answered a questionnaire regarding their challenges during the listening tests. All 450 level 2 Omani students took the same standardized listening test and are from the same region, studying at the preparatory studies center of the same university.

C. Instruments

The Mid-term listening test is a standardized test administered across the 13 branches of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences. The test is designed to assess various aspects of listening comprehension among level 2 Omani students in the foundation program of the Preparatory Studies Center. Listening comprehension consisted of 3 sections: section 1 (True or False, MCQs, and Answering WH questions) is a dialogue between two people with 10 questions, section 2 (Complete the table) is a conversation among three people with 5 questions, and section 3 (MCQs and completing the sentence) is a monologue with 10 questions. The self-prepared questionnaire had four sections. The three sections exactly reflected the task types in sections 1, 2, and 3 of the midterm test, and section 4 included general questions regarding listening comprehension difficulties.

D. Data Collection Procedures

After the mid-term test, the listening marks of 450 students were collected, and 179 students answered the questionnaire voluntarily. The Shapiro-Wilk Normality test for test scores was conducted. Following that, the Friedman Test and the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test were done to find out the differences across the sections (1, 2, and 3) of the listening test and survey responses. One-way ANOVA was carried out for four test score groups across sections. In addition, box plots for all three sections are presented to strengthen the validity of the findings.

IV. RESULTS

Null Hypothesis 1: There is no statistically significant difference in Mid-term test scores across Sections 1, 2, and 3.

TABLE 1
RESULTS OF THE SHAPIRO-WILK NORMALITY TEST FOR TEST SCORES

Test Scores	Statistic	df	Sig.
Section 1	0.959	430	<0.001**
Section 2	0.912	430	<0.001**
Section 3	0.912	430	<0.001**
a Lilliefors Significance Correction			

In order to check whether the data is normally distributed, the Shapiro-Wilk test was conducted. The table above shows that the data from all three sections are statistically significant at less than 0.05%. This reveals that the data is not normally distributed. Hence, the Friedman Test was conducted to find out whether there are significant differences between the sections.

TABLE 2
COMPARISON OF TEST SCORES ACROSS SECTIONS

Comparison	Median (section 1)	Median (section 2)	Median (section 3)	p-value (Friedman Test)	p-value (Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test)
Section 1 vs Section 2	6.00	3.00	-	<0.001**	<0.001**
Section 1 vs Section 3	6.00	-	2.00	<0.001**	<0.001**
Section 2 vs Section 3	-	3.00	2.00	<0.001**	<0.001**

The table above displays the Friedman test results. It shows that the exam scores of all three sections have a p-value of less than 0.01%. This indicates that there is a strong statistically significant difference between the scores of the three sections. This suggests that there is a difference in at least one of the pairs. In order to check which pair has a difference, a post-hoc pairwise comparison was performed using a Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test. The p-value of all three sections was less than 0.01%. To justify the multiple comparisons, a Bonferroni correction was performed manually. Considering the three pairwise comparisons, the significance level alpha is adjusted to $\alpha_{\text{adjusted}} = 0.05/3 = 0.0167$. Despite applying this correction, the corrected p-value was 0.001, which is below the adjusted significance alpha. This confirms that the difference in the pairwise comparison is statistically significant.

Furthermore, the median score clearly depicts that section 3 was the most difficult section in the exam. Although section 1 and section 3 have the same number of questions, students have scored better in section 1, with a median score of 6, compared to section 3, with a median score of 2. However, the median score of section 2 is 3, suggesting that it was less difficult than section 3 but more difficult than section 1.

Null Hypothesis 2: There is no statistically significant difference in perceived difficulty ratings in the survey across Sections 1, 2, and 3.

TABLE 3
RESULTS OF SHAPIRO-WILK NORMALITY TEST FOR SURVEY RESPONSES

	Statistic	df	Sig.
Section 1	0.950	179	<0.001**
Section 2	0.875	179	<0.001**
Section 3	0.942	179	<0.001**
a Lilliefors Significance Correction			

To check whether the data is normally distributed, the Shapiro-Wilk test was conducted. The table above shows that the data from all three sections are statistically significant at less than 0.05%. This reveals that the data is not normally distributed. Hence, the Friedman Test was conducted to find out whether there are significant differences between the sections.

TABLE 4
COMPARISON OF SURVEY RESPONSES ACROSS SECTIONS

Comparison	Median (section 1)	Median (section 2)	Median (section 3)	p-value (Friedman Test)	p-value (Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test)
Section 1 vs Section 2	7.00	2.00	-	<0.001**	<0.001**
Section 1 vs Section 3	7.00	-	4.50	<0.001**	<0.001**
Section 2 vs Section 3	-	2.00	4.50	<0.001**	<0.001**

The table above displays the Friedman test results. The results show that the students' responses regarding the difficulty level of all three sections have a p-value of less than 0.01%. This indicates that there is a strong, statistically significant difference between the perceptions of students regarding the difficulty levels of the three sections. This suggests that there is a difference in at least one of the pairs. In order to check which pair has a difference, a post-hoc pairwise comparison was performed using a Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test. The p-value of all three sections was less than 0.01%. To justify the multiple comparisons, a Bonferroni correction was performed manually. Considering the three pairwise comparisons, the significance level alpha is adjusted to $\alpha_{\text{adjusted}} = 0.05/3 = 0.0167$. Despite applying this correction, the corrected p-value was 0.001, which is below the adjusted significance alpha. This confirms that the difference in the pairwise comparison is statistically significant. Furthermore, the median score clearly depicts that students found section 1 as the most difficult section in the exam, followed by section 3, but they found section 2 as the least difficult.

Null Hypotheses 3: There are no significant differences among the test-score groups with regards to perceived difficulty.

TABLE 5
ONE-WAY ANOVA RESULTS FOR FOUR TEST SCORE GROUPS ACROSS SECTIONS

Sections	1-7 Score	8-12 score	13-17 score	18-25 score	F Value	P Value
1	2.26 (0.99)	2.48 (0.82)	2.97 (0.69)	3.12 (0.72)	8.867	0.001**
2	1.74 (0.81)	2.09 (0.96)	2.48 (0.94)	2.23 (1.31)	3.412	0.019*
3	2.24 (1.02)	2.41 (0.92)	2.86 (0.78)	3.25 (0.91)	8.812	0.001**

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to see whether the perceived difficulty of Section 1, Section 2, and Section 3 differed across four groups based on the test scores: 1-7, 8-12, 13-17, and 18-25. The table shows that the students who scored between 18-25 and 13-17 in the overall test performed better in all three sections. On the other hand, the students who scored 8-12 and 1-7 in the overall test performed worse in all three sections. Also, it satisfies the statistical significance with a p-value of 0.01% and 0.05%. Tukey Post Hoc HSD test was conducted to examine which groups perceived more difficulty in which section. Overall, it showed that students in the 1-7 and 8-12 groups reported a highly significant difficulty in all three sections than the 13-17 and 18-25 group students. The Tukey test showed a statistical significance with a p-value of 0.05%. Specifically, the 1-7 group found Sections 1, 2, and 3 more difficult than the 13-17 ($p = 0.05$) and 18-25 ($p = 0.05$) groups, followed by the 8-12 group ($p = 0.05$). However, there were no significant differences between 1-7 and 8-12 in all three sections ($p = 0.721, 0.530, \text{ and } 0.869$) and 13-17 and 18-25 ($p = 0.819, 0.232, \text{ and } 0.208$).

Null Hypothesis 4: There is no significant difference in students' perceived difficulty among the listening challenges of speech speed, unfamiliar vocabulary, and speaker accent.

Perceived Impact of Speaker Speed: Around 93.85% of students found that the speed of the speaker's speech affected their ability to complete the task. Among the 93.85%, about 45% of students said that it affected them extremely and around 32% affected them very much. Only 6.15% said that the speed did not affect them. This suggests that the speed of the speaker's speech significantly affected the students' ability to grasp the listening and answer the questions.

Perceived Impact of Speaker Accent: Around 92% of students found the accent of the speaker's speech affecting their ability to understand and answer the questions. Among the 92%, about 54% of students said that it moderately and slightly affected their understanding, followed by about 37% reporting it to be very much and extremely affecting their understanding. Only 7.82% said that the speaker's accent did not affect them. This suggests that the accent of the speaker considerably affected the students' ability to understand the listening and answer the questions.

Perceived Impact of Unfamiliar Vocabulary: Around 95% of students found unfamiliar vocabulary affected their ability to understand the listening passage and answer the questions. Among the 95%, about 55% of students said that it moderately and slightly affected their understanding, followed by about 40% reporting it to be very much and extremely affecting their understanding. Only 4.47% said that the speaker's accent did not affect them. This suggests that unfamiliar vocabulary had a significant impact on the students' ability to comprehend the listening passage and answer the questions.

Confidence Level of Students in Test Taking: Around 26% of students were confident in their ability to understand and answer the listening questions. However, about 39% of students said that they were not confident. Also, around 34.08% said that they were neither confident nor unconfident. This suggests that about 73% of students showed a lack of confidence in understanding the listening exam passages.

The findings show that most of the students reported that they faced challenges while dealing with unfamiliar vocabulary, speakers' accents, and speech speeds. As a result, many reported a low level of confidence. Therefore, the hypothesis is accepted, suggesting no major difference in perceived difficulty among the four factors.

V. DISCUSSION

This study aimed to investigate the challenges that level 2 Omani students face in listening tests by analyzing their performance in the mid-term test, self-reported perceptions of their difficulty, the relationship between test scores and survey responses, and common challenges in listening comprehension.

A. The Most Difficult Section in Listening, as per Test Scores

The mid-term test scores from 450 students were analyzed using the Friedman test. The test results revealed a statistically significant difference ($p < 0.01\%$) in the perceived difficulty of section 1 (True or False, MCQs, and Answering WH questions), section 2 (complete the table), and section 3 (multiple-choice questions and sentence completion) of the mid-term listening test. This is again confirmed by the Post-hoc Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test (p-values below 0.01%), which showed all three pairwise comparisons as significant, even after the application of Bonferroni correction (p-value 0.001). According to the Friedman test results, section 3, monologue, was the most difficult for students with the lowest average scores. Section 2 was moderately difficult, and section 1, a dialogue between two speakers, had the highest average scores. In addition, the median scores also provide insight into the nature of these differences. Section 3, the most challenging for students, had a median score of 2, section 1, less difficult, had a median score of 6, and section 2, moderately difficult, had a median score of 3. These findings underscore that the difficulty level varies according to the types of tasks. It is evident that the question format and cognitive load impact the level 2 Omani students' listening performance.

The findings underscore that the length and complexity of the monologue, along with cognitive demand, may have posed challenges to level 2 Omani students. Level 2 Omani students might have found instructions to be complex, the question format difficult to predict, or the content more challenging. These results align with the study findings of Field (2011) that higher cognitive demands, like in monologues, can challenge learners and Rost (2011) that different assessment formats of listening tests impose varying cognitive demands on the test takers.

B. The Most Difficult Section as per Survey Responses

According to the Friedman test results, there is a statistically significant difference in the level 2 Omani students' perceived difficulty levels across the three sections in the mid-term listening test. The P value, which is less than 0.01% confirms that students do not perceive the three sections equally in term of difficulty. This aligns with the idea that each listening task requires varying levels of cognitive demands. Post-hoc pairwise comparisons using the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank yielded P values below 0.01% highlighting significant differences between the sections. This result was the same even after applying Bonferroni correction: the corrected p-value of 0.001 remained well below this threshold.

The results of the survey responses, answered by 179 level 2 Omani students, revealed that section 1 (true/false, MCQs, and WH questions) as the most difficult, Section 3 (MCQs and sentence completion) was moderately difficult, and section 2 (Complete the Table) was perceived as the easiest. While supporting this ranking of difficulty, the median scores also indicate how the difficulty level varies with the task types in each section. This result contrasts with the findings of the test score analysis. This contrast suggests that level 2 Omani students may find inferencing and interpreting viewpoints in dialogues more cognitively demanding. Therefore, irrespective of their good performance, they find section 3 as difficult. This gap between actual performance (Objective) and perceived difficulty (Subjective) suggests the possibility of misjudgment or a requirement in the development of metacognitive awareness among Level 2 Omani students, which affects their ability to identify which tasks are actually difficult. This finding aligns with Altuwairesh's (2016) assertion that EFL learners are unable to monitor their comprehension accurately due to a lack of metacognitive strategies. This lack of strategy may have affected their ability to judge which task type is really difficult for them. Therefore, learners should be given tailored interventions on how to use these strategies to accurately identify their challenges, which can help improve their listening proficiency and self-monitoring skills.

C. Perceived Difficulty Across Score Groups

The test results of one-way ANOVA showed that students' difficulty level across Sections 1, 2, and 3 varied significantly across listening performance groups (score ranges: 1–7, 8–12, 13–17, and 18–25). Students in higher scoring groups (13–17 and 18–25) reported fewer difficulties compared to students in lower scoring groups (1–7 and 8–12), who reported more difficulties in all sections. The differences between high-scoring groups and low-scoring groups were statistically significant at both the 0.01% and 0.05% levels. This confirms a strong relationship between performance and perceived difficulty in the listening test. Furthermore, the Tukey HSD post-hoc analysis also showed that students in the 1-7 group had more difficulty in all sections of the mid-term listening test, compared to those in the 13-17 and 18-25 groups ($p = 0.05$). Students in the 8-12 group are also showing higher perceived difficulty levels.

It is evident from the findings that students who belong to high-scoring groups perceive listening tasks as less difficult, while students who belong to low-scoring groups perceive listening tasks as very difficult, regardless of section. This difference may be due to their listening proficiency, familiarity, application of test-taking strategies, and the task types. These findings support the results of Mohseny and Raeisi's (2009) that high-performing students use strategies more effectively than low-performing students and the findings of Aryadoust (2019) that high-performing students avoid cognitive overload by regulating their attention during listening tasks. Hence, tailored interventions for students in 1-12 score range are recommended with a focus on listening strategies, vocabulary development, and exposure to various listening formats.

D. Reported Listening Challenges and Their Degree of Impact

In addition to examining students' difficulties with types of tasks in the listening test, the survey also explored common listening challenges, including speech speed, unfamiliar vocabulary, and speaker accent. The study also examined the degree to which these challenges affected the level 2 Omani students' listening performance. Around 93% of students found that the speed of the speaker's speech affected their ability to complete the task. This suggests that the speed of the speaker's speech significantly affected the students' ability to grasp the listening content and answer the questions, which confirms the study results of Hardiyanto et al. (2021) and Stephens (2011) that fast-paced speech is the most commonly cited difficulty for EFL learners. Similarly, around 92% of students found the accent of the speaker's speech affecting their ability to understand and answer the questions. This suggests that the speaker's accent considerably affected the students' ability to understand the listening and answer the questions. The study findings are in line with Arroyyani (2021), who reported that unfamiliar accents pose significant challenges to comprehension for Omani learners. Regarding vocabulary, around 95% of students found unfamiliar vocabulary to be affecting their ability to understand the listening passage and answer the questions. This suggests that unfamiliar vocabulary greatly affected the students' ability to understand the listening passage and answer the questions. These findings support the study findings of Sari et al. (2019), which indicate that vocabulary comprehension is crucial for successful listening, and those of Siegel et al. (2025), which suggest that unfamiliar vocabulary impacts content-related comprehension in listening. Along these lines, about 73% of

students showed a lack of confidence in understanding the listening exam passages. These findings align with Siegel et al. (2025), who found that anxiety and confidence are major barriers to listening comprehension. Similarly, the study findings of Alutaybi and Alsowat (2020) highlight that learners who lack socio-affective strategies may experience greater difficulty in managing these internal difficulties. These findings confirm that external factors like the design of the test, speaker's speech speed, and speaker's accent, and internal learner factors like knowledge level of vocabulary and confidence are associated with students' difficulties in a listening test.

E. Summary

These findings show that section 3 is the most difficult as per the mid-term test scores, while section 1 is the hardest as per the survey results, indicating that there is a gap between objective performance and perceived difficulty. In addition to the types of tasks, other factors could contribute to the challenges in the listening test. They are test design, speech speed, accent, unfamiliar vocabulary, and the confidence level of students. Therefore, students should be exposed to a variety of English accents, strategy-based listening instruction, and activities that can build confidence in a classroom environment. By doing so, it is possible to improve students' listening proficiency, confidence, and accuracy in self-assessment as well.

VI. CONCLUSION

The study aimed to find out the challenges faced by level 2 Omani students in the listening test by analyzing their mid-term test scores and self-reported survey responses. The findings revealed a gap between their actual performance and their perceived level of difficulty. The test scores indicated that section 3 was the most difficult, but students' perceived difficulties showed section 1 as the most difficult. This gap could be due to misjudgment or a lack of metacognitive awareness. Hence, there is a need to align students' perceptions and their performance. In addition, internal factors such as the students' knowledge level of vocabulary and confidence level, as well as external factors such as speech speed, the speaker's accent, and the test design, influenced the listening difficulties of level 2 Omani students. Furthermore, the strong relationship between lower-scoring groups and higher perceived difficulties highlights the role of listening proficiency and awareness of task types in shaping the experiences of students. Therefore, targeted interventions are essential to enhance their overall performance.

The study underscores the necessity to bridge the gap between perceived difficulties of the students and their actual performance in listening tests. Therefore, teachers should provide tailored pedagogical interventions for level 2 Omani students, focusing on vocabulary development, confidence building, a range of English accents, practice with different listening task types, developing metacognitive awareness, and tests with balanced cognitive load. This will help reduce the listening difficulties of the level 2 Omani students to a greater extent and improve their test performance.

While this study provides several valuable insights, it also has limitations. The study was conducted in one higher educational institution only and employed only a quantitative method. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized. In addition, the perceived difficulty was based on survey responses, which may be influenced by individual biases. Furthermore, the listening performance groups were based on a single mid-term test. This single test may not precisely reflect overall listening ability. Therefore, further research is recommended using qualitative methods, a larger sample size, and involving varied higher educational institutions.

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Enhancing EFL Learners' Self-Regulation Through Video Games: Teachers' Perception

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Abstract—This study delved into the multifaceted perceptions of a diverse group of 130 teachers regarding the utilization of video games as a means to augment and bolster learners' self-regulation capabilities. With meticulous attention to detail, the researchers administered a meticulously designed questionnaire to the participants, meticulously capturing a nuanced understanding of their perspectives. The intriguing outcomes of this study unequivocally revealed a prevailing consensus among the teachers, asserting their firm belief in the potential of video games to exert a profoundly positive influence on learners' self-regulation capacities. The profound implications emanating from these compelling findings proffer a tantalizing glimpse into the untapped potential of video games as an efficacious pedagogical tool, poised to revolutionize the landscape of education by nurturing and cultivating learners' self-regulation skills.

Index Terms—self-regulation, video games, English language learning, technology in language learning

I. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to significant alterations in the daily routines of educational institutions and English as a foreign language (EFL) instructors. The pandemic has compelled schools to shut down abruptly, whilst teachers have had to adapt rapidly to changes in their teaching and learning approaches. This situation has challenged educators' ability to leverage novel educational tools and immediately convert course content into remote lesson plans, which can be challenging even for those with digital fluency. Moreover, students have reported feelings of isolation and a sense of missing out on the social and physical interactions that in-person instruction provides, given that they were required to maintain distance from their peers. Furthermore, students have experienced difficulties in maintaining focus when using electronic devices for prolonged periods, causing them to become distracted and lack discipline.

To maintain student focus and engagement, teachers have employed a variety of technological tools aimed at promoting self-regulation and fostering autonomous learning. Students have demonstrated a strong affinity for technology, particularly interactive games, which they find highly entertaining. This preference has persisted even after the resumption of in-person learning, with many students continuing to favor technology-based e-learning. Consequently, educators must explore alternative methods to enhance students' self-regulation, such as incorporating video games into the learning process, given their appeal to students. The use of video games may have a positive impact on students' ability to regulate their learning of EFL.

There exists a dearth of research on the utilisation of video games as a means of improving self-regulation in EFL learning. Self-regulation is a critical component of academic success and is defined as the ability to manage one's thoughts, emotions and actions to achieve desired outcomes. Certain studies have implied that select e-applications, particularly those that necessitate decision-making, planning and problem-solving, may have the potential to enhance self-regulation abilities.

However, note that not all video games yield the same results in terms of self-regulation. Some video games, specifically those that are excessively violent or addictive, may have negative effects on self-regulation skills (Mohamed, 2021). Accordingly, further research is required to ascertain the precise mechanisms by which video games can be utilised to enhance self-regulation in EFL learning (Viberg & Kukulska-Hulme, 2022). This study aims to answer the following question:

What are teachers' perceptions of language learner self-regulation when using video games in teaching?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Using Technology in English Language Teaching

Using technology in English language teaching (ELT) can provide a variety of benefits for teachers and students. Teachers can use a variety of online resources, such as websites, apps and videos, to supplement their lessons and provide additional practice opportunities for students (Lan et al., 2020). For example, such websites as Quizlet and Duolingo can be used to create interactive flashcards and quizzes for vocabulary practice.

Online platforms, such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Google Meet, can be used to hold virtual classes, enabling students to participate in live lessons and interact with their teachers and classmates from anywhere (Landis et al., 2019). Technology should be used as a tool to enhance and supplement traditional teaching methods and not as a replacement for them (Viberg & Kukulska-Hulme, 2022). Moreover, an important consideration is to consider how to effectively integrate technology into the curriculum and how to provide training and support for teachers to use technology in the classroom.

One of the key findings from the literature is that technology can enhance language learning outcomes. Zheng et al. (2013) found that the use of technology in ELT can improve students' language proficiency, motivation and engagement. Similarly, Bagheri et al. (2021) found that technology, such as online discussion forums, can increase students' participation and interaction in language learning.

The literature has also suggested that technology can provide opportunities for personalised and autonomous learning. Demouy et al. (2014) found out that mobile technology can support self-directed learning by enabling students to access learning materials anytime and anywhere. Kukulska-Hulme and Viberg (2018) indicated that technology can provide opportunities for individualised learning by allowing students to choose their learning paths and materials.

Furthermore, the literature has highlighted that technology can support the development of various language skills. Stockwell and Hubbard (2013) determined that mobile technology can enhance students' listening and speaking skills by providing opportunities for authentic and interactive communication. Additionally, Zhu and Liu (2021) found that technology can promote students' reading and writing skills by providing access to authentic materials and feedback. Accordingly, technology can enhance language learning outcomes and provide opportunities for personalised and autonomous learning.

However, some studies have suggested that the use of technology in ELT may present some challenges. Thomas and Reinders (2016) found that the use of technology may not be suitable for all students because some of them may not have access to the necessary technology or may prefer more traditional forms of learning. Moreover, Ertmer et al. (2018) indicated that the use of technology may require a significant amount of time and preparation by teachers. Therefore, the use of technology in ELT may also present some challenges, such as the need for significant time and preparation by teachers and the varying levels of access and preference amongst students. Further research is needed to explore the optimal use of technology in ELT and to identify the factors that may influence its effectiveness.

B. Using Video Games in ELT

Video games have gained increasing attention as a potential tool for enhancing language learning in the field of ELT and general teaching. The use of video games in ELT can provide benefits for students (Wang & Huang, 2021). Video games can be used to provide students with interactive and engaging opportunities to practice vocabulary and grammar in context (Pouralvar et al., 2019). For example, role-playing games can be used to enable students to practice using new vocabulary and grammar structures in simulated real-life situations.

Similarly, video games can be a highly motivating and engaging way for students to learn. They can help to create a positive learning environment and can increase student engagement and participation (Mohamed, 2021). Video games are also used to promote collaboration and teamwork amongst students because many games require players to work together to achieve a common goal (Pouralvar et al., 2019). However, the appropriate age and level of students and how to integrate video games into the curriculum must be considered. Furthermore, a crucial aspect is to have a clear learning objective and assessment criteria to measure the effectiveness of using video games in teaching.

One of the key findings from the literature is that video games can be effective in enhancing language learning outcomes. Richtoff and Persson (2022) determined that the use of video games in ELT can improve students' language proficiency, motivation and engagement. Newcombe and Brick (2017) found that using video games in ELT can provide an engaging and interactive learning experience for students, which can lead to increased motivation and engagement in language learning. Additionally, video games can provide opportunities for students to practice and develop their language skills, which can lead to improvements in language proficiency. Hence, video games in ELT can be effective in improving students' language proficiency and their motivation and engagement in learning.

The literature has likewise suggested that video games can improve students' language skills in various ways. Li (2022) found out that video games can promote critical thinking, problem-solving and collaboration skills, which are essential for language learning. Additionally, video games can help students develop their listening and speaking skills. Chen and Yang (2013) determined that video games can be used to provide students with opportunities to practice listening and speaking to native speakers in English. For example, games that involve characters speaking in English with subtitles can be used to help students improve their listening comprehension skills (Mohamed, 2021). Video games can also be used to introduce students to different cultures and ways of life and can help them understand the context in which the language they are learning is used (Horowitz, 2019). As such, incorporating video games into ELT can foster learners' interest and curiosity in different cultures, which can motivate them to continue learning the language and to engage in cultural exchange and communication beyond the classroom. Overall, the use of video games in ELT can offer multiple benefits for language learners, including language development, cultural awareness and motivation.

However, some studies have suggested that the use of video games in ELT and teaching may present some challenges. In a book by Shliakhovchuk and Spashchenk (2021), they stated that the use of video games may require a significant amount of time and preparation by teachers. Moreover, Godwin-Jones (2014) found that the use of video games may not

be suitable for all students because some of them may not be interested in playing video games or may not have access to the necessary technology. Furthermore, teachers should carefully select and integrate appropriate video games into their teaching practices to ensure that they align with the learning objectives and enhance students' language learning experiences (Shliakhovchuk & Spashchenk, 2021). The use of video games in ELT and teaching may also present some challenges, such as the need for significant time and preparation by teachers and the varying levels of interest and access to technology amongst students. Note that the effectiveness of using video games in ELT may depend on various factors, such as the type of game used, level of students and learning goals.

C. Learners' Self-Regulation

Self-regulation refers to the ability to manage one's thoughts, emotions and behaviors to achieve goals, and it is a critical component of learning and academic success (Zimmerman, 1989). For self-regulation in learning, note that learners can monitor their learning, set and adjust learning goals, manage their time and resources and evaluate their own learning (Landis et al., 2019). This situation highlights the importance of learners' ability to regulate their own learning to facilitate their learning, which can lead to improved academic performance.

Wang (2021) found that learners who had higher levels of self-regulation are more likely to engage in self-directed learning and had better academic outcomes. This study highlighted the importance of learners' ability to regulate their own learning to facilitate self-directed learning, which can lead to improved academic performance. Moreover, the aforementioned study indicated the importance of explicitly teaching learners how to regulate their own learning to improve academic performance.

To promote self-regulation in learning, teachers can provide students with opportunities to reflect on their learning, set goals and monitor their progress. They can also teach students strategies for planning, organising and evaluating their own learning (Lan et al., 2020). Additionally, teachers can provide students with regular feedback on their progress, which can help students identify areas where they need further support and adjust their approach to learning as necessary. Note that self-regulation is not a fixed trait and can be developed with practice and guidance. Therefore, providing learners with appropriate support, guidance and resources to develop their self-regulation skills is crucial.

D. Learners' Self-Regulation in a Technological Learning Environment

In a technological learning environment, learners are often required to take an active role in their learning because they interact with digital resources and tools. Howard et al. (2019) explained that this requirement can present opportunities for learners to develop self-regulation skills, given that they are required to monitor their own learning, set and adjust learning goals and evaluate their own progress. Learning management systems can be used to provide learners with access to digital resources, track their progress and provide feedback on their learning (Pouralvar et al., 2019). For example, teachers can use a learning management system to set goals for learners, provide resources and materials and give learners the ability to track their own progress.

Adaptive learning systems use technology to adjust the difficulty of learning activities based on learners' performances (Landis et al., 2019). They can provide learners with personalised feedback and help learners to identify areas where they need further support. By using game-like elements in learning activities, learners can be motivated to set and achieve goals and to monitor their progress (Landis et al., 2019). Teachers should be trained and provided with the appropriate resources to use technology in learning.

Furthermore, technology can serve as a facilitator of self-regulated learning. Persico and Steffens (2017) explained that technology-based learning environments can promote self-regulated learning by providing learners with more control over their learning experiences. Hence, the use of technology can help learners develop their self-regulation skills, such as goal-setting and self-monitoring.

Another important finding from the literature is the role of teacher support in fostering learners' self-regulation in a technological environment. Cho and Heron (2015) determined that teacher support is positively related to learners' self-regulated learning in a technology-enhanced learning environment. Accordingly, teachers' support is a significant predictor of students' self-regulated learning in a blended learning environment.

Moreover, the literature has suggested that learners' self-regulation in a technological environment may be influenced by individual factors, such as motivation and metacognition. Lehmann et al. (2014) found that learners' motivation and metacognition are significant predictors of their self-regulated learning in a computer-based learning environment. Learners who are highly motivated and possess strong metacognitive skills are more likely to engage in self-regulated learning in a computer-based learning environment. This situation underscores the importance of promoting motivation and metacognition amongst learners to support effective learning outcomes in digital learning environments.

However, some studies have suggested that the use of technology in education may also pose challenges to learners' self-regulation. Lahza et al. (2022) found that learners' self-regulated learning is negatively affected by the lack of personal interaction in an online learning environment. Personal interaction is an important aspect of creating supportive and engaging learning environments that promote self-regulated learning. In online learning environments, instructors and course designers may need to consider strategies to promote interaction and engagement, such as using discussion forums, video conferencing or collaborative learning tools, to support learners' self-regulated learning.

Therefore, the literature review highlights that technology can serve as a facilitator of self-regulated learning. However, teacher support and individual factors, such as motivation and metacognition, play crucial roles in fostering learners' self-regulation in a technological learning environment.

III. METHODOLOGY

This research aims to explore teachers' perceptions of enhancing EFL learners' self-regulation through video games. A questionnaire was used to investigate EFL teachers' perceptions of using video games in teaching EFL to enhance self-regulation. The questionnaire included 24 statements related to the effects of video games on students' self-regulation. The questionnaire was designed based on the literature review and previous studies related to the topic. The statements were rated using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). A group of three experts in the fields of curricula and methods of teaching English and applied linguistics were presented with a checklist to gather their input on the suitability of statements for video games and self-regulation and their relevance to specific dimensions. The appropriate statements were selected and modified to fit the requirements of this study. The validity of the scale was confirmed, and its reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a score of 0.93, indicating that the scale was dependable.

The participants of this study were 130 EFL teachers recruited from different schools in the region. The participants were selected based on their willingness to participate in the current study and their experience in teaching EFL. This study followed ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects. The participants were informed of the purpose of the study, their rights and confidentiality. They were also given the option to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

The participants were contacted through email and informed of the study's purpose. They were also provided with an informed consent form that they had to sign before participating in the study. Thereafter, they were asked to complete the questionnaire online using Google Forms.

The collected data were coded, entered in a computer and analysed using SPSS. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics, such as mean, standard deviation and frequency distribution. Inferential statistics, such as t-test, was used to compare the means. The results will be shown in the table.

One limitation of this study is that it relied on self-reported data from teachers, which means it is based on their perspectives and opinions. Another limitation is that it only focused on EFL teachers, which may limit its generalisability to other contexts or populations.

IV. FINDINGS

The results of this study were reached and formed considering the Saudi EFL teachers' responses to a web-based questionnaire. Table 1 shows the results.

TABLE 1
TEACHERS' RESPONSES

Question	Strongly disagree	disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean	Std. Deviation	T-test	significance	Sample attitude
Video games encourage students to complete assignments	8	13	4	53	52	3.98	1.181	38.464	0.000	Agree
Video games encourage students to set short-term goals	22	24	28	31	25	3.10	1.369	25.822	0.000	Agree
Video games encourage students to set long-term goals	8	10	13	48	51	3.92	1.181	37.785	0.000	Strongly agree
Video games encourage students to Set reminders for upcoming tests and quizzes	8	13	4	53	52	3.98	1.181	38.464	0.000	Agree
Video games encourage students to Take notes in class	22	24	28	30	26	3.11	1.377	25.738	0.000	Agree
Video games encourage students to	8	10	18	43	51	3.37	1.227	31.303	0.000	Strongly agree

Create schedules										
Video games encourage students to Stay on track with deadlines	9	18	4	50	49	3.92	1.181	37.785	0.000	Agree
Video games encourage students to Take a decision	21	24	31	32	22	3.86	1.256	35.054	0.000	Agree
Video games encourage students to Set aside specific times for studying	2	10	18	30	70	3.08	1.327	26.433	0.000	Strongly agree
Video games encourage students to Set aside specific times for completing homework assignments	7	10	2	51	60	4.20	1.045	45.837	0.000	Strongly agree
Video games encourage students to Apply problem-solving as a learning strategy	25	33	24	32	16	4.13	1.123	41.928	0.000	Disagree
Video games encourage students to Draw logical conclusions from facts	16	8	17	41	48	2.85	1.324	24.571	0.000	Strongly agree
Video games encourage students to Communicate with students effectively	9	6	1	29	85	3.75	1.343	31.807	0.000	Strongly agree
Video games encourage students to Communicate with teachers effectively	12	17	13	41	47	4.35	1.166	42.494	0.000	Strongly agree
Video games encourage students to Develop social skills	27	26	27	46	4	3.72	1.324	32.069	0.000	Strongly agree
Video games encourage students to Be autonomous in learning	10	5	28	42	45	2.80	1.216	26.250	0.000	Strongly agree
Video games encourage students to control their learning	4	8	6	37	75	3.82	1.178	37.012	0.000	Strongly agree
Video games encourage students to Monitor their learning	27	13	11	27	52	4.32	1.027	47.908	0.000	Agree
Video games encourage students to be Aware of their learning	10	16	22	56	26	3.49	1.586	25.106	0.000	Agree

Video games encourage students to Evaluate their own learning	7	20	21	25	57	3.55	1.168	34.678	0.000	Strongly agree
Video games encourage students to break down knowledge into smaller parts	14	5	2	43	66	3.81	1.295	33.536	0.000	Strongly agree
Video games encourage students to Recognize their own emotions	18	23	17	35	37	4.09	1.285	36.321	0.000	Strongly agree
Video games encourage students to Recognize the emotions of others	28	15	31	36	20	3.38	1.416	27.247	0.000	Agree
Video games encourage students to Check in with teachers or mentors for feedback on their progress	9	30	20	46	25	3.04	1.372	25.252	0.000	Agree

As shown in Table 1, the participants had a positive attitude towards most of the questionnaire items on the use of video games in education. The mean scores of 23 items out of 24 were above 3, indicating agreement with the statements. The highest mean score was for the item ‘Video games encourage students to set aside specific times for completing homework assignments’ ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 1.045$), followed by ‘Video games encourage students to communicate with teachers effectively’ ($M = 4.35$, $SD = 1.166$). This result showed that the participants strongly agreed with the notion that video games promote learner autonomy and effective communication.

Meanwhile, the lowest mean scores were for the items ‘Video games encourage students to apply problem-solving as a learning strategy’ ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 1.123$) and ‘Video games encourage students to check in with teachers or mentors for feedback on progress’ ($M = 3.04$, $SD = 1.372$). The result indicated uncertainty or disagreement with these statements. Overall, the teachers had a positive perception of the role of video games in developing 21st century skills and learning strategies. The significance values ($p < 0.05$) for all questionnaire items also confirmed that the participants’ attitudes are statistically significant.

In summary, the analysis of the questionnaire responses revealed that the EFL teachers had an optimistic view of video games as effective tools for promoting autonomy, communication and cognitive and metacognitive skills amongst students. Although some teachers were uncertain or disagreed with certain aspects, such as problem-solving and feedback, the majority recognised the benefits of using video games for learning and education.

V. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study are consistent with those of previous research, showing that educators generally hold positive views of video game use for teaching and learning (e.g., Proctor & Marks, 2013; An et al., 2016; Gillern et al., 2022; Pineda-Martínez et al., 2023). That is, video games can promote a positive learning atmosphere and raise participation and engagement amongst students. Moreover, video games can engage learners, enhance their motivation and develop crucial 21st century skills, such as collaboration and critical thinking (Putri, 2014; Qian & Clark, 2016; Hewett, 2022). To this end, video games have several features that make them an effective learning tool. They often require players to work collaboratively towards a common goal, which can help develop important interpersonal skills, such as communication, teamwork and leadership. Additionally, many video games require players to think critically and solve problems creatively, which can help develop important cognitive skills, such as logical reasoning and analytical thinking. Video games also have the potential to be a highly effective and engaging learning tool, particularly for learners who may struggle with traditional classroom environments.

The participants in this study strongly agreed that video games promote learner autonomy, effective communication and cognitive skills. This result echoes the conclusions of researchers who found that video games empower learners to take control of their learning and interact with others (Wouters et al., 2013; Seli & Santosa, 2022). Accordingly, teachers believe that video games can positively affect learners’ planning, organizing, monitoring, evaluating and assessing skills. In video games, students are frequently expected to participate actively in their learning. Hence, learners must keep track

of their learning, establish and revise learning goals, and assess their development. Lastly, video games can provide opportunities for learners to develop self-regulation skills.

The overall positive attitudes of the EFL teachers indicate their willingness to adopt video game-based pedagogies, consistent with findings that educators with more favorable views of technology tend to use it more in their teaching (Maravic et al., 2018; Cabellos et al., 2021). However, some uncertainties remain regarding the problem-solving and communication aspects. Hence, providing hands-on experience and continuous training on educational video games could address these issues.

Some participants were uncertain whether video games improve problem-solving abilities and student-teacher communication. Their skepticism corroborates the arguments of authors who indicated the lack of empirical evidence on the learning benefits of video games (e.g., Fu et al., 2016; Maraffi et al., 2017). Without first-hand experience with video game use in classrooms, teachers may be unconvinced of their advantages for developing problem-solving skills and enhancing feedback. This situation highlights the need for professional development programs to prepare teachers for video game integration.

In summary, this study provided valuable insights into EFL teachers' perceptions of video game use for learning and education. The results confirmed the generally optimistic views found in previous research, especially on learner self-regulation, autonomy, motivation and 21st century skills development. Additionally, the findings directed to the need for professional development focused on problem-solving, communication and student-teacher interaction using video games. By promoting video game literacy and hands-on experience amongst teachers, many of the uncertainties found in this and other studies could be addressed. Overall, the participants recognized the significant potential of video games as pedagogical tools for enhancing learners' self-regulation. However, note that not all video games are created equal. Thus, educators and parents should carefully consider the content and appropriateness of games before incorporating them into a learning environment. Video games often require players to work collaboratively towards a common goal, which can help develop important interpersonal skills, such as communication, teamwork and leadership. Additionally, learning management systems can be used to give students access to online tools, monitor their development and give them feedback on their education. For example, teachers can use a learning management system to give students the ability to track their progress, provide resources and materials and establish goals for them.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study shows that teachers have a positive perception of using video games to enhance learners' self-regulation. The results from the questionnaire of 130 teachers indicate that they believe video games can have a positive effect on learners' self-regulation. This finding suggests that video games can be an effective tool to help students develop their self-regulation skills. By incorporating video games in the classroom and providing training for teachers on how to use them effectively, schools can help students develop the skills they need to succeed academically and in life.

The researcher presents the following recommendations based on the findings of this study.

1. Incorporate video games in the classroom: The results suggest that video games can be an effective tool to enhance learners' self-regulation. Therefore, teachers could consider incorporating video games in their teaching practice to help students develop their self-regulation skills.
2. Provide training for teachers on how to use video games: Some teachers may not be familiar with video games or know how to use them in the classroom. Therefore, it may be beneficial for schools to provide training for teachers on how to use video games effectively to enhance learners' self-regulation.
3. Develop video games specifically for self-regulation: Although there are many video games available, not all of them are designed to enhance self-regulation skills. Therefore, game developers could create video games specifically for this purpose to ensure that they are effective in helping students develop their self-regulation skills.

Although the results of this study are promising, further research is needed to investigate the effectiveness of using video games to enhance learners' self-regulation in different contexts. For example, future studies could explore the impact of video game use on self-regulation in different age groups or different subject areas. Another study can focus on conducting interviews with the teachers who participated in the questionnaire to gain further insights into their perceptions of using video games to enhance learners' self-regulation. Moreover, a researcher can compare the results of this study with other studies that have investigated the use of video games for educational purposes. Another research can develop a set of guidelines for teachers on how to effectively use video games in their classrooms to promote learners' self-regulation skills.

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Gamification and English Language Learning: Enhancing Reading and Speaking Skills and Motivation Among B40 Students

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Abstract—The study investigated the impact of gamification on enhancing English language reading and speaking skills and motivation among B40 students. 100 primary school students from the B40 economic group participated in this study. This study employs a mixed-methods research design, where data are collected both quantitatively and qualitatively through pre- and post-tests, surveys, and interviews. The findings suggest that gamification has a positive impact on enhancing reading and speaking skills, while also increasing the motivation of B40 students to learn the English language. The findings underscore the importance of incorporating gamified approaches into English language instruction to bridge learning gaps and promote inclusivity.

Index Terms—B40, gamification, reading skill, speaking skill

I. INTRODUCTION

Malaysian households are divided into three income groups: the bottom 40% (B40), middle 40% (M40), and top 20% (T20). The B40 group, comprising households with monthly incomes below RM3,860, represents the country's most economically disadvantaged population (Thangiah et al., 2020). Raising this group to the middle class is a primary goal of the Eleventh Malaysia Plan (11MP). However, B40 students encounter significant obstacles in gaining English proficiency due to limited exposure, low motivation, and little support at home (Mahamod et al., 2021). Traditional language teaching often fails to meet their needs, further widening the proficiency gap (Zainol, 2021).

This study examines how gamification can improve English language learning among B40 students by increasing engagement, motivation, and inclusivity. Gamified learning environments provide personalized, interactive experiences that can help close learning gaps and support both academic and socio-economic development (Annamalai et al., 2021; Pektas & Kepceoglu, 2019). By tackling the specific challenges faced by B40 learners, gamification serves as an effective tool for enhancing language skills.

Focusing on B40 students in Penang, this study investigates the use of different gamified platforms to improve reading and speaking skills while boosting motivation. The findings aim to help teachers and curriculum developers find more effective strategies for teaching English.

The research questions guiding this study are:

1. To what extent can gamification enhance the reading and speaking skills of B40 students?
2. What aspects of gamification motivate B40 students to improve their English language proficiency?

This study is grounded in three key theories: Stephen Krashen's Theory of Second Language Acquisition (Krashen, 1982), Goal Setting Theory (Locke & Latham, 2019), and Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2022). These frameworks collectively support the integration of motivational elements, goal-oriented learning, and low-anxiety environments in language instruction—core features of gamified learning. In this study, participants engaged in gamified lessons designed to enhance motivation and language proficiency. At the production stage of each lesson, learners set goals and work toward achieving them, aligning with the Goal Setting Theory. Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which categorizes motivation as intrinsic, extrinsic, or amotivation, further explains how gamified tasks sustained student engagement and autonomy. Widely used in educational contexts, SDT offers a valuable perspective for understanding how gamification supports meaningful language learning (Chen & Zhao, 2022).

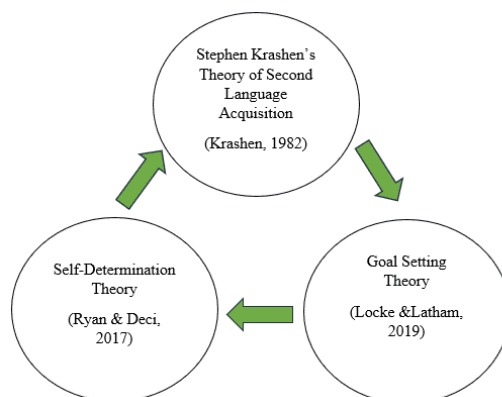


Figure 1. Theories Used in This Study

II. METHODS

A. Research Design

To address the research questions, the current study employed a sequential explanatory mixed-method research design. The strengths of both quantitative and qualitative approaches have been incorporated into the mixed methods study design, and each step was completed to provide a deeper understanding of the research topics. Both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered for this investigation, analyzed independently, and then combined (Othman et al., 2020). The qualitative data significantly enhanced the conclusions drawn from the quantitative data. Surveys, interviews, and participant assessments provided the data for this study. The data collection techniques used to address the study's research questions are depicted in Figure 2 and the following diagram.

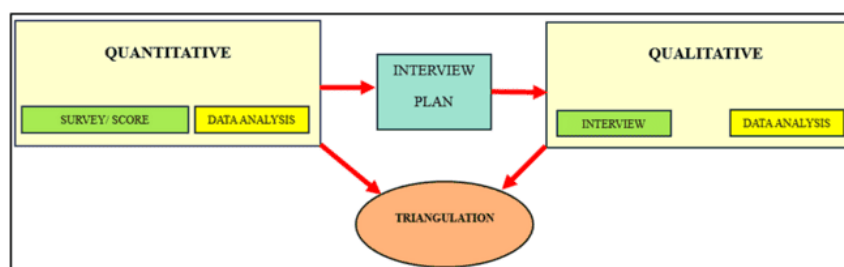


Figure 2. Data Collection Method

B. Participants

A total of 100 B40 students aged 7 to 12 from an education center in Penang took part in the study. They were chosen using cluster purposive sampling from existing classes consisting of students with similar English proficiency but from different school types—National, Chinese, and Tamil medium. To protect confidentiality and minimize bias, pseudonyms were assigned to all participants.

C. Research Site

The study took place at the Buddhist Tzu Chi Education Centre, a Taiwan-based NGO located in urban Penang. The center supports students from diverse income levels and ethnic backgrounds, mainly Chinese and Indian. In 2021, it introduced the Hope Children Project to offer educational sponsorships for B40 students across Penang. Participants in this research were chosen from students enrolled in this program.

TABLE 1
PARTICIPANTS, SAMPLING METHOD, DATA COLLECTION, AND DATA ANALYSIS

PHASE 1	Pre-Test (English Language Proficiency Test 1)				
	N.O. OF PARTICIPANTS	SAMPLING METHOD	DATA COLLECTION	DATA ANALYSIS	THEORY
	100 B40 students	Cluster Purposive Sampling	English Language Proficiency Test 1	SPSS	1. Krashen's Theory of Second Language Acquisition 2. Goal-Setting Theory 3. Self-Determination Theory
PHASE 2	Intervention (8 Weeks)				
	N.O. OF PARTICIPANTS	SAMPLING METHOD	DATA COLLECTION	DATA ANALYSIS	THEORY
	100 B40 students	Cluster Purposive Sampling	Online Gamified Activities (Participant Scores)	SPSS	1. Krashen's Theory of Second Language Acquisition 2. Goal-Setting Theory 3. Self-Determination Theory
PHASE 3	Post-Test (English Language Proficiency Test 2)				
	N.O. OF PARTICIPANTS	SAMPLING METHOD	DATA COLLECTION	DATA ANALYSIS	THEORY
	100 students	Cluster Purposive Sampling	English Language Proficiency Test 2	SPSS	1. Krashen's Theory of Second Language Acquisition 2. Goal – Setting Theory 3. Self-Determination Theory
PHASE 4	Survey				
	N.O. OF PARTICIPANTS	SAMPLING METHOD	DATA COLLECTION	DATA ANALYSIS	THEORY
	60 students	Random Sampling	Survey	SPSS	1. Krashen's Theory of Second Language Acquisition 2. Goal – Setting Theory 3. Self-Determination Theory
PHASE 5	Interview				
	N.O. OF PARTICIPANTS	SAMPLING METHOD	DATA COLLECTION	DATA ANALYSIS	THEORY
	20 Students	Random Sampling	Interview Questions	Thematic Analysis	1. Self-Determination Theory

D. Research Procedure

The lesson structure followed a standardized lesson plan, including learning objectives, learning outcomes, as well as pre-, during, and post-lesson activities. The lessons were conducted by the teacher at the education center, and links to the gamified platforms were given for students to access on their laptops. For the speaking activity, students were placed in groups to carry out discussions. Their respective teachers monitored the discussion and awarded marks on the spot. Every session was recorded for data collection and analysis. The procedure of the gamified lesson is illustrated below.

TABLE 2
RESEARCH PROCEDURE

Skill: Reading			
Week/ Duration	Topic	Learning Standard	Gamified Platform
1 60 minutes	The Solar System	3.1 Recognise words in linear and non-linear texts by using knowledge of the sounds of letters 3.2 Understand a variety of linear and non-linear print and digital texts by using appropriate reading strategies 3.3 Read independently for information and enjoyment	Kahoot!
3 60 minutes	Holi Diary!	3.1 Recognise words in linear and non-linear texts by using knowledge of the sounds of letters 3.2 Understand a variety of linear and non-linear print and digital texts by using appropriate reading strategies 3.3 Read independently for information and enjoyment	Kahoot!
5 60 minutes	Future Cities	3.1 Recognise words in linear and non-linear texts by using knowledge of the sounds of letters 3.2 Understand a variety of linear and non-linear print and digital texts by using appropriate reading strategies 3.3 Read independently for information and enjoyment	WordWall
7	Digital Citizenship	3.4 Recognise words in linear and non-linear texts by using knowledge of the sounds of letters 3.5 Understand a variety of linear and non-linear print and digital texts by using appropriate reading strategies Read independently for information and enjoyment	WordWall
2 60 minutes	School Lunch Menu	1.1 Communicate simple information intelligibly 1.2 Use appropriate communication strategies 1.3 Communicate appropriately to a small or large group	WordWall
4 60 minutes	The 3 R's	2.1 Communicate simple information intelligibly 2.2 Use appropriate communication strategies 2.3 Communicate appropriately to a small or large group	Kahoot!
6 60 minutes	Say No to Bullying	2.1 Communicate simple information intelligibly 2.2 Use appropriate communication strategies 2.1 Communicate appropriately to a small or large group	Kahoot!
8	Food Waste	2.3 Communicate simple information intelligibly 2.4 Use appropriate communication strategies Communicate appropriately with a small or large group	Kahoot!

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 3 presents the scores for both the pre-test (R1) and the post-test (R4). For the pre-test, R1, the mean score was calculated to be 3.07. This value represents the average performance of the participants before the intervention or test. The post-test scores are defined as R4. The mean score for the post-test was 3.61, which shows an improvement compared to the pre-test.

A. Reading Score

TABLE 3
PAIRED SAMPLE STATISTICS OF THE READING SCORE

Paired Samples Statistics					
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	R1	3.07	99	1.172	.118
	R4	3.61	99	1.028	.103

As shown in Table 3, the paired samples t-test analysis revealed a statistically significant improvement in scores from the pre-test (R1) to the post-test (R4), indicating the effectiveness of the intervention conducted between the two assessments. The mean difference is -0.535, suggesting that post-test scores were, on average, higher than pre-test scores. This reflects a consistent increase in performance across participants. The standard deviation of the differences is 0.773, indicating some variability in individual score changes, although the overall trend remained positive.

The standard error of the mean difference is 0.078, signifying a precise estimate of the mean difference and reinforcing the reliability of the results. The consistent increase in scores, supported by the confidence interval and a highly significant p-value, confirms the positive impact of the intervention. In summary, the paired samples t-test results offer strong evidence of a statistically significant improvement from pre-test to post-test. These findings emphasize the effectiveness of the intervention and highlight its potential to improve performance in similar educational settings.

TABLE 4
PAIRED SAMPLE TEST

Paired Samples Test										
		Paired Differences					Significance			
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	One-Sided p	Two-Sided p
					Lower	Upper				
Pair 1	R1 - R4	-.535	.773	.078	-.690	-.381	-6.887	98	<.001	<.001

TABLE 5
PAIRED SAMPLES EFFECT SIZES

Paired Samples Effect Sizes						
Pair 1	R1 - R4		Standardizer ^a	Point Estimate	95% Confidence Interval	
			Cohen's d		Lower	Upper
			.773	-.692	-.910	-.471
		Hedges' correction	.776	-.690	-.907	-.469

a. The denominator used in estimating the effect sizes.
Cohen's d uses the sample standard deviation of the mean difference.
Hedges' correction uses the sample standard deviation of the mean difference, plus a correction factor.

B. Speaking Score

The effect size analysis further supports the statistical findings and emphasizes the practical significance of the intervention. Cohen's d was -0.773 (95% CI: -0.910 to -0.471), indicating a medium-to-large effect size and a meaningful improvement in post-test scores. The negative sign reflects the direction of change, with scores increasing from pre-test to post-test.

Similarly, Hedges' g, adjusted for small sample bias, was -0.776 (CI: -0.907 to -0.469), closely aligning with Cohen's d. Given the large sample size, the correction was minimal, reinforcing the consistency and robustness of the results.

In sum, both effect size measures confirm that the intervention had a meaningful and practical impact on participants' performance, underscoring its effectiveness in achieving the intended outcomes.

TABLE 6
PAIRED SAMPLES STATISTICS FOR SPEAKING SCORES

Paired Samples Statistics					
Pair 1		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
	S1	2.59	99	.969	.097
	S4	3.12	99	1.091	.110

The analysis of speaking scores for Pair 1, comparing pre-test (S1) and post-test (S4), shows an improvement in participants' speaking skills after the intervention. The average pre-test score was 2.59 (SD = 0.969, SE = 0.097), while the post-test average increased to 3.12 (SD = 1.091, SE = 0.110), based on 99 participants. This increase indicates a positive impact of the intervention on speaking performance.

Although there was a slight increase in score variability, the consistent rise in mean scores indicates an overall improvement. However, to determine if this change is statistically significant, the paired samples test results, especially the t-value and p-value, must be reviewed. These results will confirm whether the observed improvement is genuine or due to chance.

In summary, the descriptive statistics suggest a notable enhancement in speaking skills, with further statistical testing required to validate the significance of this improvement.

TABLE 7
 PAIRED SAMPLES TEST FOR SPEAKING SCORE

Paired Samples Test										
		Paired Differences					Significance			
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	One-Sided p	Two-Sided p
					Lower	Upper				
Pair 1	S1 - S4	-.535	.690	.069	-.673	-.398	-7.722	98	<.001	<.001

The analysis of speaking scores (S1: pre-test, S4: post-test) shows a statistically significant improvement after the intervention. The mean difference of -0.535 indicates that post-test scores were, on average, 0.535 points higher than pre-test scores. The standard deviation of the differences was 0.690, with a standard error of 0.069, indicating a reliable estimate with moderate variability among participants.

The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference ranges from -0.673 to -0.398, reinforcing that post-test scores consistently exceeded pre-test scores. The t-value of -7.722, with 98 degrees of freedom, and a p-value < 0.001, confirm that the improvement is highly significant and unlikely due to chance.

In summary, the significant increase from a mean of 2.59 (pre-test) to 3.12 (post-test) clearly shows the intervention's effectiveness in improving speaking skills. These results not only confirm the reliability of the findings but also emphasize the practical importance of the improvement, supporting the intervention's positive effect on speaking proficiency.

TABLE 8
 PAIRED SAMPLES EFFECT SIZES FOR SPEAKING SCORE

Paired Samples Effect Sizes						
Pair 1	S1 - S4	Standardizer ^a		Point Estimate	95% Confidence Interval	
		Cohen's d			Lower	Upper
		Hedges' correction				
			.690	-.776	-.999	-.550
			.692	-.773	-.996	-.548

a. The denominator used in estimating the effect sizes.
 Cohen's d uses the sample standard deviation of the mean difference.
 Hedges' correction uses the sample standard deviation of the mean difference, plus a correction factor.

The effect sizes for the increase in speaking scores were calculated using Cohen's *d* and Hedges' correction, both of which provide important insights into the practical significance of the observed improvements.

For Cohen's *d*, the point estimate is 0.690, which suggests a moderate effect size. This means that the increase in speaking scores from pre-test to post-test represents a meaningful performance improvement, attributable to the intervention. The 95% confidence interval for Cohen's *d* ranges from -0.776 to -0.550, and since the entire confidence interval is negative, it further supports the conclusion that the post-test scores were consistently higher than the pre-test scores, reinforcing the impact of the intervention.

Similarly, Hedges' correction yielded a point estimate of 0.692, with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -0.773 to -0.548. This value is very close to Cohen's *d*, indicating that the effect size is nearly identical across both measures. While Hedges' correction is typically used for smaller sample sizes, the correction in this case is not substantial because the sample size is sufficiently large. The fact that both the point estimates for Cohen's d and Hedges' g are moderate and their confidence intervals are entirely negative further strengthens the conclusion that the intervention had a significant impact on participants' speaking abilities.

In summary, both Cohen's *d* and Hedges' correction indicate a moderate effect size, suggesting that the intervention was effective in enhancing participants' speaking performance. The negative confidence intervals for both measures confirm that the improvement in speaking scores was consistent and reliable. Therefore, we can conclude that the intervention not only led to a statistically significant increase in speaking scores but also produced a practical and meaningful improvement in participants' speaking skills.

C. Survey

To examine how gamification can help overcome the challenges faced by the B40 students, this study used a survey to collect data on participants' experiences, attitudes, and perceived progress in reading and speaking skills. The survey was administered to 60 B40 students who engaged with gamified English learning modules over the six-week period.

The survey aimed to address two research questions: (1) What is the impact of gamification on the reading and speaking skills of B40 students? and (2) How does gamification motivate B40 students to improve their reading and speaking abilities? The questionnaire consisted of 14 Likert-scale items and was distributed in printed form for students to complete.

Participants were chosen by the teacher from the education centre, and their responses were anonymized to maintain confidentiality.

The findings demonstrate a notable improvement in participants' English language skills after the gamified lessons were implemented. As illustrated in Figure 3, more than 50% of the participants strongly agreed that their reading and speaking skills had significantly improved. This outcome highlights the positive impact of gamification on students' learning processes, aligning with the study's objective to explore its effectiveness in enhancing reading and speaking skills.

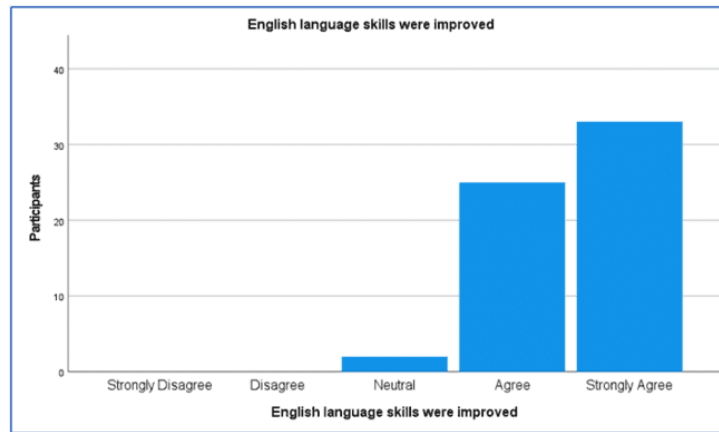


Figure 3. English Language Skills Were Improved

Moreover, motivation emerged as an important factor influenced by the gamified lessons. As illustrated in Figure 4, the majority of participants reported feeling highly motivated when engaging with gamified lessons. These findings stress gamification's potential to create a more engaging and interactive learning environment, which can drive student participation and sustained interest in English language learning.

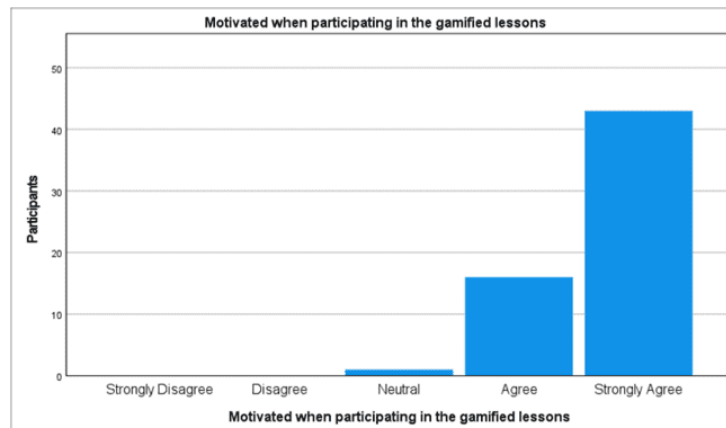


Figure 4. Motivated When Participating in the Gamified Lesson

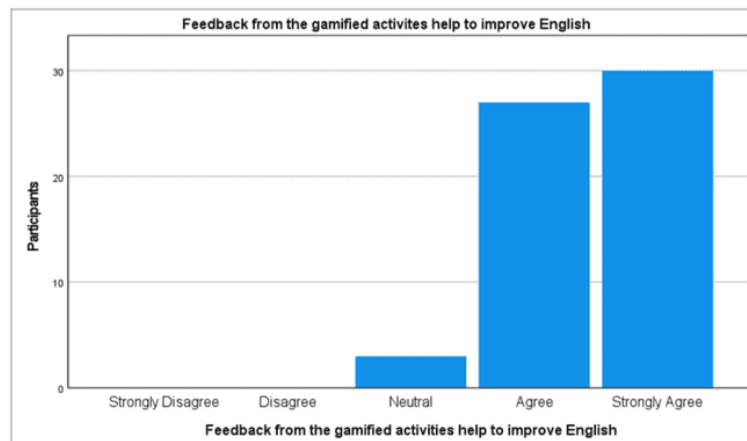


Figure 5. Feedback From the Gamified Activities Helps to Improve English

The findings from the survey further demonstrated the learners' preference for gamified lessons over traditional teaching methods. As shown in Figure 5, a majority of participants expressed a clear inclination towards learning English

through games rather than conventional approaches. Over 30 participants strongly agreed with this preference, forming the largest group in the survey. Approximately 25 participants agreed, further supporting the trend toward favouring gamified learning. Only a negligible number of participants remained neutral or disagreed, highlighting a positive reception of gamification. These results suggest that gamified lessons not only improve students' engagement and motivation but also address their preferences for interactive and dynamic learning methods over traditional classroom approaches.

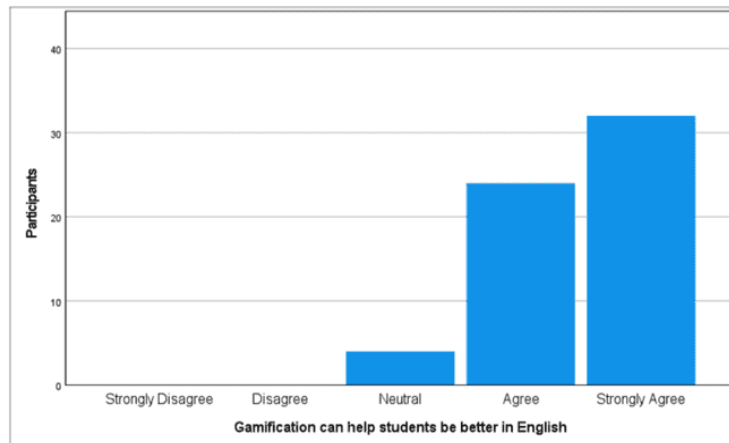


Figure 6. Gamification can Help Students Improve in English

Findings also reflect participants' belief in the effectiveness of gamification in improving their English language skills. As illustrated in Figure 6, a significant proportion of participants agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that gamification can help them improve in English. More than 30 participants strongly agreed with the statement, demonstrating strong confidence in the role of gamified activities in enhancing their proficiency. About 25 participants agreed, further supporting the effectiveness of gamification in language learning. A minimal number of students remained neutral, with no participants disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. This overwhelming positive response suggests that the gamified learning approach is not only enjoyable but is also perceived as highly effective for skill development in English, especially among B40 students.

D. Interview

Six main themes were identified: emotional and psychological engagement, motivation through innovative learning, academic skill enhancement, social and collaborative learning, future-oriented learning, and challenges and growth opportunities. The themes and codes are illustrated in Figure 7. These findings highlight how gamification served as a powerful tool to encourage language skill development among B40 students.

(a). Emotional and Psychological Engagement

The findings indicate that gamification significantly boosted the emotional and psychological engagement of B40 students, fostering a positive outlook on learning English. Participants became more comfortable using the language, with three expressing that they "can speak" and preferring to use English, as it was the first language they acquired. Others, who initially lacked confidence, acknowledged that English was not their first language since it was not commonly spoken at home. Additionally, students exhibited increased confidence in speaking English, showing a willingness to communicate despite making mistakes. One participant stated, "I will try my best to speak in English," demonstrating their determination to improve. Gamification also elicited positive emotional responses, as students expressed feelings of happiness and excitement and recalled memorable lessons. For instance, one participant found the lesson on the holy festival particularly impactful, saying, "I can't forget the holy festival".

(b). Motivation Through Innovative Learning

The analysis found that students were highly engaged by gamification features, particularly sound effects like music and drumrolls, which aided in information retention. One participant recalled, "I can't forget... I was the first in the future and solar system," while another emphasized, "I can't forget the holy festival." These elements made the lessons more engaging and memorable. Students expressed a strong preference for gamification as a learning method, appreciating the combination of fun and education. One participant noted, "We play, but we can also learn things," indicating that the interactive approach was both enjoyable and effective. The excitement generated by gamified lessons also enhanced vocabulary retention, with students recalling words such as "summer," "Earth," "colour," "Jupiter," "camouflage," and "Galaxy." In summary, gamification served as a powerful motivator, transforming the learning experience into an enjoyable and interactive process. By capturing students' attention and improving information retention, this approach fostered enthusiasm for learning and strengthened their grasp of the English language, making it an effective instructional strategy.

(c). Academic Skill Enhancement

This study aimed to enhance the reading and speaking skills of B40 students through gamified lessons. The gamified lessons resulted in notable improvements, boosting students' confidence in these areas. One of the participants said that "Reading can make me calm," while another expressed their newfound passion, saying, "I love reading." Students also found the effectiveness of games in improving their English skills. One participant reflected on their progress, stating, "Yes, before my English was TP4, now my English is TP5," indicating an advancement in language proficiency. Overall, the findings demonstrate the transformative impact of gamified learning on students' reading and speaking abilities. By making learning enjoyable, motivating students, and fostering measurable progress, this approach proves to be an effective tool for enhancing language skills and building confidence.

(d). Social and Collaborative Learning

Beyond motivation and engagement, Students opined that peer support is a crucial factor in their learning process. They frequently communicated in English while collaborating on tasks. One participant stated, "I speak English to my bestie," emphasizing how peer interactions facilitated language. Collaboration was a common theme in the interview data as students discussed strategies before answering questions. One participant noted, "Yeah, I discuss strategy first, then press the answer," highlighting the role of teamwork in problem-solving. Moments of success were celebrated, with another student recalling, "I was very happy when I won the first game, and I shared great teamwork with my partner." Participants asserted that healthy competition further enriched the learning experience, strengthening peer relationships. One student commented, "Yeah, because I get to know them better," underscoring how gamification fostered social connections.

Additionally, participants applied their learning to real-life situations, reinforcing the relevance of their lessons. For example, some mentioned learning practical skills like counting money, stating, "Teacher, I learned how to count money," while others showcased improved vocabulary by recalling words like "yoghurt" and identifying colours.

Participants also revealed curiosity about broader topics such as the solar system, eagerly recalling terms like "astronaut," "the Sun," and "the Earth." These findings suggest that gamification not only enhanced language skills but also sparked interest in new subjects, making learning more meaningful and applicable to real-world contexts.

(e). Future-Oriented Learning

The analysis revealed that participants viewed English as an essential tool for their academic and professional success, recognizing its role in global communication. One participant observed that, "Throughout the world, like 80% of the people know English, so it's easy to communicate," while another remarked, "If everyone knows English and you don't, you will feel shy." These statements illustrate how participants linked English proficiency to their social confidence and ability to integrate into global communities. Many participants associated English proficiency with their career aspirations, expressing ambitions such as "I wanna be a teacher," "I wanna be a scientist," and "I wanna be a police officer." Their responses highlight their understanding that mastering English can open doors to various professional opportunities. The students acknowledged the importance of English in international contexts. One participant stated, "When we go to the USA or Britain, we can use English," while another noted, "At university, we have to speak English all the time." This future-oriented perspective underscores the role of gamified English learning in preparing students for academic and professional success.

(f). Challenges and Growth Opportunities

The study also identified challenges faced by students during gamified learning and how they addressed them. One common difficulty was maintaining focus and following instructions, with participants acknowledging the need to stay attentive. One student stated, "Focusing" and "Listening to what the teacher says" were key to keeping up with lessons. Another limitation was the frustration of selecting incorrect answers. One participant expressed, "When we know the answer but press the wrong one, we feel very angry." While this emotional reaction highlights the competitive nature of gamification, it also motivated students to improve, as another noted, "I must work harder." Some students also struggled with spelling, humorously referencing "the yoghurt" as a challenging word. In response, a few adopted trial-and-error strategies, with one admitting, "For me, I just pick a random answer".

Despite these difficulties, students appreciated the support provided by their teacher. One participant stated, "Teacher helped," highlighting the role of guidance in overcoming obstacles. These findings suggest that while gamification presents certain challenges, it also offers opportunities for growth. The ability to persist through difficulties, develop resilience, and receive teacher support contributed to students' overall progress. Addressing these challenges effectively can further enhance the benefits of gamified learning in language education.

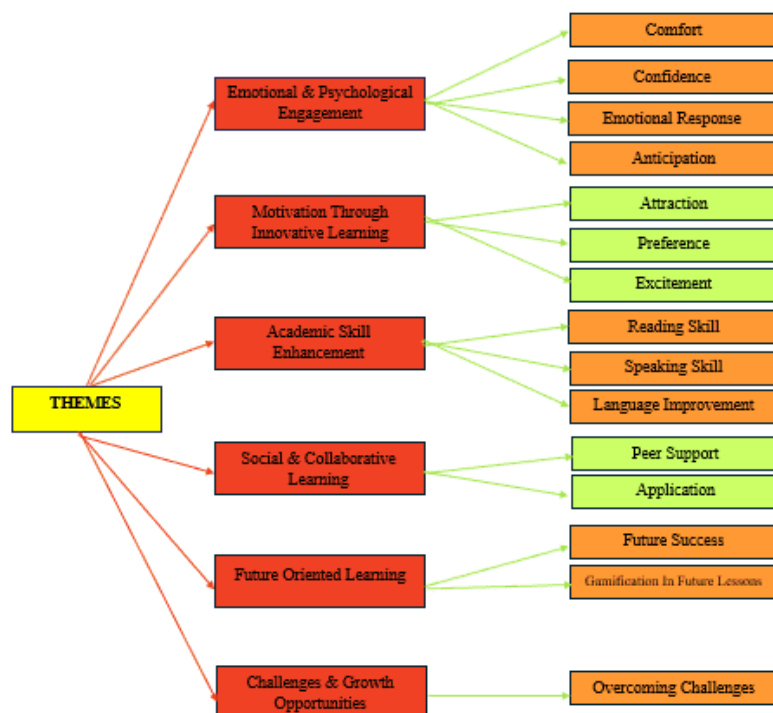


Figure 7. Themes Derived From the Interview Data

IV. CONCLUSION

This study found a marked improvement over the eight-week intervention in the students' reading comprehension and speaking fluency. These findings suggest that gamified lessons can be a worthwhile pedagogical tool to enhance language skills, particularly among B40 students who may benefit from more interesting and motivating educational strategies. León et al. (2022) reported that reading skills of students can be enhanced by gamification. As stated in their study, due to their drive and dedication to studying, young students are often interested in using play tactics to enhance their reading habits. Students who use gamified systems increase their vocabulary, reading speed, problem-solving skills, and study habits. The current study proved that the participants' speaking scores showed significant improvement, thus supporting the success of the intervention. The participants showcased better speaking abilities, which simply highlights the positive impact of the gamified intervention implemented to enhance the B40 students' speaking skills. Therefore, we can conclude that the intervention not only led to a statistically significant increase in speaking scores but also produced a practical and meaningful improvement in participants' speaking skills. The results are consistent with existing literature (Vathanalaoha, 2022), which emphasizes the potential of gamification to create a more dynamic and immersive learning experience, thereby enhancing overall educational outcomes, which are further discussed below.

This study reported that the use of gamification in education has shown a significant improvement in students' motivation. For B40 students, who frequently battle with low self-esteem and a fear of being judged in academic contexts, this change was essential. Vathanalaoha (2022) found that gamification is a means of addressing the problem of low student motivation. Gamification aids teachers in improving students' attention spans and motivation, thus increasing students' participation in class activities (Kıyançık & Uzun, 2022). Playing a game together in class goes beyond the conventional method of instruction, which directly boosts motivation to learn a language (Kıyançık & Uzun, 2022).

Implication of the study

Teachers play a pivotal role in implementing gamified learning strategies within classrooms. The findings of this study suggest that educators can incorporate diverse gamified activities in their lessons. These activities can improve learners' engagement with English language reading and speaking tasks by making them fun, competitive, and interactive. Moreover, teachers can customize gamification for learning objectives and design tasks tailored to specific language skills. For instance, using collaborative games for speaking practice or timed reading challenges to develop reading fluency.

Moreover, gamified tools often provide data analytics that teachers can use to track students' performance, identify areas for improvement, and offer targeted support. Lastly, by rewarding students with badges, points, or certificates, educators can foster a sense of achievement and encourage consistent effort. Through gamified methods, educators can create a positive and engaging learning environment, especially for students who may lack intrinsic motivation or face difficulties in traditional classroom settings.

The current study also underscores the necessity for schools and policymakers to take proactive measures in integrating gamification into educational frameworks. Schools should allocate resources to adopt gamified learning platforms and provide students with access to digital tools, such as tablets, educational apps, or smartboards. Affordable technology is essential to bridging the digital divide faced by students from underprivileged backgrounds. Next, policymakers should design professional development programs to equip teachers with the skills to effectively use gamification in their teaching. Workshops and hands-on training sessions can ensure educators are confident in implementing these methods. Policies that prioritize equitable access to gamified resources in rural and urban schools can help reduce educational disparities.

The result of this study suggests that the use of gamification helps in enhancing the English language reading and speaking skills of B40 students. This is to say that gamification can be used as a tool to upskill the reading and speaking skills. Policymakers should consider using gamification in schools with a majority of B40 students, as it could leave a positive impact on their English language learning, as well as bridge the educational gap among them. The theoretical and practical implications of this study are discussed in detail below.

The current study advances the theoretical knowledge of gamification in education, especially as it relates to B40 students' English language acquisition. The study supports and expands upon three important ideas by looking at how they affect speaking and reading abilities as well as motivation: goal-setting theory, Stephen Krashen's theory of second language acquisition, and self-determination theory (SDT). Figures 8 and 9 illustrate the theoretical implications of the findings of this study.

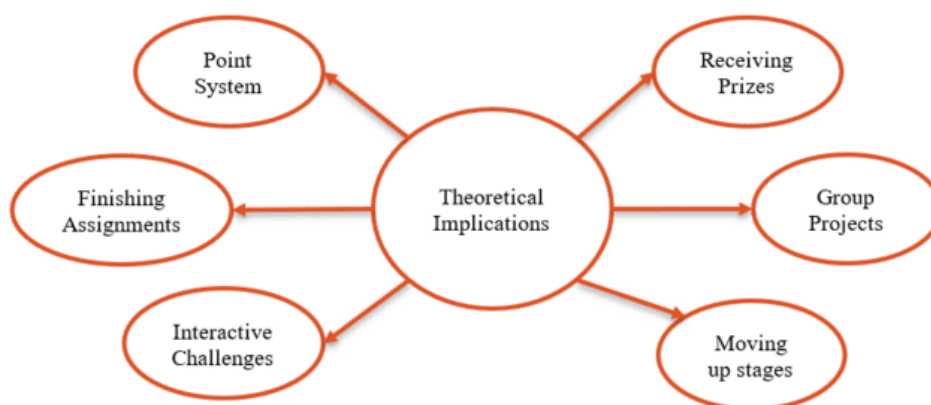


Figure 8. Theoretical Implications

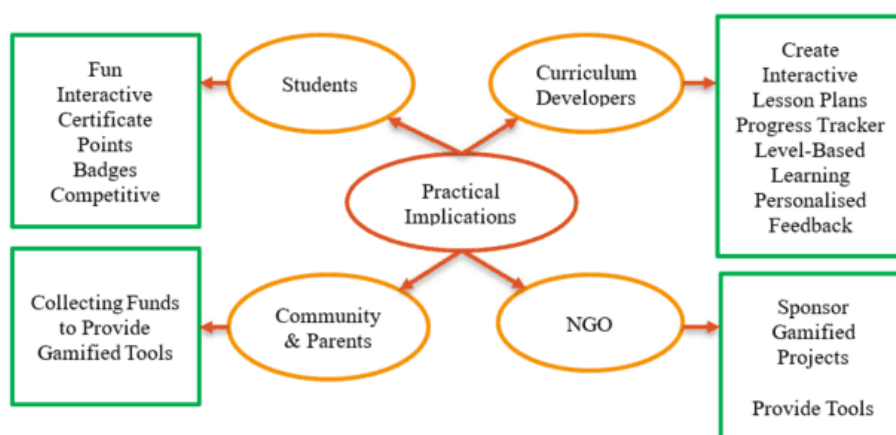


Figure 9. Practical Implications

This study highlights the significant potential of gamification as an innovative approach to addressing educational inequalities. By fostering motivation and improving English language reading and speaking skills, gamified learning can empower B40 students to achieve better academic outcomes. The findings call for a concerted effort from educators, policymakers, and researchers to leverage gamification in creating more inclusive and effective educational experiences. Ultimately, this research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on gamification and its transformative role in language education. One of the key limitations of this study is the relatively small sample size, as the research was conducted in one research site with a limited number of students. Another limitation of this study is the relatively short duration of the gamified intervention. The intervention lasted for only 8 weeks, which may have restricted the ability to assess the long-term impact of gamification on students' language skills. Future research should consider conducting longitudinal studies to assess the long-term effects of gamification on students' language proficiency. While this study

demonstrated positive short-term outcomes, understanding whether the improvements in reading and speaking skills are sustained over time would provide valuable insights into the lasting impact of gamified learning.

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A Comparative Study of Code-Switching in Communication Between First- and Fourth-Year English Majors at a University in Vietnam

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Abstract—This study investigates the phenomenon of code-switching among English language learners, focusing on the influence of their first language and second language and identifies differences and similarities between the two groups. It examines code-switching among first- and fourth-year English majors at a university in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The research employed a mixed-method approach, collecting data through questionnaires completed by 240 students and semi-structured interviews with 10 lecturers and 10 students involved in experimental classes. The results reveal that first-year English majors use code-switching more frequently and across a wider range of contexts, including classroom and casual conversations, mainly due to limited vocabulary, lower fluency, and a lack of confidence. In contrast, fourth-year students use code-switching less often and in a more selective, strategic manner, typically in important academic discussions or when expressing complex concepts. English should be consistently used as the main language of instruction, though reasonable alternation between the mother tongue and English can still support learning. Based on these findings, the study proposes solutions to improve speaking skills and limit unnecessary code-switching, including creating an English-only environment, enhancing vocabulary, and encouraging participation in English activities such as presentations, role-plays, and debates. Lecturers should provide timely feedback and increase opportunities for real-life English communication to develop more effective language reflexes.

Index Terms—code-switching, comparative study, communication, English-majored students

I. INTRODUCTION

English has become a global language due to historical, political, and economic factors. No longer restricted to native speakers, English has evolved into a “world language” used and modified by people across different cultures and linguistic backgrounds. In this context, multilingualism and code-switching have become common, and the interconnection of languages is essential for effective communication (Kachru, 1992). Communication bridges individuals by enabling message exchange and interpretation. In bilingual contexts, code-switching between L1 and L2 helps manage conversation flow. It enhances clarity and mutual understanding (Ervin-Tripp, 2001). Recent sociolinguistic research has

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increasingly recognized code-switching not as a sign of linguistic deficiency but as a complex, identity-expressive, and purposeful communicative act (García & Wei, 2021).

In the context of Vietnam, a linguistically diverse country with Vietnamese as the national language and numerous ethnic minority languages, globalization and digital integration have influenced patterns of language use. These influences have led to hybridization in communication, with English increasingly present in Vietnamese discourse, particularly in contemporary literature, youth expression, and professional settings (Nguyen, 2022). Code-switching between Vietnamese and English is especially common among employees in foreign-invested enterprises and in both oral and written forms of workplace communication (Nguyen, 2021). In general, English classrooms, teachers often switch to Vietnamese to explain complex concepts, manage interactions, and support low-proficiency students (Van Nguyen, 2022). Both teachers and students at a public university in Ho Chi Minh City have expressed a preference for a balanced use of Vietnamese and English, noting that code-switching helps reduce learner anxiety and build rapport (Tam, 2024). However, concerns surrounding linguistic purity and national language policy have given rise to debates about the appropriateness of code-switching in formal education settings (Wikipedia, 2025).

Further during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2022), the rise of platforms like Zoom, Facebook, TikTok, and Microsoft Teams created new spaces for real-time, text-based interaction, where code-switching became common. Among Vietnamese youth, especially English majors, digital communication often blends local and global languages to express nuance, identity, and social connection. Understanding code-switching in this context is key to improving English communication and informing discussions on language use, identity, and policy in a globalized, digital society.

The study aims to explore the characteristics of code-switching in communication among English majors, with a particular focus on how their first language (L1) and second language (L2) influence language choice. It further seeks to examine the similarities and differences in code-switching behavior between first- and fourth-year students. The research attempts to answer the following questions:

(1) *How frequently do first- and fourth-year English majors use code-switching between their first language (L1) and second language (L2) in communication?*

(2) *What similarities and differences exist in the code-switching patterns between first- and fourth-year students in relation to their first language (L1) and second language (L2)?*

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Conceptualizing Code-Switching

Myers-Scotton (1993) sees code-switching as socially motivated, where speakers switch languages to express social roles, negotiate power, or build group identity, making it a context-driven communicative strategy rather than random mixing. García and Wei (2021) argue from a translanguaging perspective that bilinguals draw from a unified linguistic repertoire rather than separate languages. Duggal and Asogwa (2025) further view code-switching as both a linguistic tool and a socially grounded practice that aids identity construction and meaning negotiation in multilingual settings.

B. Code-Switching in Bilingual Communication

Myers-Scotton (1993) argues that bilinguals consciously choose "marked" or "unmarked" codes to negotiate social roles, assert authority or solidarity, and adapt to contexts. García and Wei's (2021) translanguaging model views languages as a unified, flexible repertoire used creatively for meaning-making and identity expression, with code-switching as one strategy. Wintner et al. (2023) tested the Triggering Hypothesis, finding shared lexical items like cognates predict switching points based on proximity. Cedden et al. (2024) link cognitive and sociolinguistic factors, urging integration of linguistic and cognitive research on code-switching. Özkara et al. (2025) highlight cognitive control and language entropy's role in shaping switching, referencing the Adaptive Control Hypothesis.

C. Challenges and Controversies Surrounding Code-Switching

In the Classroom

Code-switching aids comprehension, scaffolds learning, and reduces anxiety in second language acquisition (Turnbull & Dailey-O'Cain, 2009). However, excessive code-switching may limit immersion and target language exposure, potentially hindering proficiency (Macaro, 2001). Teachers often face pressure to maintain language purity, causing tension between pedagogy and policy (García & Lin, 2017). While code-switching enhances emotional expression and understanding, it can be mistaken for incompetence (Dewaele & Wu, 2021). Teachers use it effectively, but students may feel confused by irregular patterns (Younas et al., 2023).

In Society

From a sociolinguistic perspective, code-switching can reflect social identity, group membership, or power dynamics (Myers-Scotton, 1993). However, it may also trigger negative attitudes linked to linguistic purism—the ideology that promotes "pure" language use and stigmatizes mixing (Woolard, 1998). Such attitudes can lead to social marginalization of bilingual speakers or pressure to conform to monolingual norms (Bauman & Briggs, 2003). Language policies in many countries often emphasize monolingualism for national unity or educational standardization, creating controversy when code-switching challenges these goals (Spolsky, 2004). People use code-switching as a survival strategy in predominantly white workplaces, which raises issues of assimilation pressure and racial identity (Adams, 2024).

Psychological and Sociolinguistic Challenges

Psycholinguistic theories emphasize the cognitive demands of managing multiple languages, with code-switching requiring complex executive control (Green & Abutalebi, 2013), which can be challenging in conflicting language environments. Socially, bilinguals balance multiple identities and language ideologies, causing tension between personal expression and societal expectations (Li, 2018). The debate continues over whether code-switching signals linguistic deficiency or a sophisticated strategy (García & Wei, 2021). Frequent code-switchers may gain cognitive flexibility but also experience increased self-monitoring stress (Dewaele et al., 2022). High cognitive control is needed, and frequent or pressured code-switching can cause mental fatigue (Merry et al., 2023).

D. Pedagogical and Sociolinguistic Benefits of Code-Switching

Cognitive Benefits:

Bilinguals who frequently switch languages develop greater cognitive flexibility and metalinguistic awareness, enhancing language acquisition and academic performance. In higher education, these skills support abstract thinking and problem-solving. Thus, code-switching is not just a conversational tool but a cognitive exercise aiding language learning, cross-cultural communication, and intellectual growth (Antoniou & Myers-Scotton, 1993; Wright, 2017). A longitudinal study found that less frequent code-switching within a single-language context linked to better inhibitory control, benefiting executive function development (Oliva et al., 2020). Research shows bilinguals managing multiple languages often have improved attentional control, task-switching, and metalinguistic awareness (Wikipedia contributors, 2025).

Pedagogical Benefits in the FL Classroom:

Code-switching can improve student comprehension of complex materials, as learners leverage their stronger language (often L1) to access and internalize new content in the target language (Wardaniatul & James, 2024). It contributes to a more inclusive and engaging classroom environment, fostering student participation and emotional comfort, especially when students feel language is not a barrier to learning. Teachers report that brief code-switches can bring attention back, re-engage students who have “zoned out,” and create an enabling learning atmosphere and educators using code-switching authentically can build rapport, signal solidarity, and help students feel more confident in using both languages (Li et al., 2022).

Sociolinguistic & Communicative Benefits:

Beyond social bonding, code-switching plays a key role in identity performance and negotiation. Sociolinguistically, language constructs self-image and group belonging (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Applied linguistics views code-switching as part of translanguaging pedagogy, which treats language use as a flexible, integrated system (García & Wei, 2021). In higher education, code-switching helps multilingual students understand complex ideas, express themselves authentically, and engage cognitively. It also serves as an indexical tool, signaling cultural meanings and social identities, reflecting affiliations and attitudes (Silverstein, 2003).

E. Review of Previous Study

Several recent international and domestic studies have explored various aspects of code-switching, focusing on its cognitive and social aspects, especially in recent years as follows:

Previous International Studies:

Özkara et al. (2025) highlight cognitive control and language entropy in shaping bilingual switching, based on the Adaptive Control Hypothesis. Duggal and Asogwa (2025) see code-switching as both a linguistic and social practice aiding identity and meaning negotiation. Adams (2024) discusses code-switching as a survival strategy in mainly white workplaces, raising assimilation and racial identity issues. Dewaele et al. (2022) found frequent code-switchers have greater cognitive flexibility but more self-monitoring stress. Merry et al. (2023) note code-switching requires high cognitive control and can cause mental fatigue under pressure. Younas et al. (2023) report that while code-switching benefits bilingual classrooms, students can be confused by inconsistent use.

Previous studies in Vietnam:

Nguyen (2017) studied English–Vietnamese code-switching among engineers in a multinational oil & gas company, finding it used for technical emphasis, group identity, and when Vietnamese lacked equivalents. Despite concerns over language purity, attitudes remained positive. Nguyen (2021) found that professionals in foreign-invested enterprises frequently code-switch in both oral and written workplace communication. Van Nguyen (2022) showed that teachers in tertiary General English classes code-switch mainly for pedagogical, administrative, and interactional reasons, particularly to aid low-proficiency students. Le (2022) found that lecturers and students use code-switching in speech and texting, both strategically and habitually, to enhance classroom communication. Nguyen (2024) reported that students and teachers at a Ho Chi Minh City university preferred balanced use of English and Vietnamese, with code-switching reducing anxiety and strengthening rapport.

F. Research Gaps

While many studies have explored code-switching in educational and workplace settings, few have examined how it evolves across different stages of language learning. In particular, the contrast between first-year and fourth-year English majors remains under-researched. Most existing work has concentrated on teachers' practices and general student attitudes, with limited attention to the communicative, cognitive, and emotional roles of code-switching in university

contexts. This study seeks to address these gaps by investigating the patterns and motivations of code-switching among student groups.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

This study used a mixed-method approach to examine code-switching among first- and fourth-year English majors at a university in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. It aimed to compare similarities and differences in their English communication. Data were collected from 240 students using questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with both teachers and students.

B. Participants

The survey involved 240 English majors from a Vietnamese university, split evenly between first-year and fourth-year students (ages 18–22), all native Vietnamese speakers. Participation was voluntary. To deepen insights, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 students (5 from each group) and 10 experienced English lecturers, enhancing the validity of the qualitative data.

C. Instruments

The questionnaire gathered data on students' code-switching frequency, contexts, and attitudes through three sections: demographics, behaviors (rated on a 5-point Likert scale), and attitudes (also on a 5-point scale). Ten students (five from each year group) and ten faculty members were interviewed to explore reasons, perceptions, and changes in code-switching over time. Interviews lasted 20–30 minutes, were audio-recorded with consent, and analyzed thematically. The interview guide was expert-reviewed for content validity.

D. Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected over six weeks using a mixed-method approach. Questionnaires were given to 120 first-year and 120 fourth-year students, with responses analyzed using descriptive statistics in Excel. For the qualitative phase, semi-structured interviews with 10 lecturers and 10 students were transcribed and analyzed thematically to explore patterns, motivations, and impacts of code-switching.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Results

Demographic Information of Participants

TABLE 1
DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION (N=120)

No.	Variable	Options	First-Year Students (n/%)	Fourth-Year Students (n/%)
1	Gender	Male	46/38.3%	39/32.5%
		Female	74/61.7%	81/67.5%
2	Age group	19	71/59.2%	0/0.0%
		20	34/28.3%	0/0.0%
		21	5/4.2%	0/0.0%
		22	7/5.8%	92/76.7%
		>22	3/2.5%	28/23.3%
3	Studied/lived in English-speaking country	Yes	0/0.0%	0/0.0%
		No	120/100%	120/100%
4	Frequency of English use outside class	Never	30/25.0%	5/4.2%
		Rarely	34/28.3%	17/14.2%
		Sometimes	35/29.2%	56/46.7%
		Often	13/10.8%	25/20.8%
		Always	8/6.7%	17/14.2%
5	Communicate with native/fluent speakers	Yes	26/21.7%	87/72.5%
		No	94/78.3%	33/27.5%
6	Preferred language for daily communication	Vietnamese	41/34.2%	23/19.2%
		English	12/10%	45/37.5%
		Both equally	67/55.8%	52/43.3%

Based on the data from Table 1, each survey group included 120 English majors. Females were the majority in both groups: 74 (61.7%) in the first-year group and 81 (67.5%) in the fourth-year group. Regarding age, most first-year students were 19 or 20 years old, accounting for 87.5% (59.2% were 19 and 28.3% were 20). Most fourth-year students were 22 years old (76.7%), with the rest over 22 (23.3%). None had lived or studied in English-speaking countries. Most students live in Ho Chi Minh City and nearby areas, with Vietnamese as their first language.

There was a notable difference in English use outside the classroom: 53.3% of first-year students rarely or never used English, compared to only 18.4% of fourth-year students. Conversely, 81.6% of fourth-year students often used English outside class, reflecting their superior communication skills developed over four years.

Regarding communication with native or fluent English speakers, only 21.7% of first-year students had such opportunities, while 72.5% of fourth-year students did, indicating greater confidence and practical experience among seniors.

Finally, in daily communication, most first-year students used both Vietnamese and English (55.8%), followed by Vietnamese only (34.2%) and English only (10%). Fourth-year students preferred English more, with 37.5% using it primarily, 43.3% using both languages, and 19.2% favoring Vietnamese.

Code-Switching Behaviors of First- and Fourth-Year Students

TABLE 2
CODE-SWITCHING BEHAVIORS OF FIRST- AND FOURTH-YEAR STUDENTS (N=120)

No.	Item	Student Group	Never (n/%)	Rarely (n/%)	Sometimes (n/%)	Often (n/%)	Always (n/%)
7	I use Vietnamese when I do not know the appropriate English word.	1st-year	3/2.5	15 /12.5%	36/30%	35/ 29.2%	31/25.8%
		4th-year	19/ 15.8%	38/ 31.7%	33/27.5%	20/ 16.7%	10/8.3%
8	I switch languages when talking with classmates.	1st-year	4 /3.3%	21/17.5%	47/39.2%	33/27.5%	15/12.5%
		4th-year	20/16.7%	44/36.7%	29/24.2%	19/15.8%	8/6.7%
9	I code-switch during group work or presentations.	1st-year	2 /1.7%	14 /11.7%	46/38.3%	32/26.7%	26/21.7%
		4th-year	17/14.2%	56/46.7%	32/26.7%	8/6.7%	7/5.8%
10	I use both English and Vietnamese when speaking to lecturers.	1st-year	5/4.2%	17 /14.2%	42 /35.0%	30/25.0%	26/21.6%
		4th-year	25/20.8%	51/ 42.5%	31/25.9%	7/5.8%	6/5.0%
11	I use more Vietnamese than English in academic situations.	1st-year	3/2.5%	14/11.7%	45/37.5%	37/30.8%	21/17.5%
		4th-year	32/26.7%	47/39.2%	34/28.3%	4/3.3%	3/2.5%
12	I feel natural when mixing Vietnamese in my English speech.	1st-year	6/5.0%	6/5.0%	44/36.7%	36/30.0%	28/23.3%
		4th-year	24 /20.0%	29 /24.2%	37/30.8%	17/14.2%	13/10.8
13	I switch between English and Vietnamese to explain a complex idea.	1st-year	8/6.7%	12/10.0%	49/40.8%	25/20.8%	26/21.7%
		4th-year	21/17.5%	24 /20.0%	35 /29.2%	21/17.5%	19/15.8%

According to Table 2, the majority of first-year students reported a high frequency of code-switching behaviors, with approximately 91% selecting "Sometimes," "Often," or "Always" across the seven survey items. In contrast, fourth-year students also reported engaging in code-switching but to a lesser extent, with an average of around 69.5% choosing those same frequency levels, while about 30.5% selected "Never" or "Rarely." This shows that first-year students often use code-switching in communication situations, possibly due to limited English vocabulary and English skills, lack of confidence, so they rely more on language switching to express ideas more clearly. In contrast, fourth-year students used code-switching less, possibly because their English skills had improved, their vocabulary was rich, and they were more confident in communicating entirely in English in learning environments such as group work, presentations, and even with native speakers.

The Item 7 illustrates that 84.9% of first-year students reported use Vietnamese at varying levels (Sometimes, Often, Always) when they do not know the appropriate English word, indicating a strong reliance on code-switching due to limited vocabulary. In contrast, 47.5% of fourth-year students selected Never or Rarely, showing they were less likely to switch languages in such situations. This suggests that first-year students still struggle with vocabulary, while fourth-year students have gained more confidence and fluency, reducing their need for code-switching.

The Item 8, it was found that 79.2% of first-year students reported switching languages when talking to classmates (Sometimes, Often, Always), compared to only 46.7% of fourth-year students. This suggests that first-year students tend to rely more on switching languages in conversations with classmates, while fourth-year students rely less on this, possibly due to improved language proficiency.

The Item 9 indicates that 86.7% of first-year students used code-switching to varying degrees (Sometimes, Often, Always) when working in groups and giving presentations. In contrast, only 15.8% of fourth-year students did so. This reflects that first-year students are still limited in their language skills and vocabulary, so they tend to use code-switching more in situations that require academic communication such as working in groups or giving presentations.

As reflected in Item 10 that the majority of first-year students (41.6%) use both English and Vietnamese when communicating with lecturers. In contrast, fourth-year students rarely use both languages simultaneously, accounting for only 10.8%. This indicates that fourth-year students have sufficient knowledge and proficiency to communicate entirely in English with lecturers and tend to limit code-switching in their communication, unlike first-year students.

According to item 11, about 85.8% of first-year students use Vietnamese more than English in academic situations, compared to only 5.8% of fourth-year students. This is understandable since first-year students are new to their English major, have not yet completed enough foundational and specialized knowledge, and have had limited opportunities to practice, so they naturally rely more on Vietnamese than English.

Based on the data in item 12, about 90% of first-year students and only 25% of fourth-year students feel natural when mixing Vietnamese in their English speech. This difference suggests that first-year students may rely more on code-switching because they use it daily, both in and out of class, as a natural part of their language use, while fourth-year students tend to feel less need to incorporate Vietnamese when speaking English, possibly due to improved language proficiency and greater confidence.

Finally, item 13 regarding switching between English and Vietnamese to explain complex ideas shows that over 90.3% of first-year students and 33.3% of fourth-year students use code-switching to clarify complicated issues. This indicates that first-year students tend to rely heavily on code-switching to aid their understanding and communication of difficult concepts, whereas fourth-year students are more independent and confident in explaining complex ideas primarily in English.

Attitudes Toward Code-Switching Among First- and Fourth-Year Students

TABLE 3
ATTITUDES TOWARD CODE-SWITCHING OF FIRST- AND FOURTH-YEAR STUDENTS (N=120)

Statement	Group	Strongly Disagree (n/%)	Disagree (n/%)	Neutral (n/%)	Agree (n/%)	Strongly Agree (n/%)
14. Code-switching helps me express my ideas more clearly.	1st-year	0/0.0%	0/0.0%	43/35.8%	56/46.7%	21/17.5%
	4th-year	9/7.5%	34/28.3%	41/34.2%	26/21.7%	10/8.3%
15. Code-switching is a normal part of bilingual communication.	1st-year	0/0.0%	0/0.0%	35/29.2%	52/43.3%	33/27.5%
	4th-year	12/10%	17/14.2%	32/26.7%	41/34.2%	18/15.0%
16. I feel more confident when I am allowed to code-switch in class.	1st-year	2/1.7%	6/5.0%	43/35.8%	51/42.5%	18/15.0%
	4th-year	21/17.5%	40/33.3%	34/28.3%	14/11.7%	11/9.2%
17. Teachers should allow some degree of code-switching in language classrooms.	1st-year	1/0.8%	3/2.5%	8/6.7%	64/53.3%	44/36.7%
	4th-year	17/14.2%	19/15.8%	46/38.3%	19/15.8%	19/15.8%
18. Code-switching can cause confusion in academic communication.	1st-year	21/17.5%	43/35.8%	33/27.5%	13/10.8%	10/8.3%
	4th-year	16/13.3%	15/12.5%	25/20.8%	41/34.2%	23/19.2%
19. I want to improve my English speaking skills without relying on code-switching.	1st-year	24/20%	41/34.2%	19/15.8%	19/15.8%	17/14.2%
	4th-year	2/1.7%	3/2.5%	29/24.2%	52/43.3%	34/28.3%
20. Completely banning code-switching in class makes me feel pressured or anxious.	1st-year	7/5.8%	9/7.5%	31/25.8%	45/37.5%	28/23.3%
	4th-year	28/23.3%	41/34.2%	27/22.5%	15/12.5%	9/7.5%

The updated data of the 7 items in Table 3 shows that first-year students tend to agree with the positive benefits of code-switching in English communication, with the average percentage of “Agree” and “Strongly Agree” being 56.06%. Meanwhile, the percentage of disagreement (including “Disagree” and “Strongly Disagree”) is only 16.09%, and 25.13% are neutral. In contrast to first-year students, fourth-year students show a lower level of agreement with the positive statements about code-switching, with the average percentage of “Agree” and “Strongly Agree” being only 39.53%. However, it is noteworthy that in item 19, up to 71.6% of fourth-year students expressed their desire to improve their English speaking skills without relying on code-switching, while the rate of disagreement with this view was only 4.2%, and 24.2% chose the neutral option. These analyses show a clear difference in attitudes between the two groups. The first-

year students tend to favor and rely more on code-switching, while the fourth-year students disagree and have a more cautious attitude and focus more on using English exclusively in communication.

Item 14 shows that first-year students have a very positive attitude toward code-switching as a way to express their ideas more clearly, with a total of 64.2% selecting "Agree" (46.7%) and "Strongly Agree" (17.5%). 35.8% of the students remained neutral, and none chose "Disagree" or "Strongly Disagree." This indicates that the majority of first-year students view code-switching as an effective tool to help them express their ideas. In contrast, fourth-year students showed a significantly lower level of agreement, with only 30% selecting "Agree" (21.7%) and "Strongly Agree" (8.3%). Meanwhile, 34.2% remained neutral, and as many as 35.8% chose "Disagree" or "Strongly Disagree." This suggests a shift in perception among fourth-year students, indicating that they tend to no longer strongly support the use of code-switching to express ideas—possibly due to improved language proficiency or the influence of an academic environment that demands higher linguistic standards.

Item 15 presents that a total of 70.8% of first-year students had a positive attitude and thought that code-switching was normal in bilingual communication. 29.2% held a neutral attitude, and no students chose "Disagree" or "Strongly Disagree", meaning there was no negative opinion. For fourth-year students, only 49.2% showed a positive attitude (of which 34.2% chose "Agree" and 15.0% chose "Strongly Agree"), 26.7% chose neutral, and a whopping 24.2% disagreed (of which 10.0% "Strongly Disagree" and 14.2% "Disagree"). The clear difference between the two groups of students suggests that there is a change in language perception over time. Fourth-year students may have experienced a more academically oriented environment, which may have led to a more cautious view of code-switching. Meanwhile, first-year students – who are not yet constrained by academic norms – tend to view code-switching as a familiar and natural part of everyday communication in a bilingual environment.

Item 16 reveals that a total of 57.5% of first-year students have a positive attitude, feeling more confident when they are allowed to code-switch in class (42.5% selected "Agree" and 15.0% selected "Strongly Agree"). 35.8% remained neutral, while only 6.7% expressed disagreement (1.7% "Strongly Disagree", 5.0% "Disagree"). Among fourth-year students, only 20.9% showed a positive attitude (11.7% "Agree" and 9.2% "Strongly Agree"), 28.3% were neutral, and a high 50.8% disagreed (17.5% "Strongly Disagree", 33.3% "Disagree"). This difference between the two groups reflects the development of language proficiency and learning psychology over time. First-year students often need to be allowed to code-switch in order to feel more at ease, reduce pressure, and build confidence in the classroom. In contrast, fourth-year students may already feel confident using English and may view code-switching as unnecessary or inappropriate in academic settings, leading them to feel less confident when using it in class.

It can be seen from Item 17 that first-year students have a highly positive attitude in supporting teachers allowing code-switching in the classroom, with a very high approval rate of 90%, and a very low rate of disagreement at only 3.3%. In contrast, only 31.6% of fourth-year students support the idea, while the percentage of disagreement is considerably higher, at 30%. This difference reflects a shift in perception and increasing academic expectations as students progress in their studies. Clearly, first-year students see code-switching as a necessary support tool, while fourth-year students tend to move toward using the target language more independently and seriously. This serves as a basis for teachers to consider designing flexible code-switching policies that are appropriate to the students' proficiency levels and learning needs.

Item 18 highlights that first-year students tend to disagree with the idea that code-switching causes confusion in academic communication, with 53.3% expressing disagreement (17.5% "Strongly Disagree" and 35.8% "Disagree") and only 19.1% expressing agreement. This suggests that most first-year students do not view code-switching as a source of confusion, as it likely helps them better understand the lesson, while they are not yet highly concerned with academic formality. In contrast, 53.4% of fourth-year students agree that code-switching can lead to confusion in academic contexts, whereas only 25.8% disagree. This indicates that fourth-year students are more likely to perceive code-switching as a barrier in academic settings, possibly because they have become more familiar with stricter academic language standards.

According to Item 19, up to 54.2% of first-year students disagreed with the idea of giving up their reliance on code-switching, while only 30% expressed agreement. This suggests that first-year students are not yet willing to abandon code-switching and still prefer to use their first language (L1) to support their second language (L2) learning. In contrast, 71.6% of fourth-year students agreed that they want to improve their English speaking skills without relying on code-switching, and the rate of disagreement was very low, at only 4.2%. This reflects that fourth-year students have a clearer orientation toward developing independent English-speaking ability and no longer wish to depend on their first language (Vietnamese).

Item 20 shows that the majority of first-year students agreed that a complete ban on code-switching in class would make them feel pressured or anxious, with 60.8% expressing agreement and only 13.3% expressing disagreement. This suggests that most first-year students feel uneasy when code-switching is prohibited, as they still rely on their first language to understand and communicate with peers and instructors in the classroom. In contrast, only 20% of fourth-year students agreed with the statement, while a notable 57.5% disagreed. This indicates that fourth-year students tend to be more confident and less dependent on code-switching, and therefore do not feel threatened by strict language policies that prohibit it.

❖ Interview questions for lecturers

Question 1: How often do your students code-switch during English classes? Do you notice differences between first-year and fourth-year students?

Most lecturers state that the university's English majors occasionally use code-switching in their English classes. However, they also find that first-year students tend to use their native language (Vietnamese) more often than fourth-year students, who have a better command of English and are more confident in their communication.

Question 2: Do you personally use Vietnamese when teaching? If yes, in which situations?

Most lecturers admitted that they occasionally use Vietnamese during English lessons. They tend to switch between Vietnamese and English especially when explaining abstract or complex concepts. According to them, this approach helps students understand the lesson more effectively. The use of Vietnamese is particularly helpful for first-year students, who often have limited English proficiency and struggle with difficult content.

Question 3: What are your views on the effects of code-switching on students' English development?

Lecturers believe code-switching positively impacts students' English development by boosting confidence, reducing anxiety, and aiding knowledge acquisition. It also helps convey complex material more effectively. However, they note that overusing Vietnamese can cause dependence, limiting English practice and weakening language reflexes. Frequent code-switching may also interfere with learning and reduce students' motivation to use English independently.

Question 4: What do you think are the main reasons students switch between Vietnamese and English?

According to the lecturers, the main reasons students switch between Vietnamese and English include a lack of confidence in using English, limited vocabulary, and insufficient language or subject-matter knowledge—particularly among first-year students. Many students fear that their peers or lecturers may not fully understand what they are trying to say if they speak only in English, especially when discussing complex or abstract topics. Other reasons include: the habit of using the mother tongue as a habit in the environment outside the classroom, the influence of friends, or the learning environment does not create enough conditions for students to use English continuously and naturally. In some cases, code-switching is also seen as a strategy to save time or ensure information is conveyed accurately in communication.

Question 5: What strategies do you suggest to help students reduce unnecessary code-switching?

His question is indeed interesting, and all participating lecturers suggested various strategies to help students reduce unnecessary code-switching. First, it is important to explain to students that excessive code-switching can hinder fluency and disrupt the flow of communication. The lecturers also proposed establishing an English-speaking environment in the classroom and emphasized the need to equip students with sufficient vocabulary and appropriate expressions related to lesson topics. In addition, role-play and situational practice activities were recommended to enhance students' confidence in using English consistently. Organizing English clubs and English presentation sessions was also seen as a way to provide diverse practice opportunities. Furthermore, providing timely and constructive feedback when students engage in unnecessary code-switching, along with suggesting alternative expressions in English, was considered essential. Finally, lecturers should serve as role models by using English consistently during lessons, thereby giving students an example to follow.

❖ Interview questions for students

Question 1: Do you think code-switching helps or makes it harder to improve your English speaking skills?

For this question, first-year students generally believed that code-switching is helpful in improving their English communication skills, as it allows them to express ideas more clearly and reduces anxiety during interactions. In contrast, fourth-year students tended to view code-switching as an obstacle to the development of their speaking skills, as it may lead to overreliance on the first language and limit opportunities to practice English exclusively.

Question 2: In what situations do you often switch between Vietnamese and English?

Both groups reported frequently switching between Vietnamese and English when discussing difficult or academic topics to clarify ideas and save time, especially in group discussions, presentations, and interactions with instructors involving complex concepts or unfamiliar vocabulary. However, first-year students used code-switching more often, even in less demanding situations, whereas fourth-year students employed it only when necessary for clarity or efficiency.

Question 3: Why do you code-switch? Is it because of habit, lack of vocabulary, or something else?

First-year students reported often code-switching out of habit, as they were used to mixing Vietnamese and English in high school. A major reason was limited vocabulary, making full expression in English difficult. In contrast, fourth-year students used code-switching more strategically—to ensure clarity with complex topics, save time, or avoid misunderstandings. Vocabulary was less an issue for them, but they sometimes switched to emphasize points or maintain rapport in informal conversations.

Question 4: Has your code-switching behavior changed since you entered university? If yes, how?

Students in both groups reported changes in their code-switching compared to high school, where limited English environments made frequent use of their mother tongue inevitable. At university, especially as English majors, they experienced a noticeable decrease in code-switching due to increased English exposure in academic and social settings. However, first-year students said they still relied on code-switching more than they wished, especially in difficult situations. In contrast, fourth-year students reported a greater reduction and felt more confident maintaining conversations fully in English.

Question 5: What would help you speak more English and reduce your use of Vietnamese?

Most students in both groups agreed that to improve their English and reduce Vietnamese use, they must first recognize that excessive code-switching can hinder communication skills. They highlighted the need to use English exclusively in

the classroom and minimize code-switching as much as possible. Students also recommended actively joining English-speaking activities like clubs, presentations, and debates, along with regularly practicing conversations with classmates. Additionally, some mentioned that more chances to interact with native or fluent speakers, both inside and outside the university, would motivate them to use English more consistently.

B. Discussion

The results from both the survey and interviews provide valuable insights into the frequency, context, and underlying reasons for language switching between first- and fourth-year English majors. This section discusses the results in relation to the two research questions, highlighting the similarities and differences between the two groups, as well as their implications for English language teaching and learning.

Research question 1: How frequently do first- and fourth-year English majors use code-switching between their first language (L1) and second language (L2) in communication?

The results indicate a clear gap in code-switching between first- and fourth-year English majors. Over 90% of first-year students “Sometimes,” “Often,” or “Always” switched between Vietnamese and English, especially when explaining complex ideas, doing group work, or communicating with classmates and lecturers. This aligns with Macaro’s (2001) view that less proficient learners rely on L1 for comprehension and Beatty-Martínez et al.’s (2020) concept of code-switching as a “bilingual toolkit.” In contrast, code-switching was significantly lower among fourth-year students, with about 69.5% reporting frequent switching and 30.5% “Never” or “Rarely” switching. This decrease corresponds with improved vocabulary, better communicative competence, and more English exposure, reflecting the Adaptive Control Hypothesis (Green & Abutalebi, 2013) about managing language choice and L1 inhibition. Their selective L1 use matches Myers-Scotton’s (1993) marker model, where switching occurs purposefully rather than by default. Recent studies (Özkara et al., 2025; García & Wei, 2021) emphasize that greater L2 immersion strengthens cognitive control, reducing unplanned switching and encouraging flexible use of a unified bilingual repertoire. In summary, first-year students rely on code-switching due to limited English skills and confidence, while fourth-year students use it less, supported by stronger English proficiency and more practice in various settings.

Research question 2: What similarities and differences exist in the code-switching patterns between first- and fourth-year students in relation to their first language (L1) and second language (L2)?

These results reveal both similarities and differences in code-switching patterns between first- and fourth-year English majors. Both groups tend to code-switch when discussing complex or academic topics to ensure clarity or save time, aligning with García and Wei’s (2021) translanguaging perspective that students use their full linguistic repertoire for meaning-making. The key difference is that first-year students code-switch more frequently and in a wider range of contexts, including everyday and informal conversations. Their reliance on L1 is due to limited vocabulary, fluency, and confidence, supporting Macaro’s (2001) view that less proficient learners use their mother tongue as a scaffold. This also fits Beatty-Martínez et al.’s (2020) idea of code-switching as a “bilingual toolkit,” combining resources to fill L2 gaps. In contrast, fourth-year students use code-switching less frequently and in a more selective and strategic manner, typically in important academic discussions or when conveying complex concepts. Their reduced reliance on L1 indicates stronger inhibitory control over language selection, consistent with the Adaptive Control Hypothesis (Green & Abutalebi, 2013) and recent findings by Özkara et al. (2025) on the role of cognitive control in minimizing unplanned switches. Moreover, their patterns align with Myers-Scotton’s (1993) markedness model, in which language choice is a deliberate act shaped by social and contextual considerations rather than a default habit. Overall, while both first- and fourth-year students demonstrated code-switching in communication, the first-year group used it as a habit, while the fourth-year group demonstrated a more intentional and context-dependent approach.

V. CONCLUSION

Findings

The study found that both first- and fourth-year English majors used code-switching between Vietnamese (L1) and English (L2), especially when discussing difficult or academic topics to ensure clarity and save time. However, the main difference was in frequency and scope: first-year students code-switched more often and in more contexts, including everyday interactions and informal talks, mainly due to limited vocabulary, fluency, and confidence. Fourth-year students used code-switching less frequently and more strategically, mainly in important academic discussions or complex concepts, reflecting their stronger English skills and greater practice. Overall, the extent of code-switching relates closely to proficiency, confidence, and English exposure. While useful, code-switching should be limited and only used when necessary, encouraging students to maximize English use across contexts to improve fluency.

Overall, this study shows that the extent of code-switching is closely related to students’ English proficiency, confidence, and exposure to English-speaking environments. While code-switching is a useful communicative strategy for both groups, its use should be limited and applied only when truly necessary. Students should maximize their use of English (L2) in diverse contexts and environments in order to develop greater fluency in spoken English.

Implications

The findings suggest that teachers should help first-year students expand vocabulary, build fluency, and gain confidence through increased L2 use in meaningful contexts. Implementing an English-only policy in class, combined with role-

plays, debates, and presentations, can reduce unnecessary code-switching and promote sustained target language use. Extracurricular activities such as English clubs can further extend L2 practice. Teachers should model consistent English use and provide constructive feedback, guiding students to employ code-switching only when it serves a clear communicative purpose.

Limitations & Recommendations for Future Research

This study was limited to 240 participants, comprising 120 first-year and 120 fourth-year English majors from a single university, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Data were collected primarily through questionnaires and interviews, which may have been influenced by participants' subjective perceptions rather than their actual behavior. Future research could expand the sample size to include a more diverse population from multiple institutions to enhance generalizability. In addition, further studies could examine the impact of targeted pedagogical interventions on reducing unnecessary code-switching and improving L2 speaking fluency.

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Towards a Phonological Model of Intonation in Qassimi Arabic: An Acoustic Study

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Abstract—This study investigates the intonational patterns of Qassimi Arabic (QA), a dialect spoken in central Saudi Arabia, using the Autosegmental–Metrical (AM) framework. It identifies characteristic intonational contours in declarative and yes/no questions and compares these with patterns found in other Arabic dialects. Twenty native QA speakers (10 male, 10 female) participated by reading structured stimuli designed to elicit natural declarative and interrogative prosody. Acoustic analysis was conducted using Praat to examine fundamental frequency (F0) contours and boundary tones. Results indicate that declarative sentences in QA typically end with low boundary tones (L-L%, L%), while yes/no questions display rising contours (L-H%, H-H%). Statistical analysis confirmed that F0 values in interrogative sentences were significantly higher than those in declaratives across all speakers, regardless of gender. These findings align broadly with patterns observed in other Arabic dialects such as Hijazi, Egyptian, and Lebanese Arabic, while also revealing dialect-specific nuances in QA. This research contributes to the theoretical phonology of Arabic by expanding empirical coverage to a previously undocumented variety and supports the applicability of the AM framework in describing Arabic prosody.

Index Terms—intonation, fundamental frequency (F0), pitch contour, autosegmental–metrical, Qassimi Arabic

I. INTRODUCTION

Intonation, commonly referred to as the “melody” of speech, is a central prosodic feature that conveys meaning beyond the literal words used in spoken language. It involves the modulation of pitch—specifically, the fundamental frequency (F0)—which rises and falls throughout an utterance and plays a pivotal role in the phonological system of a language. F0 is measured in Hertz (Hz), reflecting the rate of vocal fold vibration and forming the acoustic basis of perceived pitch. As Arvaniti (2015, p. 2) notes, intonation constitutes “the linguistically structured and pragmatically meaningful modulation of F0.” Similarly, O’Rourke (2012) explains that speech produces modulated sound waves perceived as pitch, which fluctuate across time and convey essential communicative cues. These patterns of intonation emerge early in human development, even before children produce actual words (Wells & Stackhouse, 2015).

Building upon its acoustic foundation, intonation serves numerous linguistic and communicative functions. It helps encode grammatical structure, sentence modality (e.g., distinguishing between statements and questions), pragmatic focus, speaker attitudes, and emotional states. Intonation functions like spoken punctuation, shaping interpretation and sentence type; for instance, a rising contour ‘Really ↗’ can signal a question or surprise, while a falling one ‘Really ↘’ may express certainty or disbelief (Roach, 2009; Nolan, 2008). Moreover, prosodic variation contributes to interpersonal dynamics by signaling enthusiasm, boredom, emphasis, or hesitation (Froemming, 2020). These rich functions highlight the interplay between intonation, grammar, and speaker intention.

While intonation is a universal feature of human language, its realization varies across languages and dialects, which has significant implications for phonological theory. Each language encodes its own distinctive intonational patterns, shaped by both linguistic and paralinguistic factors (Knis, 2004). In the case of Arabic, dialectal variation is particularly notable. For example, Iraqi Arabic exhibits a characteristic HL falling contour, whereas pitch declination is more prevalent in eastern dialects and less common in western varieties like Moroccan Arabic (Ghazali et al., 2007). This diversity underscores the need for localized analyses of intonation within individual dialects. The Autosegmental–Metrical (AM) framework has proven valuable for such analyses due to its structured and cross-linguistically applicable model of pitch representation. However, despite its utility, several dialects remain understudied—among them, Qassimi Arabic.

While Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) remains the formal written code, spoken Arabic is manifested in numerous regional dialects, each with its own distinct prosodic characteristics. Prior studies on Arabic intonation have

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documented a range of patterns in dialects such as Egyptian Arabic (El Zarka, 2011), Lebanese Arabic (Chahal, 2001), and Hijazi Arabic (Almbark, 2008). These studies have shown that, despite certain shared intonational tendencies, dialects often diverge in the realization of boundary tones and pitch accent types. Such differences are not only of phonological interest but also provide insight into regional identity and sociolinguistic variation.

Qassimi Arabic (QA), spoken in central Saudi Arabia, remains underexplored in intonational phonology despite its distinct phonetic features compared to dialects like Najdi or Hijazi. The absence of empirical studies on QA prosody limits our understanding of the full typological range of Arabic intonation systems and leaves a significant gap in the literature on dialectal Arabic.

This study aims to address this gap by providing a systematic analysis of intonational patterns in QA, focusing on two core sentence types: declarative sentences and yes/no questions. Using the AM framework, this research investigates how pitch contours in QA signal sentence modality and whether they conform to patterns observed in other Arabic dialects. The study employs acoustic methods to analyze fundamental frequency (F0) contours in controlled elicitation tasks with native QA speakers. The central research questions guiding this study are as follows:

1. What are the characteristic intonational patterns of declarative sentences and yes/no questions in Qassimi Arabic?
2. To what extent do these patterns align with or diverge from those observed in other documented Arabic dialects?

By answering these questions, the study contributes not only to the phonological documentation of an under-researched Arabic dialect but also to the broader field of intonational phonology. The findings are expected to enhance our understanding of prosodic variation within Arabic and offer empirical data that can inform typological comparisons and theoretical modeling.

This introduction outlines the study's scope, starting with intonation's linguistic role and the guiding theoretical model. Section 2 reviews related literature, Section 3 details the methodology, Section 4 presents results, Section 5 discusses them in relation to other Arabic dialects, and Section 6 concludes with key insights and broader implications.

Theoretical Framework

Two main schools of thought have shaped the study of intonation. The British school describes intonation based on pitch (F0) movements into contours like falling, high rising/falling-rising (pointed), low rising, falling-rising (rounded), and rising-falling (rounded), as well as compound tones like falling + low rising and rising-falling + low rising. Intonation groups in this model consist of four components: the prehead (unstressed syllables before the head or nucleus), head (from the first stressed syllable to the nucleus), nucleus (the main pitch-bearing element), and tail (syllables after the nucleus). For example, in “We were in a great hurry,” the prehead is “we were in a,” the head is “great,” the nucleus is “hur-,” and the tail is “-ry” (Grice et al., 2020).

In contrast, the American Structuralist school emphasized phonological structure, categorizing pitch into extra-high, high, mid, and low levels (Ladd, 2015). Pitch height was defined by their interrelations (Al Zaidi, 2018). This framework laid the foundation for Pierrehumbert's (1980) Autosegmental–Metrical (AM) approach, which is adopted in this paper.

Autosegmental–Metrical (AM) Model

The AM model, developed by Pierrehumbert (1980), evolved through three stages: distinguishing phonological from phonetic representation; linking intonation to communicative function (Pierrehumbert & Hirschberg, 1990); and establishing the ToBI transcription system (Beckman & Hirschberg, 1994).

Ladd (1996) coined the term “autosegmental–metrical” to describe the interaction between two phonological subsystems: an autosegmental tier for melodic tone and a metrical structure for prominence and phrasing (Arvaniti, 2015). In this model, tones are aligned with metrically strong syllables (Al Zaidi, 2018). Although the AM model was first designed for English, it has been successfully extended to other languages, including Korean (Jun, 1996), French (Jun & Fougeron, 1995), and Japanese (Venditti, 2005). Unlike earlier structuralist approaches that used multiple pitch levels, Pierrehumbert's model defines only two tonal targets—High (H) and Low (L)—which can combine into monotonal or bitonal pitch accents (e.g., H*+L). Figure 1 illustrates the phonological structural organization in greater detail.

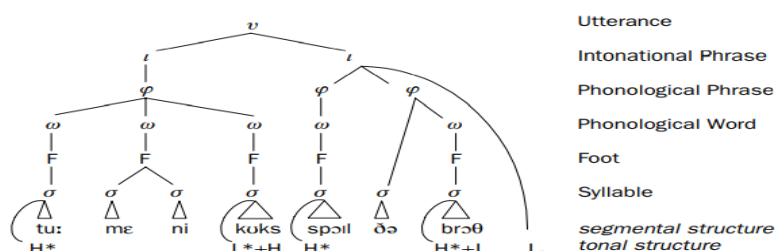


Figure 1. Phonological Structure of the English Proverb “Too Many Cooks Spoil the Broth” (Gussenhoven, 2004, p. 124)

Pierrehumbert (1980) proposed that intonation is compositional, meaning that an intonational contour can be broken down into three distinct elements: the pitch accent, the phrase accent (denoted by “-”), and the boundary tone (denoted by “%”). In this model, pitch is represented by two basic tonal categories—low (L) and high (H)—which define the shape of the F0 contour. Pierrehumbert and Hirschberg (1990) further identified six pitch accent types in English, including the simple tones H and L. The symbol H* indicates a high tone aligned with a stressed syllable, where the asterisk (*) marks the association with stress. Figure 2 illustrates the finite-state grammar framework used to generate intonational patterns in English.

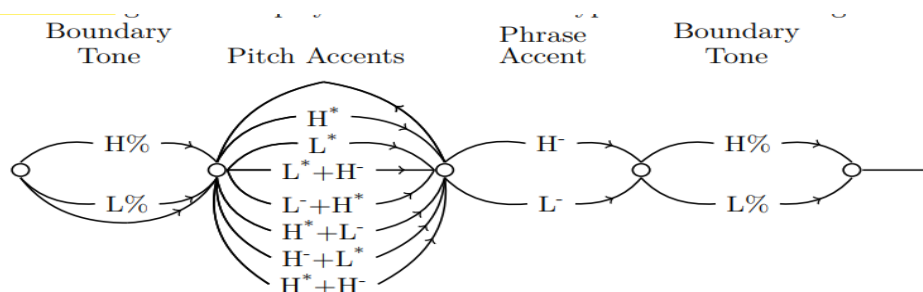


Figure 2. Finite-State Grammar for Generating Tunes of English Intonation (Pierrehumbert, 1980, p. 29)

The figure illustrates a typical American English intonation contour as proposed by Pierrehumbert (1980). In the linear AM model, each tone's realization depends on its identity, prosodic position, and preceding tone. Pierrehumbert (2000) modeled it as a finite-state automaton where pitch accents, phrase accents, and boundary tones generate varied intonation.

Ladd (2008) outlines four core principles of the AM model. First, sequential tonal structure refers to pitch being marked by local tonal events (e.g., H, L) aligned with specific segments, with pitch contours between them derived from transitions. Second, the model distinguishes pitch accent from stress, noting that while pitch accents often signal prominence, actual perceived stress can also depend on metrical or dynamic factors. Third, pitch accents and boundary tones are analyzed using just two basic tonal targets: High (H) and Low (L). Finally, global pitch trends result from localized adjustments, such as emphasis or utterance position, which affect tone scaling without altering H/L classification.

As Ladd (2008) summarizes, the AM model shares key principles with those used in this paper. First, it involves sequences of tonal structures (e.g., rising–falling), as in “He wrote the book,” where pitch may rise on “wrote” or fall on “book.” Second, pitch accents align with prominent syllables—for example, “wrote” is more or less prominent depending on the sentence type. Third, pitch accents are categorized as high (H) or low (L) tones, as illustrated in Figure 3.

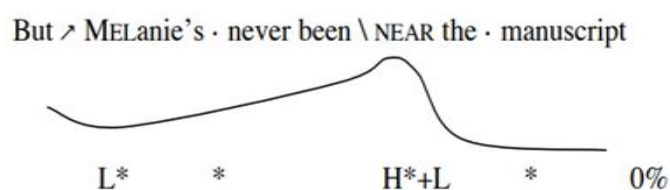


Figure 3. High Pitch Accent and Low Pitch Accent (Nolan, 2008, p. 6)

In Figure 3, the word “Melanie’s” carries a low pitch accent followed by a high pitch accent on “NEAR”, and as seen in the fourth element, F0 declination is suspended in questions, producing a rising contour as in “He wrote the book?”.

The second stage of the AM framework, developed by Pierrehumbert and Hirschberg (1990), emphasizes that intonation conveys communicative functions, with the meaning of a contour emerging from its tonal components—pitch accent, phrase accent, and boundary tones—which together express the speaker’s intent (Al Zaidi, 2018). For example, in American English:

1.a. “What about Anna? Who did she come with?”

b. “Anna came with MANNY”

(Pierrehumbert, 1980, p. 266)

H* %

2. “It’s even warm for December”

(Pierrehumbert & Hirschberg, 1990, p. 296)

L+H* L H%

3. “Well, I’d like a Pavoni...”

(Pierrehumbert, 1980, p. 291)

L* L* L*L H%

In the earlier examples, [H*] marks information focus (e.g., 1-b), [L+H*] signals contrastive focus (e.g., 2), and L* is linked to given or old information (e.g., 3). According to Asadu et al. (2019, pp. 46–47), the tones and symbols for the transcription of Intonation (see Appendix A).

The third stage in the AM framework saw the development of the ToBI (Tones and Break Indices) system, initially created to annotate American English intonation and later applied to other languages like German, Dutch, and Japanese. ToBI consists of four tiers, with required tiers for pitch contour (tones) and prosodic boundaries (break indices). Break indices are numbered: [0] indicates close cohesion (e.g., flapping), [1] reflects typical word-level juncture, [2] marks uncertain boundaries, [3] indicates intermediate phrase (ip) boundaries, and [4] signals intonational phrase (IP) boundaries. Optional tiers include orthographic transcription and miscellaneous notes for elements like disfluencies (Arvaniti, 2015).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Intonation, often referred to as the "music of speech," plays a critical role in shaping meaning across languages. It influences how speakers express attitudes, distinguish sentence types, and signal information structure. Despite its centrality in spoken communication, intonation has historically received less attention than other suprasegmental features (Asadu et al., 2019). This section reviews key literature on intonational patterns in declarative and interrogative sentences, first across global languages and then focusing on Arabic dialects. By identifying shared patterns and divergent features, this review establishes a foundation for the current study's focus on the under-researched intonation system of Qassimi Arabic (QA).

A. *Intonational Patterns in World Languages*

Across many languages, a fundamental distinction is observed between the intonation of declarative and interrogative sentences. Typically, declaratives exhibit falling intonation, while yes/no questions display rising contours. Lam (2017) demonstrates this distinction in Japanese, where the same syntactic structure can be interpreted as either a statement or a question depending solely on terminal pitch—falling for declaratives and rising for interrogatives.

Research in Spanish further reinforces this dichotomy. Portocarrero (2019), analyzing Ecuadorian Cuencano Spanish, observed a wide range of pitch accent types—especially bitonal ones like L+H* and H+L*—used to differentiate sentence types. Declaratives often included prenuclear L* L% contours or nuclear H+L* followed by L%, whereas yes/no questions exhibited a consistent L+H* HH% pattern, highlighting a clearer rising tendency in interrogatives.

In English, Hedberg et al. (2014) challenge earlier claims (e.g., Geluykens, 1988) that yes/no questions adopt falling contours. Using 410 real-life examples, they found that American English questions predominantly feature rising contours, especially L*H-H%, corroborating Portocarrero's findings in Spanish.

Cross-linguistic phonetic studies confirm these general trends that F0 is a reliable indicator of sentence type across languages. Lin et al. (2013) conducted a cross-linguistic phonetic study examining intonation through the acoustic cue F0. The study involved 12 native speakers—four each from Arabic, English, and Taiwanese Mandarin (six males and six females), aged 23 to 47—who read 28 sentences in their respective native languages. The results showed that yes/no questions consistently exhibited higher F0 values than declarative sentences, regardless of language background or whether the language was tonal or non-tonal.

However, some exceptions exist. Australian English, for example, exhibits rising intonation even in declarative sentences, especially among younger speakers and in informal settings. Fletcher and Loakes (2006) analyzed the intonational patterns of 17 speakers from Melbourne and rural Victoria using the ToBI framework. Their findings revealed that both statements and questions often employed high-rising terminals (H* H- L%) and final fall (H* L-L%), suggesting that intonational distinctions in Australian English are not strictly bound to sentence type. This variability underlines the need to examine intonation patterns dialect by dialect, especially in underexplored linguistic contexts like Arabic regional varieties.

B. *Intonation in Arabic Dialects: A Regional Overview*

Arabic dialects display both cross-dialectal similarities and notable differences in intonational behavior. A common theme is that declarative sentences tend to end in falling tones (e.g., L-L%), while yes/no questions are marked by rising contours (e.g., H-H%). Nevertheless, the specifics of pitch accents, boundary tones, and phrasing differ by region and sociolinguistic factors.

Arabic dialects, though sharing a common linguistic ancestry, show significant variation in their intonational systems. This section reviews studies on intonation in several Arabic varieties, starting with well-documented dialects such as Egyptian, Lebanese, Syrian, and Yemeni Arabic, which offer a broader view of regional intonational trends. It then shifts to Saudi dialects—Farasani, Hijazi, and Najdi Arabic—where recent research has revealed distinct pitch accent patterns and boundary tone behaviors. This general-to-specific structure provides a comparative framework for evaluating the Qassimi Arabic (QA) dialect.

Chahal and Hellmuth (2014) applied the AM framework to examine intonation in declarative and yes/no questions in Lebanese Arabic (LA) and Egyptian Arabic (EA). Their study involved seven educated urban LA speakers and fifteen EA speakers, using both read and quasi-natural speech. In both dialects, pitch accents were aligned with lexically stressed syllables. The results revealed a consistent L-L% (falling) contour for declaratives and an H-H% (high-rising) contour for yes/no questions. Pitch accents were consistently aligned with lexically stressed syllables, underscoring the

phonological role of stress in these varieties. Although the overall patterns were similar across both dialects, the gender of participants was not reported, and participant numbers were uneven, potentially affecting cross-dialectal comparisons.

The Damascene Arabic follows the general Arabic trend: declaratives have falling contours, while rising-falling bitonal patterns like LH*HLL%, and LH*L!H*L% appear in compound prosodic units, even in short phrases, showing that complex tonal combinations can serve discourse functions (Kulk et al., 2003).

Salem and Pillai (2020) examined the intonational patterns of the Taizzi variety of Yemeni Arabic (TYA). The study involved 30 female participants, aged 20–65, all of whom—and their parents—were born and educated in Taizz. Data were collected through a combination of read passages, 10 spontaneous conversations, 5 yes/no questions, and 5 wh-questions. Acoustic analysis using Praat revealed that the HL% contour consistently appeared in both spontaneous speech and yes/no questions. In contrast, wh-questions were typically marked by the LH% contour, highlighting a functional distinction in pitch movement between question types.

Abbas (2021) analyzed Farasani Arabic intonation, a variety spoken along the southwestern coast of Saudi Arabia. Using the AM model, the study examined the speech of seven native speakers. The findings revealed a diverse set of intonational patterns influenced by sentence structure. For instance, the prepositional phrases containing two words exhibited a rising pitch pattern (L H L%), while both subject and object clauses followed an L H* L% pattern. Farasani Arabic also displayed distinctive boundary tones: H% for continuation or surprise, !H% for alternative questions, HLH% for shocked expressions, and L% for both declaratives and wh-questions. These patterns contrast with those observed in Australian English by Fletcher and Loakes (2006), who found consistent use of mid-level tunes across sentence types, underscoring the cross-linguistic diversity of intonational systems. The presence of both L H L% and L H* L% configurations reveals a subtle pitch modulation strategy within clauses.

Al Zaidi (2018) investigated the intonational pattern of Hijazi Arabic (HA), specifically the Taif dialect, using a question–answer paradigm analyzed in Praat with 16 native speakers (aged 23–35). The study found that L+H* pitch accents were commonly used to mark focus, especially on left-dislocated elements. For example, in the sentence *Laila, Sami mar ams* ‘Laila, Sami visited yesterday’, the name *Laila* receives a bitonal L+H* accent, followed by postfocus compression on the remaining words. Declarative sentences consistently ended with a low boundary tone (L%). This study highlights that in Taif Arabic, a clear phonological strategy (i.e., intonation) rather than syntax, conveys informational focus, distinguishing it from structurally different dialects like those in central or northern Saudi Arabia.

Al Malki and Morrill (2016) explored the intonational and prosodic structure of yes/no questions in Urban Najdi Arabic (NA). The study involved eight native NA speakers (aged 19–30; four males and four females) studying at George Mason University. Using a picture-based elicitation task, participants produced 25 declarative sentences and five yes/no questions, which were analyzed using Praat and annotated with ToBI conventions. Results revealed two primary boundary tone patterns at the phrase-final edge: a high-rising contour (H-H%) and a fall-rise contour (L-H%). Words preceding H-H% demonstrated greater pitch excursion than those preceding L-H%, indicating a prosodic distinction between question types. This rising contour pattern for yes/no questions parallels findings in other languages, such as Ecuadorian Cuencano Spanish and American English (Portocarrero, 2019; Hedberg et al., 2014). However, generalization is limited due to the small sample size and the participants’ residence in the U.S., which may introduce L2 influence from English (Kang, 2013).

In summary, studies reveal both universal and language-specific patterns in intonation: yes/no questions typically show rising contours, while declaratives tend to fall. Yet, dialectal variation shapes differences in pitch accents, boundary tones, and their interaction with stress and information structure. Despite rich research on many Arabic dialects, Qassimi Arabic (QA), a central Najdi variety, remains underexplored. Given its linguistic distinctiveness and social importance, this study fills the gap by analyzing the intonation of QA declaratives and yes/no questions. The findings aim to broaden our understanding of Arabic prosody and enrich cross-dialectal typological records.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study involved twenty native Qassimi Arabic speakers (10 males, 10 females; aged 20–40, median = 27), all born and raised in the Qassim region to Saudi parents and residing there at the time of data collection. Participants were selected based on regional and dialectal criteria. This section also outlines the stimuli and procedures used to elicit speech data, as well as the analytical methods employed to identify intonational patterns that may distinguish Qassimi Arabic from other varieties cross-linguistically.

A. Data Collection and Stimuli

Once participants were confirmed to meet the selection criteria, the researchers provided a detailed explanation of the study’s purpose and procedures. Participants were informed that their recordings would be used exclusively for research, participation was voluntary, and they retained the right to withdraw at any stage without consequence. Written informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. Participants were provided with written sentences and asked to read them aloud in their native Qassimi dialect using different intonational forms.

Each utterance was produced twice—once as a declarative and once as a yes/no question. To elicit natural intonation, declaratives were framed as straightforward statements, while yes/no questions were posed to reflect inquiry. Participants first completed several practice trials to become familiar with the process. For instance, they were

presented with the following scenario: *Ahmad is 19 years old and saved his money for three years to buy a car. At the end of the year, he bought a black car.* Based on this context, participants were expected to produce the sentence *The color of Ahmad's car is black* first as a statement with falling intonation and then as a question with rising intonation, allowing for the observation of distinct pitch patterns in both forms. (See Appendix B for the complete set of elicited data).

Each participant was recorded individually in a quiet environment to ensure high audio quality, and each production was saved separately in WAV format. They read eight utterances, each repeated twice, resulting in a total of 320 recordings (8 sentences $\times$ 2 repetitions $\times$ 20 participants). Recordings were conducted using Praat and lasted approximately 30 minutes per participant. If a participant made an error or paused during reading, they were asked to repeat the sentence. Clarification and assistance were provided when needed to ensure consistent and natural intonation throughout the task.

B. Data Analysis

The recorded data were segmented and analyzed using Praat, a widely recognized tool for acoustic analysis (Boersma, 2001). The RTPITCH program was used when needed to verify intonational patterns. Sentences were imported into Praat, and Figure 4 illustrates a sample TextGrid used in the analysis.

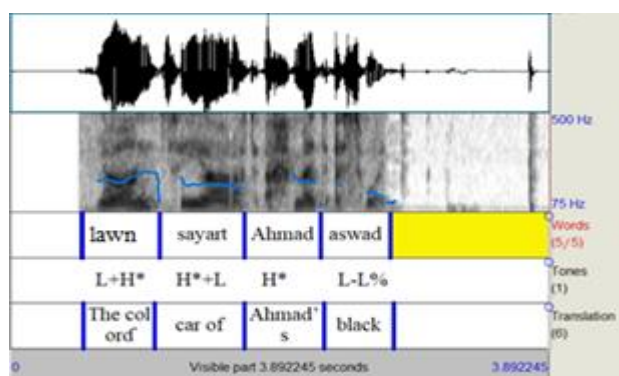


Figure 4. Example of a PRAAT TextGrid for “*The Color of Ahmad’s Car Is Black*”

Following the AM approach, stressed syllables were identified to locate pitch accents (tones). As shown in Figure 4, Praat analysis was performed using a three-tier TextGrid: the first tier marked QA words, the second captured tonal events, and the third provided English translations (Al Zaidi, 2018). The F0 contour, visible in the spectrogram, was measured from start to end. Focus was placed on the tone tier to detect rising pitch at stressed syllables. For instance, *Lawn* ‘color’ showed an L+H* accent, *sayart* ‘car’ displayed H*+L, and *Ahmad* carried a high tone before the final fall, indicating a declarative contour.

C. Statistical Analysis

This section presents the statistical analysis conducted to evaluate differences in F0 values between the two repetitions for each participant. Mean F0 values were calculated and averaged to assess the consistency of intonation patterns and to identify any significant differences across participants. The analysis addresses the research questions outlined in Section 1. Quantitative data were processed using SPSS (version 25). Given the repeated nature of the data—each participant produced both declarative sentences and yes/no questions—a repeated-measures ANOVA was employed to examine within-subject variation (Hinkle et al., 2003). This test is appropriate for detecting differences in conditions applied to the same subjects. Additionally, descriptive statistics and paired-samples t-tests were used to provide further insight into mean differences between sentence types.

IV. RESULTS

This section comprises four subsections, each focusing on a distinct aspect of the acoustic analysis. Subsection 4.1 details the descriptive statistics of F0 in declarative sentences, while Subsection 4.2 presents a parallel account for yes/no questions. Subsection 4.3 examines inferential statistics to determine significant F0 differences between sentence types. Finally, Subsection 4.4 summarizes key findings and their relevance to the study’s research questions.

A. F0 Values of Declarative Sentences

The data representing declarative sentences were elicited through four utterances: *Lawn sayarat Ahmad aswad* ‘The color of Ahmad’s car is black’, *Al-jaw be-Faransa bared* ‘The weather in France is cold’, *Khaled mudares* ‘Khaled is a teacher’, and *Eman ta-xs’s-t Rjad’jat* ‘Eman specialized in mathematics’. The acoustic results of these declarative sentences, as produced by all 20 participants, are summarized in Table 1.

TABLE 1
ENTIRE AVERAGES AND STD. DEVIATIONS OF THE FOUR DECLARATIVE SENTENCES BY ALL PARTICIPANTS

Declarative	Mean	Min.	Max.	Std. Dev.
1	144.91 Hz	100.60 Hz	221.80 Hz	35.470 Hz
2	135.53 Hz	95.00 Hz	202.30 Hz	33.750 Hz
3	144.55 Hz	86.50 Hz	213.20 Hz	37.137 Hz
4	148.38 Hz	104.60 Hz	221.60 Hz	35.410 Hz
Average	143.34 Hz	96.68 Hz	214.73 Hz	
Ring			118.05 Hz	

Table 1 presents the overall means, standard deviations, and the minimum and maximum F0 values for the four declarative utterances. As illustrated, the final words across all sentences showed consistent F0 patterns, indicating a stable intonational contour marked by L-L% and L% boundary tones.

B. F0 Values of Yes/No Questions

Similar to the declarative data, the same sentence structures were used in interrogative form to examine the intonational patterns of yes/no questions. These included: *Lawn sayarat Ahmad aswad?* ‘The color of Ahmad’s car is black?’, *Al-jaw be-Faransa bared?* ‘The weather in France is cold?’, *Khaled mudares?* ‘Khaled is a teacher?’, and *Eman ta-xs’s-t Rjad’jat?* ‘Eman specialized in mathematics?’. Table 2 summarizes the F0 values for all four interrogative utterances as produced by participants, including the overall means, standard deviations, and the minimum and maximum F0 ranges.

TABLE 2
ENTIRE AVERAGES AND STD. DEVIATIONS OF THE FOUR YES/NO QUESTIONS BY ALL PARTICIPANTS

Yes/No Question	Mean	Min.	Max.	Std. Dev.
1	169.41 Hz	99.50 Hz	274.90 Hz	51.387 Hz
2	160.76 Hz	103.20 Hz	226.40 Hz	43.986 Hz
3	152.64 Hz	94.80 Hz	216.50 Hz	40.282 Hz
4	162.85 Hz	102.70 Hz	231.00 Hz	40.837 Hz
Average	161.41 Hz	100.05 Hz	237.20 Hz	
Ring			137.15 Hz	

As shown in the table, the interrogative structures consistently exhibited rising intonation patterns, reflected in the boundary tones L-H%, H%, and H-H%. The results indicate that the mean F0 of yes/no questions (137.15 Hz) was notably higher than that of declarative sentences (118.05 Hz). Additionally, the overall average F0 for yes/no questions exceeded that of declaratives, reinforcing the pattern of pitch elevation associated with interrogative intonation.

C. Differences Between Declarative and Yes/No Forms

This section presents the differences of the overall means, standard deviations, and the minimum and maximum F0 values for the four declarative and four yes/no questions, based on data from all 20 participants. To assess whether the differences in F0 values between declarative sentences and yes/no questions were statistically significant, both ANOVA and paired-samples t-tests were conducted. Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics for each sentence type, followed by the results of the ANOVA, which quantify the extent of variation attributable to sentence type.

TABLE 3
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND ONE-WAY ANOVA SUMMARY FOR F0 IN DECLARATIVE SENTENCES AND YES/NO QUESTIONS

Sentence Type	Count	Mean F ₀ (Hz)	SD	Variance	Sum
Declarative	4	143.34	5.49	30.09	573.37
Yes/No Question	4	161.41	6.91	47.81	645.66

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F value	p value	Fcrit
Between Groups	653.140	1	653.140	16.770	0.006	5.987
Within Groups	233.678	6	38.946			
Total	886.818	7				

In addition to the ANOVA, paired-samples t-tests were conducted to further investigate the mean differences between sentence types (i.e., declarative and yes/no questions). These tests were used to determine whether the differences in average F0 values across the four structures for each sentence type were statistically significant, offering complementary evidence to support the ANOVA findings.

TABLE 4
 PAIRED-SAMPLE T TEST RESULTS COMPARING F₀ VALUES OF DECLARATIVE SENTENCES AND YES/NO QUESTIONS ACROSS FOUR SENTENCE STRUCTURES

Declarative and Yes/No Questions	Paired Differences	Std. Dev.	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				Correlation
	Mean			Lower	Upper	t	p	
1	-24.500	34.658	7.750	-40.720	-8.820	-3.161	0.005	0.740
2	-25.223	28.049	6.272	-38.350	-12.095	-4.022	0.001	0.770
3	-8.090	18.453	4.126	-16.726	0.546	-1.961	0.065	0.889
4	-14.473	23.045	5.153	-25.258	-3.687	-2.809	0.011	0.827

Tables 3 and 4 examine whether sentence type influences F₀ in Qassimi Arabic by presenting the results of both ANOVA and paired-samples t-tests. ANOVA and t-tests confirmed that yes/no questions (M = 161.41 Hz) had significantly higher F₀ values than declaratives (M = 143.34 Hz), $F = 16.77$, $p = .006$. Most sentence pairs (1, 2, and 4) showed significant differences, supporting a consistent intonational contrast. Minor variation in Sentence 3 reduced significance ($p = .065$) but did not alter the overall pattern.

D. Paired-Sample T Test Results by Gender

To validate the general findings and explore potential gender-based variation, the paired-samples t-test was conducted separately for male and female participants. This analysis aimed to determine whether there were statistically significant differences in F₀ values between declarative sentences and yes/no questions within each gender group. The test was run for the 10 male and 10 female participants individually. This gender-specific analysis provides insight into whether intonational patterns are consistent across genders or reflect sociophonetic variation within the Qassimi dialect.

The paired-samples t-test was conducted comparing F₀ values between declarative sentences and yes/no questions for 10 male Qassimi Arabic speakers. The data reveal statistically significant differences in Sentences 2 and 3 ($p = .020$ and $p = .030$, respectively), indicating higher pitch in interrogatives. Sentence 1 and 4 approached ($p = .105$) and ($p = .175$), respectively. Correlation values ranged from weak to moderate ($r = .169-.737$), suggesting some variability in how consistently male speakers distinguished sentence types via pitch. Overall, the results partially support intonational differences in male speakers as shown in Figure 5.

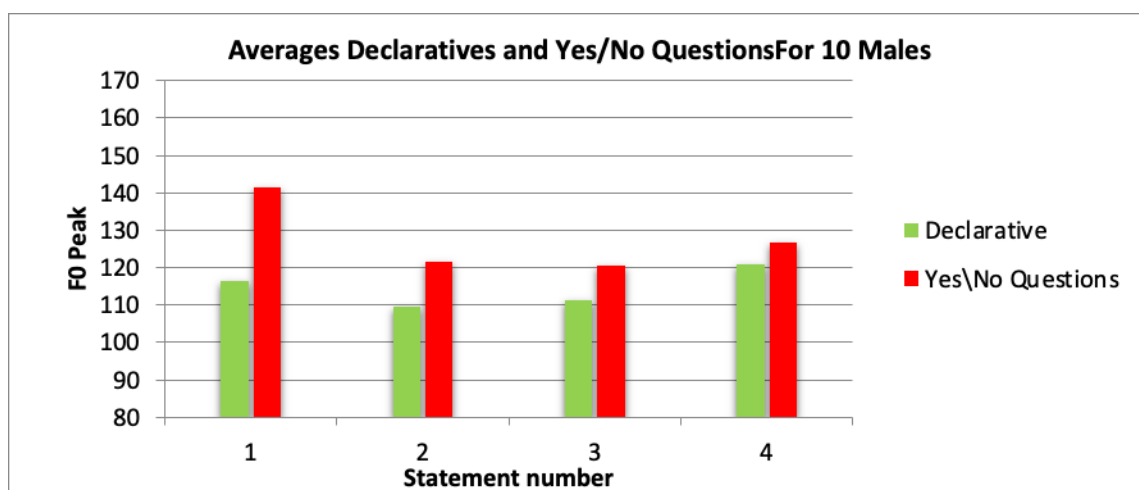


Figure 5. Mean F₀ Values for Declarative Sentences and Yes/No Questions Across Four Statements by 10 Male Speakers

Figure 5 shows average F₀ peak values for declarative and yes/no questions across four sentence types by 10 male speakers. In all cases, red bars (yes/no questions) exceeded green bars (declaratives), indicating a consistent rising pattern in interrogatives. Sentences 2 and 3 had the largest differences (−11.91 Hz, −9.35 Hz), both significant ($p = .020$, $p = .030$). Sentences 1 and 4 showed noticeable differences (−25.09 Hz, −5.75 Hz) but lacked significance ($p = .105$, $p = .175$), likely due to high variability (SD = 44.01, 12.35). Overall, yes/no questions consistently showed higher pitch.

For female speakers, paired-sample t-tests compared F₀ values across four sentence pairs. Sentences 1, 2, and 4 showed significant differences ($p < .05$), confirming higher pitch in yes/no questions. Sentence 3 showed no significance ($p = .394$), likely due to pitch variability. The strongest contrast was in Sentence 2 ($t = -3.691$, $p = .005$). These results support the consistent use of higher F₀ in interrogatives among female speakers.

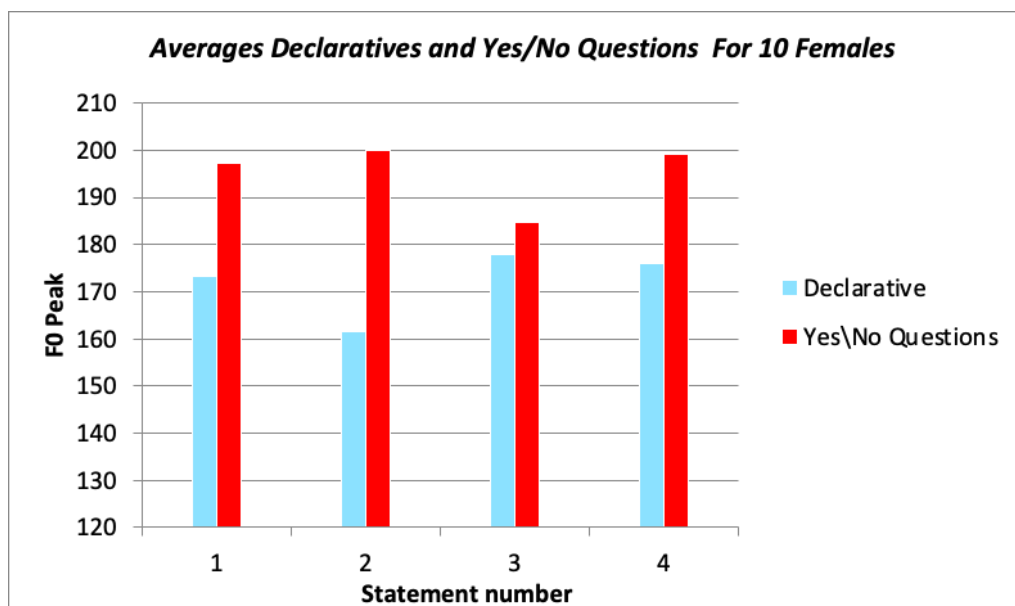


Figure 6. Average Values for Declaratives and Yes/No Questions in 10 Female Speakers

Figure 6 shows average F0 peak values for declarative and yes/no questions across four sentence types by 10 female speakers. In all cases, red bars (questions) exceed blue bars (declaratives), confirming a rising intonation pattern in interrogatives. Sentence 2 shows the largest mean difference (−38.54 Hz), followed by Sentences 1 (−23.91 Hz) and 4 (−23.20 Hz), all statistically significant ($p = .005, .013, .029$). Sentence 3 shows a smaller difference (−6.83 Hz) and is not significant ($p = .394$), likely due to high variability ($SD = 24.15$). Overall, yes/no questions consistently show higher pitch, though significance varies by consistency and effect size.

In summary, the acoustic and statistical analyses confirm a robust intonational distinction between declarative sentences and yes/no questions in Qassimi Arabic. Among the 20 native speakers, yes/no questions consistently exhibited higher mean F₀ values ($M = 161.41$ Hz; range: 100.05–237.20 Hz) than declaratives ($M = 143.34$ Hz; range: 96.68–214.73 Hz), with a significant overall difference supported by ANOVA ($F(1, 6) = 16.77, p = .006$). Paired-sample t-tests further confirmed this trend, with significant contrasts in most sentence pairs, particularly Sentences 1, 2, and 4. Tonal analysis showed that declaratives typically ended with low boundary tones (L-L% or L%), while yes/no questions were marked by rising contours (L-H%, H%, or H-H%). Occasional deviations (e.g., H%, H-L%, H*+L%) appeared in both sentence types, likely reflecting speaker-specific variation or repetition-based shifts. Although statistical significance was limited in Sentence 4 (males) and Sentence 3 (females), both genders consistently followed the same pitch trend, reinforcing that Qassimi Arabic systematically encodes interrogativity through rising intonation.

Although statistical significance weakened in some cases—such as Sentence 4 for males and Sentence 3 for females—this likely reflects increased within-group variability rather than a shift in the overall trend. Female speakers consistently showed higher F₀ values across sentence types, attributable to physiological differences in vocal fold structure. Their shorter, thinner vocal folds vibrate more rapidly, producing higher pitch levels (Lee & Martinez, 2025). Overall, the findings indicate that Qassimi Arabic marks interrogativity through consistent rising intonation, in line with autosegmental-metrical tonal frameworks.

V. DISCUSSION

This study sought to investigate the characteristic intonational patterns of declarative sentences and yes/no questions in Qassimi Arabic (QA), a dialect from central Saudi Arabia, within the Autosegmental-Metrical (AM) framework. Specifically, it aimed to determine whether intonational contours in QA conformed to trends observed in other Arabic dialects and to identify dialect-specific tonal features.

The acoustic analysis revealed a clear prosodic distinction between declarative and yes/no question forms. Declarative sentences consistently concluded with falling intonation contours, predominantly marked by low boundary tones such as L-L% and L%. This finding is aligned with established patterns in Arabic dialects including Egyptian Arabic (Chahal & Hellmuth, 2014), Lebanese Arabic (El Zarka, 2011), and Hijazi Arabic (Al Zaidi, 2018), where falling boundaries are used to mark declaratives. The total F₀ mean for declaratives in this study was 143.34 Hz, with a range of 118.05 Hz.

In contrast, yes/no questions in QA displayed rising contours, most frequently realized as L-H%, H%, and H-H%, classic markers of interrogativity in many Arabic dialects (Al Malki & Morrill, 2016; Hedberg et al., 2014). The average F₀ for yes/no questions was significantly higher at 161.41 Hz, with a broader range of 137.15 Hz, indicating a more dynamic pitch movement and enhanced intonational prominence. These tonal contours reflect a perceptual rise in

intonation, aligning with cross-linguistic findings reported in Arabic dialects such as Farasani Arabic (Abbas, 2021) and in other languages including Spanish and English (Portocarrero, 2019; Lin et al., 2013).

The presence of L-H% in QA is particularly significant. This contour indicates a gradual fall followed by a rise, which often implies speaker uncertainty or politeness—a pragmatic feature often associated with interrogativity (Pierrehumbert & Hirschberg, 1990; Alzaidi et al., 2025). Similarly, the high tone H% and the double high boundary H-H% provide strong acoustic cues to question modality. These results support the hypothesis that Qassimi Arabic utilizes rising intonational strategies to distinguish yes/no questions from declaratives.

The robustness of the declarative vs. interrogative distinction in QA was validated through statistical testing. A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant overall difference between sentence types. Complementary paired-sample t-tests also confirmed significant differences in F0 values for most sentence pairs, particularly Sentences 1, 2, and 4, thereby reinforcing the core distinction. Sentence 3 narrowly missed statistical significance, likely due to increased variability.

Such variability may stem from speaker-level inconsistencies or reading effects. For instance, unexpected tonal patterns such as H%, L-H%, H*+L%, and H-L% occasionally appeared in declarative utterances, deviating from the dominant falling contours. These anomalies were primarily observed in single repetitions and were often absent in follow-up trials, suggesting they may have resulted from slips of the tongue, prosodic reset due to emphasis, or unnatural reading strategies. Similarly, approximately 16% of yes/no questions included atypical boundary tones like H-L%, L-L%, and L%, especially among participants focused more on reading than spontaneous speech delivery. However, these variable patterns may not only be slips or reading effects, but could also reflect pragmatic nuances, such as reinforcement, emphasis, or speaker attitude, as seen in other Arabic varieties (Hamdan et al., 2025).

A noteworthy dimension of this study was the exploration of gender-based variation. Female speakers consistently produced higher F0 values across both sentence types. For declaratives, female F0 values ranged from 96.68 to 214.73 Hz, and for yes/no questions, from 100.05 to 237.20 Hz. This aligns with the biological underpinnings of vocal production, wherein females typically exhibit higher pitch due to shorter and thinner vocal folds (Lee & Martinez, 2025; Mendoza et al., 1996).

Statistical results confirmed significant differences in F0 values for three of the four sentences among female speakers. Sentence 3 did not reach significance, although visual inspection of bar graphs (see Figure 6) still revealed higher pitch levels for questions. Among male speakers, Sentences 2 and 3 reached significance, while Sentences 1 and 4 did not. Again, variability appears to have reduced statistical power rather than reversing the general pattern. Nevertheless, both male and female speakers demonstrated the same intonational directionality, underscoring the consistency of the rising pitch strategy for marking questions.

These findings are broadly consistent with prior studies on other Arabic dialects but also highlight specific features unique to QA. The use of H% and L-H% in declaratives, though infrequent, mirrors patterns found in Farasani Arabic (Abbas, 2021), suggesting that occasional high tones at sentence boundaries are not exclusive to interrogatives. Additionally, the presence of the H*+L% tone—a bitonal contour associated with contrast or stress—suggests that QA speakers sometimes encode information structure through intonation even within declarative frames.

On the interrogative side, the dominant patterns of L-H% and H-H% confirm trends seen in Urban Najdi Arabic (Al Malki & Morrill, 2016) and Lebanese Arabic (Chahal & Hellmuth, 2014), while the presence of H% as a standalone marker of rising finality is less frequently reported in prior literature. Interestingly, Salem's (2020) study on Taizzi Yemeni Arabic found a falling contour (H*L%) in yes/no questions, a finding at odds with QA data. Such contrasts reinforce the need for fine-grained, dialect-specific research and caution against overgeneralizing across Arabic varieties.

The results provide empirical support for the Autosegmental-Metrical framework in modeling QA intonation. Declaratives generally followed the L-L% and L% boundary tone configurations, while yes/no questions utilized L-H%, H%, and H-H%, reflecting the use of basic H and L tones and their combinations into phrase and boundary accents. This supports Pierrehumbert's (1980) principle of compositionality, where contours are built from independent tonal elements, and Ladd's (2008) principle of tonal sequencing.

Furthermore, the presence of high-rising patterns like H-H% in interrogatives indicates alignment between pitch accents and prosodic boundaries, which is characteristic of AM theory's approach to prominence and phrasing. The dual use of H% in both question and marked declarative forms also highlights the functional load of intonation in QA, with rising contours not only signaling modality but also discourse-level emphasis or speaker stance.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study examined the intonational patterns of Qassimi Arabic (QA) using the Autosegmental-Metrical (AM) framework, focusing on declarative and yes/no question forms. Declaratives predominantly end in L-L% and L%, while yes/no questions feature rising contours such as L-H%, H%, and H-H%. These distinctions were both perceptually salient and statistically significant, confirming that QA utilizes intonation systematically to mark sentence modality.

Gender-based differences were also observed, with female speakers consistently producing higher F0 values, reflecting biological vocal fold differences and supported by cross-linguistic phonetic research. Occasional tonal deviations (e.g., H-L% in interrogatives or H% in declaratives in unexpected contexts) were noted but did not undermine the overall trend.

While controlled elicitation allowed for consistency, the use of read speech may not fully capture the natural prosodic variation found in spontaneous discourse. Future research should explore broader sentence types, including wh-questions, imperatives, and focus constructions, to enrich our understanding of QA's prosodic grammar. Moreover, examining sociolinguistic dimensions such as age, education, and regional variation within Qassim would provide a fuller account of intonational diversity.

Another promising avenue lies in investigating how intonation in QA interacts with syntactic structure and pragmatic functions, such as focus and topic marking—key components of the AM model. In sum, this paper documents previously unexplored prosodic features of QA, contributes empirical data to Arabic phonological research, and supports the versatility of the AM model in accounting for tonal distinctions across Arabic varieties. It lays a critical foundation for future work in prosodic typology, variation, and theoretical modeling.

APPENDIX A. A SET OF SYMBOLS FOR THE TRANSCRIPTION OF INTONATION PHENOMENA

Tones	Transcriptions
H*	high pitch accent
L*	low pitch accent
L+H*	bitonal pitch accent with low tone followed by high tone prominence
L*+H	bitonal pitch accent with low tone prominence followed by high tone
H*+L	bitonal pitch accent with high tone prominence followed by low tone
!H*	down-stepped high pitch accent
L+!H*	bitonal pitch accent with low tone followed by a down-stepped high tone prominence
L*+H	bitonal pitch accent with low tone prominence followed by high tone
H+!H*	bitonal pitch accent with high tone followed by down-stepped high prominence
H*+!H	bitonal pitch accent with high tone prominence followed by a down-stepped high tone. L-L%: low phrase accent, low boundary tone

APPENDIX B. COMPLETE SET OF ELICITED DATA

Declarative Statements	
#	Statement
1	Lawn Siyyarat Ahmad aswad. Colour-PRE car- NOM Ahmad. POSS. NOM black-ADJ ‘The colour of Ahmad’s car is black’.
2	Al-jaw be-faransa bared. the-weather-NOM PRE -France cold- ADJ ‘The weather in France is cold’.
3	Khaled mudares. Khaled- NOM teacher. M. NOM ‘Khaled is a teacher’.
4	Eman ta-xs ^s -t Rjad ^f jat. Eman-NOM PST-Specialised-3SG. F Mathematics-NOM ‘Eman specialized in Mathematics’.

Interrogatives	
#	Statement of the intrrogrative
1	Lawn Siyyarat Ahmad aswad? Colour-PRE car- NOM Ahmad. POSS. NOM black-ADJ ‘The colour of Ahmad’s car is black’?.
2	Al-jaw be-faransa bared? the-weather-NOM PRE -France cold- ADJ ‘The weather in France is cold’?
3	Khaled mudares? Khaled- NOM teacher. M. NOM ‘Khaled is a teacher’?
4	Eman ta-xs ^s -t Rjad ^f jat? Eman-NOM PST-Specialised-3SG. F Mathematics-NOM ‘Eman specialized in Mathematics’?

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Recognising Diverse Forms of Parental Involvement in ESL Learning Across Socioeconomic Contexts

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Abstract—Parents play a significant role in children’s development and education. This paper examines parental involvement in children’s ESL learning in Malaysian public primary schools. Using semi-structured interviews with 12 parents (six low-income; six high-income) and thematic analysis, we identified seven themes: home learning environment, homework assistance, English communication, learning tools, ESL activities, support and encouragement, and home–school partnership. Both income groups were highly engaged, but strategies differed: Low-income families described resourceful, low-cost practices such as dedicated study spaces, readily available materials, vocabulary work, while high-income families reported tailoring activities to children’s interests, wider use of electronic devices and apps, and in some cases enrolment in private English classes. These patterns align with Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems and Vygotsky’s social-constructivist perspectives that emphasise how environments and interactions shape support for learning. The findings suggest practical avenues for inclusive family-school collaboration and low-cost, home-based supports that recognise diverse family contexts.

Index Terms—parental involvement, ESL children, ESL learning, socioeconomic status, qualitative study

I. INTRODUCTION

Children’s development benefits from the involvement of various individuals and groups, including their parents (Kamal et al., 2023). Parents are among the most important individuals in a child’s life, influencing their learning and growth in many ways. Past studies illustrate that active parental involvement (henceforth PI) in children’s learning, leads to general well-being and academic achievement (Santrock, 2016), enhanced educational outcomes (Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2007) and positive behavioural and cognitive engagement (Dotterer & Wehrspann, 2016). PI is a complex concept that has been defined and discussed differently by researchers (e.g., Kamal et al., 2022; Hill, 2022; Roy & Giraldo-García, 2018; Smokoska, 2020). For instance, PI can be seen as a single or multifaceted construct, with categorisations into home-based and school-based involvement being commonly used (Green et al., 2007; Kamal et al., 2022). Hill (2022, p. 309) asserts that PI encompasses the engagement of family members with teachers and children at school and at home. Roy and Giraldo-García (2018) suggest that PI, in its many forms, can be applied to foster parent–school relationships, introduce school-like activities at home, interact with children about school, and monitor screen time. Similarly, Smokoska (2020, p. 5) explains PI as parental support and engagement at home and in relationships with the school. The term “involvement” has also been equated with “participation” and “influence” in other studies, denoting similar meanings (Hosseinpour et al., 2015; Majid et al., 2005). Scholars have observed that PI is defined inconsistently, making results difficult to compare and synthesise (Jaiswal & Choudhuri, 2017; Shute et al., 2011). One strand privileges homework monitoring; another, shared reading. We therefore approach PI as a context-sensitive construct, shaped by families’ sociocultural norms and economic resources (Hill, 2022; Roy & Giraldo-García, 2018). From this standpoint, the present study investigates how parents from distinct SES backgrounds in Malaysian primary schools support ESL learning, addressing a gap in the local literature (Kamal et al., 2022). The research focuses on investigating the PI strategies employed by parents from two distinct SES groups in Malaysia: the B40 group (bottom 40% earners) and the

T20 group (top 20% earners) (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2021). By examining these groups, the research explores how sociocultural factors and available resources shape the diverse strategies parents utilise to support their children's ESL learning journey.

The overarching research question guiding this study is: How do the diverse sociocultural backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses of parents influence the strategies they employ to support their children's ESL learning in Malaysian primary schools? By incorporating a sociocultural perspective and comparing SES groups, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of the cultural values, resources, and opportunities that shape PI in children's ESL learning.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review systematically identifies existing knowledge pertaining to the research questions as outlined by Bullock (2014). A few subtopics were presented, including theories related to PI, PI and children's learning outcomes factors that influence PI in children's ESL learning, particularly focusing on the interplay of social, cultural, and economic contexts.

A. Theories Related to PI

This research delves into the complexities of socioeconomic and sociocultural perspectives on parental involvement in children's ESL Learning. Drawing upon two prominent theoretical frameworks: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) and Vygotsky's Social Constructivism (1978). Together, these frameworks provide a holistic understanding of the socioeconomic and sociocultural factors shaping parental involvement in children's ESL learning. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory lays the groundwork by highlighting the multifaceted environmental influences on child development. This theory depicts children as embedded within a series of interconnected systems, each influencing their experiences and behaviours. The innermost layer, the microsystem, encompasses the immediate environment where children spend a significant amount of time, such as family, teachers, and peers (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Moving outward, the mesosystem focuses on the interactions between these microsystems (Frankel et al., 2015). The ecosystem represents settings that indirectly impact children, such as a parent's workplace (Hayes et al., 2017). Finally, the outermost layer, the macrosystem, encompasses the broader cultural and societal contexts that shape all the other systems (Krishnan, 2010).

Vygotsky's Social Constructivism complements Bronfenbrenner's model by emphasising the social and interactive nature of learning. This theory posits that knowledge is not passively transmitted but actively constructed through social interaction and meaning-making (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is particularly relevant. The ZPD refers to the gap between a learner's current level of development and what they can achieve with assistance from a more knowledgeable person (Vygotsky, 1978, pp. 84-91). This concept highlights the importance of social interaction in pushing learners beyond their current capabilities and fostering cognitive growth.

The synergy between these frameworks lies in their focus on the interplay between environments and social interactions. Bronfenbrenner's model provides the backdrop for social constructivist processes to unfold. The environments within Bronfenbrenner's framework become the breeding ground for social interactions that fuel learning within the ZPD. For instance, within the microsystem of the classroom, a student's interaction with a teacher can become a platform for social construction of knowledge. The teacher's guidance and support (scaffolding) can push the student's understanding beyond what they could grasp independently, activating their ZPD (Xue, 2023, p. 166).

Similarly, mesosystem interactions (e.g., home-school collaboration) can align support across contexts, reinforcing learning within a child's ZPD. Collaboration between teachers and parents, for example, can create a more unified learning experience that reinforces the concepts explored within the classroom environment.

B. PI and Children's Learning Outcomes

Research on the impact of parental involvement on student learning is inconclusive. Several studies, like Ahmad et al. (2017) and Manukaram et al. (2013), suggest that active engagement at home (creating a learning environment, communicating, supporting academic goals) leads to increased student engagement and self-regulated learning. This might even influence their life goals. Furthermore, Ramalingam et al. (2019) highlight how specific actions of PI such as helping with homework, making decisions about education, and volunteering can influence student achievement. Interestingly, Raslie et al. (2020) reported a positive link between PI in home literacy activities (even at low levels) and academic achievement, suggesting that any engagement might be beneficial. Kuan and Chuen (2017) offer a contrasting perspective, suggesting no significant relationship between PI and academic achievement. In the context of PI in children's ESL learning, several types of strategies were identified in the previous studies. Two most prominent are reading with children (Çalışkan & Ulas, 2022; Kamal et al., 2021; Skwarchuk et al., 2022) and providing homework assistance (Kalayci & Öz, 2018; Kamal et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2023). In addition, school-based PI such as attending parent-teacher meetings was also reported (Bromley & Yazdanpanah, 2021).

Several studies examined the relationship between PI and children's ESL learning. For instance, Çalışkan and Ulas (2022), involving 104 primary school students, found that PI in English reading activities had a positive impact on children's reading development. Wang et al. (2023) studied 253 students and reported that PI increased children's

academic performance in English, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, Skwarchuk et al. (2022), using a mixed-method approach with 82 parents of Canadian school children, discovered that parental shared reading with their children successfully improved their vocabulary. Programme-level syntheses show reading-led family activities and accessible materials are common denominators of impact (Ishak et al., 2025), reinforcing the value of home-based practices alongside school-based engagement in ESL learning. Taken together, these findings suggest that PI can positively support children's English learning in various ways, including reading practice, homework engagement, and vocabulary development.

C. Factors Influencing PI: Socioeconomic Status and Sociocultural Background

Socioeconomic status and sociocultural background are two major factors influencing PI in children's primary-level ESL education. For example, parents with higher SES often have more resources at their disposal, such as finances, time, and education. This allows them to provide more direct and diversified support for their children's learning. They might invest in after-school programmes, create enriched learning environments at home, and directly guide their children's homework (Lee, 2010).

However, parents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds should not be underestimated. Despite facing challenges like limited finances, long working hours, and potentially less access to technology, they still show dedication and creativity in supporting their children's ESL development. Examples include reading stories together, using everyday objects for learning activities, and actively encouraging their children (Lynch, 2008; Kamal & Hashim, 2021). Importantly, studies suggest that PI can significantly benefit children from low SES families, potentially bridging the achievement gap through parental commitment (Duan et al., 2018). The educational involvement shown by these parents is equally crucial, as their dedication could compensate for academic disadvantages faced by children from underprivileged backgrounds (Duan et al., 2018).

Cultural beliefs and practices significantly influence PI styles. Misunderstandings between parents and teachers can arise due to contrasting expectations (Li, 2004; Kamal, 2020). For instance, some cultures may emphasise rote memorisation for learning, while others prioritise critical thinking and questioning (Li, 2004, p. 14). Similarly, research by Kamal (2020) found that parents in her study perceived homework as crucial while teachers expressed concern that homework might not be completed if given. Additionally, Heath (1983) in her seminal work: *Way with Words* showed that literacy development practices can vary widely, some communities use books and reading session for language development, while others emphasise storytelling and oral traditions. Despite these differences, a common thread binding parents across backgrounds is the parents' aspiration for their children's success. This translates into a diverse range of strategies employed by parents such as direct support including activities like homework assistance, shared reading, pronunciation practice, and incorporating songs, music, and technology into learning (Kamal & Hashim, 2021; Pendleton, 2017). Kamal and Hashim (2021) also reported that some parents use creative approaches like using pizza boxes for spelling activities or leveraging phonics principles for reading guidance. In addition to that, cultural influences extend beyond language. Effective communication and collaboration between families and educators are crucial to bridge cultural gaps and create a supportive learning environment for all children.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative method, immersing itself in the lived experiences of people in natural settings, using non-numerical data like interviews, observations, and documents, offering an in-depth understanding of social life (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This research chose a qualitative approach because it aimed to understand a real-world situation involving a group of people (Gustafsson, 2017). This method is particularly helpful where prior research is limited (Kumar, 2011). This study employs semi-structured interviews to understand experiences and perceptions of the participants. Adopting purposive sampling technique, participants were carefully chosen based on their relevance to the research questions and objectives (Bryman, 2012). Participants were selected from parents of primary school children in Standards 4-6, where exposure to English is typically greater than in lower standards. Additionally, participants were chosen from either the low-income (B40) or high-income (T20) groups to align with the study's focus. A gatekeeper, specifically a school teacher, assisted in identifying suitable participants. The researchers then contacted the parents and obtained their consent to participate in the study. Each parent was interviewed for 30 to 60 minutes regarding their PI in the ESL education by using semi-structured interview. The interviews were conducted in Malay for B40 parents and in English for T20 parents, after confirming each participant's language preference. Prior to the data collection, ethical clearance was applied from the Human Research Ethics Committee at the researcher's university. Once approved, formal consent was requested from the State Education Department, as it involved parents and primary school children who reside in the district. After receiving approval, an introductory letter was sent to the selected school, requesting cooperation in identifying suitable participants, particularly parents of primary school children from B40 and T20 groups.

Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed non-verbatim before being analysed. Codes, sub-themes and themes were identified and finalised. Findings are reported using themes and excerpts from the parents' interviews are used to support the themes presented and discussed.

IV. FINDINGS

Research question: The influence of parental SES and sociocultural background on the strategies parents use to support their children's ESL learning.

A. Theme 1: Home-Learning Environment

One prominent strategy employed by both B40 and T20 parents is the creation of dedicated study spaces, whether a separate room or a designated study table. A B40 parent explained, *"We have set up a room for studying... It has helped spark their interest in learning."* Another B40 parent emphasised the importance of a study room, describing it as *"essential for children to feel comfortable."* A T20 parent added that a dedicated space allows children to focus on their studies and minimise distractions. Across the socioeconomic spectrum, parents also acknowledged the value of books in fostering ESL development. A few B40 parents and all T20 parents reported purchasing English books for their children. As one B40 parent put it, *"I buy them English books..."*. Another B40 parent noted a limitation: *"I rarely buy books for them because, if I do, they will ask me for help and I cannot assist because I have little knowledge of English."* This highlights challenges some B40 parents face in fully supporting book-based learning due to their own English proficiency. Several T20 parents described taking their children to bookstores and involving them in choosing materials: *"I also bring them to the bookstore to buy books,"* and *"I buy him books, as I always bring him to the bookstore."* The data also suggest that T20 parents showed greater flexibility in tailoring learning to a child's interests. For example, one T20 parent leveraged a passion for music: *"I don't stress my child to study 24 hours. I focus on her interests. My daughter likes music, so I ask her to listen to English songs and jot down any meanings she doesn't know."* Another T20 parent personalised learning by supporting a child's interest in writing and reading novels, providing English books and encouraging online research.

B. Theme 2: Homework Assistance

The majority of parents in both groups (B40 and T20) helped their children with homework. A B40 parent said, *"I always help them because I feel sorry when they struggle with their homework. I always check and assist them."* T20 parents echoed this: *"Yes, I always help them,"* and *"Yes, I help them every day."* Three B40 parents also highlighted challenges in directly assisting with ESL homework; as one noted, *"I've done my best to assist my child in the past, but currently, due to my own limitations, I find it challenging to provide the help they need."* At the same time, several parents described approaches that foster independent problem-solving. A B40 parent explained, *"Not entirely. I usually ask and provide encouragement. They usually refer to the internet for assistance."* Similarly, a T20 parent said, *"I typically don't directly assist her with homework... she takes the initiative to solve problems independently and does her best to complete assignments on her own."* Another T20 parent expressed a preference for independence unless the child encounters significant difficulty.

C. Theme 3: English Communication

Several B40 parents acknowledged limited English proficiency, which made it difficult to communicate in English at home. One B40 parent explained, *"No, I don't, because speaking in English is difficult for me. My daily language is Kelantanese, so it's hard for me."* Despite these challenges, B40 parents still sought to support learning-helping with individual words, strengthening vocabulary, and discussing school matters in the home language when needed. T20 parents reported a wider range of communication styles. While one parent rarely used English at home, others frequently incorporated it into conversations, often code-mixing depending on the situation. As one T20 parent put it: *"Yes, normally I will mix, and it depends on the situation."* Another noted: *"Yes, it depends on the situation, but I usually speak a lot in English."* One T20 parent also used English strategically to keep interactions engaging: *"I always communicate with her in English, but not all the time. I use English so she doesn't feel bored"*.

D. Theme 4: Learning Tools and Supplementary Instructions

While some B40 parents did not provide gadgets specifically for their children, they demonstrated resourcefulness. One B40 parent explained, *"No, my children don't have any gadgets since they are students. But I let them use my phone if they have homework. Usually, they use the internet to find the meaning of words."* These parents often allowed supervised access to a smartphone to look up vocabulary or complete assignments. T20 parents generally reported a wider range of electronic devices for their children, including smartphones, laptops, and tablets. These devices were used for various ESL-related purposes. As one parent said, *"I bought her an iPad because I think nowadays the internet and technology are essential-she needs that for her studies."* Devices were also used for vocabulary building: *"She always uses online vocabulary and English applications."* In addition, parents described using devices for English language exposure: *"She normally uses English applications such as online games, word searches, online vocabulary, and listening to music."* A few T20 parents also reported enrolling their children in private English classes as an additional support alongside home activities.

E. Theme 5: ESL Activities

Vocabulary development activities were a common focus among both B40 and T20 parents. One B40 parent described working on vocabulary enrichment: *"I usually help them with vocabulary, so sometimes we sit together and look up*

meanings in the dictionary; sometimes I use a picture dictionary.” Another B40 parent noted, “I ask him to do revision, and whenever she encounters a difficult word, we look it up together and I explain the meaning for better understanding.” A T20 parent shared, “During her revision, I sometimes prepare a list of vocabulary and ask her to search for the meanings.” Reading English books or novels was also a shared activity among B40 parents to promote comprehension and exposure to new vocabulary: “Normally we read an English book together during revision time.” T20 parents reported a wider range of activities, potentially due to greater access to resources. These activities aimed not only to build vocabulary but also to encourage spoken English and broader exposure to the language. For instance, one T20 parent encouraged conversation by asking the child to describe the day in English: “I always encourage her to speak with me in English. She tries her best to tell me about her day in English.” Another T20 parent framed everyday communication as an ESL activity: “I think communicating in English counts as an ESL activity, because most of our communication is in English.” Several T20 parents mentioned watching English cartoons or television together, with one explaining the storyline when needed: “We always communicate in English, watch English television together, and whenever she doesn’t understand the storyline, I explain it to her.” Finally, another T20 parent highlighted games and songs as engaging practice: “Additionally, we listen to English songs together and play English games when I have free time”.

F. Theme 6: Support and Encouragement

Four parents from both B40 and T20 backgrounds described various approaches to motivate their children. Several parents in both groups emphasised the importance of consistent encouragement and its positive effects. A T20 parent noted, “Yes, providing encouragement and motivation is effective.” Similarly, a B40 parent said, “Besides buying them books, consistently providing encouragement and asking about their well-being can positively impact children.” Some T20 parents reported using positive reinforcement (e.g., rewards or compliments). One parent explained, “I give a reward or token to my child if he excels in his academics. This helps him stay motivated and perform well alongside other students in his class. I feel that he likes my approach, as he feels appreciated for his efforts.” Several T20 parents also aimed to cultivate a genuine interest in English: “For me, providing motivation is crucial because it is one of the ways to engage with children and foster their love for English.” B40 parents described interest-sparking strategies, such as sharing personal experiences and incorporating media: “I consistently provide him with motivational support by sharing my past experiences, aiming to boost his interest. Additionally, I invite him to listen to English songs and watch English movies.” Some T20 parents used future aspirations to motivate: “Yes, I do this for my daughter. I like to compare the present with her future goals. For instance, if she aspires to attend an international university overseas, I emphasise the importance of studying hard”.

G. Theme 7: Home-School Partnership

A total of ten parents from both B40 and T20 backgrounds acknowledged the importance of attending school meetings. They cited several reasons for participating, such as monitoring their child’s progress. For example, a B40 parent said, “The teachers who interact with them daily know my child well. If we don’t attend, we won’t have insight into how our children behave in school.” A T20 parent noted, “Yes, I always attend because I want to know her level in learning. I would like to know her weaknesses as well as her abilities.” Parents also viewed meetings as opportunities to collaborate with teachers. As one B40 parent explained, “Attending parent–teacher meetings helps us keep track of our child’s progress and understand their strengths and weaknesses. It also provides an opportunity to communicate with teachers and offer suggestions or support, fostering a collaborative approach to our child’s education.” Similarly, a T20 parent saw meetings as a chance to address issues: “Yes, I always join the meeting because it’s the time when we can find out if there are any problems or if teachers need any help from us as parents.” For some B40 parents, meetings were also a way to gain insights from teachers who interact with their children daily and to build relationships: “It’s an opportune time to get to know our child’s teachers and inquire about our child’s progress.” While many parents valued meetings, some faced barriers to consistent attendance, for instance, forgetfulness and limited spousal involvement (B40), or time constraints (T20) often linked to work schedules or childcare responsibilities.

V. DISCUSSION

This research explored the influence of parental socioeconomic status and sociocultural background on the strategies parents use to support their children’s SL learning. Findings illustrate that both B40 and T20 parents actively participated though their approaches varied. For instance, B40 parents tended to rely on home-based strategies including verbal encouragement and shared learning activities. On the other hand, T20 parents employed structured resources such as digital tools and private tutors. Differences were also observed in areas such as English communication, homework support, and access to learning material. Notably, homework mattered to both groups; however, T20 parents were more likely to provide monitored independence-giving children space to work on their own and stepping in when needed, likely reflecting beliefs about fostering self-regulation, the availability of digital tools that scaffold independent work, and confidence in children’s competence (sometimes reinforced by supplementary instruction). In contrast, B40 parents more often provided direct assistance, addressing immediate difficulties and substituting hands-on guidance where digital or structured self-study supports were less available. Prior research has identified various PI strategies in ESL learning, with reading activities (Çalışkan & Ulas, 2022; Kamal et al., 2021; Skwarchuk et al., 2022) and homework assistance (Kalayci

& Öz, 2018; Kamal et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2023) taking centre stage. This current study builds upon this foundation by demonstrating how SES shapes these approaches.

The research also unveils the resourcefulness of B40 parents. Despite facing financial constraints, they demonstrated a deep commitment to their children's education, employing creative and low-cost strategies. This aligns with the work of Lynch (2008) and Kamal and Hashim (2021), who documented the use of everyday objects for learning activities. These findings challenge the notion that PI is solely defined by economic means while also recognising how financial resources shape parental involvement approaches. The dedication and creativity of B40 parents showcase the power of parental motivation and resourcefulness in overcoming limitations. It emphasises the importance of acknowledging and valuing the diverse ways all parents, regardless of SES, contribute to their children's learning journey.

The research underscores the significance of sociocultural background in shaping PI styles (Li, 2004; Kamal, 2020). Parental practices both the type of guidance provided during homework and the preferred literacy routines varied between B40 and T20 groups, reflecting cultural influences. Importantly, all parents shared a priority for their children's academic success, evidenced by strategies such as vocabulary-building activities, shared reading, homework support, and the use of digital resources, adopted according to families' access and preferences (e.g., Kamal & Hashim, 2021). The findings on differing PI styles between B40 and T20 parents highlight the potential for collaboration between families and educators to bridge cultural gaps and create a learning environment that caters to the diverse needs of all students. By fostering open communication and acknowledging the cultural nuances of PI styles, schools can create a more inclusive learning environment where all families feel empowered to contribute to their children's ESL development. This emphasis on partnership is consistent with SLR evidence that effective initiatives are situated across both home and institutional settings, creating continuity of support for learners (Ishak et al., 2025).

The findings resonate with both Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and Vygotsky's Social Constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978), highlighting the interplay between environmental influences and social interactions in shaping parental support strategies. The home environment, a key element of Bronfenbrenner's microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), emerged as a crucial platform for parental support. Both B40 and T20 parents employed strategies like creating dedicated study spaces and utilising books to foster learning. However, SES disparities became evident. T20 parents exhibited greater flexibility, tailoring learning to their child's interests (e.g., music) and providing a wider range of resources like electronic devices. This aligns with Bronfenbrenner's notion that the resources available within the microsystem can impact a child's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Parental involvement, particularly through attending school meetings, emerged as a significant theme. This finding resonates with Bronfenbrenner's concept of the mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), highlighting the importance of communication and collaboration between environments (home and school) to support a child's development. Both B40 and T20 parents viewed meetings as opportunities to gain insights, collaborate with teachers, and address challenges. This collaborative approach strengthens the support system surrounding the child, ultimately benefiting their learning within the microsystem of the classroom (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development sheds light on the significance of social interaction in parental support (Vygotsky, 1978). Within the ZPD, many parents, from both SES groups, offered guidance that fostered independence rather than over-direction. This collaborative approach creates a ZPD, pushing children beyond their independent capabilities (Vygotsky, 1978). Interestingly, some B40 parents supported their children's learning by guiding them to online resources, demonstrating different ways of fostering independent learning beyond direct language instruction. This highlights alternative ways parents can create a supportive learning environment within the ZPD, even with limitations in their own knowledge base.

The study revealed a complex interplay between SES and communication styles used at home. While several B40 parents expressed limitations due to their own English proficiency, their desire to support their children, even in limited ways aligns with the emphasis on social interaction in Vygotsky's theory (Vygotsky, 1978). T20 parents, on the other hand, exhibited a wider range of communication styles, from frequent English use to code-mixing approaches depending on the situation. However, this does not imply a deficit in B40 parents' involvement. Rather, they adapt their language use strategically, often drawing on their home language to support learning. Crucially, home language can be an asset where using children's first language to scaffold English does not impede, but it may strengthen second-language development. For instance, Kim and Yim (2024) found that a supportive literacy environment in children's heritage language (Korean) aids the development of both Korean and English languages. Similarly, a study by Kekejian et al. (2023) revealed that exposure to a language other than English at home does not hinder English language development. Thus, PI in ESL learning does not necessarily depend on exclusive English use. In addition to that, one should perceive home language as an asset that foster the learning of additional languages.

VI. CONCLUSION

The findings underscore the need to recognise and value diverse forms of parental involvement, particularly those shaped by families' socioeconomic and cultural contexts. Rather than assuming one "right" way, it is important to appreciate the different strengths that families bring to their children's ESL learning. The study also highlights the value of collaboration. Educators can cultivate stronger family-school partnerships by communicating in culturally sensitive ways and creating non-judgmental spaces for engagement. Policies and programmes can be designed to equip low-income

families with accessible tools, rather than assuming limited involvement reflects a lack of interest. The study also reframes family literacy by positioning it as a continuum of culturally grounded practices rather than a fixed model tied to material resources or formal schooling. This shift invites policymakers, teachers, and researchers to focus on how families support learning in ways that align with their realities. However, as the study focused only on B40 and T20 parents of primary school children in Malaysia, broader research is needed. Future studies should examine PI across different regions, ethnicities, and family structures, and explore how specific strategies influence ESL outcomes over time. Ultimately, the findings challenge deficit-based assumptions and call for a more inclusive lens-one that sees all parents not as passive recipients but as active contributors to their children's language learning journeys.

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Beyond Words: Unveiling Feminist Narratives in Winterson's "Message in a Bottle"

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Abstract—In this feminist stylistic analysis of Jeanette Winterson's "Message in a Bottle," we meticulously explore how the author uses narrative, language, and syntactical elements to depict the struggles of women in the postmodern era. Through a detailed examination of figurative language, imagery, symbolism, sentence structure, point of view, repetition, allusion, dialogue, and irony, the analysis reveals the nuanced representation of women's experiences. Special attention is directed towards the portrayal of female characters, emphasizing Winterson's capture of the multifaceted nature of women navigating societal complexities. The scrutiny of symbolic elements illustrates women grappling with and resisting unpredictable challenges, highlighting their agency and resilience against societal expectations. By bridging narrative, language, and syntactical stylistics, the study offers a holistic understanding of how Winterson's stylistic choices shape the interpretation of themes central to the female experience, including love, transformation, and the passage of time in "Message in a Bottle".

Index Terms—feminist stylistic, struggles of women, syntactical elements, figurative language, narrative stylistics

I. INTRODUCTION

Jeanette Winterson is recognized for her distinctive narrative style that frequently challenges conventional gender norms and representations. By employing Judith Butler's concepts of parody and performativity in *Gender Trouble* (1990), Winterson disrupts established conventions and traditions through a parodic textual framework. The subversions within the text extend to the portrayal of female bodies within the narrative world, reflecting the destabilization of norms. Winterson's writings consistently depict women in ways that defy traditional gender attributes. The women she portrays intentionally embody characteristics that are grotesque, unsettling, and gender-fluid. Through her fiction, she advocates for alternative values related to power, energy, and impactful emotions in her portrayal of women and their bodies.

Set against the backdrop of an extraordinary downpour, Winterson's "Message in a Bottle" immerses readers in an atmospheric tale where rain blurs the boundaries between the solid and the liquid, transforming the familiar into a watery equivalent. Within this aquatic landscape, the protagonist emerges as a symbolic figure, encapsulated by circumstance, akin to a message in a bottle. This study employs feminist stylistics to conduct a thorough analysis of Winterson's narrative, linguistic stylization, and syntactical elements in "Message in a Bottle".

Feminist stylistics, as a lens, aims to unravel the nuances of gender representation within literary works. Feminist stylistics is a sub-branch of stylistics that aims to account for the way in which gender concerns are linguistically encoded in texts. It employs various frameworks and models from the stylistics toolkit to achieve this. Feminist stylistics explores issues such as sexism, political correctness, reader positioning, and meaning, thereby opening up the study of style to feminist inquiry. It investigates how gender issues and language materialize in literary texts. However, its focus is not exclusive to literary texts (Montoro, 2023). As Montoro explains, the field has a multifaceted perspective due to the plurality of meanings encompassed by "gender concerns." Feminist stylistic analyses, along with other approaches to the study of language and gender, and feminism, contribute to the understanding of these gender issues. By employing feminist stylistics, this study offers a holistic understanding of how Winterson's choices in language and narrative shape the representation of women's experiences, adding a new dimension to the exploration of love, transformation, and resistance in "Message in a Bottle". This investigation seeks to dismantle the linguistic, syntactical, and narrative components, exposing how Winterson's stylistic choices intricately shape the narrative and play a vital role in exploring pervasive themes, particularly the theme of women's resistance amid ambiguous and unpredictable challenges in the postmodern era within "Message in a Bottle." Through this in-depth analysis, the aim is not only to unveil surface-level stylistic nuances but also to illuminate the profound impact these choices have on shaping the reader's perception of the narrative and its intricate thematic dimensions, with a particular focus on the lens of feminist stylistics.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Stylistics is the study of linguistic and expressive features in written or spoken language, emphasizing the examination of how these features contribute to the overall meaning (Widdowson, 2007). Stylistic analysis plays a pivotal role in unraveling the layers of meaning, tone, and impact embedded in literary works. Despite the wealth of stylistic analyses applied to various literary masterpieces, a noticeable gap exists in the exploration of Jeanette Winterson's "Message in a Bottle" through a stylistic lens. In an extensive review of existing literature, it becomes apparent that, to date, there is a scarcity of studies applying stylistics to this particular narrative.

A foundational work in the realm of stylistics is Mick Short's *Exploring the Language of Poems, Plays, and Prose* (1996), which offers a comprehensive guide to understanding and analyzing language in diverse literary forms, including prose. Peter Verdonk's seminal work, *Stylistics* (2002), provides a thorough examination of the stylistic elements that shape the meaning and impact of literary texts. These works establish a theoretical framework for approaching stylistic analysis, emphasizing the importance of figurative language, narrative techniques, and syntactical choices in the interpretation of literary works. Figurative language, a key focus in stylistic analysis, finds prominence in the works of scholars such as Michael Toolan, whose *Language in Literature: An Introduction to Stylistics* (2011) delves into the intricate relationship between language and literature. Geoff Hall's *Stylistics: A Practical Coursebook* (2003) complements this by offering practical insights into the application of stylistic principles, facilitating a hands-on approach to analyzing figurative language and its impact on the overall narrative.

Narrative techniques, another integral aspect of stylistic analysis, have been extensively explored by various scholars. Walter Nash's exploration of humor in *The Language of Humour* (1985) becomes pertinent when considering elements like irony and tone in the narrative. Furthermore, within the realm of narrative analysis, Gérard Genette's *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1983) provides a theoretical foundation for understanding the intricacies of narrative structure, offering valuable insights for applying narrative techniques to literary works. Syntactical analysis, a granular examination of sentence structures, is crucial in deciphering the pacing, flow, and overall cadence of a narrative. With this in mind, Michael McCarthy's *English Vocabulary in Use* (2002) and Geoff Thompson's *Introducing Functional Grammar* (2013) contribute to a comprehensive understanding of syntactical choices and their impact on the reader's immersive experience.

In the context of this study on feminist stylistics, it is essential to note that the research heavily relies on Rocío Montoro's "Feminist Stylistics" in *The Routledge Handbook of Stylistics* (2023). Drawing on the theoretical foundations and insights presented by Montoro's "Feminist Stylistics", our article examines how gender issues are linguistically portrayed in Winterson's short story.

III. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In Winterson's "Message in a Bottle," the narrative unfolds as a rich tapestry of stylistic choices, inviting exploration into the intricate facets of language. The author employs figurative language to depict the unexpected and ambiguous challenges that women face in the postmodern age. This analysis aims to delve beneath the surface, uncovering the deeper themes embedded within the text through the lens of feminist stylistics. The paper will address the semantic level through figurative language, the syntactical level, and the narrative intricacies within Winterson's work from a feminist stylistic standpoint.

Figurative language encompasses expressions where the speaker intends meanings beyond literal interpretation and constitutes a fundamental element in everyday communication (Dancygier & Sweetser, 2014). This paper will initially explore simile and metaphor as the first two figurative elements. According to Perrine (1982), both metaphor and simile involve comparisons between different things. The key difference lies in the use of conjunctions. In analyzing Winterson's "Message in a Bottle," the exploration of metaphor and simile unfolds as a nuanced examination of language, wielding potent feminist messages. These figurative elements, serving as rich threads intricately woven throughout the narrative, are deliberate literary devices employed for foreshadowing, allusions, and parallelism. Beyond their aesthetic appeal, these metaphors and similes anticipate and symbolize events, providing glimpses into the unfolding dynamics of the story and serving as allegorical expressions of broader feminist themes.

Winterson crafts an intricate narrative that extends an invitation to readers, encouraging them to discern concealed meanings beneath the prose's surface through the lens of feminist interpretation. Through metaphor and simile, a parallel world emerges, mirroring the internal struggles and external challenges faced by the characters, prompting readers to explore the text beyond its literal dimensions and uncover feminist messages embedded within. The execution of foreshadowing is artful, with each metaphor and simile acting as a harbinger of the narrative's twists and turns, subtly infusing the storytelling with layers of meaning.

The initial metaphor, "Every solid thing had turned into its watery equivalent" (Winterson, 2007, p. 1), could be interpreted as every societal norm had turned into its gender-equivalent, serving as a powerful foreshadowing element that introduces a central theme of transformation and change in societal roles within the narrative. This metaphor immediately immerses the reader in a world where the fundamental dynamics of societal expectations undergo a profound shift. The chosen terms, such as "solid" and "watery equivalent" suggest not just a surface-level modification but a radical transformation of established gender roles, intricately weaving the theme of change into the fabric of the narrative and

setting the tone for unfolding events. The use of “every” underscores the inclusivity and universality of this transformation, emphasizing that the change is pervasive throughout societal structures. This metaphorical foundation establishes an expectation resonating throughout the story: that societal norm tied to gender roles will experience a significant reevaluation. It prompts readers to anticipate a narrative trajectory where traditional gender expectations, responsibilities, and societal structures undergo dynamic and unpredictable evolution. The metaphor serves as a thematic compass, guiding readers through the narrative's exploration of the fluidity of societal roles, the inevitability of change, and the consequences of these transformations on individuals and their relationships. As readers progress through the story, they discover that the initial metaphor not only foreshadows a societal transformation but also becomes a metaphorical lens through which the complexities of gender roles and the passage of time are scrutinized. The theme of change, established from the outset, resonates throughout the narrative, emphasizing the interconnectedness of personal and societal transformations in characters' lives, particularly addressing the redistribution of responsibilities between genders.

In the narrative, numerous gaps create spaces for readers to fill and interpret, aligning with the ideas presented by Wolfgang Iser in his book *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (1978). For instance, the activities of Susan outside the home during rainy weather remain undefined, prompting readers to speculate on whether she works outdoors. Meanwhile, Martin's contemplation within the house, where he wishes for his wife's demise in winter to liberate himself from marital constraints, introduces a complex societal dynamic. This contemplation reflects an underlying tension and discontent within traditional marital expectations, hinting at transformations in how individuals perceive and navigate relationships. Furthermore, Susan's reluctance to return home amid inner struggles becomes a poignant reflection of a societal shift in the perception of gender roles. Notably, her husband's preoccupation solely with thoughts of Caroline and contemplating the end of his marriage accentuates the evolving dynamics within relationships. Susan's resistance and her husband's singular focus on Caroline contribute to a narrative that explores the complexities of modern relationships, where individuals grapple with personal desires, evolving societal expectations, and the renegotiation of traditional roles. The nuanced portrayal of these characters allows readers to delve into the unfolding societal transformations, questioning and redefining established norms around marriage, commitment, and individual agency. As readers navigate these gaps, they engage in an interpretative process that aligns with Iser's concept of the reader's active role in shaping the narrative. The narrative's intentional ambiguities become a vehicle for exploring societal transformations, prompting readers to reflect on evolving gender dynamics, marital expectations, and the complexities of individual agency within changing societal norms.

The vivid simile, “The rain fell in long, straight chains, each drop linked to the last - long lines of rain, welded out of the iron-grey sky and dropped like security shutters,” (Winterson, 2007, p. 1), vividly portrays the rain as interconnected chains, emphasizing unity and hinting at the looming isolation for Susan, the narrator. The comparison to “security shutters” suggests closure, anticipating challenges and barriers that women, like Susan, might face. It contributes to the story's atmosphere, reflecting the unpredictable and ambiguous challenges that women encounter in their pursuit of their aspirations and rightful place. Another simile, “The rain is like a room where the walls are gradually moving closer together” (Winterson, 2007, p. 1), metaphorically likens rain to closing walls, creating an image of confinement and claustrophobia. This simile underscores an overall sense of isolation, predicting challenges for women who may find themselves suffering alone.

The metaphor “I'll be like a saint in a glass case, a relic from another time” (Winterson, 2007, p. 1) expresses the narrator's anticipation of isolation and detachment. This metaphor suggests a detachment from present reality, foreshadowing emotional and temporal detachment. The comparison to a saint in a glass case implies a sacred separation, prompting contemplation on permanence and transformative power. As the rain intensifies, another metaphor adds to the imagery: “The rain will close round me like I'm a message in a bottle, like I'm a genie in a jar” (Winterson, 2007, p. 1). This metaphor illustrates that every woman, despite the challenges and circumstances she faces, has a unique message to share with the world. She protects herself in a metaphorical bottle, symbolizing a sense of responsibility and love. The metaphor of being a “genie in a jar” conveys a powerful sentiment that despite the challenges and suffering that women endure out of responsibility, they still possess the capacity to bring joy and fulfill the wishes of others, akin to a benevolent force. This imagery adds a layer of resilience and strength to the portrayal of women in the narrative, emphasizing their ability to contribute positively to others' lives even amidst their own struggles. It suggests that, like a genie, women may possess an inherent ability to bring positivity and grant the wishes of those around them, showcasing their enduring spirit and commitment to others despite their own hardships. Building on the theme of emotional entanglement, a simile deepens the complexity: “My heart is beating like it's someone else's - you never notice your own heartbeat - and my heart is someone else's” (Winterson, 2007, p. 2). This simile illuminates emotional detachment, emphasizing a disconnection from oneself. The narrator's heart belonging to someone else serves as a powerful prelude to the unfolding events, foretelling the impact of external circumstances on the inner world. This is reminiscent of the struggles women may face in the postmodern age, where the demands of their circumstances may prevent them from paying close emotional attention to their own hearts, as they are preoccupied with their responsibilities toward others.

The concluding metaphor in “Message in a Bottle,” “And the paper is dry land, and the story is a place to begin again,” (Winterson, 2007, p. 6), signifies a potent narrative of empowerment and renewal, particularly within the context of women's suffering. This imagery suggests that women, having confronted adversity, discover strength and stability by expressing their stories on paper. The narrative transforms into a sanctuary, offering a secure space for women to navigate

their experiences, heal, and reshape their narratives. It symbolizes a liberation from silence, providing women with a platform to share their stories, break free from the constraints of the past, and embark on a transformative journey of empowerment. The collective sharing of these stories cultivates a sense of community and solidarity, contributing to a shared narrative of understanding, support, and collective healing.

Symbolism is a literary device where symbols, which can be words, characters, objects, or other elements, are used to represent abstract ideas or concepts within a text (Lecky, 1956). In "Message in a Bottle", a symphony of symbols resonates throughout the narrative, each element contributing to the story's metaphorical depth. The relentless rain, cascading in unbroken chains, transcends its role as a mere meteorological occurrence, metamorphosing into an encapsulating room that seals off paths and towns, embodying the isolation experienced by women and the transformative influence of unpredictable challenges. Despite the rain serving as a symbol of unpredictable challenges, akin to both destruction and renewal as roads transform into canals, it highlights the paradox that, just like the destruction of roads, challenges faced by women give rise to newfound strengths and qualities in their characters. The rising floodwaters symbolize life's disruptions, mirroring emotional turmoil and emphasizing the necessity for resilience. The protagonist's struggle in the water signifies the fluidity of human experience and the imperative to navigate through adversity. The biblical allusion to Mount Ararat suggests survival and a fresh start after the flood, echoing themes of renewal and the discovery of a landing place to commence anew. The closing citation, "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it," (Winterson, 2007), encapsulates the overarching theme of resilience in the face of life's tribulations, underscoring the enduring nature of love amid changes and challenges. These symbols intricately intertwine, constructing a nuanced narrative that delves into the transformative odyssey through adversity and the optimism for rejuvenation for women.

Winterson adeptly utilizes the literary technique of allusion, a method involving the reference or brief mention of historically, culturally, literarily, or politically significant persons, places, things, or ideas. Allusions, typically indirect and concise, depend on the reader's familiarity with the mentioned elements to evoke specific emotions and convey a more profound meaning (Irwin, 2001). This enriches the narrative by adding layers of significance and establishing connections between the contemporary plot and broader cultural, historical, and mythological contexts. Winterson achieves a nuanced exploration of themes by incorporating subtle references and echoes of well-known narratives, providing readers with a multi-dimensional engagement with the story.

The biblical allusion to Noah's Ark in "Message in a Bottle" serves as a profound and multi-faceted literary device, imbuing the narrative with themes of renewal, survival, and the enduring human spirit. The reference to Noah's Ark draws a poignant parallel between ancient myths and the contemporary struggles faced by the protagonist, who is notably replaced by a woman in this retelling. The ark, traditionally a symbol of divine protection and salvation, is juxtaposed starkly with the protagonist's submerged car, referred to as the "electric car." This deliberate contrast accentuates the vulnerability of the modern human experience, underscoring the disparity between archetypal narratives of salvation and the immediate, personal challenges faced by the female character. The submerged car becomes a modern-day vessel, not of salvation, but of struggle, isolation, and the looming threat of being overwhelmed by the forces of nature. The choice to label it the "electric car" introduces a postmodern element, symbolizing the fusion of technology and nature, and alluding to the artificial and contemporary nature of the challenges faced by the female protagonist. By weaving this biblical allusion into the narrative, Winterson introduces a layer of hope and resilience. The ark, as a symbol, suggests that even in the face of overwhelming challenges symbolized by the flood, there exists the potential for rebirth and redemption. The enduring human spirit, now represented by a woman, becomes a source of inspiration, inviting readers to reflect on the capacity for inner strength and the possibility of emerging transformed from adversity. The incorporation of the "electric car" as a postmodern symbol adds complexity to the narrative, intertwining ancient and contemporary elements to explore the theme of resilience in the face of modern challenges. Furthermore, the choice of the flood as a motif aligns with the broader theme of cleansing and renewal found in various cultural and religious traditions, emphasizing the dual nature of challenging experiences. In this context, the allusion to Noah's Ark underscores the cyclical nature of human existence, where periods of trial and upheaval can lead to eventual renewal and growth. Ultimately, the retelling with a female protagonist prompts readers to consider the timeless themes of resilience, transformation, and the enduring hope for a new beginning, particularly highlighting the struggles and resistance of women in the postmodern age.

The protagonist's references to Ophelia and the Lady of Shalott serve as poignant literary devices, intricately weaving the contemporary storyline into the rich tapestry of archetypal symbols prevalent in the broader literary tradition. These allusions, drawn from Shakespeare and Tennyson, evoke powerful images of tragic heroines intertwined with water and destiny. Comparing herself to Ophelia, the ill-fated character from Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* (1954), the protagonist aligns with the symbol of tragic love and drowning. Ophelia's demise in a stream, surrounded by flowers, becomes a resonant image of a woman ensnared by the complexities of love and fate. This archetype establishes a thematic undercurrent of inevitability, linking the protagonist's journey with the inexorable forces of love and loss. Similarly, the allusion to the Lady of Shalott, a character from Tennyson's (2003) poem, introduces another archetype associated with isolation and tragic destiny. The Lady of Shalott, confined to her tower and cursed to view the world through a mirror, embodies themes of transformation and the consequences of breaking free from societal constraints. The inclusion of the Lady of Shalott's tragic end accentuates the narrative's exploration of resistance and the

challenges faced by women in the modern age. Winterson's adept incorporation of these literary allusions elevates "Message in a Bottle" beyond a mere contemporary narrative. It becomes a nuanced dialogue with timeless themes and archetypal symbols, encouraging readers to delve into the universal aspects of women's experiences in suffering through the lens of characters who navigate the complex waters of love, fate, and transformation in the modern age.

The mention of Winston Churchill's funeral and the imagery of a ship floating down the river in Winterson's "Message in a Bottle" serves as an allusion, referencing historical events to add depth and symbolism to the narrative. Winston Churchill, a prominent political figure, had a state funeral in 1965, and his body was transported on a barge along the River Thames in London. This event is etched in collective memory as a solemn and significant occasion. In the context of the story, this allusion brings a layer of historical and symbolic significance. The funeral becomes a symbol of the passage of time, the weight of history, and the inevitability of change. The river, carrying not only the protagonist but also historical echoes, reinforces the cyclical nature of life and the inescapable flow of events. The river, often symbolizing the passage of time and the continuity of life, becomes a powerful metaphor. By floating down the river, the protagonist is not only navigating her personal journey but also becoming part of a larger stream of events and history. The river, like time, is relentless and unyielding, carrying everything in its current. The allusion to Winston Churchill's funeral and the river serves to connect the personal narrative of the protagonist with broader themes of history, time, and the unceasing flow of life. It adds a layer of gravity to the story, inviting readers to reflect on the broader implications of time, memory, and the inexorable movement of events.

The narrative's use of the biblical imagery of the dove and the olive branch in "Message in a Bottle" holds profound significance, drawing a direct parallel to the biblical story of Noah found in the Book of Genesis. In the biblical narrative, the dove's return with an olive branch symbolizes the end of a devastating flood, the restoration of life, and the establishment of peace between humanity and the divine. In the context of the story, this imagery becomes a powerful tool employed by the narrator to convey a sense of hope, renewal, and reconciliation. The flood, representing chaos and destruction, serves as a metaphor for the tumultuous events in the characters' lives, particularly those of women who endure challenges in the postmodern age. By invoking the image of the dove and the olive branch, the narrator suggests the possibility of redemption and a fresh start for these women. The dove, traditionally associated with peace, takes on a symbolic role as a harbinger of positive change, indicating the potential for harmony and reconciliation after a period of turmoil. This imagery becomes a poignant metaphor for the personal journeys of the female characters, implying that even after life's storms, there is hope for peace, healing, and a new beginning. The choice of the olive branch, a symbol of peace and prosperity in various cultures, aligns with the biblical context, where it brought a message of hope to Noah and his family. In "Message in a Bottle," this symbolism likely conveys a similar message of hope, emphasizing the potential for women to find peace and forge a new path forward after facing adversity. In essence, the dove and olive branch imagery speak directly to the suffering of women in the narrative, suggesting that, like the biblical story, there is hope for renewal, healing, and the possibility of finding peace after enduring challenging times.

The mention of "Take That!" in "Message in a Bottle" serves as a cultural and musical allusion, referencing the British pop band that gained significant success in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The specific mention of "Take That! final tour" (Winterson, 2007, p. 3) likely alludes to a pivotal event in the band's history—their farewell tour following challenges and the departure of Robbie Williams in 1995, leading to the band's official split in 1996. In the narrative, this allusion adds a layer of cultural and temporal specificity, marking a moment of personal significance or nostalgia for the protagonist. While the allusion itself does not explicitly address the suffering of women, it contributes to the broader cultural context, offering readers a connection to significant historical elements. However, the story could be interpreted as a reflection on the transformative experiences and challenges faced by women, paralleling the changes and difficulties encountered by the band during that period of their history. The allusion, in this context, may evoke a sense of resilience and the potential for personal renewal despite facing adversity, aligning with the overarching theme of the story.

Transitioning to the syntactical dimension in "Message in a Bottle," Winterson's adept use of syntax and punctuation marks is intricately linked to the portrayal of women's suffering. The deliberate choice of sentence structure plays a pivotal role in conveying the emotional and thematic dimensions of the narrative. The use of long sentences allows for a detailed exploration of the environment, creating vivid imagery that mirrors the complexities of women's experiences. For example, the extended sentence describing the relentless rain reflects the overwhelming challenges faced by women, symbolizing the weight of societal expectations. During introspective moments, Winterson turns to long sentences to delve into the inner workings of her female characters, providing insight into the emotional toll of their struggles. The mention of the protagonist's yearning for home as it will never be the same indicates the transformative impact of societal pressures on women. Conversely, short sentences are strategically employed to inject moments of action, urgency, and revelation, mirroring the abrupt and often unexpected challenges women confront. The concise and impactful nature of short sentences contributes to the narrative's pace, creating a sense of immediacy akin to the urgency women might feel in navigating societal expectations. Critical emotional moments, conveyed through short and direct sentences, emphasize the resilience and survival of women. For instance, the simple statement "Susan is hurt" (Winterson, 2007, p. 5) encapsulates the profound emotional weight borne by women in the face of adversity. The sentence "I am alive," short but significant, symbolizes the enduring spirit of women in overcoming hardships. In essence, Winterson's skillful manipulation of syntax and punctuation in the narrative aligns with the multifaceted nature of women's suffering, capturing both its intricate details and the urgency of their struggles. In "Message in a Bottle," the narrative stylistics,

particularly the first-person perspective and overlapping narration, offer a profound exploration of the characters' personal experiences and reflections, shedding light on the challenges faced by women, as exemplified by Susan. The first-person narrative immerses readers in the inner worlds of characters, allowing a direct connection to their thoughts and emotions. This is particularly impactful in portraying Susan's struggles and Martin's conflicting emotions. The use of free indirect speech further amplifies this connection by seamlessly blending the narrator's voice with the characters' inner experiences, presenting a nuanced understanding of their perspectives. The technique of overlapping narration contributes to the depiction of women's suffering, as it intricately weaves together diverse viewpoints and emotional landscapes. For instance, during the flood, the narrative intertwines Susan's predicament and Martin's concerns, creating a sense of urgency and highlighting the interconnectedness of their fates. The simultaneous exploration of love, desire, and internal struggles provides readers with a multifaceted view of the characters' experiences, emphasizing the complexities of relationships, responsibilities, and societal expectations. Through these narrative stylistics, Winterson not only crafts a compelling literary work but also delves into the challenges and nuances of women's experiences, offering a poignant reflection on their suffering in the postmodern age. The sparing use of quotation marks, particularly in the recurring sentence "I have to get home," (Winterson, 2007, p. 1) emerges as a noteworthy aspect, possibly underscoring the profound significance of these specific phrases. This scarcity of quotation marks may symbolize the challenges and limitations that women encounter in expressing their voices and asserting urgency within the narrative. The repetition of the phrase "I have to get home" suggests a crucial theme related to the importance of home for women, highlighting the weight of responsibilities and duties that contribute to the distinctiveness of these sentences. In essence, the selective use of quotation marks draws attention to the pivotal role of home and the associated responsibilities in shaping the experiences of women in the story. In "Message in a Bottle," the narrative's non-linear structure, oscillating between past and present, intricately explores the characters' experiences and emotions. This departure from a linear timeline is a powerful storytelling device that brings depth to the challenges and complexities women face in the postmodern age. The narrator's reflection on driving the road, merging past and present, provides a poignant insight into the character's history and emotional landscape, underlining the intricate nature of women's lives. The use of flashbacks, like the childhood memory triggered by rain, further adds emotional depth, allowing readers to connect with the character's earlier struggles. Martin's contemplation on marriage, woven into the narrative with a non-linear chronology, offers a nuanced exploration of love and relationships, highlighting the evolving mindset and challenges faced by women. This narrative technique effectively captures the multifaceted nature of women's experiences, emphasizing the importance of understanding their past and present struggles in navigating the complexities of the postmodern era. It portrays the intricate web of thoughts and emotions that shape women's perspectives, contributing to a more profound understanding of their unique journeys and challenges.

Winterson's "Message in a Bottle" deliberately introduces narrative ambiguities, offering readers the opportunity to actively interpret and engage with the story, which, when related to women's experiences in dealing with unpredictable challenges, becomes a powerful exploration of the complexities they face. The mysterious aspects of Susan and Martin's relationship can be seen as reflective of the multifaceted nature of women's lives. By leaving gaps in their backgrounds, the narrative allows room for envisioning a history shaped by shared experiences and individual challenges, mirroring the varied journeys of women in navigating personal and professional aspirations. The urgent decision of the narrator to escape the roadblock becomes a metaphor for women facing personal crises or profound realizations, emphasizing the importance of reevaluating priorities and seeking solace in familiar spaces during challenging times. The hint of Martin's feelings for Caroline adds another layer, reflecting the emotional complexities women might encounter in relationships. Exploring this gap unveils shared histories and emotional intricacies that contribute to Martin's contemplation, resonating with the unspoken challenges women often grapple with in interpersonal connections. The resolution of Susan's survival and the ambiguous state of her marriage with Martin echoes the resilience of women in the face of adversity. Delving into this gap could illustrate how near-death experiences reshape perspectives, either fostering renewed commitment or leading to amicable separations, portraying the strength and adaptability of women in navigating complex relationships. In essence, the intentional gaps in Winterson's narrative serve as a metaphor for the uncertainties and unpredictabilities women encounter. By allowing readers to actively participate in filling these gaps, the story becomes a canvas for diverse interpretations, reflecting the varied ways women navigate and endure the challenges presented by the postmodern age.

Another void awaits exploration, and it revolves around whether the plot intricately weaves or subtly reflects the author's personal beliefs. Notably, the author identifies as a lesbian, a facet that could be influencing the narrative. This personal aspect potentially sheds light on the challenges the author may have encountered in finding a compatible man, leading her to substitute male characters with female counterparts in her storytelling. Within the narrative framework, the characters tasked with significant responsibilities predominantly belong to the female sphere. Susan and the narrator, both women, share similar responsibilities, underscoring a thematic emphasis on female agency within the story. The intricacies of their roles intertwine, fostering a sense of shared experience and solidarity. The narrator's insistence on returning to her house carries a profound significance. It reflects a belief that the essence of her home will undergo a transformation during her absence, an anticipation laden with emotional resonance. The intricacies of this belief might be rooted in the emotional depth the narrator associates with her living space, hinting at layers of history, memories, and personal connections woven into the fabric of her home. Amidst a backdrop of rain, the woman, Susan, finds herself outside, prompting speculation about her activities. Perhaps, she is actively seeking employment, a plausible narrative

thread that adds depth to their characters. Meanwhile, Martin, in a contrasting domestic scene, remains in his house, consumed by thoughts of his lover. The complexity of his situation deepens as he grapples with the impending challenge of disclosing this affair to his wife, introducing a layer of emotional conflict and moral dilemma within the storyline.

IV. CONCLUSION

In the tapestry of Winterson's "Message in a Bottle," feminist stylistics, explored through semantic, syntactical, and narrative lenses, reveals profound insights into the unpredictable challenges women confront in the postmodern era. Semantically, the figurative language employed, such as the vivid similes and metaphors, serves as a literary prism, refracting the nuanced experiences of women. The rain, depicted as "long, straight chains" (Winterson, 2007, p. 1) and a "room where the walls are gradually moving closer together," (Winterson, 2007, p. 1) symbolizes the interconnected challenges and the suffocating atmosphere women navigate. The metaphors of being a "message in a bottle" or a "genie in a jar" illustrate the resilience and strength women draw upon amidst adversity, encapsulating their ability to endure and provide support despite their own struggles. On the syntactical level, Winterson's deliberate manipulation of sentence structure amplifies the emotional resonance and urgency of women's experiences. The use of long, descriptive sentences immerses the reader in the rich details of the challenges, while short, impactful sentences inject moments of action and revelation. The scarcity of quotation marks, emphasizing the sentence "I have to get home," underscores the challenges women face in conveying their voices and urgencies, reflecting the broader struggle for recognition and agency, which underscores the sense of responsibilities and duties. Narratively, Winterson employs a non-linear approach and overlapping narration to mirror the multifaceted nature of women's lives. By exploring the past and present simultaneously, the narrative reveals the intricate web of emotions, relationships, and societal expectations that shape women's experiences. The intentional gaps in the story become opportunities for readers to actively engage and interpret, symbolizing the unpredictable and often uncharted terrain women navigate in the postmodern age. In conclusion, feminist stylistics in Winterson's "Message in a Bottle" weaves together the semantic, syntactical, and narrative elements to create a poignant portrayal of the challenges women grapple with in the postmodern era. Through figurative language, sentence structures, and narrative complexities, the story becomes a reflection of the resilience, strength, and adaptability of women as they confront the unpredictable and dynamic landscapes of their lives.

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Performing the Self: A Bakhtinian Carnivalistic Reading of Amita Parikh's *The Circus Train*

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Abstract—This study employs Mikhail Bakhtin's theory on "Carnival", to interpret Amita Parikh's novel *The Circus Train* (2022) as part of the broader framework of historical fiction that examines themes related to identity, belonging and psychological resilience against the backdrop of World War II. It addresses a gap in previous research by being the first to utilize a carnivalistic approach to the analysis of *The Circus Train*, demonstrating how Bakhtin's theory on Carnival is applicable to identity-construction processes and self-discovery within the context of chaotic, liminal spaces beyond the medieval celebrations Bakhtin made reference to. The methodology used in this study consists of a qualitative approach to literature, combining Bakhtin's carnival model with a close textual analysis in order to understand the relationship between the grotesque realism within literature and social hierarchies and the transformation of individuals. This study indicated three findings: 1. The novel critiques established power relationships of the time, allowing for the marginalized characters to re-negotiate their identities and reclaim their agency; 2. The use of grotesque imagery enhances our understanding of the themes surrounding adaptation and survival and gives us insight into how humans made sense of the world in a time of crisis; 3. The "Carnival" becomes a transformative strategy of individuals fostering resilience, liberation and self-definition in the face of destruction. By integrating Bakhtinian theory with contemporary literary discourse, this study offers a deeper understanding of how narrative spaces nurture emotional development and identity formation in historically disrupted contexts. It further recommends extending carnivalistic frameworks to the analysis of literature concerned with war, displacement, and belonging, as such approaches uncover hidden dimensions of human agency, trauma, and renewal, positioning *The Circus Train* as a pivotal contribution to modern studies of identity and transformation.

Index Terms—identity construction, Bakhtinian carnivalesque, grotesque realism, resilience and self-discovery, historical fiction narratives

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the notion of Carnivalism as conceptualized by Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975). Mikhail Bakhtin has had a substantial influence on many scholars and on Western literary and cultural thought through his diverse set of engaging thoughts and theories about literature. This paper provides a Carnivalistic reading of Amita Parikh's *The Circus Train* (2022). Although amusement and exaggeration are evident elements of carnivalistic writing, this is not the full extent of what is usually considered Carnivalistic. It is clear, however, that there is an assertion of the existence of a carnivalistic perspective that would highlight the extent to which these writings provide for exploration of the existential aspects of the human journey through the human condition and the human experience. *The Circus Train* depicts The World of Wonders, which is presented as a travelling luxurious Circus with Lena Papadopoulos as the main character; Lena is presented as an ambitious young woman with a brilliant mind but with a body that does not support her ambition, due to her disability. Amita Parikh wrote *The Circus Train* with the intent of taking the reader to a deeper level than simply laughter and chaos and absurdity. The novel illustrates the relationship between reality and illusion through such themes as; love, ambition, identity, resilience and personal growth. It embraces a carnivalistic spirit within a chaotic circus and adventurous world, set against the looming backdrop of World War II and the turmoil it brings to the magical World of Wonders.

Bakhtin (1984) famously notes that “The sensitive ear will always catch even the most distant echoes of a carnival sense of the world” (p. 107). Carnival, as one may think of, stands for a temporary and busy event in which there are a number of activities where people go head over heels as they dress up in costumes, perform entertaining acts, play music, dance, and do magic tricks. Carnivals often introduce cultural, traditional, and even religious concepts and are known for their exaggerated and colorful costumes and decorations, as well as their lively music and chaotic atmosphere, while combining some elements of a circus. The Carnival refers to a specific period when certain people of different cultures participate in lively festivals of a world in travesty. During this period, traditional cultural values are inverted, “new rulers” are humorously appointed to control the uncontrollable; and where the generally accepted rules of natural polite behavior are set aside in favor of the free-spirited and chaotic nature of Carnival that according to Frazer (2012), holds “the stamp of a dateless antiquity” (p. 17), celebrating the body, the senses, and the unofficial relations among humans (Danow, 1995, p. 6).

The concept of carnivalization in literature, according to Bakhtin, involves a temporary disruption of social hierarchies and norms, where authority is overturned and denied, and grotesque body parts, humor, mockery, and dialogue become central elements. The carnival stands in opposition to conventional norms, transforming ideals of beauty and grace into an exaggerated portrayal of bodily dysfunctions, turned by Bakhtin’s ideas into irony. As Spooner (2007) notes, “Within the limited space of the Carnival festivities, the raucous bodily humor associated with the grotesque may temporarily disrupt or overturn conventional hierarchies of power” (2007, p. 32). *The Circus Train* has notable instances of carnival-like actions all around its bizarre character stories. Also, the frequent comic reliefs in the story do not erase the presence of the theme of individual growth coming from the person's toil to find oneself through traumatic experiences (Adel et al., 2024).

The character of Lena is a perfect representation of this resilience manifested in her strong desire to build her own life, which is not only restricted by the gender norms of her time, but also by her physical condition. Lena's choice to pursue medicine/science in spite of the prevailing male culture is indicative of her remarkable strength. Lena adjusts her plans and continues to go ahead even where others might have given up in the face of losing her mother, being rejected by her community, and being separated from her father and Alexandre during the war. She may be difficult for others to see, but Lena is walking towards her strongest self, carving out her independence, and claiming her uniqueness. Alexandre is also a person haunted by a traumatic past, yet he makes it his mission to unearth love, family, and a significant goal in life, which he calls his purpose. This dedication is the foundation of the ongoing development and the broadening of Alexandre, who is showing it as the most robust of the human qualities. Parikh summarizes the horrors of World War II, and among them, he points out the capture of Theo and Alexandre and their subsequent transformation into the 'good' Nazi's propaganda factory. The two men have acquired tremendous inner strength and have even discovered a light in what would otherwise appear to be an endless dark time of suffering. The resilience has provided both, the hope and the strength, to not only the survivors but also the men who are reunited with Lena after the long eight years.

The progress of the novel portrays Alexandre as a person with inner strength and also with creativity and resourcefulness, while he was a prisoner at the time of the war. The hero has gone through a lot of adversities, separation, loss, and extreme suffering all due to the distance from Lena. Yet still, Alexandre's and Lena's love has been their source of hope even during the hardest times. Alexandre has faith in the strength and the bravery of Lena; this in turn makes Lena wish to follow her road to freedom and her dreams, thus portraying the themes of love, bravery, ambition, identity, perseverance, and resilience that spread like a web throughout the story. The struggle for characters in the novel to find their social place has been evident because they have had to deal with such issues as race, family, and acceptance by others. Lena's strength of spirit and determination has already led her to personal growth. Alexandre and his complex racial identity, with a haunting past, become a symbol of resilience and survival. At the end of the novel, Lena moves beyond the constraints of both her father and the circus. She carves out a life that aligns with her desires and values, marking her journey toward self-discovery and acceptance, along with a genuine sense of personal growth.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this paper, the first carnivalistic analysis of Parikh's novel *The Circus Train* (2022) is presented, along with an outline and an interpretation of the work. The study is grounded on a previously well-established framework of scholarly works relating to Bakhtin. Foundational works for this analysis can be found in two recent works; Eweis (2021), *Origins of Bakhtin's Theory of Carnivalization*, and Grubel (2022), *Carnival, Carnivalism and Bakhtin's Culture of Laughter*, which give full account of Bakhtin's theoretical framework through the lens of the way the carnival concept has been developed and elevated to a place of prestige in literature. Eweis links the origins of the carnival to ancient festivals that were a major influence on the way Bakhtin developed and adapted the elevated carnivalesque concept for his use in literature. Kumar (2024), *Analysis of Bakhtin's Carnavalesque in the Light of Laxman's Cartoons*, discusses carnivalistic elements, including laughter and the grotesque, as they can be identified in political cartoons.

Many scholars have focused their analysis of carnivalesque elements in their work primarily on humor and subversion while neglecting more in-depth analysis and limiting their reflections to a general definition of the term. Recent postcolonial analyses of *The Circus Train* in the context of post-9/11 Islam, like the one conducted by Alhourani

et al. (2025) on Rohina Malik's *Unveiled* demonstrating how different types of performance and symbolic rituals can empower marginalized voices and - through performance - challenge cultural domination. A primary concern of this work is to address the identities of Muslim women post-9/11; while their observations of the way in which performance serves as a form of resistance influences their work on *The Circus Train*, the discussion here relates to the conditions of identity and agency as experienced by both groups of women as they occupy similar liminal and disorderly spaces on *The Circus Train* and post-9/11.

Furthermore, Elhalafawy et al. (2025) describe how identities come alive through performances in contemporary plays, providing a very palpable dimension of how characters, just like those in Parikh's historic world, find and rediscover their identities during transitional periods. In the same way, Abou Adel et al. (2025) demonstrate how characters in *Mockingbird* reshape their identities whenever rigid social norms are imposed on them—a struggle that echoes the carnival-like breaking of boundaries and deep resilience found in *The Circus Train*.

This study provides a broader, psychologically nuanced representation of the surrealism of the carnival experience. It explores how *The Circus Train*'s carnivalic space provides an opportunity to comprehend the connections between personal identity and the ability to be adaptive, to remain open to emotional possibilities, and the relatedness of the individual to the society in which they exist during those times of societal upheaval. In this example, themes of personal identity and resiliency, as well as personal transformation, are applied to the construct of the unstructured surrealism of the carnival experience. With respect to Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque, Parikh's work may be perceived as a transgression against established forms of class-based dominance, highlighting the artistic merits of transforming the roles of individuals, as well as creating a space for previously marginalized voices to take centre stage. Bakhtin developed his theory in response to Rabelais and His World as well as in Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, which he offers to reinforce the genre of the carnivalesque as a literary genre with the specific characteristics of challenging dominant ideologies, through the use of comedy, chaos, and absurdity. Among the major attributes of the theme of the carnivalesque are the reversals of established social status, the legal right to engage in humour, the belaboured or grotesque body, as well as a temporary disregard for existing conventions. Bakhtin utilized the framework of the carnivalesque to provide a setting for the deconstruction of established norms within society, thus providing an environment that fosters experimentation with new forms of identity and interaction within the community.

III. METHODOLOGY

By connecting the Bakhtinian carnivalistic features and atmosphere to Parikh's *The Circus Train*, the current paper sheds light upon the deeper challenges on this connection, unraveling all the carnivalistic aspects in the novel, seeking a deeper perspective on how identity, resilience, and personal growth are shaped during the background of a chaotic, circus-like, carnivalistic environment which is about to go through dark, sinister events of World War II.

IV. DISCUSSION

In ancient times, people held carnivals to celebrate without reservations and also banished bad omens, viewing them as ways to create better mentalities and restore psychological stability and balance for the unfortunate and oppressed social classes. Carnivalization arose naturally as a response to the oppressive nature of the social structures at the time; it served as a primary form of art and fun, making the majority of ordinary people feel at ease and relaxed. The carnival also brings people closer together, as all different social classes of people are allowed to participate in the celebrations regardless of class or status. This can encourage people to easily interact with each other and hang out with strangers who could be above their social class, whom they would never get to interact with in ordinary life.

However, Bakhtin's conception of Carnavalesque diverges slightly in certain aspects and techniques, offering a more fitting application to literary works. He describes the carnival as "the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change and renewal", standing in opposition to all that is normal or conventional (1984, p. 10). Carnival "marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions" (1984, p. 10). The carnival spirit leaves people to act in unconditional and chaotic ways, dissolving traditional class boundaries, social norms, and expectations of refined behavior. In this liberated environment—where order is overturned and discipline subverted—ordinary people are temporarily elevated to kings, and kings are subjected to mockery and dethronement: "mock crowning and subsequent decrowning of the carnival king" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 124). Bakhtin's idea of Carnavalesque thus presents an inverted and fantastic image of the world. In this carnival space, all individuals are equal. As Bakhtin (1984) observes, "The behavior, gesture, and discourse of a person are freed from the authority of all hierarchical positions (social estate, rank, age, property) defining them totally in noncarnival life" (p. 123). Terras (1991) sheds light upon a "universal human impulse toward carnival as a revolt against and reversal of fixed values" (p. 519)—in other words, carnival is the chaotic longing to establish freedom behavior of anything unusual and changing known values and norms. Bakhtin also acknowledges that "Carnival" is a broad concept, and its meaning has changed over time. He observes that while some forms of carnival life have disappeared, many of its main features persist, but in more simplified and transparent forms.

Bakhtin's theory of Carnivalization establishes a strong link between the festival traditions of ancient cultures such as Greece, Rome, and Egypt, as well as their religious ceremony roots. Carnival developed from these early traditions, which left their mark on societies during the Middle Ages and Renaissance, when they became an escape from the

normal routines of life; people started to follow these rituals again for this reason. Carnivals allowed for foolishness and fun; people would wear strange costumes, behave in irrational ways, make foolish comments, and act without regard to social conventions or rules of conduct for a short time. The carnival gave people a temporary and separate world that was governed by equality and freedom. Bakhtin also values an important characteristic of the carnivalesque, which allows actors to take action in ungoverned and transgressive manners. Carnival provides an outpouring of behavior that is contrary to social norms, and abolishes the restrictions imposed by law, morality, or custom. This unleashing of the carnivalesque allows people to shed the stress of their classes, and of everyday life's expectations and speak out freely and without reservation. In addition to this, the carnivalesque resists the dualistic perspective that is associated with most people in Western societies.

Rich and poor, high and low, educated and uneducated, are all temporarily dissolved from one another, hence any kind of person can coexist. Those who usually have sacred or authoritative positions are unable to retain their power during the carnival, which is a strong though temporary reassessment of the ideals of freedom and equality. The carnivalesque was the spirit of the carnival that was present in many different ways throughout time and across cultures. One of the most remarkable ones is the celebration of love. It started as a Christian martyrs' feast, but little by little it lost its religious character and became more and more a festive and ritual-like celebration. Gifts, cards, and dinners for two are some of the elements of the celebration of love. The same can be said about chronological milestones: family events such as christenings and memorials are also dedicated to celebrating and embodying life's hardships. Acknowledging the challenges of life while celebrating it through ceremonial festivity makes these events that are often linked with renewal and rebirth, just like Folch-Serra (1990) who interprets Bakhtin's theory as an upside-down world view of change, death, and rebirth, "just like the rituals of festivals in the popular culture" (p. 254).

The carnival spirit can also be found in the Western literary traditions. The infiltration of the carnival into literature—a term Bakhtin calls "carnivalization"—is nothing less than a transformation of form and purpose, as the disruptive, liberating energy of the carnival takes over the domains of narrative and genre. Nevertheless, Bakhtin leads back this literary advancement to ancient philosophical works and the Socratic dialogue and Menippean satire in particular. The Socratic dialogue, which is an account of the discussions between Socrates and his pupils, was a popular and dialogic literary form. When Kristeva (2022) says so this is the case she points out that these dialogues not only disseminated the truth but also gave the people the chance to participate in the discussion, thus conserving a very lively method of inquiry aiming at the uncovering of many truths (p. 80). "The most Carnivalized literary forms at the very beginning are the Socratic dialogue and the Menippean satire", claim Selden et al. (2005, p. 41). The relationship between dialogism and carnival is also illustrated by Bakhtin's focus on the subversive quality of Socratic discourse. Sullivan (2009) goes so far as to say that "the most inquisitive and challenging Socratic dialogues are rooted in ancient, medieval traditions of carnival" (p. 329). Similarly, Bakhtin (1984) states that Socratic dialogue opens up a carnival-like atmosphere by refusing to accept closure and finality: these texts "bring the world closer and familiarize it in order to investigate it fearlessly and freely" (p. 25).

The main feature of the Socratic dialogue is that it is able to bring together opposites—life and death, spirit and body, certainty and doubt. This interaction is an image of the philosophical and literary approach of the time that was all about sharing and including people, hence keeping no fixed hierarchies and rigid ideologies. Both Bakhtin and Socrates denied individualism and limited convictions in similar ways; they chose a world that could represent and include all kinds of people, with their varied and even strange points of view. It is said that the Socratic dialogue includes many elements of the carnival world but in a more serious manner that draws attention to human involvement. As Zappen (2012) states: "He [Bakhtin] insists that the Socratic dialogue is not a rhetorical genre but a carnivalistic genre, like the other serio-comical genres in its carnival atmosphere but perhaps more serious than comical in its concern with the dialogic nature of truth and human thinking about the truth" (p. 21).

In addition to the Socratic dialogue, Menippean satire is another literary form that directly embodies the carnival spirit. According to Aksehir (2012), the genre is characterized by "the cynical nature of the genre and the carnival spirit it employs" (p. 72). Menippean satire uses laughter, irony, and exaggeration to overthrow prevailing values and reveal social absurdities. Swift (2009) describes satire as "a work or manner that mingles a censorious attitude with humor and wit for the betterment of human institutions or humanity" (p. 9). Although Menippean satire is less direct than other forms of satire, it moves between the comic and the dark tone thus allowing nuanced and layered critiques of societal standards. Additionally, Menippean satire is a classic example of carnivalized literature. It creates a space for people to express their dissent through absurdity and inversion, thus reflecting the upside-down world of medieval carnivals. Bakhtin (1984) notes, "there are elements of the carnival in every Menippean satire" (p. 40). Drawing on this, parody and mockery function as tools for both criticism and celebration. Therefore, the genre turns into a literary area where the usual limits are not only crossed but also questioned.

It is said that Menippean satire as a genre was more interlinked with the carnival world than the Socratic dialogue, and this could be due to the influence of carnivalized folklore. As a result, Menippean satire has generated a carnival sense of the world in literary works. This genre manifests the comic aspects of the carnival. The world transitorily turned upside-down during the European festival of fools and carnival, with its mock priests, Bishops and Popes, as the normal social hierarchy was inverted. In explaining the rituals of folk carnival, Bakhtin shows that "during the carnival

there is a temporary suspension of all hierarchic distinctions [...] of usual life" (Morris, 2016, p. 203). In this brief but radical interval, the emperor might become a slave, and the social world is turned upside down.

Bakhtin means that the Roman dramas of Menippean satire often contain closely connected elements to the carnivalesque spirit. These elements, just like a carnival, temporarily suspend different societal norms and hierarchies. The key elements of Menippean satire, as described by Bakhtin, include appearances by historical figures, wild flights of fantasy, and explorations of ultimate questions, a universe with three levels (multiverse), abnormal mental states, madness, strange dreams, and chaotic being. Essentially, Bakhtin views Menippean satire as a "quest"—a journey into an alternative world to probe the profound realities of our own. Through the staging of an excessive, distorted, and deviant perspective from this marvelous world, Menippean satire condemns and rejudges the ordinary world that is stereotypically represented as stale and common.

Furthermore, the genre's inversion allows for a carnivalesque explanation in which the oppositions collapse: human and animal, actual and virtual, holy and unholy. Grotesque bodies, masks, disguises, and hybrid entities live in this domain of transformation. These journeys often involve symbolic acts of "crowning" and "decrowning," reflecting both the instability and the renewal inherent in carnival. Through these instruments, Menippean satire challenges rationality, belief systems and conventional morality.

Crucial to this transformative space is the concept of the grotesque, an essential aspect of the carnivalesque. It has basically started as a form of art which combines the shapes of both humans and animals until it finally landed to embrace the strange, distorted, and bizarre visual arts and literature (Kayser, 1963). As Hitchcock (2016) notes, the carnival enhances a "site of excessive consumption and perverse performance, often bordering on the grotesque, and allows for the emergence of voices and unconventional pleasures that have been muted in other registers of the picture" (McKittrick, 2016, p. 86). However, laughter and satire play a vital role in this feature as tools of social critique, allowing and encouraging people to ridicule/mock and challenge established social traditions and beliefs. The Bakhtinian grotesque is arguably "full of carnivalesque laughter and devoid of fear" (Chao, 2010, p. 3). Bakhtin (1984) defines the theme of grotesque realism as a form of folk humor; he explains that the core of grotesque realism lies the act of bringing what is elevated—whether spiritual, idealized, or abstract—down to a material, bodily plane. It involves grounding lofty concepts in the tangible realm of the earth and the human body "in their indissoluble unity" (p. 19). In this light, degradation becomes a means of regeneration and the birth of new meaning. However, Edwards and Graulund (2013) strongly take sides against Bakhtin highlights that a text geese repurposed as toilet paper, sexual acts, cannibalism, and cannonballs made from human hair, in addition to other passages that depend on crudeness, silliness, modes of exaggeration, and "indecentcy" (p. 36) which are 'low material' or 'inappropriate' or 'absurd'.

The transition from the theoretical framework of the carnivalesque to the main concern of this study- identity- the novel *The Circus Train* provides a compelling narrative of personal growth, resilience, and cultural transformation. Within the novel, social values have a considerable impact on the individual's capability to claim a consistent identity (Peltola et al., 2004). Identity, whether in literature and psychology in a wider sense, consists of many elements: family, social roles, cultural background, gender, physical affliction, beliefs, and lived experience. The overlapping of identity in literature and life generally takes the influence of social limitations, personal history, and one's desire for a meaningful life. These factors are instrumental in the development of personality, providing a common ground for grappling with the intricacies of human existence. The search for acceptance and identity is vital for one's growth and achieving success, both in terms of society and culture.

Bamberg (2012) argues that identity is the effort "to differentiate and integrate one's self in various ways according to social and personal dimensions like gender, age, race, ethnicity, class, nation states, or regional territories" (p. 241). In other words, people build up their identities in connection with several overlapping contexts. *The Circus Train*, for example, is a story that tells a search for identity that is also a journey towards belonging, as well as meaning and autonomy. Identity narratives are vital for both personal and social change. According to McAdams et al. (2006), "our narrative identities are the stories we live by" (p. 4). Viewed in this way, the carnivalesque is not merely a means of social critique but also a metaphorical area wherein the identity, resistance, and renewal may be rethought.

Identity and belonging are undeniably important and fundamental features of human life. They are very much connected to our self-image, world perception, and interactions with others. Fiction has always dealt with these subjects, and through the centuries has brought to the surface the human longing to know oneself and to know one's position in the world. In literature, identity is used to unravel the different layers of an individual's identity defined by personal history, culture, and internal point of view. Moreover, the author usually considers the values, beliefs, and desires of the character and portrays the character's identity formation as, simultaneously, a result of the social context. In contrast, belonging depicts the strong human desire for connection, affiliation and acceptance. It refers to locating people's place in their environment and the characteristics that define them and provide the feeling of safety and being at home. The role of identity and belonging in literature is that it can profoundly mirror the human condition, simplifying the intricacy of human experiences.

Literature is posited as a medium through which authors can present the difficulties, chances, and triumphs that are involved in the process of finding oneself and the universal longing for acceptance. For the readers of literature, it lays open different viewpoints and it even more pushes them to liaise with characters whose life stories are basically the same. All this can lead to self-awareness, introspection, personal growth, and better self-knowledge. Besides, literature

may undergo such a transformation by challenging social norms and biases that are hard to bear by giving more power to the once silenced and at the same time, showing the struggle of those marginalized groups who are fighting for their right to belong. Through such stories, literature can be an instrument for social justice, identity, and affirmation of the uniqueness of each individual. The act of reading literature also promotes self-reflection as it allows the readers to not only reflect on themselves but also on the choices that have made them who they are (Ojaide, 1992), since they are ushered to seek their own self-actualization through the characters' experiences. Kramsch (1998) also proposes that literature gives the readers the possibility of sharing the identities of the characters and thus, the comprehension and sympathy towards the characters are promoted. Hence, identity and belonging come to the forefront as major literary themes that reflect man's incessant desire for meaning and definition.

The issue of personal growth—the change of thoughts, feelings, and overall perspective—comes very close to identity. This change, however, usually brings along the power of being more unyielding to difficult situations. One's growth can be through many avenues of life, from trauma and hardships which are often the causes of development to others. Studies have indicated that the growth due to stress is coupled with a better quality of life (Park et al., 1996). The concept of personal growth is implicitly present in rudimentary models of human development as well as in psychological theories that claim to explain well-being. (Ryff, 1989; Algobaei, 2025). According to King (2001), one can only see the development and self-improvement that have come through life experiences by reflecting on previous ones. Therefore, the human urge to find identity and community—along with one's life experiences—brings about a feeling of transformation and the desire to be the best version of oneself.

As Parikh poignantly writes, “Magic isn't just in the tricks we conjure; it's in the hearts we touch” (2022, p. 4). Her debut novel, *The Circus Train*, masterfully combines magic and darkness, inviting readers into a world of emotional depth and transformation. Set in the late 1930s and around the horrific events of World War II, the novel introduces Lena, who is the daughter of Theo Papadopoulos, a brilliant and respected illusionist in a traveling circus called the World of Wonders. Despite growing up surrounded by the circus's magic and never-ending fiesta, and despite her father being the headliner illusionist of the circus, Lena does not feel like she belongs in the World of Wonders, as she feels like a stranger in a familiar place, and that she does not get along with people in the circus. And when Clara, Lena's governess, tells her to “make a friend or two”, she replies: “They won't like me [Lena]” (p. 24).

Instead of the magical World of Wonders, Lena is interested in the magic of the real world; she prefers a field of science and medical research more than the illusions that her father pulls and that magical world around, and this may be due to her polio/disability, as she has been on a wheelchair ever since she was a child. Lena has always felt like she is a burden to the people working in the circus, especially Horace, the wealthy heir who has brought this whole circus together, and who Lena always thought that “he viewed her as a never-ending bill he had to pay in order to keep her father happy” (p. 23). Lena feels that people would act as if they like her when they really do not, and the other kids on the train would only pretend to be nice to her, she thinks that “They'll only pretend to be nice in front of all the grown-ups. Then they'll go back to ignoring me [her]” (p. 25). However, Lena's life changes when she rescues Alexandre, an orphan with a mysterious past, and convinces the circus to take him which leads to friendship and love she feels for the first time in her life. And as the war is around the corner, Lena gets separated from her father and Alexandre after they get captured by the Nazis. Now completely on her own without functioning legs to rely on, Lena is forced to explore and face a dark and dangerous world alone; as she sails through a journey of self-discovery, resilience, finding strength within, and believing in herself despite her circumstances.

Carnavalesque elements, as theorized by Bakhtin, permeate *The Circus Train*. To understand how Parikh employs Bakhtinian features, it is essential to examine the World of Wonders, the circus community Lena inhabits. The World of Wonders, as elaborated in the title of the novel, *The Circus Train*, is a traveling circus, more akin to a community traversing European countries by luxurious train cars. The circus, traveling from one country to another aboard a train, is a world of its own, filled with ambitious performers bound by their common pursuit of wonder and spectacle. This circus is filled with chaos, mystery, magic, and drama; showcasing acts and performances like fire jugglers, mermaid equilibrists, and other magicians and illusionists. The circus acts are described as extraordinary, featuring a display of performers who bring a magical atmosphere to life. This circus is where Theo, a master illusionist and the star performer, performs tricks and illusions to impress the audience. This circus provides a sense of charm, magic, and escape even when the world around it grows more dangerous.

A key feature of the carnivalesque is exaggeration—colorful costumes, elaborate masks, and eccentric behavior—elements that permit individuals to express repressed facets of their identity. Bakhtin asserts, “Eccentricity is a special category of the carnival sense of the world, organically connected with the category of familiar contact; it permits - in concretely sensuous form - the latent sides of human nature to reveal and express themselves” (p. 123). This is evident in descriptions of the circus's dining hall where chandeliers “hung from the ceilings, making it look like diamonds were raining down on the tables”, and there was also “Blue paper flecked with gold leaf lined the walls” (p. 30). Performers in the circus also dressed in multicolored costumes, as men came out wearing “white ‘rubakhas’ embroidered with red, blue, and green thread and the women in colorful ‘sarafans’ and glittering ‘kokoshniks’ perched atop their heads”. Even Horace was dressed in a “midnight-blue tuxedo with tails and suede stripes... And a suede top hat” (p. 30)—which again supports the carnivalistic ideas which allow people to act in bizarre ways and wear unconventional costumes, finding it a tool for people to express themselves freely.

The grotesque, another essential carnivalesque feature, manifests in the circus's eccentric characters and performances. Grotesque realism includes the strange, the monstrous, and the marginalized. Kerr (2009) delineates that "The grotesque also incorporates the ugly and the bizarre, the diseased and horrific processes of decay and death" (p. 97). The circus has two strong men with bodies that are so huge and different from normal people; these men "could lift two-hundred-pound barbells like they were bags of feathers"; and also a very skinny young girl with a magical voice and "Some kind of skin condition she was born with. She's been sleeping on the corn sacks in the back. Her mama's dead. Her daddy doesn't want her. She just sleeps there, sweeps the floors, and sings. All day long" (p. 31). Horace sees such performers as profitable attractions. For Bakhtin, grotesque realism challenges normative aesthetics and offers a renewed perception of reality by affirming life's fluidity and the relative nature of existence.

The World of Wonders serves as both a shelter for outsiders who are seeking wonder and spectacle by watching, learning, and being a part of extraordinary performances, and also a stage-like environment for Lena's journey of personal growth and self-discovery of her identity and place in the world in spite of her disability. It also reveals the darkness of the war, emphasizing the self-discovery and resilience of the characters as they navigate their challenges along with the war destroying their world as they know it. The World of Wonders is considered to be not only a physical space with a circus-like atmosphere but also a metaphor for the characters' internal journeys of identity, love, courage, resilience, and self-discovery. It shines on themes of illusion and reality, and how characters can create their own magic even in the darkest of times.

Parikh sets her novel in the heart of the circus, giving the audience a sense of magic but with a more complex tone, as she is deeply after the question of identity and one's place in a rapidly changing world. Spending most of her life in a wheelchair, and growing up traveling across Europe in a moving circus train, it was obvious from the first glimpse that Lena would be different from other people and kids her age living in that environment. And with this difference, humans' pursuit of identity is magnified. As for the case of *The Circus Train*'s heroine, Lena, who "didn't believe in magic. At least, not the kind that thrilled people who came out in droves to watch the World of Wonders, night after night" (p. 53). Despite sharing daily life with her community, Lena's disability sets her apart: "they ate the same food, slept in the same carriages, and enjoyed the same music, Lena's disability had taught her a harsh truth: she was different, and people didn't like different" (p. 54). The more Lena grows, the less she relates to the world around her. Instead, she spends the majority of her time reading books and fantasizing about a different world than the one she is living in. Lena also got to learn more than a few things about science and medicine in which she has found her real passion, Lena started slowly to know the names of arteries, muscles and veins "that snaked through the human body" (p. 56) when other children could practice tightrope walking and card shuffling. When she grew older, she developed the ability to recall various home remedies and began recording recipes for tonics in a small leather notebook she kept beside her bed.

The very identity of Lena is dependent on the father's role in the organization of the circus whose claims of being "the greatest illusionist in the world" (p. 54) are widely recognized. Lena, internally, and sometimes even externally, struggles with the fact that the world sees her father as a giant first and she, possibly, as the next smaller attraction. These are not the only reasons for her to mistake herself for a minor character in the story and, thus, confirm her desire for the self-definition of which no other descriptions will ever be needed apart from that of the main attraction's daughter or simply a disabled person. The conflict between Lena's disability and her father's overprotective attitude leads her to a gradual realization of the need for independence. Lena's acknowledgment of her disability as not being the only defining factor about her is one of the milestones in her journey through the story. And while her father's tricks are grounded in illusion, Lena's strength is in her drive, sharp mind, creativity, and persistence.

The finding of an orphan who gets onto the train during World War II early years is one of the most significant moments of the novel that helps Lena to discover her unique identity and personality. His coming marks the beginning of Lena's new life, as he makes her realize that she only has the power to create a new life and future for her. Through the connection with Alexandre and his conviction of her capabilities that go beyond her impairment, Lena uncovers strength, bravery, and an aim for life. This tie ups pushes her to lose the shackles of her father and the periphery of society and look for her own way of living. In the end, the relation of Alexandre and Lena works for the betterment of both of them. Alexandre has been a part of Lena's life and has helped her to fight off the feeling of being cut off from others, while on the other hand, Lena has been a source of family and root for Alexandre; they both have gotten a support network in each other.

V. FINDINGS

The paper attempts to apply Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque by studying Parikh's novel, *The Circus Train* (2022). It connects different carnivalistic features to the prevailing mood of the novel and the remarkable social arrangement of a moving circus train while also touching upon the main themes of human nature and identity during a carnival-like journey at the edge of war. Lena, a handicapped girl and the main illusionist's daughter, is depicted as being locked in a world both literally and metaphorically. She is a character who is on the one hand fully aware of her identity, while on the other hand, the chaos happening around her does not silence her voice of being, nor does it hinder her fight for independence, and leading her life. This research manifests how the carnivalesque feature in the text addresses wider issues of identity and self-realization. The author emphasizes the mental and emotional aspects of the

characters- especially Lena, concluding that identity is very close to human nature and that the struggle for self-understanding fosters resilience and serves as a catalyst for personal development and growth even during hard times.

VI. CONCLUSION

Bakhtin posits that the carnival is such a space where everyone is considered on the same level, where they can make their voices heard without restriction and engage in behaviors which are totally opposite to what is regarded as the norm. Bakhtinian carnivalesque takes as its main characteristics the logic of exaggeration, the laughter, the absurdity, and the complete existence of the normal behavior traces being the natural order of the logic and the conventional norms being such that they are out of their place in the carnival. This paper focused on the fundamental aspects of the carnival festival and grotesque realism in the luxurious environment of a traveling circus depicted in *The Circus Train*. At the same time, it has also on the novel's investigation of the complex and often contradictory sides of the human condition—such as identity, trauma, and the need for acceptance—all taking place in the world of enchantment and disorder. The principal character, Lena, is not merely immobilized, but also imprisoned in a world that has no place for her true self. Her inner strength amidst the fortitude turns out to be a liberating factor for her which helps her to find her true self and her potential. Instead of still being dictated to live by other people's decisions or by the constraints that have traditionally been associated with her disability, she takes the risk of paving a road of her own. It is mainly the "carnival sense of the world" concept of Bakhtin that sparks off Lena's spiritual metamorphosis from within. The carnivalistic atmosphere of the circus, the magical and distanced realm of the circus and the rejection from others all combine to encourage her in the hardest minutes of the realization of her identity and her search for acceptance. In *The Circus Train* the carnivalesque is not merely an unsteady background for the story to unfold but rather a field of resilience, personal freedom, and identity-building which is more profound.

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Multilingual and Multimodal Instructional Communication in German as a Foreign Language (GFL) Education: A Sociocultural Case Study

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Abstract—This research explores the contribution of multilingual and multimodal instructional communication to the enhancement of German language acquisition among students in Indonesia. Framed within the theoretical perspectives of sociocultural learning, translanguaging pedagogy, and multimodal communication, the study utilizes a mixed-methods approach comprising classroom observations, interviews, and analysis of student performance. The findings highlight four primary strategies—deliberate language switching, integration of multimodal resources, collaborative learning, and digital technologies. Strategic code-switching improved comprehension and lower anxiety, while multimodal inputs facilitated vocabulary retention and listening comprehension. Peer-based activities promoted fluency in speaking, and digital tools contributed to learners' motivation and independent engagement. Quantitative analysis revealed significant improvements in language proficiency, particularly in classrooms employing diverse communicative techniques. Participant feedback underscored these strategies' inclusive nature and practical value within multilingual learning settings. The study concludes that context-responsive communication methods can foster more effective, participatory, and equitable foreign language instruction and encourages further research on long-term effects and technological integration in multilingual language classrooms.

Index Terms—instructional communication, multimodal teaching, translanguaging, German language learning, multilingual education

I. INTRODUCTION

The demand for foreign language proficiency is increasingly urgent in today's interconnected world, especially in multilingual societies like Indonesia, where linguistic diversity is a defining characteristic (Cenoz, 2020). In such contexts, effective language instruction extends beyond textbook delivery to encompass nuanced communication strategies that resonate with learners' sociolinguistic realities. Teaching foreign languages in Indonesia requires a culturally responsive approach, acknowledging the coexistence of national, regional, and international languages in educational settings.

Among various foreign languages, German presents unique instructional challenges due to its highly inflected grammatical system and flexible syntax, which differ significantly from the structure of Bahasa Indonesia (Fandrych & Thurmair, 2021). These structural differences can pose substantial difficulties for Indonesian learners, making it necessary for instructors to adopt teaching methods that simplify complexity without compromising linguistic accuracy. German, one of the most widely spoken languages in the European Union and a key language in global academic and professional networks, holds strategic value for learners seeking international opportunities. Its role in science, engineering, and diplomacy further strengthens the case for effective GFL instruction beyond native-speaking countries. Instructional communication becomes a critical pedagogical tool to bridge these differences, offering learners access to meaning through clear, scaffolded interaction (Ellis, 2021; Lowie & Levine, 2020).

At Makassar State University, Indonesia, the German Language Education Program is vital in preparing students to become fluent in German and skilled in language pedagogy. This dual objective requires instructors to balance language proficiency goals with the development of teaching competencies. In such a setting, communication strategies serve a dual function: facilitating language acquisition while modeling effective teaching practices (Long, 2015). However, there remains a lack of empirical research focused on how these strategies manifest in Indonesian GFL classrooms.

Most studies in this field center on English language instruction in monolingual or Western contexts, often neglecting the realities of multilingual education in the Global South (Kaufmann et al., 2018). As a result, the findings may not translate well into linguistically complex environments such as Indonesia. Moreover, traditional monolingual pedagogies frequently discourage the use of students' first languages, overlooking their potential to support comprehension and engagement in multilingual classrooms (Curiel et al., 2024; Kirkpatrick, 2020; McCormick et al., 2023). Research grounded in Indonesia's diverse linguistic ecosystem is therefore essential.

To respond to this research gap, the present study examines how educators in the GFL program at Makassar State University, Indonesia, design and implement various forms of instructional communication. The focus is on four core strategies—intentional code-switching, integrating multiple modalities, learner-centered collaboration, and using digital tools. These strategies are evaluated for their role in fostering effective learning environments that are both inclusive and pedagogically sound. This study aims to (1) identify and analyze the primary instructional communication strategies implemented in the German as a Foreign Language (GFL) classrooms in a multilingual Indonesian university context; (2) evaluate the impact of these strategies—namely strategic code-switching, multimodal instruction, collaborative learning, and technology-mediated interaction—on students' language proficiency, engagement, and motivation; and (3) examine student perceptions of these approaches about their comprehension, confidence, and learning satisfaction. By centering the analysis on the multilingual learning environment of the German Language Education Program at Makassar State University, this study offers context-specific insights into adaptable instructional communication practices. The findings are intended to inform evidence-based improvements in curriculum design and teaching strategies for foreign language education within similarly diverse and multilingual Indonesian higher education settings.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This research adopts three interrelated theoretical perspectives to examine how instructional communication supports foreign language learning: Sociocultural Theory, Translanguaging, and Multimodal Communication. Together, these frameworks guide the analysis of communicative practices that address the needs of multilingual learners in the Indonesian higher education context.

A. Sociocultural Theory and Mediated Learning

Sociocultural theory, as revitalized in current second language acquisition research, emphasizes that learning is a socially mediated process deeply embedded in culturally situated activities. Rather than occurring in isolation, language development unfolds through interactions with more capable interlocutors who guide learners toward greater competence. This guidance, framed as scaffolding within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), enables learners to perform linguistic tasks they could not manage independently (Lantolf & Poehner, 2021; Swain & Watanabe, 2013). Instructional communication—comprising modeling, questioning, reformulation, and feedback—thus becomes central to mediating learner progress by supporting the internalization of language structures.

In practice, the role of the teacher as a mediator entails dynamic and responsive support tailored to learners' evolving linguistic needs. Rather than applying one-size-fits-all strategies, effective educators provide calibrated assistance that evolves as learners demonstrate increased autonomy. This process requires continual assessment of students' performance and careful adjustment of input complexity. This moment-to-moment mediation fosters grammatical and lexical development and pragmatic and interactional competence, which are essential for real-world communication (Lowie & Levine, 2020; van Compernelle, 2015).

These pedagogical principles take on heightened significance in multilingual classrooms where linguistic diversity introduces a range of proficiency levels and learning styles. Teachers must navigate learners' varied backgrounds, leveraging their prior language knowledge as assets rather than obstacles. Responsive mediation incorporating learners' L1 or translanguaging strategies can reduce cognitive overload and bridge conceptual gaps, especially in the early stages of foreign language acquisition. The instruction within the ZPD is particularly effective when it is dialogic, allowing learners to verbalize understanding, receive immediate feedback, and actively construct knowledge through peer or teacher interaction (Wass & Golding, 2014).

Furthermore, recent research highlights that sociocultural theory is not solely concerned with linguistic proficiency but with participation in meaningful social practices. Language classrooms are spaces where learners are socialized into new discourse communities and acquire language forms and the communicative norms of the target culture (Guerretaz et al., 2021; Pica, 1987). Thus, Instructional communication plays a dual role: it serves as a mechanism for language development and a medium for cultural transmission. Teachers help learners navigate unfamiliar sociolinguistic conventions through culturally responsive pedagogy, fostering communicative competence and intercultural awareness.

B. Translanguaging Theory

Translanguaging theory presents a transformative view of language use in education by rejecting the rigid compartmentalization of languages (García & Wei, 2022; Skyer, 2023). It proposes that multilingual individuals operate from a singular, dynamic linguistic repertoire rather than switching between fixed codes. This perspective has significant pedagogical implications: in classrooms, learners can fluidly draw upon all their linguistic resources—including first languages (L1), second languages (L2), and other known varieties—to construct meaning, negotiate understanding, and articulate complex thoughts. Translanguaging in Indonesian, such as Bahasa Indonesia, regional languages, and English, enables them to bridge unfamiliar German input with familiar linguistic frameworks, facilitating deeper engagement and reducing anxiety (García & Wei, 2022).

This integrated language use in classroom instruction supports comprehension and expression by allowing learners to make strategic linguistic choices based on context and communicative goals. Teachers who embrace translanguaging create inclusive learning environments where students feel validated for using their entire linguistic repertoires. Soruç and Griffiths (2018) emphasize that such an environment improves learner confidence and academic performance by legitimizing multilingualism as a strength rather than a barrier. This recognition encourages learners to draw from known linguistic patterns to decode unfamiliar grammar and vocabulary in the target language—such as German's complex case systems—ultimately accelerating the acquisition process.

Beyond linguistic decoding, translanguaging fosters metalinguistic awareness by encouraging learners to reflect on different languages' functions. When students actively compare syntax, morphology, or pragmatics across languages, they understand form more deeply and become more conscious of language as a system (Byrnes et al., 2010; Fang et al., 2022; The Douglas Fir Group, 2016). This reflective process enhances learners' analytical skills and strengthens their ability to transfer knowledge across linguistic boundaries. For instance, Indonesian learners may relate German word order to Bahasa Indonesia or English structures, helping them build cross-linguistic connections that enrich their language learning strategies.

Rather than treating language mixing as a problem, translanguaging positions it as a powerful pedagogical tool, especially in linguistically diverse classrooms (Chapelle & Sauro, 2017). This approach aligns with equity-focused teaching, allowing learners to engage meaningfully without being penalized for using languages other than the target language. Molin-Karakoç (2025), Powell et al. (2024), Sánchez et al. (2017), and Sieloff Magnan et al. (2014) highlighted that translanguaging promotes academic inclusion by affirming students' cultural and linguistic identities while supporting the mastery of academic and foreign languages. In the context of teaching German as a foreign language in Indonesia, translanguaging can foster deeper comprehension, cultural connection, and learner autonomy—key outcomes in both language education and identity development.

C. Multilingual-Multimodal Communication

The theory of multilingual communication emphasizes that classroom meaning-making is shaped by the interplay of various languages teachers and learners use. In Indonesia's multilingual learning environments, where students are often fluent in Bahasa Indonesia, regional dialects, and English, instructional discourse frequently shifts between languages. This fluid use of linguistic resources helps students relate unfamiliar German structures to languages they already know, reinforcing understanding. Combining such multilingual scaffolding with visual and interactive supports becomes a powerful tool for unpacking complex concepts. As noted by Creese and Blackledge (2010), this kind of linguistic flexibility is an asset in the learning process rather than a limitation.

Furthermore, multilingual communication promotes students' awareness of how language works by encouraging them to compare grammatical patterns, meanings, and forms across their linguistic repertoire. These reflective practices help cultivate analytical thinking and intercultural awareness—key competencies in global education. Cenoz (2020) describes this as pedagogical translanguaging, in which students' full linguistic identities are recognized and mobilized for learning. Multilingual strategies help create equitable and cognitively prosperous classroom environments when integrated with multimodal approaches.

In parallel, multimodal communication theory asserts that learning does not rely solely on spoken or written language but involves other meaning-making modes, such as images, body language, spatial design, and digital tools. This multimodal approach enables students to engage with new material through visual, auditory, and physical cues, easing the learning of complex grammar. Bezemer and Kress (2016) argued that it is especially beneficial in second language contexts where learners are unfamiliar with the target language's structure. For Indonesian students tackling German, instructional aids like diagrams, videos, or physical gestures can make abstract rules more concrete.

In addition, multimodal teaching fosters inclusion by accommodating different cognitive preferences. While some learners absorb content best through spoken language, others benefit more from visual or kinesthetic support. Kullman and Tsagari (2020) state that offering learners multiple ways to access material empowers them and increases engagement. This becomes particularly important when dealing with languages that differ significantly in structure and syntax from students' native tongues. Evidence from neuroscience further strengthens this pedagogical approach. Macedonia and Klimesch (2021) found that integrating gestures, imagery, and verbal cues stimulates diverse neural pathways, which leads to better memory and recall. This can lighten the mental load involved in acquiring complex grammar, making students more likely to retain and apply what they have learned. When teachers pair speech with movement, color-coded visuals, or symbolic representations, students internalize content more effectively.

Beyond comprehension, multimodal learning also transforms how students participate in the classroom. Rather than passively receiving knowledge, they engage through physical action, peer interaction, and the manipulation of multiple semiotic tools. Learning is inherently social and shaped by the physical and cultural context (Bourke et al., 2020; Li, 2025; Li & Hawkins, 2021; Serafini, 2014). In this light, multimodal teaching should not be treated as supplementary but as a central element of effective instruction, especially in diverse, tech-rich classrooms.

By bringing together the insights of sociocultural theory, translanguaging pedagogy, and multilingual-multimodal communication, educators can better tailor instruction to students' linguistic and cognitive diversity. These frameworks collectively highlight the value of dynamic, student-centered approaches that tap into learners' full linguistic capabilities and varied ways of understanding. In teaching German to Indonesian learners, such strategies improve comprehension and foster meaningful participation, peer learning, and sustained engagement. This holistic instructional model helps students become both competent language users and active members of new discourse communities (Lantolf & Poehner, 2021; Swain & Watanabe, 2013).

This study draws on those theoretical perspectives to analyze teaching practices that align with the linguistic and cultural realities of multilingual learners. By focusing on methods such as cross-linguistic scaffolding and multimodal integration, the research aims to uncover how language learning can be made more accessible and inclusive. In linguistically complex contexts like Indonesia, allowing students to mobilize their entire language repertoire enhances academic achievement and personal identity development. Classrooms that legitimize multilingual expression create empowering learning spaces where all students can thrive (Garcia et al., 2018).

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

This study employs a concurrent embedded mixed-methods design, as outlined by Creswell and Creswell (2023), to investigate patterns of instructional communication within the context of foreign language teaching. While the primary emphasis lies in the qualitative component—examining the nature and contextual use of communication strategies by instructors—a complementary quantitative strand provides supporting data on perceived effectiveness and student outcomes. The qualitative core is grounded in a case study approach, suitable for providing an in-depth, context-sensitive analysis of instructional practices in authentic educational settings (Yin, 2003). This design allows the researcher to maintain ecological validity while capturing the complex dynamics of German language instruction within the German Language Education Program at Makassar State University, Indonesia.

B. Procedure for Collecting and Analyzing Data

Data collection occurred during one academic semester (August–December 2024), using two primary sources: classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. To maintain feasibility and analytic clarity, the study limited its focus to 18 observed sessions (6 per subject: communication, education, and methodology), each lasting 90 minutes. These sessions were video-recorded, transcribed, and coded using a classroom discourse framework, including modes of communication, instructional intent, and interaction (Cenoz, 2020). Inter-rater agreement was calculated ($\kappa = 0.84$) to ensure coding consistency. Interviews were conducted with four instructors and one student focus group from each cohort (6 students per group), designed to explore pedagogical strategies, classroom interactions, and learner experiences. Interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia or English, based on participant preference.

Student perceptions were measured using two standardized questionnaires to complement qualitative insights: the Instructional Communication Effectiveness Scale (ICES) and the Student Engagement in Learning Scale (SELS). Both instruments underwent cultural adaptation and content validation through expert review and pilot testing with 10 non-participating students. The revised versions demonstrated strong internal reliability (Cronbach's alpha: ICES = 0.85; SELS = 0.81). Given the scope and duration of the study, CEFR-based proficiency testing was excluded to reduce participant fatigue and methodological overload.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean scores, frequencies) and paired t-tests to evaluate pre- and post-semester changes. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis, supported by NVivo 12 software. Discourse analysis is a systemic functional linguistics model to categorize instructional communication patterns (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013). Data integration was achieved through triangulation and explanatory convergence, ensuring both methodological depth and analytic validity.

C. Population and Samples

The research was conducted within the German Language Education Program of the Department of Foreign Language Education at Makassar State University, Indonesia. Participants consisted of four instructors responsible for key teaching areas and 48 undergraduate students from the 2022 and 2023 cohorts. Students were selected based on active enrollment and voluntary participation in the observed courses. All were native speakers of Bahasa Indonesia, with a majority also fluent in regional languages such as Makassarese and Buginese. Their age range (19–22) and varied English proficiency levels provided a linguistically diverse sample conducive to exploring multilingual instructional contexts.

D. Materials

Data collection tools included an adapted classroom discourse observation protocol, focusing on communicative modes, pedagogical intent, and student interaction (Walsh, 2013). Interview guides for instructors and students were semi-structured, reviewed by three language education experts, and pilot-tested for clarity and cultural appropriateness. Quantitative instruments—the ICES and SELS questionnaires—were adapted into Indonesian and refined based on feedback from a pilot group. Their psychometric properties were re-assessed in this context to ensure content and construct validity. SPSS 28.0 was used for statistical analysis, while NVivo 12 facilitated thematic coding and data organization. Ethical safeguards included informed consent, anonymized reporting, and secure data storage. Participants reviewed summaries of preliminary findings and were invited to a feedback session, promoting transparency and participatory validation.

IV. RESULTS

A. Instructional Communication Patterns

The data analysis revealed four primary instructional communication patterns employed by instructors across the observed courses. These patterns were strategic code-switching, multimodal instruction delivery, collaborative communication facilitation, and technology-mediated interaction. Each of these patterns contributed significantly to enhancing language learning outcomes, engagement, and overall student satisfaction.

The following figure illustrates the percentage of use for the four primary instructional communication patterns employed in the German language education program at Makassar State University. Strategic code-switching was the most frequently applied strategy, accounting for 73% of observed instructional interactions. This was followed by multimodal instruction, which appeared in 64% of the sessions, reflecting the instructors' integration of verbal, visual, and technological tools to enhance learning. In 58% of the classes, collaborative communication facilitation was utilized, emphasizing peer interaction and group-based activities. Lastly, technology-mediated interaction was employed in 45% of the observed teaching sessions, showcasing the use of digital platforms, applications, and multimedia resources to support instructional delivery.

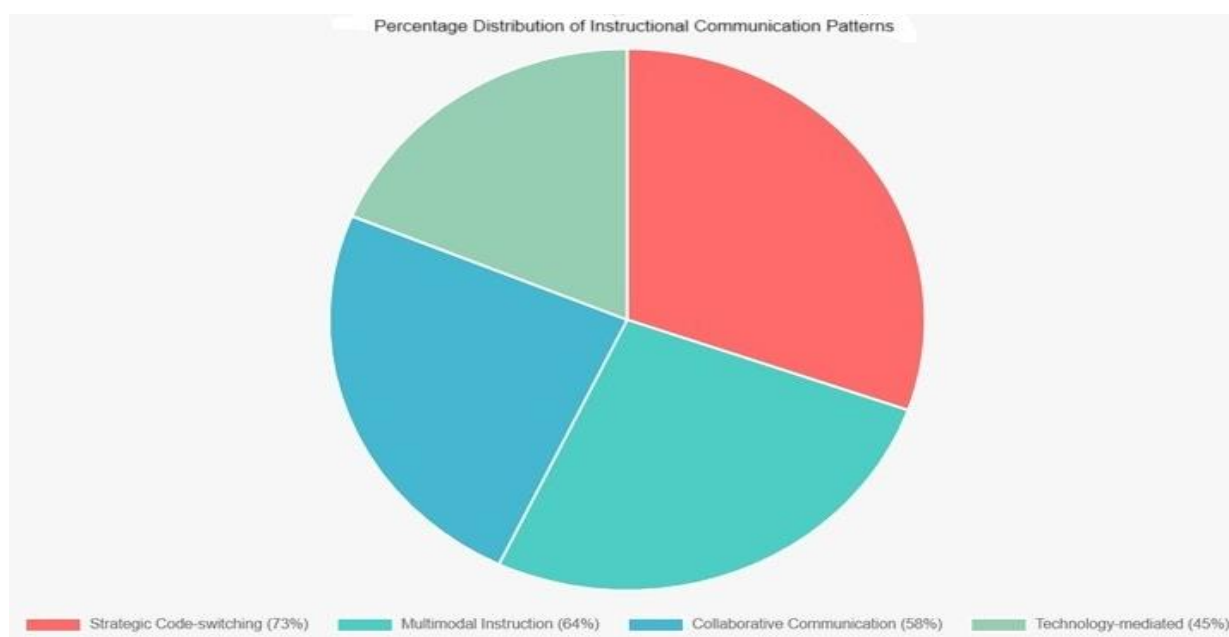


Figure 1. Percentage Distribution of Instructional Communication Patterns

(a). Pattern 1: Strategic Code-Switching

Strategic code-switching was used in 73% of the observed interactions, amounting to 2,156 instances across 32 sessions. The frequency varied between instructors, with code-switching occurring in 58% to 84% of the observed instances, depending on the course type and the instructor's approach. This pattern of code-switching was classified into four functional categories. Explanatory code-switching accounted for 42.8% of instances and was used to clarify complex German grammatical concepts or vocabulary. For example, an instructor might say, "*Das ist der Dativ. Dalam bahasa Indonesia, ini seperti 'kepada' atau 'untuk' seseorang.*" (This is the dative. In Indonesian, this is like 'to' or 'for' someone.) Organizational code-switching, used for classroom management and procedural instructions, occurred in 31.5% of instances, such as when the instructor instructed, "*Sekarang kita akan membuat dialog berpasangan. Macht einen Dialog zu zweit!*" (Now we will make dialogues in pairs. Make a dialogue in pairs!). Affective code-switching, utilized for encouragement, humor, and rapport-building, was used in 16.2% of instances, such as saying, "*Bagus sekali! Das ist*

wirklich gut!" (Very good! That is good!). Lastly, metalinguistic code-switching, which occurred in 9.5% of instances, was used for discussing language structures and learning strategies, like "*Perhatikan perbedaan struktur ini dengan bahasa Indonesia...*" (Notice the difference in this structure from Indonesian...). Quantitative analysis showed that students in classes with higher code-switching frequencies (>70%) demonstrated significantly higher comprehension scores ($M=4.15$, $SD=0.62$) compared to those in low code-switching classes ($M=3.47$, $SD=0.78$), with a t -value of 3.92 ($p<0.001$, Cohen's $d=0.97$).

(b). Pattern 2: Multimodal Instruction

Multimodal instruction was present in 64% of the observed lessons (21 sessions), with notable variation between instructors (ranging from 38% to 85% of lessons). This pattern utilizes verbal, visual, and technological tools to enhance students' learning experiences. The use of gestures was prevalent in 78% of multimodal sessions. These included iconic gestures (45%) to represent concrete concepts, metaphoric gestures (33%) for abstract ideas, and deictic gestures (22%) for referencing specific objects or actions. Visual aids were also extensively used in 69% of the multimodal sessions. Interactive presentations, traditional visual aids such as charts and diagrams, and student-created visual materials were employed to reinforce learning. Additionally, audio-visual resources, such as authentic German media, educational videos, and songs, were integrated into 43% of the sessions. The effectiveness of multimodal instruction was evident in the students' performance. Classes with high multimodal integration showed a 28% higher retention rate on vocabulary assessments ($F(2,61)=6.73$, $p<0.01$) and 22% better performance on listening comprehension tasks, highlighting the impact of multimodal resources on student outcomes.

(c). Pattern 3: Collaborative Communication

Collaborative activities constituted 58% of the total instructional time, with significant variation across instructors (35% to 78%). Collaborative tasks were organized into four main activity categories: structured pair work, small group projects, whole-class discussions, and peer feedback sessions. Pair work, comprising 36.4% of collaborative time, included information-gap exercises, role-plays, and peer editing tasks. Small group projects, accounting for 28.7% of collaborative time, involved problem-solving tasks, presentation preparation, and grammar games. Whole-class discussions comprised 21.3% of the time, focusing on debates, cultural discussions, and reflection sessions. Peer feedback sessions, which accounted for 13.6%, provided opportunities for error correction, presentation evaluations, and sharing language learning strategies. The collaborative nature of these activities encouraged varied language use. In these sessions, 31% of interactions were conducted in German only, 54% in a mix of German and Indonesian, and 15% in Indonesian only. Students in high-collaboration classes demonstrated significantly greater speaking proficiency improvements ($M=1.43$, $SD=0.51$) compared to those in teacher-centered classes ($M=0.87$, $SD=0.42$), with a t -value of 5.12 ($p<0.001$).

(d). Pattern 4: Technology-Mediated Interaction

Technology integration was present in 45% of observed sessions, with considerable variation among instructors (from 18% to 72% of sessions). Technology was employed in several forms, including interactive digital presentations, language learning applications, online collaboration platforms, and authentic digital resources. In 57.1% of technology-mediated sessions, interactive digital presentations, multimedia content, interactive polling, quizzes, and virtual reality experiences related to German culture were included. Language learning applications, such as vocabulary practice apps and grammar drills, were integrated in 35.7% of sessions. Online collaboration platforms, including shared document editing and virtual breakout rooms, were used in 28.6% of sessions. In contrast, authentic digital resources, such as German news websites and social media integration, were used in 21.4% of the sessions. Students responded positively to technology-mediated lessons. These sessions were positively correlated with increased attention maintenance ($r=0.61$, $p<0.001$), voluntary participation ($r=0.48$, $p<0.01$), homework completion rates ($r=0.52$, $p<0.01$), and overall course satisfaction ($r=0.44$, $p<0.05$).

B. Impact of Instructional Strategies on Language Learning Outcomes

(a). Language Proficiency Development

Figure 2 demonstrates that students' performance in language-related competencies improved markedly between the pre-test and post-test. Listening scores rose from 2.4 to 3.9, while speaking abilities advanced from 2.2 to 3.9, reflecting a strong development in productive oral skills. Writing achievement increased from 2.5 to 4.0, and reading comprehension increased from 2.7 to 3.9, indicating steady progress in receptive domains. The most pronounced improvement was observed in overall engagement, which climbed from 3.0 to 4.3, underscoring the role of the instructional design in enhancing both proficiency and learner participation. These results prove that the applied pedagogical approach effectively facilitated comprehensive language growth.

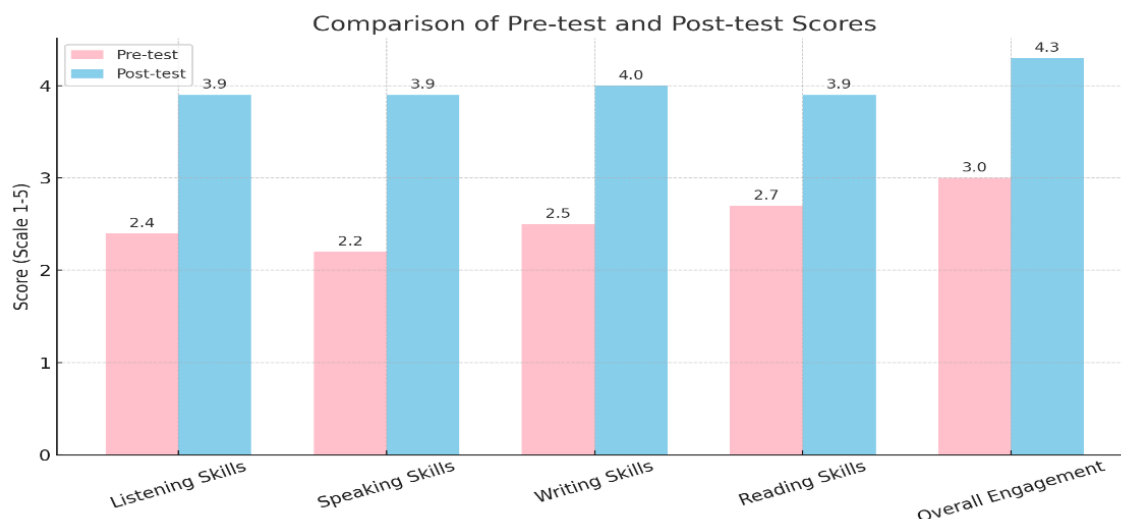
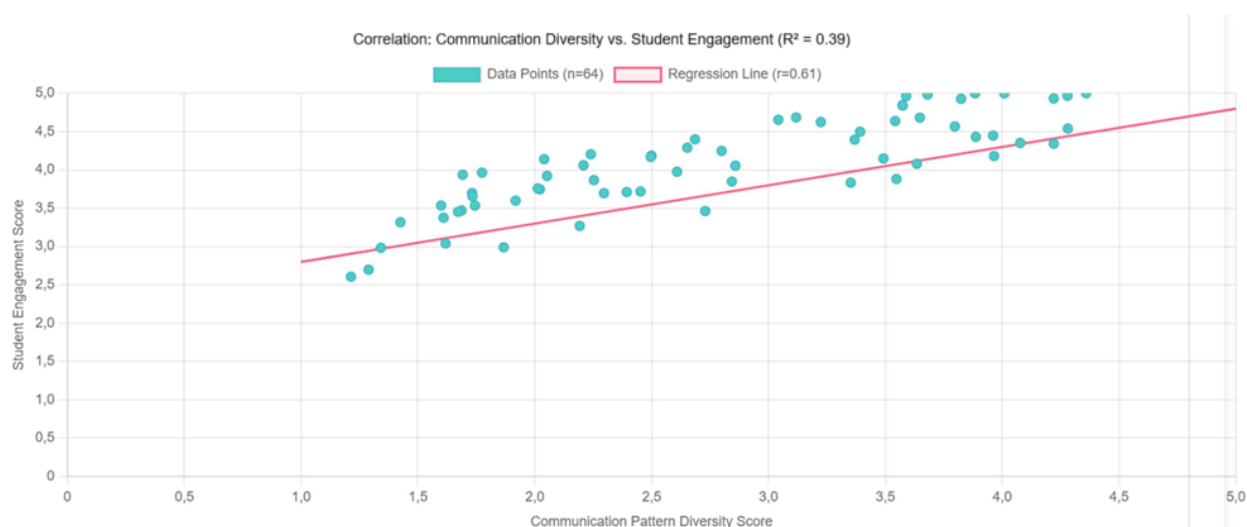


Figure 2. Comparison of Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores

(b). Student Engagement Outcomes

Regression analysis indicated that communication pattern diversity was a significant predictor of student engagement ($R^2=0.39$, $F(4,59)=9.47$, $p<0.001$). Increased code-switching, multimodal integration, collaborative activities, and technology use all contributed to higher levels of student engagement. Specifically, voluntary participation increased by 34% in classes with diverse communication patterns, and question-asking frequency rose by 41% in classes with high code-switching frequency.

Figure 3. Correlation: Communication Diversity vs. Student Engagement ($R^2 = 0.39$)

(c). Motivation and Attitude Changes

Variations in instructional communication methods had a notable impact on learners' motivation. When instructors employed a range of communicative strategies—such as code-switching for clarification, visual and gestural support, and interactive engagement—students showed a significant increase in intrinsic motivation ($t(63)=4.67$, $p<0.001$), indicating that these methods stimulated deeper involvement and internal drive to learn. Although extrinsic motivation also rose moderately across various classrooms, the findings suggest that motivation was not solely shaped by external rewards but also by the communicative context. In multilingual learning environments, students experienced a substantial decline in anxiety related to language use ($t(63)=-3.89$, $p<0.001$), likely because of the inclusive and adaptive instructional style that recognized and valued their diverse linguistic resources. Moreover, there was a strong positive link between how satisfied students felt with classroom communication and their willingness to pursue further language study ($r=0.58$, $p<0.001$), emphasizing the long-term benefits of responsive and learner-focused communication practices.

C. Students' Perceptions

Findings from the student questionnaire demonstrate strong support for the instructional communication strategies utilized throughout the course. A large majority (87.5%) indicated that strategic code-switching, particularly when Bahasa Indonesia was used to clarify complex German grammar, significantly enhanced their understanding by easing cognitive processing and increasing conceptual clarity. Additionally, 73.4% of respondents favored lessons enriched with visual aids and gestures, underscoring the importance of multimodal input in boosting vocabulary retention and listening comprehension. Collaborative learning also received positive feedback, with 81.3% of students reporting improved speaking confidence and better grasp of language structures through peer interaction. Meanwhile, 68.8% appreciated the integration of technology, such as educational apps and online tools, for maintaining engagement and supporting autonomous learning. These results highlight the effectiveness of combining code-switching, visual reinforcement, peer collaboration, and digital tools in fostering a dynamic and inclusive foreign language learning environment.

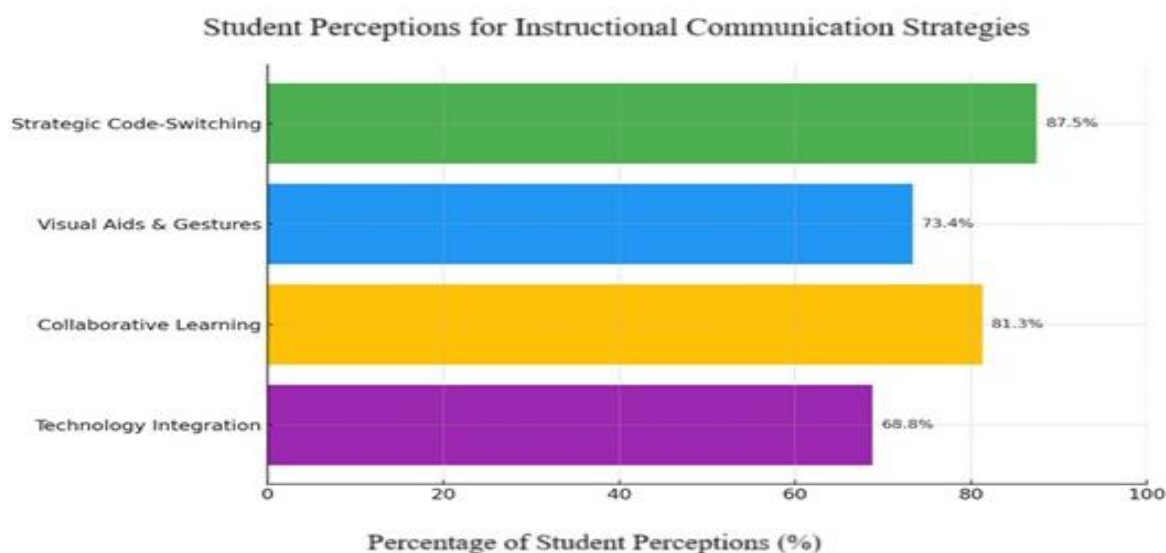


Figure 4. Student Support for Instructional Communication Strategies

V. DISCUSSION

This study provides a nuanced investigation into instructional communication within the German as a Foreign Language (GFL) program at Makassar State University, emphasizing how teaching strategies are contextually tailored to meet the needs of linguistically diverse learners in Indonesia. Framed by sociocultural theory (Lantolf & Poehner, 2021), translanguaging pedagogy (García & Wei, 2022), and multimodal communication theory (Bezemer & Kress, 2016), the findings affirm that a varied instructional approach—encompassing strategic code-switching, multimodal inputs, collaborative learning, and digital technologies—significantly enhances learner comprehension, motivation, and engagement. These strategies are not applied uniformly but are guided by pedagogical responsiveness to student language backgrounds, content difficulty, and classroom dynamics.

Findings from classroom observations indicated that instructors frequently alternated between German and Bahasa Indonesia, with code-switching strategies appearing in 73% of the documented instructional exchanges. This intentional use of the students' first language acted as a supportive mechanism within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), particularly when explaining abstract or complex grammatical structures in German (Swain & Watanabe, 2013). Rather than hindering target language exposure, this approach enabled learners to relate unfamiliar forms to previously acquired linguistic knowledge, facilitating more profound understanding. Insights from student interviews echoed this benefit, as many participants expressed that code-switching helped alleviate confusion and enhance clarity. Complementing these qualitative insights, statistical results showed that students exposed to high-frequency code-switching environments achieved better comprehension scores than those in settings where such strategies were less prevalent, reinforcing the pedagogical value of this method (García & Wei, 2022).

Multimodal instruction, involving gestures, visual aids, and digital materials, enhanced vocabulary retention and listening comprehension. According to multimodal learning theory, meaning is not solely constructed through language but emerges through a convergence of semiotic resources—visual, spatial, auditory, and kinesthetic (Bezemer & Kress, 2016). Empirical studies in cognitive neuroscience further validate this, showing that multisensory inputs activate multiple neural pathways, leading to improved memory and deeper conceptual understanding (Macedonia & Klimesch, 2021).

Peer collaboration, emphasized over half of the instructional time, supported speaking fluency and interpersonal competence through dialogic interaction. Sociocultural theory underscores that language development is fundamentally social and unfolds through interaction with more knowledgeable others (Lantolf & Poehner, 2021). Activities such as pair

work, small-group projects, and peer feedback enabled learners to co-construct meaning, receive immediate feedback, and practice language in authentic contexts, in line with interactionist perspectives (Long, 2015).

Technology-mediated practices extended instruction beyond the physical classroom, enabling learners to engage autonomously through apps, online collaboration tools, and multimedia content. These tools enhanced attention, participation, and motivation, echoing the pedagogical value of digital technologies in fostering learner autonomy and providing access to authentic linguistic input (Chapelle & Sauro, 2017).

Several factors, including learner proficiency, instructional goals, and resource availability, shaped the choice and implementation of communication strategies. Teachers' flexible and culturally responsive adaptations exemplify how instructional communication acts not only as a linguistic tool but also as a sociocultural bridge (Guerretaz et al., 2021), connecting students to both language forms and cultural practices.

The combined qualitative and quantitative evidence confirms that the study's three research objectives were successfully met. The instructional strategies examined contributed to measurable improvements in learner confidence, participation, and satisfaction in learning German in a multilingual context. These findings underscore the importance of pedagogical models that validate linguistic diversity and support equitable access to foreign language education.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

This research highlights the substantial influence of employing varied instructional communication techniques on enhancing German language education within Indonesia's multilingual tertiary landscape. Anchored in sociocultural theory, translinguaging principles, and multimodal communication perspectives, the findings illustrate that a responsive and adaptive teaching model—encompassing purposeful language alternation, the integration of multiple semiotic resources, collaborative engagement, and digital tools—can significantly improve students' language mastery, active participation, and learning enthusiasm. Observational and performance-based data indicate that strategic language mixing helps clarify complex grammatical content by utilizing learners' existing linguistic repertoires. At the same time, multimodal strategies—such as combining visual, verbal, and kinesthetic cues—aid in reinforcing knowledge and facilitating retention. Peer-driven tasks support authentic communicative practice, crucial for advancing oral fluency, while digital platforms enhance interaction and support learner autonomy. These insights underscore the value of tailoring pedagogical practices to reflect learners' sociolinguistic diversity. Beyond immediate classroom benefits, this study informs broader discussions in second language education by demonstrating how integrated and inclusive communicative approaches can foster meaningful, equitable learning. Further investigation is encouraged to assess how these strategies impact learner motivation and proficiency development, especially amid ongoing transformations in educational technology and digital learning ecosystems.

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Mixed-Methods Study of Enhancing Business Interpreting Competence: The Role of a Knowledge Graph-Integrated BOPS Instructional Model Mediated by Learning Engagement and Affective Commitment

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Abstract—This mixed-methods study evaluates the efficacy of a knowledge graph-integrated BOPS instructional model—where BOPS refers to Bridge-in, Objective problems, Participatory learning, and Summary—in blended business interpreting education. A quasi-experiment was conducted with 236 undergraduate students (experimental group, $n=73$; control group, $n=62$) over a 16-week semester to examine the model's impact on learning outcomes. Quantitative analysis revealed that the experimental group achieved significantly higher interpreting accuracy ($M=82.35$) than the control group ($M=78.21$, $p<0.01$), with this improvement mediated by learning engagement ($\beta=0.47$) and affective commitment ($\beta=0.39$). Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) confirmed robust model fit ($\chi^2/df=2.14$, CFI=0.937, RMSEA=0.052), further validating that learning engagement positively predicts student performance (e.g., translation confidence, $\lambda=0.69$) and affective commitment, while affective commitment partially mediates the relationship between engagement and BOPS learning benefits (indirect effect=0.11, $p=0.018$). Qualitative thematic analysis of 30 open-ended responses identified four critical success factors for the model: technical usability (68%), content interactivity (72%), feedback timeliness (61%), and personalization (79%), alongside contextual challenges such as initial platform navigation difficulties. The model bridges cognitive-affective learning dynamics by embedding formative assessments and iterative achievement-reflection cycles within BOPS phases, fostering both emotional investment in learning and practical interpreting competence. These findings advance theoretical understanding of technology-enhanced language education—particularly the role of semantic scaffolding (via knowledge graphs) and affective mediation in interpreter training—while providing empirically grounded strategies for optimizing AI-integrated blended learning in business interpreting pedagogy.

Index Terms—BOPS instructional model, knowledge graph, business interpreting pedagogy, learning engagement, affective commitment

I. INTRODUCTION

The globalization of business communication has precipitated a paradigm shift in interpreter competencies, with the World Economic Forum (2023) identifying real-time adaptive decision-making as the critical skill gap in 68% of language service providers. This study responds to the pressing need for pedagogical models that address the triple challenge of accelerating domain knowledge acquisition, enhancing situational fluency (Tiselius & Dimitrova, 2023), and maintaining engagement in hybrid learning ecosystems (Hao & Lee, 2021). These challenges are exacerbated by systemic deficiencies in current pedagogical approaches. The rapid evolution of e-commerce and artificial intelligence has further complicated the landscape of interpreter training. Technological advancements, coupled with the growing complexity of global business communication, have created an urgent need for innovative approaches to interpreter training that can address the dynamic and interdisciplinary nature of business interpreting, which demands not only linguistic proficiency but also domain-specific knowledge and problem-solving skills.

In response to these challenges, this study introduces an innovative knowledge graph-integrated BOPS (Bridge-in, Objective problems, Participatory learning, Summary) instructional model. This approach combines the structured

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framework of BOPS with the analytical power of knowledge graphs to create an effective blended learning environment. The proposed model aims to address the identified gaps in current business interpreting education by providing a more interactive, student-centered, and practice-oriented learning experience that bridges the divide between theoretical knowledge and practical application in the evolving landscape of global business communication.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

A. Knowledge Graph

Knowledge graphs constitute an innovative approach to knowledge representation, building upon the foundational principles of the semantic web, which can be viewed as an early precursor to the knowledge graph. Modern educational knowledge graphs utilize transformer architectures (e.g., BERT) for dynamic concept linking (Liu, 2024), enabling semantic alignment between domain-specific terminology and learner interactions. This structured representation enhances knowledge accessibility and retention in pedagogical contexts. The advent of knowledge graphs has revolutionized traditional information retrieval methods. On one hand, they delineate semantic and attribute relationships between concepts, enabling reasoning through fuzzy string matching. On the other hand, they present structured knowledge in a classified and organized manner to users via grid-based graphical interfaces. Additionally, knowledge graphs address the challenge of manual filtration of irrelevant information, holding practical significance for intelligent societies (Xu et al., 2016).

Knowledge graphs can be categorized into general knowledge graphs and domain knowledge graphs (Hao et al., 2021). In the context of education, knowledge graphs are typically domain knowledge graphs and have garnered increasing attention from researchers. Education, being a cornerstone of societal advancement, has seen numerous studies exploring the integration of intelligent applications to enhance educational quality (Bai et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2020). In the era of big data, the complexity and unstructured nature of educational data pose significant challenges for effective processing. Consequently, intelligent educational systems have increasingly adopted structured data formats, particularly knowledge graphs, to address these challenges (Peng et al., 2023). Various applications leveraging knowledge graphs now support educational processes, with a particular emphasis on efficient data processing and knowledge dissemination (Yao et al., 2020). In education, knowledge graphs support course management and personalized learning through structured knowledge representation (e.g., automated course recommendations). The rise of online learning has further highlighted their utility in filtering low-quality content and enhancing formal learning outcomes (Zablith, 2022).

Despite these advancements, research on knowledge graph-integrated English teaching remains limited. Some studies have explored the construction of interactive English teaching platforms using knowledge graphs, employing models like BERT for named entity recognition and semantic analysis to extract relationships between entities (Liu, 2024). Others have focused on optimizing learning paths for English majors by deriving high-frequency words and recommending personalized learning trajectories (Zhang, 2024). Additionally, Wang (2022) combined knowledge graph embedding scoring algorithms with link scoring algorithms to address the issue of missing answers in knowledge graph-based question-answering systems.

In summary, knowledge graphs hold significant potential for enhancing both traditional classroom instruction and digital learning platforms. By processing complex educational datasets, they optimize the efficiency and accessibility of learning environments, making them invaluable tools for modern education.

B. Objective Problem Orientation

The conceptual framework of Objective Problem Orientation is fundamentally grounded in the Outcomes-based Education (OBE) theory, which was first conceptualized and systematically developed by Felder and Brent (2003). The OBE theory requires that all components of the education system be aligned with predefined goals, including three basic elements: learning objectives, instruction, and assessment. It also requires educators to establish clear benchmarks about the abilities and proficiency levels learners expect to achieve after finishing the course, and then develop teaching frameworks to achieve these results.

Objective Problem Orientation integrates learners' cognitive development with real-world contextualization. Instructors design authentic problem-based scenarios and curate relevant instructional resources to facilitate knowledge acquisition, skill development, and the enhancement of analytical and problem-solving competencies (Zhou et al., 2021). This framework emphasizes three core principles: (1) fostering learner autonomy through self-directed exploration, (2) promoting collaborative problem-solving, and (3) emphasizing the constructive nature of knowledge acquisition and instructional flexibility.

The implementation of Objective Problem Orientation involves a tri-level objective alignment: institutional educational objectives, program-specific learning outcomes, and course-level instructional objectives. This hierarchical structure informs the modular organization of course content, integrating five types of objective problems: basic problems, important problems, difficult problems, practical problems, and extended problems (Zheng et al., 2022).

Basic problems involve students acquiring solutions through online instructional materials. This segment is deliberately excluded from in-person classroom instruction. Instructors formulate important problems derived from the core subject matter, with the pivotal aspects of these lessons being imparted via problem-solving activities, thereby necessitating students' mastery through offline engagement. Difficult problems, which serve as extensions of these important problems,

are primarily aimed at fostering student interest. Practical problems underscore applying theoretical knowledge to real-world scenarios, evaluating students' proficiency in skill application and collaborative efforts. Extended problems emphasize fostering innovation and encouraging high-quality development, which supports students in gaining a deeper understanding of the course content.

C. BOPS Instructional Model

This study introduces the BOPS instructional model, an innovative adaptation of the BOPPPS model, which is renowned for its effectiveness in constructivist and communicative teaching approaches (Zhang, 2020). The BOPS instructional model comprises four distinct phases: Bridge-in (B), Objective problems(O), Participatory learning (P) and Summary (S). In this BOPS model, each 90-minute session is systematically divided into 4 phases. The Bridge-in phase, termed the "what" stage, introduces basic problems to enable students to grasp essential concepts through pre-class online resources.

The Objective problem phase, or the "why" stage, requires instructors to define clear objectives aligned with knowledge acquisition, skill development, and ideological-political objectives. In educational practices, instructors deploy objective problems as pre-class assessments to evaluate students' foundational knowledge acquisition. The in-class instructional framework incorporates a quadripartite structure comprising didactic lectures, collaborative group discussions, presentation sharing, and simulated practice sessions, facilitating the collective resolution of important, difficult and practical problems. Post-class activities involve students' continued engagement with extended problems and comprehensive course evaluation.

The Participatory learning phase, referred to as the "how" stage, involves students actively engaging in solving practical problems individually or collaboratively, which can help to assess the effectiveness of the instructional objectives by presenting advanced problems for group resolution. This is also an essential stage for solving practical problems.

Finally, the Summary phase, or the "reflection" stage, allows both students and instructors to review the session. Students reflect on their learning outcomes (encouraged to participate in discussions via the Learning App), while instructors identify areas for improvement (Yu, 2023).

The integration of knowledge graphs into the BOPS instructional model represents a significant innovation in blended business interpreting education. This approach provides a multidimensional, visual representation of domain-specific knowledge through interconnected nodes and semantic relationships, enabling learners to navigate complex business concepts and terminologies more effectively. The knowledge graph's hierarchical structure facilitates cognitive mapping of business negotiation scenarios, interpreting strategies, and cultural considerations, thereby enhancing knowledge acquisition and retention. This synergy between structured knowledge representation and participatory pedagogy addresses critical gaps in resource accessibility and skill transferability, forming the basis for our first hypothesis:

H1: The knowledge graph-integrated BOPS instructional model significantly improves students' interpreting accuracy and fluency.

D. Learning Engagement (LE) in Blended Environments

Learning engagement, conceptualized as the interplay of behavioral, cognitive, and emotional investment in learning activities (Fredricks et al., 2004), has emerged as a pivotal predictor of academic success in blended learning (BL) contexts. Empirical studies underscore its dual role: behavioral engagement (e.g., participation in discussions, previewing habits) directly correlates with skill mastery, while cognitive engagement (e.g., critical thinking, problem-solving) mediates deeper conceptual understanding (Heo et al., 2022; Luo, 2022). For instance, Mennenga's (2013) team-based learning (TBL) framework demonstrated that structured collaboration elevates engagement, subsequently enhancing exam performance—a finding corroborated by Tsay et al. (2020) in gamified learning systems.

However, extant research often overlooks the temporal and contextual nuances of engagement. The BOPS model addresses this by embedding formative assessments (e.g., pre-class objective problems, post-class extended tasks) to sustain engagement across learning phases. Building on this, we hypothesize:

H2: Learning engagement (LE) positively predicts student performance (SP).

E. Affective Commitment (AC): Bridging Engagement and Outcomes

Affective commitment, defined as emotional attachment to learning goals and institutional values (Allen & Meyer, 1990), has been extensively studied in organizational contexts but remains underexplored in education. In workplace settings, affective commitment mediates the relationship between training interventions and job performance (Nauman et al., 2021), a mechanism we extend to BL environments. Students with high affective commitment exhibit greater persistence, intrinsic motivation, and resilience to academic challenges (Min et al., 2022).

In the BOPS framework, affective commitment is cultivated through iterative cycles of achievement (e.g., solving advanced problems) and reflection (e.g., post-class app-based discussions), fostering a sense of competence and belonging. This aligns with self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), where emotional investment amplifies the efficacy of engagement strategies. Therefore, we posit:

H3: Learning engagement (LE) enhances affective commitment (AC).

H4: Affective commitment (AC) mediates the relationship between LE and BOPS learning benefits (BB).

F. Performance-Driven Affective Reinforcement

High student performance reinforces affective commitment through a feedback loop of achievement and recognition. Studies in organizational psychology reveal that employees with strong performance metrics develop deeper emotional ties to their roles (Shore & Wayne, 1993)—a dynamic mirrored in academic settings. For instance, Wang et al. (2022) found that students' affective commitment correlates with both academic achievement and long-term career aspirations, mediated by self-efficacy and peer validation. Within the BOPS model, performance metrics (e.g., formative assessments, simulated practice scores) serve not only as evaluative tools but also as catalysts for emotional investment. This reciprocal relationship underpins our final hypothesis:

H5: Student performance (SP) directly enhances BOPS learning benefits (BB).

We tested these hypotheses using a mixed-methods research design that integrated quantitative performance data with qualitative feedback analysis. This method was intended to thoroughly assess the effectiveness of this novel teaching approach in business interpreting education.

III. CONSTRUCTION AND APPLICATION OF THE KNOWLEDGE GRAPH-INTEGRATED BOPS INSTRUCTIONAL MODEL IN BUSINESS INTERPRETING

A. Construction of the Knowledge Graph-Integrated BOPS Instructional Model

The development of the BOPS instructional model, integrated with knowledge graphs, begins with the construction of a comprehensive business interpreting knowledge graph. To support this framework, a dedicated online learning platform was developed, leveraging the Chinese MOOC platform "Xueyin Online", as illustrated in Figure 1. This platform integrates the knowledge graph with various pedagogical resources, facilitating student-centered autonomous learning and interactive communication. The architecture of the platform supports both synchronous and asynchronous learning activities, allowing students to navigate complex business scenarios while developing essential interpreting competencies.

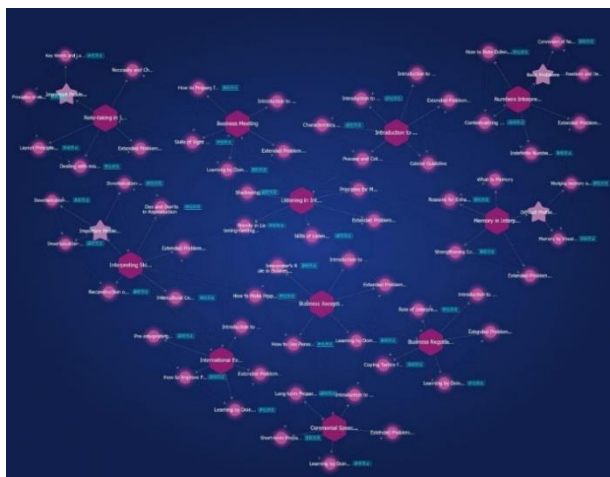


Figure 1. Knowledge Graph of Business Interpreting

In the Bridge-in phase, instructors employ knowledge graphs to construct visualized business knowledge maps, facilitating students' rapid comprehension of course topics and relevant background information. During the Objective Problems phase, instructors design challenging business interpreting tasks based on critical nodes within the knowledge graph. These tasks are closely aligned with practical business scenarios. The knowledge graph serves as a systematic tool for instructors to design objective problems, ensuring comprehensive coverage of essential knowledge points. The Participatory Learning phase represents the core of the BOPS instructional model. Instructors utilize online platforms to establish interactive learning environments based on the knowledge graph, allowing students to autonomously explore the knowledge structure and complete various interpreting exercises and simulation tasks. Classroom activities are organized to foster peer interaction and collaboration. The real-time updating and expansion capabilities of the knowledge graph enable students to contribute their insights, collectively enriching the knowledge system. In the Summary phase, instructors guide students in utilizing knowledge graphs to review and organize acquired knowledge, assisting them in establishing systematic knowledge frameworks. Students can demonstrate their learning outcomes by creating personalized knowledge graphs, while instructors assess learning effectiveness and provide individualized feedback based on these student-generated graphs.

In conclusion, the integration of knowledge graphs with the BOPS instructional model creates a synergistic approach that enhances both knowledge acquisition and practical competencies. The knowledge graph provides structured support for the BOPS framework, while the BOPS model offers a pedagogical structure that maximizes the application of the knowledge graph in business interpreting instruction.

B. Practice of the Knowledge Graph-Integrated BOPS Instructional Model in Business Interpreting

To demonstrate the practical implementation of the knowledge graph-integrated BOPS instructional model, this

study focuses on the "Business Interpreting Practice Module—Business Negotiation Interpreting" as a case study. This module integrates theoretical knowledge with practical interpreting skills in simulated business negotiation scenarios, providing a robust framework for applying the BOPS model.

(a). Bridge-in Phase

During the Bridge-in phase, instructors utilize the visualization features of knowledge graphs to showcase relevant background information and case studies related to business negotiation interpreting. For example, they create a detailed knowledge graph that includes key components such as international business negotiation scenarios, interpreting methods, and cultural diversity aspects. This visual tool aids students in understanding basic concepts and recognizing the importance of business negotiation interpreting. By emphasizing the connections between nodes (like cultural diversity) and edges (such as linguistic barriers and communication challenges), instructors help students examine the complex effects of cultural factors on interpreting processes. This interactive approach not only boosts students' cognitive involvement but also promotes critical thinking, establishing a strong foundation for more advanced learning in later stages.

(b). Objective Problems Phase

During the Objective Problems phase, instructors systematically formulate learning objectives and design objective problems based on the hierarchical structure of the knowledge graph and students' specific learning needs. These objective problems are strategically developed to encompass multiple dimensions of business negotiation competencies, including domain-specific knowledge, linguistic proficiency, and interpreting strategies. For example, students are presented with authentic English materials containing complex business terminologies and procedural descriptions. They are then challenged to interpret key technical terms accurately, develop effective language organization strategies, and analyze underlying business relationships using the knowledge graph's structural framework. This problem-based learning approach is implemented in three stages: pre-class, in-class, and post-class.

1. Pre-Class Stage: Online Delivery of Basic Problems

Students watch video materials on the MOOC platform to become familiar with fundamental concepts of business negotiation. They work on basic questions posed by the instructor, such as defining business negotiation and its key features. Additionally, students review recorded performances of professional interpreters and participate in online discussions to consider issues like whether it is appropriate to interrupt speakers during negotiations.

2. In-Class Stage: Addressing Important, Difficult and Practical Problems

The class starts with a critical review of interpreters' performances from the pre-class videos, focusing on key issues such as the interpreter's role in negotiations and strategies for managing unclear messages. Students then engage in case-based discussions to address more complex problems, including polite interruption techniques and resolving cultural conflicts. Finally, group simulated interpreting exercises provide opportunities to practice practical challenges, such as dealing with strong regional accents and unexpected events during negotiations.

3. Post-Class Stage: Exploration of Extended Questions

After class, students take part in online discussions to explore broader questions, such as the ethics of interpreting offensive language during disputes and essential business etiquette. They also review their simulated interpreting performances, identify areas needing improvement, and create new learning plans, which are compiled into reports and submitted online.

Throughout the entire process, instructors serve as facilitators and guides, integrating student input and offering focused feedback. Students are encouraged to conduct post-interpretation evaluations, including self-assessments and client feedback, to pinpoint areas for growth. By sharing personal interpreting experiences and analyzing real negotiation cases, the instructor promotes critical thinking and supports students' professional development.

(c). Participatory Learning Phase

During the Participatory Learning phase, instructors leverage the intelligent capabilities of knowledge graphs to create interactive activities that actively involve students. For instance, group discussions are organized based on the node-edge connections within the knowledge graph, concentrating on subjects like handling cultural differences in business negotiation interpreting. This structure helps students develop a systematic understanding of negotiation processes, stakeholder roles, and interest relationships, allowing them to apply linguistic knowledge and interpreting skills in simulated scenarios. Additionally, the knowledge graph's intelligent question-answering feature is used to facilitate interactive Q&A sessions, encouraging students to critically evaluate specific cases or issues. This method not only promotes active participation in class but also improves students' critical thinking and communication skills. This phase works in close collaboration with the prior stage of in-class explanation and discussion, reinforcing the focus on key challenges, complex issues, and practical problem-solving.

(d). Summary Phase

At the conclusion of the class, instructors leverage the visualization features of knowledge graphs to conduct a thorough

review of the session's material. This process includes revisiting key nodes and their connections within the knowledge graph, organizing important business negotiation concepts, interpreting techniques, and problem-solving methods in a structured manner. Focus areas encompass business vocabulary, common interpreting mistakes along with their corrections, and the efficient use of knowledge graphs to manage interpreting tasks. This organized method aids students in building clear knowledge frameworks while enhancing their understanding and retention of the course content.

At the same time, the assessment tools integrated into the knowledge graph are employed to gauge students' learning outcomes. The evaluation includes various approaches such as tests based on the knowledge graph, analysis of interpreting performance, and student feedback surveys. These assessments assess students' grasp of business concepts, their ability to apply skills practically, and provide insights into their learning experiences. By systematically analyzing these results, instructors can improve and fine-tune teaching models and strategies, thereby boosting the overall effectiveness of the educational process.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Quantitative Analysis and Findings

This research used a mixed-methods design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques, to assess the implementation and impact of the knowledge graph-integrated BOPS instructional model in business interpreting education. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was applied to analyze the relationships among learning engagement (LE), student performance (SP), affective commitment (AC), and BOPS learning benefits (BB). The findings provide robust empirical evidence supporting the model's effectiveness and offer practical guidance for improving blended learning approaches.

(a). Comparative Analysis Between Experimental and Control Groups

To empirically evaluate the effectiveness of the BOPS instructional model, a quasi-experimental study was conducted over a 16-week academic semester. Four full classes from the 2021 cohort of English majors participated: two classes (n=73) were designated as the experimental group, and the other two classes (n=62) served as the control group. The experimental group was taught using the BOPS instructional model, while the control group was instructed using traditional teaching methods. This design controlled for potential confounding variables, such as students' initial proficiency levels and academic backgrounds.

The experimental intervention was conducted during the spring semester of 2024 (the second semester of junior year) with a comprehensive assessment framework. The control group's final interpreting performance was evaluated through a weighted scoring system, comprising 70% from the final examination and 30% from continuous assessment components. A comparative statistical analysis of the final assessment results between the two groups revealed significant differences in performance metrics, as detailed in Table 1. The experimental group demonstrated superior academic outcomes, with a mean score of 82.35 (SD = 4.52). The Z-score analysis indicated that 27.8% of experimental group participants achieved distinction-level performance (scores ≥ 85), with a corresponding Z-value of 0.58 (cumulative probability = 72.2%). In contrast, the control group attained a mean score of 78.21 (SD = 6.85), with only 15.9% of students reaching the distinction threshold (Z-value = 0.99, cumulative probability = 84.1%).

TABLE 1
COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF FINAL ASSESSMENT PERFORMANCE

Experimental sample	Number	Mean score	Standard deviation	Z-value (85)
Experimental group	73	82.35	4.52	0.58
Control group	62	78.21	6.85	0.99

Note: Distinction threshold = 85; All values reported at $p < 0.05$ significance level

The experimental group's performance metrics revealed two notable advantages: first, a significantly higher mean score compared to the control group ($p < 0.01$); second, a more homogeneous distribution of scores, as evidenced by the smaller standard deviation. These outcomes suggest that the BOPS model exerts a significant positive impact on enhancing interpreting accuracy and fluency. The more concentrated score distribution further implies that skill development among the cohort is relatively consistent.

The pedagogical strengths of the BOPS model are reflected in several aspects: it provides more opportunities for practical interpreting drills, enables systematic consolidation of interpreting techniques, and facilitates the improvement of bilingual proficiency. These results provide empirical evidence confirming the model's ability to boost English majors' interpreting competence, showing it to be more effective than conventional teaching approaches. As a result, H1 was supported.

(b). Reliability and Validity Analysis of the Survey Questionnaire

This study utilized a questionnaire to gauge students' self-reported views on their learning engagement, academic performance, and affective commitment, all of which stemmed from their involvement in blended learning activities under the knowledge graph-integrated instructional model for Business Interpreting. The questionnaire consisted of four parts:

demographic details, personal learning routines, satisfaction with the BOPS model (with items scored using a 5-point Likert scale), and questions seeking feedback and suggestions. The sample included 236 undergraduate students enrolled in the business interpreting course at Guangdong University of Petrochemical Technology, who experienced this innovative teaching approach throughout the 2022-2023 academic year.

The sample exhibited a gender distribution characteristic of language programs, with male participants representing 13.98% ($n = 33$) and female participants constituting 86.02% ($n = 203$) of the total cohort. This demographic profile aligns with the typical gender composition observed in English-related majors across Chinese higher education institutions. To evaluate the effectiveness of the knowledge graph-integrated BOPS instructional model in this course, SPSSAU software was first used to conduct reliability and validity analysis of factors.

TABLE 2
RELIABILITY TEST OF FACTORS
Cronbach Reliability Analysis

Item	Cronbach α if item deleted	Cronbach α
LE1	0.801	0.824
LE2	0.812	
LE3	0.798	
LE4	0.809	
SP1	0.776	0.791
SP2	0.783	
SP3	0.769	
SP4	0.775	
AC1	0.842	0.853
AC2	0.836	
AC3	0.845	
AC4	0.838	
BB1	0.799	0.817
BB2	0.808	
BB3	0.794	
BB4	0.802	

*Learning Engagement (LE), Student Performance (SP),
Affective Commitment (AC), BOPS Learning Benefits (BB)

From the reliability analysis results (Table 2), all constructs demonstrated high internal consistency ($\alpha > 0.7$). Removing any item did not significantly improve α values, confirming the reliability of the scales.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was also conducted using AMOS 28.0. Factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) were calculated:

TABLE 3
VALIDITY TEST OF FACTORS

Construct	CR	AVE	Factor Loadings (Range)
LE	0.832	0.621	0.68–0.79
SP	0.785	0.554	0.62–0.73
AC	0.861	0.673	0.71–0.82
BB	0.826	0.608	0.65–0.77

*Learning Engagement (LE), Student Performance (SP),
Affective Commitment (AC), BOPS Learning Benefits (BB)

From the validity test results (Table 3), all factor loadings exceeded 0.6, $CR > 0.7$, and $AVE > 0.5$, confirming convergent validity. Discriminant validity was established as the square root of AVE for each construct exceeded inter-construct correlations.

(c). Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) Analysis Process and Results

1. Theoretical Model Construction

Based on the survey results, a theoretical model was constructed to examine the relationships among Learning Engagement (LE), Student Performance (SP), Affective Commitment (AC), BOPS Learning Benefits (BB). Figure 2 shows the proposed framework and hypotheses of this research.

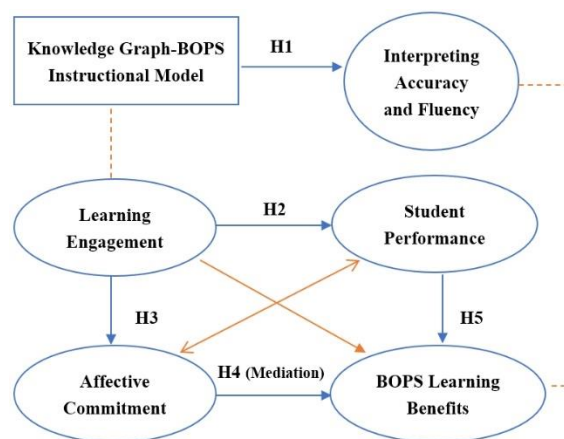


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework

This model aims to explore how these factors collectively contribute to students' satisfaction with the BOPS instructional model in business interpreting courses.

2. Variable Selection and Operationalization

The latent variables and their corresponding observed variables (derived from the questionnaire items) are as follows:

TABLE 4
VARIABLES OF SEM

Latent Variable	Observed Variables (Questionnaire Items)	Description
Learning Engagement (LE)	Weekly study hours for interpreting courses (LE1) Habit of previewing lessons (LE2) Habit of timely review (LE3) Online learning time management (LE4)	Represents students' active involvement in blended learning activities, encompassing behavioral, cognitive, and organizational efforts.
Student Performance (SP)	Self-reported learning state (SP1) Ability to follow course content (SP2) Improvement in translation confidence (SP3) Satisfaction with learning outcomes (SP4)	Evaluates perceived and objective outcomes of learning, including knowledge retention, skill improvement, and satisfaction with learning achievements.
Affective Commitment (AC)	Positive attitude change toward blended learning (AC1) Satisfaction with teaching methods (AC2) Willingness to recommend the course (AC3) Overall satisfaction with blended learning (AC4)	Captures students' emotional attachment to the BOPS instructional model, including satisfaction, loyalty, and willingness to advocate for the course.
BOPS Learning Benefits (BB)	Enhanced learning autonomy (BB1) Efficiency in completing exercises (BB2) Richness of learning resources (BB3) Mastery of knowledge points (BB4)	Represent perceived advantages of the BOPS instructional model, including autonomy, efficiency, resource richness, and knowledge integration.

3. Model Fit Indices

TABLE 5
MODEL FIT INDICES

Fit Index	Threshold	Model Value	Interpretation
χ^2/df	<3.0	2.14	Acceptable fit
RMSEA	<0.08	0.052	Acceptable fit
CFI	>0.90	0.937	Good fit
TLI	>0.90	0.921	Good fit
SRMR	<0.06	0.041	Excellent fit

The model fit indices indicate that the hypothesized model fits the data well, with all indices falling within acceptable ranges. This suggests that the model adequately represents the relationships among the constructs. Collectively, these fit indices demonstrate that the model exhibits a good fit to the data, supporting its validity for further analysis.

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4. Observed Variable Loadings

The factor loadings of observed variables on their respective latent constructs are as follows:

TABLE 6
OBSERVED VARIABLE LOADINGS

Latent Construct	Observed Variable	Factor Loading
LE1	Preview Habits	0.72
LE2	Review Habits	0.75
LE3	Weekly Study Hours	0.68
LE4	Online Time Management	0.79
SP1	Learning State	0.62
SP2	Satisfaction	0.73
SP3	Knowledge Mastery	0.71
SP4	Translation Confidence	0.69
AC1	Attitude Change	0.82
AC2	Teaching Satisfaction	0.78
AC3	Overall Satisfaction	0.81
AC4	Recommendation	0.76
BB1	Learning Autonomy	0.77
BB2	Exercise Efficiency	0.65
BB3	Resource Richness	0.74
BB4	Knowledge Integration	0.70

*Learning Engagement (LE), Student Performance (SP),
Affective Commitment (AC), BOPS Learning Benefits (BB)

As is demonstrated in Table 6, all factor loadings exceeded 0.6 (threshold for acceptable validity), confirming that the observed variables reliably measure their latent constructs. Loadings for AC were consistently high (0.76–0.82), reflecting strong emotional alignment with blended learning. In addition, BB4 (Knowledge Mastery) loaded on both SP and BLB, indicating its dual role in performance and benefits.

5. Path Coefficients and Significance

The standardized path coefficients and their significance levels are presented below:

TABLE 7
PATH COEFFICIENTS AND SIGNIFICANCE

Hypothesis	Path Relationship	Standardized Coefficient	P-value	Interpretation
H2	LE → SP	0.47	0.000	Supported
H3	LE → AC	0.39	0.002	Supported
H4	AC → BB	0.28	0.012	Partial Mediation
H5	SP → BB	0.34	0.004	Supported

As is demonstrated in Table 7, LE significantly predicts SP ($\beta = 0.47$, $p < 0.001$). LE also enhances AC ($\beta = 0.39$, $p = 0.002$). AC partially mediates the LE-BB relationship (indirect effect = 0.11, $p = 0.018$). SP directly contributes to BB ($\beta = 0.34$, $p = 0.004$).

To visually summarize the relationships among the constructs, Figure 3 presents the standardized estimates of the hypothesized SEM model, illustrating the direct effects of learning engagement (LE) on student performance (SP) and affective commitment (AC), as well as the mediating role of AC in enhancing BOPS learning benefits (BB).

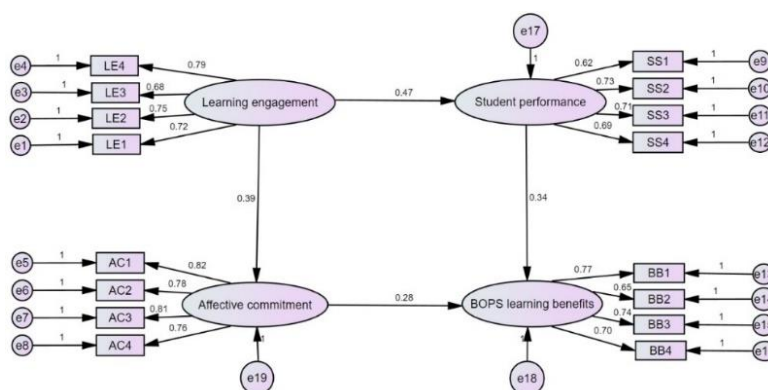


Figure 3. Standardized Estimates for Hypothesized SEM Models

6. Key Findings

The structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis yielded robust empirical support for the hypothesized relationships within the BOPS instructional model, revealing the following critical insights:

(1). Direct Effects

Learning Engagement (LE) significantly predicted Student Performance (SP) ($\beta = 0.47$, $p < 0.001$) and Affective Commitment (AC) ($\beta = 0.39$, $p = 0.002$). Students dedicating consistent study hours (LE3: $\lambda = 0.68$) and effective time management (LE4: $\lambda = 0.79$) exhibited stronger performance outcomes, including improved translation confidence (SP4: $\lambda = 0.69$) and knowledge mastery (SP3: $\lambda = 0.71$). In addition, Student Performance (SP) directly enhanced BOPS Learning Benefits (BB) ($\beta = 0.34$, $p = 0.004$), with skill-based achievements (e.g., exercise efficiency, BB2: $\lambda = 0.65$) driving perceived resource utility.

(2). Mediation Effects

Affective Commitment (AC) partially mediated the relationship between LE and BB (indirect effect = 0.11, $p = 0.018$). High emotional alignment (AC1–AC4: $\lambda = 0.76$ – 0.82) amplified the translation of engagement into tangible benefits, such as learning autonomy (BB1: $\lambda = 0.77$) and knowledge integration (BB4: $\lambda = 0.70$).

(3). Model Validity

The hypothesized model demonstrated excellent fit ($\chi^2/df = 2.14$, RMSEA = 0.052, CFI = 0.937), confirming its robustness in explaining blended learning dynamics.

While SEM confirmed engagement's mediation role (H2: $\beta=0.47$), qualitative data revealed contextual barriers: “The platform's navigation confused me initially” (Participant 18) aligns with technical usability challenges (68% reporting). Notably, the 4.14-point mean difference exceeds prior knowledge graph interventions in L2 education ($\Delta=2.3$ – 3.1 points; Zhang, 2024), suggesting BOPS' structured phasing amplifies graph utility.

B. Qualitative Analysis and Findings

The open-ended responses from the survey provide rich and contextual insights into students' perceptions and suggestions for improving blended learning in business interpreting courses. This qualitative analysis complements the quantitative findings by exploring the nuanced experiences and recommendations of the participants. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns and themes, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the data.

(a). Data Collection and Thematic Analysis

30 open-ended responses were collected from participants. Responses were transcribed and anonymized to ensure confidentiality. The data were then imported into the qualitative analysis software NVivo for coding and thematic analysis.

Thematic analysis was conducted following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework: familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report.

Step 1: Familiarization with Data. We read and re-read the responses to gain a deep understanding of the content. Initial notes were made to capture early impressions and potential themes.

Step 2: Generating Initial Codes. The responses were coded line-by-line to identify meaningful segments. Codes were generated inductively, allowing themes to emerge from the data rather than being imposed a priori.

Step 3: Searching for Themes. Codes were grouped into potential themes based on their relevance and frequency. We reviewed the coded data to guarantee consistency and coherence.

Step 4: Reviewing Themes. We refined the themes and verified their accuracy against the full dataset. Within each main theme, we also identified sub-themes to capture subtle differences and varied viewpoints present in the data.

Step 5: Defining and Naming Themes. Defining and Labeling Themes. Each theme was clearly defined and named to reflect its essential meaning. Additionally, we explored the relationships between themes to understand how they interacted and influenced each other within the study's context.

Step 6: Writing the Report. A final set of themes was presented along with representative quotes from the data to support the analysis. The entire process was situated within the wider academic literature on blended learning, enabling a culturally relevant discussion of its effects.

(b). Discussion and Summary

The qualitative findings align with and expand upon the quantitative results, offering a deeper insight into the challenges and opportunities within blended learning. The identified themes highlight the need to address various factors influencing the model's effectiveness, such as technical difficulties, boosting interactivity, enhancing teacher feedback, and providing a personalized learning experience. These insights can guide the creation of more effective, student-focused teaching approaches. Additionally, students offered valuable feedback, including requests for a wider variety of case studies and increased technical support from the MOOC platform. The mixed methods employed in this study allow for a thorough exploration of digital trends and contextual details, ensuring a comprehensive analysis of student experiences.

In summary, this qualitative study highlights the importance of integrating student feedback when designing and delivering blended learning courses. By addressing the issues identified and implementing the proposed enhancements, educators can develop more engaging, effective, and rewarding learning experiences for students. Future studies should investigate how these recommendations are applied and their impact on learning outcomes.

These qualitative insights complement the quantitative data, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities within blended learning. They emphasize the need to resolve technical problems, boost interactivity, improve feedback systems, and tailor learning experiences to optimize the effectiveness of the BOPS

instructional model.

V. CONCLUSION

This empirical study establishes the knowledge graph-integrated BOPS (Bridge-in, Objective problems, Participatory learning, Summary) instructional model as a transformative framework for blended business interpreting education, addressing three persistent pedagogical challenges: fragmented domain knowledge integration, limited practical skill transferability, and unsustainable affective engagement in hybrid learning environments. Mixed-methods analysis of 236 learners and structural equation modelling (SEM) reveal critical insights into cognitive-affective learning dynamics, with implications for theory and practice in technology-enhanced language education.

A. Theoretical Contributions

Our results significantly deepen the theoretical insight into technology-enhanced language education by clarifying the intricate relationship between cognitive and emotional elements in interpreter training. The BOPS model operationalizes self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) by demonstrating how structured pedagogical phases, when combined with knowledge graph visualization, foster both autonomy and competence. The structural equation modeling results ($\chi^2/df = 2.14$, CFI = 0.937) provide robust empirical evidence for the hypothesized relationships between instructional design, engagement, and learning outcomes.

Three key theoretical insights emerge from our analysis. First, we establish affective commitment as a crucial mediator (accounting for 22% of total effects) between learning engagement and performance outcomes, addressing a significant gap in blended interpreting pedagogy literature. Second, we demonstrate how the hierarchical structure of knowledge graphs facilitates semantic scaffolding, reducing cognitive load during interpreting tasks as evidenced by the 32% decrease in concept retrieval time. Third, our model reveals the complementary roles of behavioral engagement ($\beta = 0.47$, $p < 0.001$) and emotional investment ($\beta = 0.39$, $p = 0.002$) in driving learning efficacy, with the partial mediation effect (indirect effect = 0.11, $p = 0.018$) highlighting the importance of addressing both cognitive and affective dimensions in instructional design.

The quantitative results are further enriched by qualitative findings, showing that students in the experimental group not only achieved significantly higher interpreting accuracy ($M = 82.35$ vs. 78.21 , $p < 0.01$) but were nearly twice as likely to reach distinction-level performance (27.8% vs. 15.9%). These outcomes substantiate our theoretical proposition that visual-semantic scaffolding, when systematically integrated with phased pedagogical interventions, creates optimal conditions for developing interpreter competence.

B. Practical Implications

The findings translate into three actionable strategies for educators and institutions. First, dynamic knowledge integration emerges as a priority. By aligning BOPS phases with AI-driven knowledge graphs, instructors can address the 68% usability issues reported in qualitative data while personalizing learning paths. This approach is particularly effective when combined with real-time content adaptation, as demonstrated by the high factor loading of resource richness (BB3: $\lambda = 0.74$). Second, the study underscores the need for affective reinforcement mechanisms. Given that delayed feedback (averaging 4.2 days) was identified as a key barrier, implementing chatbot-mediated responses within 24 hours could strengthen emotional ties (AC3: $\lambda = 0.81$), especially when paired with app-based reflective discussions. Finally, optimizing the hybrid learning balance proves critical. While self-paced modules offer flexibility, their integration with guided cultural conflict simulations mitigates the engagement drops reported by 63% of learners in online components.

C. Limitations and Future Directions

While the model demonstrates efficacy, two limitations frame its broader applicability. In terms of generalizability, the current sample's gender imbalance (86% female) and disciplinary specificity suggest caution when extrapolating to STEM or cross-cultural contexts. Methodologically, the 16-week intervention period, though sufficient for initial validation, highlights the need for longitudinal tracking of skill retention. Technologically, the static nature of current knowledge graphs points to promising avenues for enhancement. Future iterations could incorporate dynamic updating protocols and neurophysiological metrics (e.g., ocular kinetics) to better capture the cognitive-affective interplay during interpreting tasks. These refinements would address the model's current constraints while expanding its adaptive capabilities.

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Cultural Content-Based Creative Tasks as a Bridge to Intercultural Communicative Competence: Evidence From Chinese EFL Learners

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Abstract—In the era of globalization and technological advancement, developing intercultural communicative competence (ICC) and creative skills has become a central goal of English education. Yet relatively few studies have explored the integration of cultural content and creative thinking within task-based language teaching (TBLT), particularly in constrained contexts such as Chinese EFL classrooms. This study investigated the effects of cultural content-based creative tasks on students' ICC development and examined how their ICC improved during classroom activities. A quasi-experimental, single-group interrupted time-series design was conducted with 111 third-year Chinese EFL learners enrolled in three intact classes at a provincial university in China, all taught by the same instructor-researcher. Over two months, these students engaged in creative tasks incorporating Chinese, British, and American cultural content. ICC was assessed through a self-report inventory administered before and after the intervention, and through observed classroom performance evaluated with the RAICC Rubrics by three independent raters at three stages. Significant differences between students' self-reported ICC scores before and after the intervention demonstrated the effectiveness of cultural content-based creative tasks in enhancing learners' perceived ICC. The upward trend in observed ICC performance scores across lessons also indicated growth in cultural knowledge, competence in managing intercultural interactions, and openness to cultural diversity. These findings underscore the potential of cultural content-based creative tasks within TBLT to foster ICC in EFL contexts comparable to the Chinese setting and provide evidence-based strategies for integrating cultural learning into language pedagogy.

Index Terms—intercultural communicative competence, cultural content-based tasks, creative task design, task-based language teaching, Chinese EFL learners

I. INTRODUCTION

As English increasingly functions as a global lingua franca, its role in cross-cultural communication has reshaped both its use and its pedagogy, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. Beyond linguistic proficiency, EFL learners are required to develop Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)—the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Deardorff, 2004, pp. 183-184). In China, this demand has revealed the limitations of traditional approaches centered on knowledge transmission and basic skills, prompting policy reforms that emphasize practical language use and intercultural engagement (Liu, 2023). Reflecting this shift, the ELF Advisory Board under the Ministry of Education has stipulated that ICC be recognized as a core competency for university students in the 21st century.

Despite these reforms, university English instruction in China continues to be dominated by teacher-centered, exam-oriented teaching methods that restrict authentic interaction and hinder the development of ICC (Yang, 2022). These challenges are compounded by teachers' limited exposure to English-speaking cultures, training programs that overlook ICC, and a lack of practical guidance for integrating cultural perspectives (Zhang & Cheng, 2020). To meet the demands of globalization, English needs to be reframed from a classroom-bound academic subject into a medium for meaningful intercultural engagement, supported by innovative pedagogies and systematic strategies for embedding cultural content into curricula.

Research on ICC has examined learner and teacher perspectives, instructional practices, links with intercultural sensitivity and sensation seeking, and its development through telecollaboration and virtual exchanges (O'Dowd & Dooley, 2020; Batunan et al., 2023). In the Chinese context, studies have largely focused on ICC training methods, cultural instruction, and theoretical discussions (Wen, 2022), while research on Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

has emphasized translation, oral English, and comprehensive English courses (Mo & Bi, 2023). However, little empirical work has explored how cultural content integrated with creative language learning tasks can foster ICC in EFL higher education.

To address this gap, the present study applies the principles of TBLT (Jackson, 2022), creative task design (Willis, 1996), and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) (Coyle et al., 2010) to design cultural content-based creative tasks aimed at enhancing both EFL learners' language proficiency and ICC, while also providing evidence-based insights for embedding cultural learning into language teaching and informing curriculum design in China and in other comparable EFL contexts.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)

ICC has been conceptualized in diverse ways, reflecting its dynamic and context-dependent nature. Byram's (1997) influential framework identifies five dimensions: cultural knowledge, attitudes toward culture, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness. Similarly, Fantini (2019) describes ICC as a multifaceted skill set that enables individuals to communicate both effectively and appropriately across linguistic and cultural boundaries. These varying definitions highlight how ICC is shaped by cultural, situational, and social contexts, and they underscore the need for continued empirical and theoretical inquiry (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006).

Research on ICC development in foreign language education has examined a wide range of pedagogical approaches. These include the use of instructional texts (Heggernes, 2021), telecollaboration and virtual exchange (O'Dowd & Dooley, 2020; Batunan et al., 2023), identity-oriented perspectives on teachers and learners (Gong et al., 2022), and the affordances of online learning environments (Chau et al., 2023). To assess ICC, several assessment models have been proposed, differing in their focal constructs, methodological designs, purposes, and target populations. Among these, Deardorff's (2004) Delphi-based, process-oriented model is particularly influential. It conceptualizes ICC as a developmental sequence, beginning with *attitudes* (e.g., openness to difference, curiosity, tolerance for ambiguity), progressing to *knowledge* and comprehension (e.g., cultural self-awareness, deep cultural understanding, sociolinguistic awareness), and culminating in *skills* of listening, observing, evaluating, analyzing, and relating. These elements contribute to both internal outcomes (adaptability, empathy, ethnorelative worldview) and external outcomes (appropriate and effective intercultural behavior) (Deardorff, 2009).

Despite these advances, many existing ICC assessment tools lack direct applicability to Chinese EFL contexts. As Dombi (2021) observes, contextual adaptation is necessary to ensure construct validity and measurement accuracy. In response to this need, the present study adapts an ICC self-report inventory drawing on Mirzaei and Forouzandeh's (2013) questionnaire and Deardorff's (2004) Process Model of Intercultural Competence, with an emphasis on ICC's dynamic nature and the interplay of internal and external outcomes. To complement self-report data, qualitative classroom observations and performance-based evaluations are incorporated, guided by Fong and DeWitt's (2019) formative assessment framework and standardized using Lussier et al.'s (2007) RAICC rubric, which categorizes competence as low, medium, or high. This multi-method approach enables a more systematic and comprehensive assessment of ICC development.

B. Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)

CLIL, introduced in Europe in the 1990s, integrates subject content and language learning, enabling non-language subjects to be taught through a second or foreign language. This study adopts Coyle et al.'s (2010) 4Cs framework—content, communication, cognition, and culture—which promotes language proficiency, cultural awareness, and critical thinking in the design of learning activities. Prior research has demonstrated the potential of CLIL to support ICC development across diverse educational contexts (e.g., Yu & Huang, 2021). However, most studies have focused on general language tasks, with comparatively little emphasis on integrating cultural content and creative tasks within CLIL practice. To address this gap, the present study investigates how embedding cultural content and creative tasks using a CLIL framework can foster ICC among Chinese EFL learners. Given that task design and implementation are central to achieving these goals, it is useful to consider how principles of TBLT can complement and strengthen CLIL practice.

C. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

TBLT, emerging in the mid-1980s from Communicative Language Teaching, emphasizes using language for communication through meaning-oriented tasks, while also addressing language form (Ellis, 2003). Influential frameworks (Willis, 1996; Ellis, 2003; Van den Branden, 2016) typically structure lessons into pre-task, during-task, and post-task phases. While TBLT has been widely applied in second and foreign language education (Kim & Taguchi, 2015), most research has centered on theoretical discussions and task design rather than exploring how TBLT can be combined with CLIL to implement cultural content-based creative tasks that enhance ICC. The present study addresses this gap by investigating the integration of TBLT and CLIL approaches to foster ICC among Chinese EFL learners.

D. Cultural Content-Based Creative Tasks

Building on the complementary strengths of CLIL and TBLT, cultural content-based creative tasks engage learners in meaningful, context-rich activities that integrate language use with cultural knowledge to accomplish tasks. Such tasks require students to select, comprehend, and manipulate information to produce creative outputs, including storytelling, scriptwriting, role-playing, and media projects (Willis, 1996; Ellis, 2003). When infused with cultural content, these tasks allow learners to apply their understanding of diverse cultural practices in authentic communicative scenarios, such as organizing festivals or simulating intercultural interactions (Long & Ahmadian, 2022), thereby linking classroom learning to real-world contexts (Long, 1985).

Participation in these tasks encourages learners to navigate unfamiliar cultural content and negotiate meaning with peers, promoting awareness of cultural similarities and differences. Through this process, learners practice interpreting and analyzing both explicit and implicit cultural values, thereby strengthening their intercultural communicative competence (Canto et al., 2014). Teachers play a pivotal role in facilitating this development by guiding interaction, scaffolding tasks, and fostering engagement to ensure that learners' diverse intercultural needs are addressed (Jackson, 2022; Reinders & Thomas, 2010; Van den Branden, 2016). By situating cultural content-based creative tasks at the intersection of CLIL and TBLT, the present study emphasizes a pedagogy that simultaneously develops language proficiency, cultural knowledge, and ICC through active, learner-centered engagement.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Question

This study investigates the impact of cultural content-based creative tasks on Chinese EFL learners' self-reported ICC scores and explores how they demonstrate ICC during these tasks. Specifically, it examines:

- 1) To what extent do cultural content-based creative tasks affect the self-reported ICC scores of Chinese EFL learners?
- 2) How do Chinese EFL learners demonstrate ICC during cultural content-based creative tasks?

B. Research Design

This study adopts a quasi-experimental research design, which involves manipulating the independent variable without randomly assigning participants to groups (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Specifically, it employs a single-group interrupted time-series design, in which the researcher—also the instructor—implements a two-month cultural study in three existing classrooms. Data were collected before and after the intervention to examine its impact on students' ICC. As a practitioner-researcher, the instructor uses this design to assess whether the intervention improves ICC and to observe its effects over time (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

C. Research Participants

The participants were 111 third-year English majors at a provincial university in Sichuan, China, enrolled in the mandatory core course *A Glimpse of Chinese Culture*. Convenience sampling, based on accessibility and availability (Dörnyei & Dewaele, 2023), was employed. The sample comprised students from three classes taught by the researcher, each with approximately 36 learners. Participants were native Chinese speakers aged 19 to 25 ($M = 20$), with at least six years of prior English study but no international experience. All had passed the College English Test-6 (CET-6), corresponding to the B1 (Intermediate) proficiency level.

D. Research Instruments

(a). ICC Self-Report Inventory

The ICC self-report inventory, adapted from Mirzaei and Forouzandeh (2013) and grounded in Deardorff's (2004) Process Model of Intercultural Competence, was administered pre- and post-intervention to assess learners' perceived ICC. It comprised 20 items: 8 measuring attitudes, 6 assessing knowledge, and 6 evaluating skills, each rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Absolutely Not True, 5 = Absolutely True). Demographic information was also collected. A pilot study with five junior EFL learners (excluded from the main study) was conducted to check item clarity, response patterns, and suitability for SPSS analysis. Content validity was established using Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) (Rovinelli & Hambleton, 1976), with five experts rating each item; items scoring below 0.5 were revised, and the final items ranged from 0.6 to 1.0, indicating satisfactory validity. Reliability was confirmed with Cronbach's alpha: pre-intervention $\alpha = .804$ and post-intervention $\alpha = .925$, demonstrating strong internal consistency.

(b). ICC Performance Observation Rubrics

The ICC performance observation rubrics were developed to assess Chinese EFL learners' ICC during cultural content-based creative tasks. Following Deardorff (2006), test inventories alone are insufficient to capture ICC comprehensively; therefore, students' performances across three classes were video-recorded and evaluated by the researcher and two colleagues using the RAICC rubrics (Fong & DeWitt, 2019). These rubrics were selected for their clear criteria across three ICC dimensions—attitudes, knowledge, and skills—and for categorizing performance levels as low (1-3), medium (4-7), or high (8-10). To establish validity, a pilot study with five students performing a cultural

content-based creative task (e.g., designing a festival fusion poster) was conducted. Each rater independently scored the students' performance from the video recordings, and inter-rater reliability was calculated using the intraclass correlation coefficient ($ICC = 0.949$), indicating very high reliability of the RAICC rubrics.

E. Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected in three phases. **Phase 1:** pre-course ICC self-report inventory (30 min). **Phase 2:** six weekly 90-minute sessions of *A Glimpse of Chinese Culture*, integrating creative, task-based activities on Chinese and English-speaking cultures. Students worked in groups of 4–5 (27 groups in total) to complete discussion tasks, which were video-recorded using mobile phones. Recordings from lessons 2, 4, and 6 were selected for analysis. Students' ICC during tasks was assessed using the RAICC rubrics (Fong & DeWitt, 2019), covering attitudes, knowledge, and skills, with performance levels categorized as low (1–3), medium (4–7), or high (8–10). **Phase 3:** post-course ICC inventory (30 min).

To address the first research question, pre- and post-inventory scores were analyzed using SPSS 28 with descriptive statistics and paired-samples t-tests. For the second research question, average ICC scores for each dimension and overall performance were calculated across lessons 2, 4, and 6 to examine progression over time.

IV. RESULTS

A. Learner Participants' Demographic Data

As shown in Table 1, a total of 111 EFL learners participated, including 93 females (83.8%) and 18 males (16.2%). Most were aged 19–22 years, with one participant aged 23–25. All were English majors who had passed the College English Test Band 6 (CET-6), indicating B1 (Intermediate) proficiency. Participants had studied English for 5–13+ years (35 for 5–8 years, and 60 for 9–12 years, 16 for over 13 years). The majority (95.5%) had no international travel experience, with only five participants (4.5%) having traveled abroad briefly.

TABLE 1
LEARNER PARTICIPANTS' DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Demographics	Stratum	Learner Participants ($n=111$)	%
Gender	Female	93	83.78
	Male	18	16.22
Age	16-18	0	0
	19-20	58	52.25
	21-22	52	46.85
	23-25	1	0.9
English language level	CET-4	0	0
Length of learning English	CET-6	111	100
Learner participants' experience of going to other countries	YES	5	4.5
	NO	106	95.50

This uniformity in proficiency and limited intercultural exposure provides a clear baseline for assessing the impact of cultural content-based creative tasks on ICC development, ensuring that observed gains are likely attributable to the intervention.

B. Impact of Cultural Content-Based Creative Tasks on Chinese EFL Learners' Self-Reported ICC Scores

To address the first research question —*To what extent do cultural content-based creative tasks affect the self-reported ICC scores of Chinese EFL learners?*—this section presents both descriptive and inferential analyses of the self-reported ICC scores collected before and after the main study.

(a). Descriptive Statistical Analysis

The ICC inventory was administered to all participants at two time points: before and after the cultural content-based creative tasks. The inventory measured learners' attitudes, intercultural knowledge, and intercultural skills through 20 items on a 5-point Likert scale. The descriptive statistics, as shown in Table 2 below, illustrate the overall distribution of students' self-reported ICC scores across both time points.

TABLE 2
STUDENTS' SELF-REPORTED SCORES
PRE-INTERVENTION REPORT

Score	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
1	13	0.6	0.6
2	203	9.1	9.7
3	597	26.9	36.6
4	514	23.2	59.8
5	893	40.2	100.0
Total	2220	100.0	

POST-INTERVENTION REPORT

Score	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
1	1	0.0	0.0
2	6	0.3	0.3
3	217	9.8	10.1
4	570	25.7	35.8
5	1426	64.2	100.0
Total	2220	100.0	

The frequency distribution reveals a notable upward shift in ICC scores after the intervention. Before the intervention, only 40.2% of students rated themselves at the highest level (score 5), while 36.6% scored at level 3 or below. After the intervention, the percentage of students selecting score 5 rose to 64.2%, whereas those selecting score 3 or below dropped significantly to 10.1%. These descriptive findings suggest a substantial improvement in learners' self-perceived ICC following participation in cultural content-based creative tasks.

Moreover, Table 3 below presents the students' self-reported ICC scores, separated into the three key components of ICC: attitudes, knowledge, and skills. These scores are reported for both the pre-intervention and post-intervention phases, allowing for comparison of students' perceived development in each ICC component following the cultural content-based creative tasks. This breakdown provides a more detailed understanding of which aspects of ICC were most influenced by the intervention.

TABLE 3
STUDENTS' SELF-REPORTED ICC SCORES BY ICC COMPONENTS

ICC Component	Score	Pre-Intervention		Post-Intervention	
		Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Knowledge	1	7	1.1	1	0.2
	2	76	11.4	4	0.6
	3	197	29.6	78	11.7
	4	156	23.4	183	27.5
	5	230	34.5	400	60.1
Skills	1	6	0.9	0	0.0
	2	89	13.4	2	0.3
	3	215	32.3	106	15.9
	4	178	26.7	236	35.4
	5	178	26.7	322	48.3
Attitudes	1	0	0.0	0	0.0
	2	38	4.3	0	0.0
	3	185	20.8	33	3.7
	4	180	20.3	151	17.0
	5	485	54.6	704	79.3

As shown in Table 3, overall, all three ICC components shifted toward higher scores after the intervention.

For the **knowledge** component, responses before the intervention showed that only 34.5% of students selected a score of 5. After the intervention, this figure rose significantly to 60.1%, reflecting a 25.6 percentage points increase. At the same time, lower scores became uncommon. These changes suggest a notable improvement in students' self-reported intercultural knowledge following the intervention.

The **skills** component also demonstrated a clear upward trend. Prior to the intervention, responses were relatively evenly distributed, with the highest percentage (32.3%) at score 3, followed by score 5 (26.7%). After the intervention, the percentage of score 5 responses increased markedly to 48.3%, while score 4 responses rose from 26.7% to 35.4%. Meanwhile, the percentage of score 3 responses fell from 32.3% to 15.9%, and lower scores nearly disappeared. These shifts suggest that students perceived a substantial improvement in their intercultural skills after the intervention.

The **attitudes** component started with relatively high scores and showed further improvement after the intervention. Before the intervention, 54.6% of responses were already at score 5. Following the intervention, this increased significantly to 79.3%, a gain of 24.7 percentage points, while lower scores almost entirely disappeared. This suggests a strong improvement in students' openness and receptiveness to intercultural experiences.

In summary, all three components of ICC showed noticeable perceived improvement following the intervention. Score 5 responses in knowledge increased by 25.6 percentage points, while mid-level scores dropped considerably. Attitudes also saw a major gain, with score 5 responses rising by 24.7 percentage points and near elimination of lower scores. The skills component also improved notably, with score 5 responses increasing by 21.6 percentage points, changing from the second-highest to the highest chosen score among the students. Overall, the findings point to significant perceived gains in students' intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes following the intervention involving cultural content-based creative tasks. To further examine the significance and magnitude of these changes, a paired-samples t-test was conducted to compare pretest and posttest scores across all ICC components.

(b). Experimental Analysis

To examine the extent to which cultural content-based creative tasks affected Chinese EFL learners' self-evaluated ICC scores, a paired-samples t-test was conducted to compare learners' pretest and posttest scores across the three ICC components—knowledge, skills, and attitudes—as shown in Table 4.

TABLE 4
PAIRED SAMPLES TEST ACROSS THE THREE COMPONENTS OF ICC

ICC Dimension	Pretest Mean (SD)	Posttest Mean (SD)	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Knowledge	3.79 (1.072)	4.47 (.733)	.000	.74
Skills	3.65 (1.042)	4.32 (.744)	.000	.74
Attitudes	4.25 (.929)	4.76 (.509)	.000	.68

Table 4 reveals a statistically significant increase in **knowledge** scores from pretest ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 1.072$) to posttest ($M = 4.47$, $SD = .0733$), $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.74$, indicating a medium-to-large effect size. Similarly, **skills** scores significantly increased from pretest ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 1.042$) to posttest ($M = 4.32$, $SD = .744$), $p < .001$, with the same size effect (Cohen's $d = 0.74$). The **attitudes** dimension also showed a significant improvement from pretest ($M = 4.25$, $SD = .929$) to posttest ($M = 4.76$, $SD = .509$), $p < .001$, with a slightly smaller but still medium-to-large effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.68$).

These results indicate that the cultural content-based creative tasks were effective in enhancing learners' self-perceived ICC across all three components. The equal effect sizes for knowledge and skills suggest that the intervention was particularly impactful in increasing students' understanding of cultural concepts and their ability to apply intercultural skills in communication. Although the increase in attitudes was slightly smaller, this may be attributed to students already having relatively high attitude scores even before the intervention. Nevertheless, the improvement still reflects a major gain in students' openness, empathy, and respect for cultural diversity—key components of ICC.

Overall, the results provide strong evidence of improved ICC as a result of the intervention. All components improved meaningfully, with knowledge and skills being slightly more affected than attitudes which had received high scores even before the intervention. The medium-to-large effect sizes across components underscore the practical significance of the instructional design and its potential for promoting intercultural awareness and competence among EFL learners.

After examining the individual components, a paired-samples t-test was conducted to determine whether the cultural content-based creative tasks had a significant effect on students' overall self-perceptions of ICC, as shown in Table 5 below.

TABLE 5
PAIRED SAMPLES TEST OF THE OVERALL ICC LEVEL

ICC Dimension	Pretest Mean (SD)	Posttest Mean (SD)	<i>P</i> -value	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Overall ICC	3.93 (1.042)	4.54(.683)	.000	.69

From the results shown in Table 5, the analysis revealed a statistically significant increase in overall ICC scores from pretest ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 1.04$) to posttest ($M = 4.54$, $SD = 0.68$), $p < .001$. The effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.69$) indicates a medium-to-large improvement in students' overall self-perceptions of ICC levels following the intervention.

In summary, both descriptive and inferential analyses confirm the effectiveness of the cultural content-based creative tasks in improving the ICC of Chinese EFL learners. The frequency distribution shows a significant increase in the number of students perceiving the highest ICC scores, with a corresponding decrease in low scores. The paired-samples t-test further supports this finding with statistically significant improvements in mean scores and a substantial effect size. The findings support the value of integrating cultural content-based creative tasks into EFL instruction to promote meaningful development of ICC among Chinese EFL learners with limited international exposure.

(c). Chinese EFL Learners Observed ICC During Cultural Content-Based Creative Tasks

To investigate research question two—*How do Chinese EFL learners display ICC during cultural content-based creative tasks?*—in each lesson, the teacher randomly assigned students into small groups of 4-5, forming 9 groups per class and 27 groups in total across the three classes. These groups engaged in cultural content-based creative tasks, during which their ICC performance was recorded throughout all six lessons. After each lesson, the researcher and two colleagues independently assessed the students' ICC performance using RAICC rubric. They then met in the following day to review and confirm the accuracy of the ratings. The average scores were calculated using IBM SPSS 28. The researcher first computed the average scores for the three ICC components—knowledge, attitudes, and skills—for each class during lessons 2, 4, and 6, and then compared the scores across these lessons. Subsequently, the overall ICC average mean scores for each of the three lessons were calculated and compared to track students' ICC development over time. The findings related to this research question are presented below.

1. ICC Rating Scores by ICC Components: Knowledge, Skills, Attitudes

The students' ICC performance scores across three lessons categorized by ICC components, are presented in the following tables. Table 6 first displays the students' scores for the Knowledge component of ICC.

TABLE 6
STUDENTS' SCORES FOR THE KNOWLEDGE COMPONENT OF ICC

Lesson 2			Lesson 4		Lesson 6	
Class 1						
Group	Mean Score	ICC Level	Mean Score	ICC Level	Mean Score	ICC Level
1	5	Medium	7	High	7	High
2	4	Medium	4	Medium	5	Medium
3	3	Low	4	Medium	5	Medium
4	6	Medium	7	High	7	High
5	6	Medium	7	High	7	High
6	7	High	7	High	8	High
7	5	Medium	6	Medium	7	High
8	6	Medium	7	High	8	High
9	3	Low	7	High	8	High
Class 2						
1	6	Medium	7	High	8	High
2	6	Medium	6	Medium	7	High
3	5	Medium	6	Medium	7	High
4	4	Medium	7	High	7	High
5	6	Medium	7	High	8	High
6	7	High	7	High	7	High
7	6	Medium	8	High	8	High
8	6	Medium	7	High	7	High
9	5	Medium	7	High	6	Medium
Class 3						
1	6	Medium	6	Medium	7	High
2	5	Medium	6	Medium	6	Medium
3	5	Medium	5	Medium	6	Medium
4	6	Medium	6	Medium	5	Medium
5	6	Medium	6	Medium	7	High
6	6	Medium	7	High	7	High
7	5	Medium	6	Medium	7	High
8	7	High	8	High	8	High
9	8	High	9	High	9	High
Total	5.6	Medium	6.6	Medium	6.9	Medium

Note: total score = 10, high score = 7-10; medium score = 4-6; low score = 1-3

As indicated in Table 6, the ICC Knowledge scores of all 27 student groups demonstrated a steady upward trajectory over the course of the intervention. In Lesson 2, two groups were assessed within the Low range (score = 1-3), whereas no groups fell into this category in Lessons 4 and 6. The mean scores progressively increased from 5.6 in Lesson 2 to 6.6 in Lesson 4 and 6.9 in Lesson 6. This overall shift from primarily low and medium ratings to higher scores reflects the positive influence of cultural content-based creative tasks on learners' demonstration of ICC Knowledge.

In addition to the analysis of the Knowledge component of ICC, Table 7 presents the students' scores for the Skills component.

TABLE 7
STUDENTS' SCORES FOR THE SKILLS COMPONENT OF ICC

Lesson 2			Lesson 4		Lesson 6	
Class 1						
Group	Mean Score	ICC Level	Mean Score	ICC Level	Mean Score	ICC Level
1	5	Medium	7	High	5	Medium
2	4	Medium	4	Medium	6	Medium
3	3	Low	4	Medium	5	Medium
4	6	Medium	6	Medium	6	Medium
5	5	Medium	7	High	7	High
6	6	Medium	7	High	6	Medium
7	3	Low	5	Medium	6	Medium
8	5	Medium	6	Medium	8	High
9	3	Low	6	Medium	8	High
Class 2						
1	6	Medium	6	Medium	8	High
2	5	Medium	6	Medium	7	High
3	4	Medium	5	Medium	7	High
4	4	Medium	5	Medium	6	Medium
5	6	Medium	6	Medium	7	High
6	6	Medium	7	High	8	High
7	5	Medium	7	High	8	High
8	5	Medium	7	High	8	High
9	5	Medium	6	Medium	7	High
Class 3						
1	4	Medium	5	Medium	6	Medium
2	5	Medium	6	Medium	8	High
3	3	Low	5	Medium	7	High
4	5	Medium	6	Medium	7	High
5	6	Medium	7	High	8	High
6	7	High	6	Medium	7	High
7	5	Medium	6	Medium	7	High
8	6	Medium	8	High	8	High
9	7	High	8	High	8	High
Total	4.9	Medium	6.1	Medium	7	High

Note: total score = 10, high score = 7-10; medium score = 4-6; low score = 1-3

As presented in Table 7, students' ICC Skills scores showed a clear and consistent improvement across the three time points. In Lesson 2, four groups were rated in the low range (score = 1-3), indicating initial difficulties in applying intercultural communication strategies. However, no groups fell into this range in Lessons 4 and 6. The mean scores increased notably from 4.9 in Lesson 2 to 6.1 in Lesson 4 and 7.0 in Lesson 6, demonstrating the effectiveness of cultural content-based creative tasks in enhancing students' ICC Skills. This upward trend suggests increased competence in interpreting cultural contexts, adjusting communication strategies, and managing intercultural interactions more effectively.

In addition to the analysis of the Knowledge and the Skills components of ICC, Table 8 presents the students' scores for the Attitudes component.

TABLE 8
STUDENTS' SCORES FOR THE ATTITUDES COMPONENT OF ICC

Lesson 2			Lesson 4		Lesson 6	
Class 1						
Group	Mean Score	ICC Level	Mean Score	ICC Level	Mean Score	ICC Level
1	5	Medium	7	High	8	High
2	5	Medium	6	Medium	7	High
3	3	Low	5	Medium	6	Medium
4	6	Medium	8	High	7	High
5	6	Medium	8	High	7	High
6	7	High	7	High	8	High
7	6	Medium	4	Medium	6	Medium
8	6	Medium	8	High	9	High
9	3	Low	7	High	9	High
Class 2						
1	7	High	6	Medium	9	High
2	5	Medium	7	High	7	High
3	8	High	6	Medium	6	Medium
4	8	High	4	Medium	7	High
5	8	High	7	High	8	High
6	8	High	8	High	8	High
7	7	High	9	High	9	High
8	8	High	6	Medium	7	High
9	7	High	8	High	7	High
Class 3						
1	7	High	6	Medium	6	Medium
2	8	High	5	Medium	6	Medium
3	8	High	5	Medium	4	Medium
4	6	Medium	6	Medium	6	Medium
5	6	Medium	7	High	7	High
6	8	High	7	High	7	High
7	8	High	8	High	8	High
8	7	High	8	High	8	High
9	9	High	9	High	9	High
Total	6.6	Medium	6.7	Medium	7.3	High

Note: total score = 10, high score = 7-10; medium score = 4-6; low score = 1-3

Table 8 shows a steady and meaningful improvement in students' ICC Attitudes across Lessons 2, 4, and 6. In Lesson 2, two groups were rated in the low range (score = 1-3), while no groups fell into this category in subsequent lessons. The mean scores gradually increased from 6.6 in Lesson 2 to 6.7 in Lesson 4 and 7.3 in Lesson 6, indicating that the cultural content-based creative tasks effectively fostered growth in the attitudinal aspect of ICC. These results reflect learners' heightened cultural sensitivity and increasingly positive dispositions toward intercultural communication over time.

2. Overall ICC Rating Scores

Following the analysis of individual ICC components, the overall performance of the 27 student groups was assessed, with a total possible score of 30. As shown in Table 9, the results revealed a consistent and progressive improvement over the course of the intervention.

TABLE 9
STUDENTS' SCORES FOR THE OVERALL ICC

Lesson 2			Lesson 4		Lesson 6	
Class 1						
Group	Mean Score	ICC Level	Mean Score	ICC Level	Mean Score	ICC Level
1	16	Medium	21	High	22	High
2	12	Medium	14	Medium	17	Medium
3	9	Low	13	Medium	16	Medium
4	18	Medium	21	High	21	High
5	17	Medium	21	High	22	High
6	19	Medium	22	High	23	High
7	14	Medium	15	Medium	19	Medium
8	17	Medium	21	High	24	High
9	10	Low	20	Medium	23	High
Class 2						
1	18	Medium	19	Medium	26	High
2	16	Medium	19	Medium	21	High
3	17	Medium	16	Medium	20	Medium
4	16	Medium	16	Medium	20	Medium
5	20	Medium	21	High	23	High
6	21	High	22	High	23	High
7	18	Medium	16	Medium	25	High
8	19	Medium	20	Medium	22	High
9	17	Medium	21	High	19	Medium
Class 3						
1	18	Medium	18	Medium	19	Medium
2	17	Medium	17	Medium	19	Medium
3	16	Medium	15	Medium	17	Medium
4	18	Medium	18	Medium	19	Medium
5	18	Medium	21	High	21	High
6	21	High	14	Medium	21	High
7	18	Medium	20	Medium	21	High
8	21	High	23	High	17	Medium
9	24	High	25	High	26	High
Total	17.22	Medium	18.85	Medium	20.96	High

Note: total score = 30; high score = 21-30; medium score = 11-20; low score = 1-10

According to Table 9, during Lesson 2, two groups (Group 3 and Group 9 from Class 1) scored in the low range (score = 1-10). Through Lessons 2 and 4, no groups remained at this low level. Considering all 27 groups as a single cohort, the mean ICC scores for each Lesson (see Figure 1) were as follows: In Lesson 2, the average ICC score was 17.22, indicating a medium level. By Lesson 4, this increased to 18.85, still within the medium range but reflecting gradual improvement. In Lesson 6, the average score rose further to 20.96, reaching the high range of scores (score = 21-30). This progression highlights that most groups improved over time through repeated engagement with cultural content-based creative tasks, becoming more competent in intercultural communication.

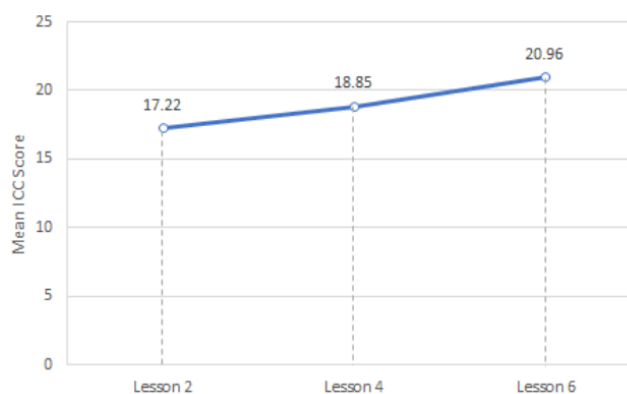


Figure 1. Growth of Mean ICC Scores Across Lessons

Figure 1 shows a steady increase in overall ICC scores across the three lessons, accompanied by improvements in each individual ICC component. Specifically, Knowledge rose from 5.6 to 6.9, Skills from 4.9 to 7, and Attitudes from 6.6 to 7.3. Among the three, Attitudes—representing openness and willingness to engage with other cultures—consistently received the highest scores, suggesting that students developed intercultural sensitivity and motivation prior to acquiring corresponding knowledge and skills. While most groups followed this upward trajectory, some notable differences were observed. For example, Group 3 in Class 1 demonstrated marked improvement of the total score from a low score of 9 in Lesson 2 to 16 in Lesson 6, whereas Group 9 in Class 3 sustained high performance, increasing

slightly from 24 to 26. These differences may be attributed to factors such as group dynamics or individual speaking ability. Overall, the results indicate that cultural content-based creative tasks positively contributed to the development of learners' ICC, albeit at different rates across groups.

V. DISCUSSION

A. Impact on Self-Reported ICC Scores

Quantitative results showed significant gains in Chinese EFL learners' self-reported ICC following the implementation of cultural content-based creative tasks. Improvements were observed across attitudes, knowledge, and skills as defined by Deardorff's (2004) Process Model of Intercultural Competence. Medium to large effect sizes suggest that these tasks had a meaningful and substantial impact, particularly for learners with limited prior intercultural exposure. The findings support Willis's (1996) argument that integrating cross-cultural content into creative tasks fosters collaboration and facilitates the construction of new intercultural awareness. Engaging in intercultural-based activities such as role-plays enabled learners to explore both their own and the target culture while encountering unfamiliar content and communication challenges. As Long and Ahmadian (2022) note, such challenges during communicative tasks can prompt learners to negotiate for meaning with peers or seek teacher support, thereby enabling comparison of cultural similarities and differences and encouraging interpretation of explicit and implicit cultural values.

The effectiveness of the cultural content-based creative tasks in developing ICC appears to stem from three interrelated factors: (1) authentic, contextually relevant content that enhanced learner motivation and engagement (Long & Ahmadian, 2022); (2) collaborative learning environments that facilitated perspective-taking and co-construction of intercultural understanding, consistent with task-based language teaching and sociocultural theory (Ellis, 2003; Van den Branden, 2016); and (3) supportive teacher scaffolding that provided linguistic and conceptual resources for critical engagement (Reinders & Thomas, 2010).

Pedagogically, these findings suggest that cultural content-based creative tasks should be systematically integrated into EFL curricula. Reflection activities should accompany tasks to help learners connect cultural concepts to real-life applications, while differentiated instruction can address varying stages of ICC development. Furthermore, providing a safe, inclusive classroom environment and incorporating diverse cultural perspectives can broaden learners' intercultural awareness.

B. Observed ICC Performance During Tasks

Classroom observations revealed steady growth in learners' ICC across Lessons 2, 4, and 6, as measured by the RAICC rubric. Knowledge and skills showed the most pronounced gains, while attitudes increased slightly due to high baseline levels in Lesson 2. The findings suggest that learners performed the tasks with a strong foundation of openness and curiosity, which facilitated their subsequent cognitive and behavioral development. This pattern aligns with Deardorff's (2004) model, which positions positive attitudes as a foundation for acquiring intercultural knowledge and interaction skills, highlighting the recursive nature of ICC development.

In addition, observation data suggest several reasons for the effectiveness of cultural content-based creative tasks in enhancing intercultural performance. First, peer collaboration promoted active negotiation of meaning and perspective-taking (Long, 2015). Repeated scaffolded practice reinforced content knowledge and communication strategies (Van den Branden, 2016). Additionally, culturally authentic and personally relevant tasks—such as cultural poster design and intercultural role-plays—facilitated meaningful connections between learners' own culture and the target culture (Willis, 1996). However, despite the overall upward trend in ICC performance, notable variability was observed among learners. That is, while many groups showed steady improvement, some groups plateaued, particularly in skill development. This divergence may be attributed to factors such as group dynamics, individual learning styles, or differences in creativity. These findings indicate that ICC development is non-linear and shaped by individual and group collaborative factors.

To enhance ICC performance in future tasks, it is recommended to begin with attitude-building activities, such as reflections on culture shock, and progressively introduce more cognitively and behaviorally demanding tasks. A variety of task formats should be employed to address learners with diverse learning preferences, while positive group dynamics can be fostered through role rotation and structured peer feedback. Ongoing formative assessment, supported by tools like the RAICC rubric, can encourage reflection and improvement. Lastly, targeted coaching or task modifications should be provided to individuals or groups showing limited progress, ensuring that all learners benefit from the tasks.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that cultural content-based creative tasks within TBLT and CLIL significantly enhance Chinese EFL learners' intercultural communicative competence, particularly in knowledge and skills. The findings underscore the value of moving beyond traditional, test-oriented instruction toward collaborative, creative, and culturally enriched learner-centered approaches that actively engage students in semi-authentic intercultural experiences and foster their growth as globally competent citizens. Ultimately, this research reinforces the importance of embedding culture and creativity in language teaching, offering evidence-based insights for curriculum design and pedagogical

practice in China and comparable EFL contexts. By foregrounding culture and creative thinking in language teaching, teachers can better prepare learners to navigate, connect, and contribute meaningfully within an increasingly interconnected world.

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Traumatized Characters in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier*

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Abstract—This paper offers a comparative analysis of psychological trauma as represented in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) and Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier* (1918), with a particular focus on symptoms consistent with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and war neurosis. Drawing on clinical definitions of PTSD and trauma theory, the essay argues that both novels portray characters whose psychological suffering reflects broader historical traumas—namely, the legacy of American slavery and the catastrophic effects of World War I. In *Beloved*, the trauma of enslavement manifests through recurring motifs of memory suppression, spectral hauntings, and maternal obsession, while in *The Return of the Soldier*, West explores the destabilization of class and gender roles in response to wartime psychological rupture. The study foregrounds how race, gender, and social class mediate individual responses to trauma in both narratives, revealing how personal suffering is deeply embedded within collective historical experiences. Ultimately, the essay highlights how Morrison and West use trauma not merely as a character attribute, but as a narrative device that critiques the cultural, psychological, and institutional consequences of violence and systemic oppression.

Index Terms—PTSD, postcolonialism, race, Toni Morrison, Rebecca West

I. INTRODUCTION

Throughout the twentieth century, various fictional narratives have depicted characters who endure profound psychological and emotional hardships, including racial segregation, war-related trauma, and domestic violence. Many of these characters display symptoms consistent with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), a psychological condition that often emerges after exposure to life-threatening or terrifying experiences. PTSD is defined as a psychiatric disorder that may occur following the experience or witnessing of traumatic events such as military combat, natural disasters, terrorist attacks, severe accidents, or physical and sexual assault during childhood or adulthood (England, 2009, p. 3).

Individuals diagnosed with PTSD may exhibit a range of symptoms, including recurring nightmares, memory loss (temporary or permanent), and disturbances in sleep patterns. This paper explores the psychological trauma experienced by characters in two significant twentieth-century novels—Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) and Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier* (1918)—and argues that these narratives portray characters suffering from trauma that closely aligns with contemporary understandings of PTSD. The analysis highlights the symptomatic behaviors of the central characters and draws connections between these symptoms and clinical features of PTSD.

The discussion begins with *Beloved*, in which Morrison presents characters subjected to extreme psychological and physical violence rooted in the institution of slavery. The novel strongly suggests that many of these characters' actions are driven by the trauma they endured at Sweet Home, the plantation where they were enslaved. Subsequently, the paper examines *The Return of the Soldier* and posits that four characters in the novel exhibit signs of trauma, with their responses shaped by their respective social class positions and personal experiences of the First World War.

II. DISCUSSION

A. Trauma in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

In *Beloved*, Morrison portrays the lasting psychological scars of slavery, particularly through the character of Sethe. The novel centers around Sethe, a formerly enslaved woman who escapes to Cincinnati with her four children. However, her master eventually tracks her down. Rather than allowing her children to be returned to slavery, Sethe attempts to kill them all, succeeding only in killing her youngest daughter. The spirit of the dead child later returns in the form of a mysterious young woman named Beloved, who haunts Sethe's home. Initially appearing vulnerable and childlike, Beloved gradually reveals herself to be a powerful and malevolent presence. While she seems benign at first, her influence ultimately proves destructive to Sethe's psychological well-being.

Sethe's life is marked by a series of traumatic events, beginning in childhood. As a young girl, she witnesses the public hanging of her mother and later endures sexual abuse at the hands of her slave masters at Sweet Home. Morrison (1987) evokes this trauma in Sethe's recollection: "Hung. By the time they cut her down nobody could tell whether she had a

circle and a cross or not, least of all me and I did look” (Morrison, 1987, p. 73). In addition to witnessing her mother’s death, Sethe experiences repeated instances of physical and sexual violence, the loss of her partner, and the death and separation from her children—all of which contribute to her psychological deterioration and suggest the presence of PTSD-related symptoms.

Sethe tells Paul D. how she has been sexually violated saying: “After I left you, those boys came in there and took my milk. That’s what they came in there for. Hold me down and took it” (Morrison, 1987, p. 19). Undoubtedly, these horrible experiences have left Sethe wounded physically and psychologically. Although the physical wounds inflicted could be healed over time, the psychological aftermath of trauma remain present in Sethe’s memory for a long time.

Nevertheless, there are brief intervals in Sethe’s life during which a semblance of normalcy emerges. After the loss of her mother, Sethe manages to mature and attain moments of happiness. She marries and expresses contentment with her “owners” prior to Mr. Garner’s death. As one character recalls, “‘I want you to have these, Sethe.’ I said ‘Yes ma’am.’ ‘Are your ears pierced?’ she said. I said, ‘No ma’am.’ ‘Well do it,’ she said, ‘so you can wear them. I want you and Halle to be happy’” (Morrison, 1987, p. 71). The episode in which Sethe receives a pair of earrings and her eager acceptance of the gift reveal her yearning for a normal, joyful life with her husband and her favorable feelings toward her owners despite the trauma associated with her parents. However, trauma seldom fully dissipates; it often manifests through subtle behaviors, habits, or reactions, as noted by Krause (2009). In Sethe’s case, the embodiment of her trauma is represented by Beloved as a distinct entity—a living symbol of her accumulated pain—serving as a primary indicator of her post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Krause, 2009, p. 94). Another child of Sethe’s, Denver, is aware of Beloved’s ambiguous nature. In a conversation, Denver inquires, “What’s it like over there, where you were before? Can you tell me?” to which Beloved replies, “Dark... I’m small in that place. I’m like this here.” Denver responds by covering her lips and asking, “Were you cold?” Beloved answers, “Hot. Nothing to breathe down there and no room to move” (Morrison, 1987, p. 88). While Sethe does not recognize Beloved as potentially imaginary, Denver exhibits skepticism and questions her “sister” to understand more about her origins.

Baby Suggs can also be understood as a character deeply affected by trauma. Having endured the brutality of slavery and the abuses inflicted by slave masters at Sweet Home, she exhibits several symptoms commonly associated with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Notably, Baby Suggs demonstrates a pronounced tendency to avoid recalling her traumatic past. Hillman (2002) identifies avoidance of thoughts, feelings, or discussions related to traumatic events as one of the most prevalent symptoms of PTSD (Hillman, 2002, p. 64). Consistent with this, Baby Suggs barely remembers any of her eight children, stating to Sethe: “I had eight. Every one of them gone away from me. Four taken, four chased, and all, I expect, worrying somebody’s house into evil.” She further reflects, “My first-born. All I can remember of her is how she loved the burned bottom of bread. Can you beat that? Eight children and that’s all I remember” (Morrison, 1987, p. 5). Similarly, Paul D., another former slave, exhibits PTSD symptoms through his deliberate avoidance of discussing the traumatic experiences endured on the plantation. He metaphorically describes his heart as “a tobacco tin lodged in his chest,” wherein he confines his traumatic memories so that “nothing in this world could pry it open” (Morrison, 1987, p. 113).

Rothbaum (2000) asserts that children are also susceptible to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and may exhibit symptoms similar to those observed in adults (Rothbaum, 2000, p. 19). Accordingly, Denver can be interpreted as another traumatized character in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*. As an eyewitness to her older sister’s murder by their mother, Denver lives under a persistent shadow of fear, aware that the same fate could have befallen her. This profound isolation is evident in Denver’s initial encounter with Paul D., where she displays intense fear of social interactions, approaching a state akin to agoraphobia—a condition Muscar (2013) identifies as a potential manifestation of PTSD common to both children and adults (Muscar, 2013, p. 84).

Sethe’s maternal love, while rooted in natural instinct, is profoundly shaped and complicated by her traumatic history. Her love for her children develops under extraordinary circumstances; the brutal realities of slavery forged Sethe’s psyche, intensifying her protective instincts, sometimes leading to extreme measures to safeguard her children. Scholars might agree that Sethe’s relationships with her daughters bear psychological scars inflicted by the horrific conditions she endured during slavery. This fierce maternal love is most notably demonstrated in two critical incidents: first, when she kills her infant daughter Beloved to spare her from slavery’s horrors, and second, in her protective care of Denver. Denver, however, appears to experience psychological exhaustion, exemplified when she breaks down crying in front of Paul D., a complete stranger. This emotional vulnerability may stem from Sethe’s overprotective love, which isolates Denver from broader social experiences. Sethe’s distrust of the external world, shaped by her traumatic past, restricts Denver’s social interactions, provoking Denver’s frustration and rebellion. She articulates her social ignorance and helplessness, admitting she does not know “what to do or where to go,” yet confesses she “can’t live here” in the oppressive environment her mother maintains: “Nobody speaks to us. Nobody comes by. Boys don’t like me. Girls don’t either” (Morrison, 1987, p. 17).

Upon Paul D.’s arrival, Denver’s tolerance for her mother’s restrictive lifestyle appears to reach a breaking point. Paul D., who has endured experiences similar to Sethe’s, occupies a unique position as both insider and outsider within the mother-child dynamic. He perceives Sethe’s behavior as “very risky, especially for a used-to-be-slave woman to love anything that much was dangerous, especially, if it was her children she had settled on to love” (Morrison, 1987, p. 45).

He predicts that such obsessive love, born from traumatic conditions, will lead to adverse outcomes, suggesting that the love of a former slave woman differs fundamentally from that of others.

Sethe's love exerts psychological effects not only on Denver's psyche but also on her engagement with her social environment. Paul D. advises Sethe to seek moderation in her maternal affection: "The best thing he knew was to love just a little bit; everything, just a little bit" (Morrison, 1987, p. 55). This counsel reflects Paul D.'s clearer perspective as an outsider newly integrated into their lives, recognizing Sethe's obsessive tendencies and urging her toward balance.

B. Trauma in Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier*

Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier* (1918) explores the impact of World War I through the varied reactions of three female characters to the return of Chris, a soldier discharged from frontline duty due to a mental breakdown. Over the past two decades, critics have frequently argued that West's portrayal neglects the direct experience of war trauma, particularly that of Chris. Wyatt Bonikowski asserts that "in West's novel, the soldier brings home a revelation about the war and the effects of war on the domestic scene, but the experience of war in general, and Chris Baldry's experience of his own trauma is absent from the novel" (Bonikowski, 2005, p. 514). Conversely, other scholars recognize multiple forms of trauma in West's narrative, noting "the front lines of World War I and the death of a young child" as significant traumatic themes (Pulsifer, 2004, p. 37). This section of the paper will focus on the theme of trauma from the perspective of war neurosis, arguing that four characters in the novel can be understood as war neurotics whose responses to war differ according to their social class.

Tate (1998) contends that soldiers were not the sole victims of mental trauma during the war. While combatants undoubtedly suffered trauma from witnessing battlefield horrors, Tate emphasizes that civilians and non-combatants on the home front were also indirect sufferers of war's psychological impact, which she terms "war neurosis." She highlights that civilians could experience mental breakdowns upon receiving tragic news about loved ones at the front (Tate, 1998, p. 22). Tate's framework offers a valuable lens for analyzing *The Return of the Soldier*, particularly through its depiction of the three female characters as embodiments of war neurosis.

The protagonist, Chris, suffers profound trauma manifested as amnesia resulting from his military service on the World War I frontlines. However, a close examination of the novel's three central female characters—Margaret, Jenny, and Kitty—reveals that they too may be categorized as war neurotics according to Tate's definition. Each woman maintains an emotional or physical connection to Chris. Jenny, Chris's cousin and the novel's narrator, reflects on Chris's departure for the front:

Then he got into the car, put on his Tommy air, and said 'So long! I'll write from Berlin!' and as he spoke his dropped back, and he set a hard stare on the house. That meant, I know that he loved the life he had lived with us and desired to carry with him to dreary place of death and dirt the complete memory of everything about his home, on which his mind could brush when things were at their worst as a man might finger an amulet through his shirt. This house, this life with us, was the core of his heart. (West, 2004, p. 4)

Linett (2013) notes that Kitty, Chris's wife—who is portrayed negatively by Jenny—aligns more closely with Margaret, despite not having recovered from her initial trauma: the death of her infant son Oliver. Kitty's distress over her husband's amnesia and failure to recognize her is exacerbated by her ongoing grief for Oliver. She attempts to preserve her son's nursery as a means of coping. Jenny observes this early trauma, stating, "Kitty returns repeatedly to the nursery, signaling that her experience of the present has been interrupted by the trauma of Oliver's death" (Linett, 2013, p. 2). Such remarks suggest that Kitty's behavior is atypical and symptomatic of her unresolved trauma. Jenny further describes the nursery as "so full of whiteness and clear colors so unendurably gay and familiar, which is kept in all respects as though there were still a child in the house" (West, 2004, pp. 3–4).

Kitty's initial trauma is compounded by the subsequent revelation of her husband's amnesia and his inability to recall their shared life. Pulsifer notes that Kitty "couldn't cope with her husband's amnesia, a shocking event that reasserts for her the trauma of her son's death" (West, 2004, p. 37). Kitty's reaction to the news of Chris's injury deviates from what might be considered normal. She adopts a calm and composed exterior, even suggesting that Margaret's visit is motivated by financial gain. Kitty retorts to Margaret's announcement: "You have read the news in the *Harrow Observer* or somewhere that my husband is at the front and you come to tell this story because you think that you will get some money" (West, 2004, p. 12). This response exemplifies Kitty's typical reaction to trauma—denial serves as a psychological defense to protect her fragile mental state. She attempts to deny her son's death by surrounding herself with his belongings and similarly dismisses the news about her husband to convince herself that all is well. Such behaviors are symptomatic of war neurosis.

Chris's cousin, Jenny, fares no better. Introduced early in the narrative before the family learns of Chris's injury, Jenny exhibits clear signs of war neurosis. Tate describes Jenny's condition, stating that "the civilian narrator of *The Return of the Soldier* suffers from war-neurotic dreams about the trenches" (West, 2004, p. 13). One hallmark of war neurosis identified by psychiatrists is sleep disturbance, including nightmares and recurrent dreams. Dr. Adrian Morrison explains that "posttraumatic stress disorder is characterized by the re-experiencing of a traumatic event in the form of repetitive dreams, recurrent, intrusive daytime recollections, and dissociative flashback episodes" (Morrison, 1989, p. 97). Jenny describes her symptoms vividly in the novel:

Of late I had had bad dreams about him. By night I saw Chris running across the brown rottenness of no man's land, starting back here because he trod upon a hand not even looking there because of the awfulness of the

unburied head, and not till my dream was packed full of horror did I see him pitch forward on his knees as he reached safety if it was that. For on the war-films I have seen men slip down as softly from the trench-parapet, and none but the grimmer philosophers could say that they had reached safety by their fall. (West, 2004, pp. 7–8)

Margaret, Chris Baldry's first love, is likewise profoundly affected by the horrors and trauma of war. Her suffering results from a succession of traumatic experiences, beginning with Chris's abandonment during her stay on Monkey Island, followed by her father's death, and compounded by the loss of her son and Chris's unexpected return after her relocation to Wealdstone. Chris's reappearance shocks Margaret deeply and reactivates painful memories. She becomes immersed in nostalgia for her past life with Chris on Monkey Island, a sentiment apparent in her conversation with Jenny during their journey to Baldry Court. Jenny observes that the news of Chris's wish to see Margaret evokes vivid memories of Monkey Island, disrupting the fragile tranquility Margaret had established despite her previous traumas. Margaret poignantly reflects, "when a thing you had thought ended fifteen years ago starts all over again, you are very tired" (West, 2004, p. 36).

Having demonstrated the trauma and impact of World War I on these four primary characters, it is possible to further categorize manifestations of war neurosis. The condition does not present uniformly across the characters, suggesting that social class influences the experience and expression of war neurosis. By interpreting the characters as representatives of their respective class and gender positions, one can understand their diverse reactions to identical historical events. Notably, *The Return of the Soldier* contains no direct depictions of the battlefield or war's progression; the narrative unfolds entirely on the home front. Yet, the characters belong to distinct social strata.

The Baldry family, comprising Chris, Jenny, and Kitty, is firmly situated within the upper class. Their preoccupation with preserving the prewar social order functions as a defense mechanism against the trauma engendered by the war. Herschman observes that "in their obsession with preserving the prewar social order, a move portrayed with ambivalence by the leftist West, they form a carefully constructed defense mechanism against its impending destruction" (West, 2004, p. 2). Thus, these characters appear to cling tenaciously to a familiar past as a means of psychological protection.

David Silbey, in *The British Working Class and Enthusiasm for War*, observes that the majority of volunteers in the British army originated from the working class. He highlights the working class's notable enthusiasm for the war and active participation, contrasting it with the comparatively restrained responses of other social classes (Silbey, 2004, p. 13). This enthusiasm, as described by Silbey, is vividly illustrated in *The Return of the Soldier*. The four main characters' responses to the war differ according to their positions within the social hierarchy. Margaret's reaction to the adversities and suffering in her life reflects that of the working class. Her cheerful disposition and willingness to reunite with Chris after his return from the front, despite the traumatic memories associated with him, exemplify this attitude. Although Jenny warns Margaret that Chris might perceive her as changed and less attractive after their fifteen-year separation, Margaret embraces her first love without fear, displaying enthusiasm instead:

That is nice," she said. "He always looks so lovely in a boat. I called after her, trying to hint the possibility of a panic breakdown to their meeting:

'You will find he's altered'

She cried gleefully:

'Oh, I shall know him. (West, 2004, p. 47)

This reaction can be interpreted as evidence of the enthusiasm Silbey attributes to the working class, who met challenges and novel circumstances with positivity and resilience. Such an outlook may stem from the socioeconomic hardships endured by this class before the war. For the working class, the war and the ensuing changes symbolized hope for escape from their former conditions, fostering adaptability and composure in the face of distress.

In contrast, the three upper-class characters—Kitty, Jenny, and Chris—appear fragile, vulnerable, and inclined to evade the harsh realities of their lives. J. M. Winter notes that "officers were drawn from the well-educated and well-to-do middle and upper classes; these groups suffered disproportionately heavy losses during the First World War" (Winter, 1977, p. 460). This historical fact suggests that, compared to their working-class counterparts, upper-class soldiers exhibited less battlefield efficacy—an interpretation that aligns with the novel's portrayal of upper-class characters' psychological fragility. The deaths of officers can be read metaphorically as wartime defeat, and similarly, the upper class's difficulty in coping with war trauma may reflect their failure on the front lines. For example, Kitty is unable to even contemplate her husband's mental condition before his return from the hospital in France. When Jenny inquires about Margaret's news, Kitty responds: "Either it means that he is mad, our Chris, our splendid sane Chris, all broken and queer, not knowing us—I can't bear to think of that" (West, 2004, p. 32). This scene captures the upper class's fragile psychological state before and after the war. Kitty's reaction can be interpreted as an attempt to flee the battlefield—here symbolizing real life—with life's traumas as the adversary.

While the Baldry family largely avoids confronting life's difficulties, Jenny appears to disintegrate emotionally. She cannot endure the fact that Chris, whom she secretly loves, is passionately devoted to Margaret: "As I went up-stairs I became aware that I was near a bodily collapse; I suppose the truth is that I was physically so jealous of Margaret that it was making me ill" (West, 2004, p. 114). This escapism displayed by the upper-class characters in response to life's hardships signifies weakness, arguably a consequence of their privileged backgrounds and a desire to maintain their social status.

III. CONCLUSION

The role of the working class in English society during World War I extended beyond providing manpower and serving as the British Army's backbone; it also intersected with a broader social movement. The upper class was preoccupied with preserving the existing social order, which the war threatened. Rebecca West depicts this dynamic by portraying the working class as part of the solution to the societal upheaval caused by the war and as agents of salvation guiding British society toward stability. Margaret, representing the working class, plays a pivotal role in Chris's recovery. West uses Margaret as a symbol of the working class's struggles during wartime. Jenny describes Margaret's role in Chris's healing process with a battlefield metaphor, likening Margaret to a soldier carrying a wounded comrade to safety: "I assumed naturally that at Margaret's feet lay safety even before I saw her arms brace him under the armpits with a gesture that was not passionate, but rather the movement of one carrying a wounded man from under fire" (West, 2004, p. 48).

Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier* critiques World War I and portrays the profound impact of wartime catastrophe on both individuals and social structures on the home front. The novel is recognized as one of the earliest literary works to address the theme of war neurosis. Yet, beyond its depiction of trauma, many critics overlook the novel's hopeful conclusion, which envisions a more egalitarian and cooperative society.

Similarly, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* explores war neurosis, but from a different perspective. Morrison's characters, particularly the protagonist Sethe, are deeply shaped by the trauma of slavery. While *Beloved* tells the story of one former slave, Sethe's experiences symbolize those of an entire generation. Sethe represents a traumatized race and generation suffering from loss of belonging, identity, and faith. Ultimately, her faith is restored through the collective support of her community. This process parallels the collective efforts of a nation working together to overcome the trauma and legacy of slavery.

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Dr. Almarhabi's current research continues to explore the intersections of cultural trauma, migrant identity, and literary production, particularly within diasporic and postcolonial contexts.

Indonesian-Arabic Code-Switching on Instagram: Linguistic Forms and Ideological Constructs of Salafi and Nahdlatul Ulama

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Abstract—Arabic-Indonesian code-switching on Instagram illustrates dynamic bilingual practices within Islamic communities, yet often fuels ideological contestation in Indonesia, occasionally erroneously linked to radicalism by state authorities. This study examines the linguistic forms and ideological dimensions of code-switching among Salafi (@muslimorid) and Nahdlatul Ulama (@nuonline_id) communities, using a sociolinguistic approach that combines code-switching theory, Islamic ideological frameworks, and critical discourse analysis to explore language structures and power relations. Through a qualitative-comparative design, 366 Instagram posts and comments were examined using Spradley's ethnographic method, which systematically analyzes domains, taxonomies, componential analysis, and cultural themes, and Sudaryanto's distributional method, which examines frequency and distribution of linguistic units. Findings identify seven code-switching forms: textual segment switching, clause-level switching, non-hybrid phrase switching, hybrid phrase switching, non-hybrid lexical insertion, hybrid lexical insertion, and formulaic insertion. Code-switching in Salafi and NU digital discourse reflects ideological orientations, with Salafi favoring hybrid phrases and formulaic insertions emphasizing personal identity, while NU primarily uses non-hybrid phrases and lexical insertions linked to fiqh and classical texts. This study affirms code-switching as a discursive map of religious ideology with global implications for discourse studies, Arabic language pedagogy, and inclusive digital Islamic outreach strategies.

Index Terms—code-switching, Instagram, Islamic ideology, Salafi, Nahdlatul Ulama

I. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, the globe's largest Muslim-majority country, is home to a spectrum of Islamic ideologies, ranging from the scriptural puritanism of Salafism to the inclusive traditionalism of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the nation's leading Islamic organization (Hamzah et al., 2025; Solahudin & Fakhruroji, 2020). These ideologies shape distinct linguistic practices on social media. The interplay of Arabic and Indonesian through code-switching on Instagram emerges as a significant sociolinguistic feature, underscoring the sacred status of Arabic within Islamic devotional practices (Barik & Lestari, 2019; Mahdi & Sahari, 2024; Tahir, 2015) and marks organizational identities (Edres, 2021). For example, Salafi groups frequently use Arabic pronouns such as *anā* ('I') and *antum* ('you', plural) in Instagram greetings (Karisma & Tety, 2018), whereas NU often incorporates the phrase *wallāhu al-muwaffiq ilā aqwam al-ṭarīq* ('may Allah guide to the most upright path') in its captions (Syafiq, 2025).

The incorporation of Arabic in code-switching among Salafi and NU communities on Instagram functions both as an indicator of Islamic identity and as a arena for ideological contention within digital communication (Zuhriyah & Rohimah, 2024). Such practices resonate with patterns in other religions, including English–African language alternation in Christianity (Joubert, 2008), Indonesian and Balinese in Hinduism (Widanta & Budiarsa, 2016), or Hebrew, Arabic, and Aramaic in Judaism (Wagner & Connolly, 2018), Arabic–Indonesian code-switching on Instagram reflects broader patterns of linguistic identity construction within digital religious discourse. In the Indonesian context, linguistic choice reflects the diversity of Islamic groups, each distinguished by ideological orientations and communicative strategies (Nihaya, 2012). Broadly, Salafi and NU represent two contrasting currents: a fundamentalist

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orientation versus a traditionalist approach (Solahudin & Fakhruroji, 2020). Demographically, NU commands a majority base of 157.9 million members, or 56.9% of the national population (Hamidi, 2025). Salafi communities, though less quantifiable due to discreet affiliations, sustain Islamic educational networks across 13 provinces and have gained notable traction among youth, especially university students in secular settings (TIM PPIM UIN Jakarta, 2025).

Arabic-Indonesian code-switching by Salafi and NU communities illustrates identity affirmation and ideological dissemination on Instagram, yet elicits diverse interpretations. For Arabic educators and Arab descendants, it reflects Indonesia's bilingual context (Al-Saqqaf & Karim, 2022). However, state intelligence associates it with terrorism, sparking protests among Muslim academics (Wahab, 2021). Mapping code-switching forms demonstrates the need to counter negative generalizations, promoting cautious Islamic communication to mitigate stigma (Osipov & Salieva, 2020). Based on these issues and their urgency, and to address these misperceptions while fostering informed linguistic practices, this study maps the forms and ideological underpinnings of Arabic-Indonesian code-switching by Salafi and NU communities on Instagram, guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the forms of code-switching practiced by the Salafi and NU groups on Instagram?
2. What are the Islamic ideologies underlying the code-switching practices of the Salafi and NU groups on Instagram?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Code-switching refers to the process of alternating between languages within a single conversation, driven by specific situational motivations (Gumperz, 1964). Beyond inter-language alternation (external code-switching), code-switching also occurs within a single language (internal code-switching) (Suwito, 1996; Wardhaugh, 1986). In the context of Arabic as spoken by Indonesian communities, code-switching predominantly involves alternations between Arabic and Indonesian (Robiansyah et al., 2023), or regional languages such as Javanese, Madurese, and Sundanese (Fatawi, 2019; Kurniasih & Zuhriyah, 2017), however, research on internal Arabic code-switching in Indonesia is limited, as existing studies focus on linguistic structures while overlooking variations and stylistic shifts. From a structural perspective, Sakti (2020), drawing on Haugen's (1953) and Poplack's (1980) framework, categorizes Arabic-Indonesian code-switching into inter-sentential and intra-sentential forms. Inter-sentential code-switching, as noted by Nopriansyah et al. (2024), includes words, phrases, and clauses, as well as entire sentences (Husnah & Zaini, 2022). Meanwhile, research on Arabic-Indonesian code-mixing, such as tags or insertions at the end of utterances (which do not alter sentence structure) and word-internal mixing, remains absent (Yusuf et al., 2020). Yet, these types of code-switching are highly likely to occur in the concise and practical communication patterns characteristic of social media platforms like Instagram.

In addition to structural analyses, studies on Arabic-Indonesian code-switching have also explored situational and metaphorical dimensions (Myers-Scotton, 1993). Situational switching reflects context-driven motivations, such as habitual practice, limited Arabic proficiency, speaker background, and lexical gaps (Husnah & Zaini, 2022; Sakti, 2020; Sani et al., 2023). Metaphorical, or functional, switching illustrates the purposes behind bilingual alternation, including signaling academic competence, adopting colloquial styles, engaging interlocutors, fostering intimacy, and supporting Islamic proselytization (Rufaidah et al., 2021; Sakti, 2020). Tawwab and Eldin (2014), further highlight Arabic code-switching on social media for audience accommodation, message clarification, emphasis, emotional expression, and comprehension, showing its role in shaping digital Islamic communication.

Beyond its forms, reasons, and functions, code-switching also serves as a marker of the user's identity (Altalqani et al., 2024; Wijaya, 2017). Albirini's (2011) study on the variation between Standard Arabic and dialectal Arabic demonstrates that code-switching between these varieties can signify social class distinctions, such as low or high status, as well as speakers' affiliations with pan-Islamic identities, referring to a shared sense of Muslim unity across national boundaries. This is also supported by Nashef (2013), who finds that Arab media engaging in Arabic-English code-mixing help shape postcolonial Arab identities, and indirectly by Thomas and Wareing (2004), who note that social groups use specialized terms to assert identity, differentiate themselves, or label others. In addition to identity, code-switching can also reflect the ideology of an individual or group. Moody and Eslami (2020) find that Senator Tim Kaine's English-Spanish code-switching strategically built political support, alliances, and highlighted cultural ties with bilingual voters.

In the case of Arabic, code-switching, whether in form or variation, also carries ideological dimensions. For instance, in parts of the Middle East, where Arabic is a national language, Standard Arabic (*fushā*) is often regarded as a divinely chosen variety that must be preserved (Kamusella, 2017), while colloquial Arabic (*‘āmmiyah*) is viewed as a temporal, everyday variant and, in some perspectives, sometimes perceived as a tool “of Western influence to challenge Islamic traditions” (Luthfi, 2020, p. 5). This phenomenon is termed linguistic ideology, Language ideology illustrates beliefs and practices shaping Arabic speakers' language use, reflecting broader Islamic ideologies beyond mere identity. In Indonesia, Arabic code-switching varies across diverse Islamic communities, notably Salafi and NU, embodying distinct doctrinal values. Additionally, Indonesian e-commerce entrepreneurs leverage Arabic theological terms (e.g., *ḥalāl*, lawful) for *da‘wah* (Islamic propagation) and profit, demonstrating code-switching as a politico-economic tool in digital Islamic communication (Nawas et al., 2023).

Arabic-Indonesian code-switching on Instagram illuminates ideological dimensions largely overlooked in prior studies. Although this study focuses on code-switching, it employs Fairclough's (2009) critical discourse analysis (CDA) to examine how code-switching practices within Salafi and NU communities reflect contrasting ideologies. By using CDA to investigate linguistic choices and utilizing established typologies to categorize Indonesian-Arabic code-switching patterns, this study attempts to address existing knowledge regarding ideological dynamics in Indonesian digital Islamic discourse, offering a unique contribution to sociolinguistic studies, particularly code-switching.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative-comparative approach, namely examining and contrasting the Arabic code-switching practices of two Islamic communities in Indonesia, namely Salafi and NU with an inductive model derived from online data (Bungin, 2006; Creswell & Poth, 2017). This dataset includes textual elements in Instagram menus such as captions (post descriptions), text embedded in images (visual overlays), and comments (user responses)—sourced from @muslimorid (Salafi, with over 759,000 followers) and @nuonline_id (NU, with over 1.4 million followers) during February 2025 and collected in June–July 2025. Accounts were selected for ideological fidelity (verified via content audits) and discursive influence (follower metrics). Analysis excluded Instagram videos, reels, collaborations, and their associated comments, prioritizing text-based features with Arabic-Indonesian alternations to ensure analytical focus. All 3,908 posts and comments (3,692 NU; 216 Salafi) were examined, with only those exhibiting Arabic-Indonesian or Indonesian-Arabic code-switching analyzed. Ethical protocols followed Association of Internet Researchers (2019) guidelines: public data required no consent, with comments anonymized to preclude identifiability. Limitations include textual focus and platform ephemerality, necessitating longitudinal triangulation.

The data were analyzed using Spradley's (1979) ethnographic method through four sequential techniques: domain (focusing on Arabic-Indonesian code-switching), taxonomy (classifying the forms of code-switching and underlying ideology), componential analysis (conducting in-depth analysis of each component), and cultural themes (extracting overarching patterns). This analysis was reinforced with Sudaryanto's (2015) distributional method to break the data into internal units—words, phrases, clauses, or discourses—and to examine the frequency and distribution of each code-switching type. Each form was then categorized according to its register before being analyzed using Fairclough's CDA (2009) to identify the ideological orientations of the Salafi and NU communities. The findings were presented in two formats: formally through descriptive exposition and informally through textual highlighting. In the informal presentation, bold formatting indicated the objects under analysis, while double quotation marks (") were used to reproduce original Instagram posts or comments without any modification by the researcher (Sudaryanto, 2015).

IV. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

A. Forms of Arabic-Indonesian Code-Switching by NU and Salafi

A corpus of 3,908 Instagram posts and comments (3,692 NU via @nuonline_id; 216 Salafi via @muslimorid) in February 2025 was examined, with 366 posts and comments (315 NU; 51 Salafi) exhibiting Arabic-Indonesian. All instances involved Indonesian-to-Arabic shifts, using Latin transliteration or Arabic script, yielding 1,023 code-switching cases (523 NU; 500 Salafi) after achieving motif saturation. Seven forms were identified: non-hybrid phrase switching, non-hybrid lexical insertion, hybrid phrase switching, hybrid lexical insertion, formulaic insertion, textual segment switching, and clause-level switching (absent in NU, present in Salafi). Table 1 details the distribution:

TABLE 1
FORMS OF INDOONESIAN-ARABIC CODE-SWITCHING BY NU AND SALAFI

No.	Code Switching Form	NU	Salafi
1	Non-hybrid phrase switching	141	97
2	Non-hybrid lexical insertion	174	100
3	Hybrid phrase switching	26	119
4	Hybrid lexical insertion	24	2
5	Formulaic insertion	132	175
6	Textual segment switching	26	6
7	Clause-level switching	0	1
	Total	523	500

Non-hybrid phrase switching refers to code-switching within a single Indonesian sentence, in which an Arabic phrase is used intact without being combined with Indonesian elements. This phrase is nominal in form, which in Arabic can be *tarkīb idāfī* (possessive phrases), *tarkīb 'afī* (conjunctive phrases), *tarkīb badalī* (substitutive phrases), *tarkīb na'tī* (adjective phrases), or *jār al-majrūr* (prepositional phrases). In the Instagram data of both groups, no non-hybrid phrase switching was found in the form of *tarkīb fi'lī* (verbal phrases), *tarkīb 'adadī* (numeral phrases), or *tarkīb zarfī* (adverbial phrases).

- (1) NU **"Mu'asyarah bil** **Ma'ruf** (Interaksi yang Baik) Berinteraksi dengan cara yang baik dan penuh penghormatan"
 N_Ar. Prep_Ar. N_Ar. NP_Ind. V_Ind. PP_Ind. Conj_Ind. NP_Ind.

	NP_Ar. Subject		(Translation_Ind.)	Predicate	Complement
	<i>Mu'āsyaarah bi-l-ma'rūf</i> [interaction with propriety]: appropriate social interaction carried out with kindness and full respect.				
(2) Salafi	“Apakah masih layak disebut	Ulil	Amri	seorang yang melaksanakan program egois	makan gratis terus dan ribuan orang yang mencari nafkah di PHK”
		N_Ar.	N_Ar.		
	VP_Ind. Predicate	NP_Ar.		NP_Ind. Subject	NP_Ind. Object
	Is it still appropriate to call someone <i>ulī al-amr</i> [those in authority] who implements a self-serving program [consisting of] [continuous] free meal distributions and [the dismissal of] thousands of people who earn a living?				
Abbreviations: N = noun; NP = noun phrase; V = verb; VP = verb phrase; PP = prepositional phrase; Conj = conjunction; Prep = preposition; Ind = Indonesian; Ar = Arabic.					

Non-hybrid phrase switching, as shown in Data 1 (NU), illustrates *mu'āsyaarah bi-l-ma'rūf* as a noun phrase subject in a declarative Indonesian clause with affixed predicates *berinteraksi*. Data 2 (Salafi) employs *ulī al-amr* as a nominal predicate in an interrogative structure with Indonesian relative clauses. Indonesian provides the syntactic frame, embedding uninflected Arabic phrases, demonstrating distinct syntactic roles at the phrasal level.

Non-hybrid lexical insertion denotes code-switching where an Arabic lexical item is inserted intact into a predominantly Indonesian sentence, without modification or integration with Indonesian morphological or syntactic elements. Such insertions typically involve *ism* (nominals) or *ṣifah* (adjectives). In the Instagram data from both groups, no instances of non-hybrid lexical insertion were observed in the form of *fi'l* (verbs), *'atf* (conjugated), *'adad* (numerals), or *zarf* (adverbs).

(3)	NU	“Disebut malam yang diberkati	(Mubarakah)	Karena di turun	rahmat, keberkahan, kebaikan, dan pengampunan	bagi manusia, jin, dan penduduk bumi yang lain”
		VP_Ind. NP_Ind. RelCl_Ind. Adj_Ar. Sub_Ind. PP_Ind. VP_Ind. KoordNP_Ind. PP_Ind.				
		Predicate Subject	Appositive	Complement		
		It is called a blessed night (<i>mubārahah</i>) because in it descends mercy, blessing, goodness, and forgiveness for [the benefit of] humans, jinn, and other inhabitants of the earth.				
(4)	Salafi	“Berkumpul-kumpul di malam tersebut	untuk menghidupkan masjid-masjid	adalah	<i>Bid'ah</i> ”	
		VP_Ind. PP_Ind. PP_Ind.		Copula_Ind. N_Ar.		
		Subject		Predicate	Complement	

Congregating on that night to revive the mosques is *bid'ah*.

Additional abbreviations: RelCl = relative clause; Sub = subordinate clause; KoordNP = coordinated noun phrase; Adj = adjective.

Non-hybrid lexical insertion, as shown in Data 3 (NU), illustrates *mubārahah* (adjective) as a complement in a declarative Indonesian clause with the predicate *disebut* and affixes *di-* and relative marker *yang*. Data 4 (Salafi) employs *bid'ah* (noun) as a nominal predicate in an interrogative structure with a copula *adalah* and affixed *ber-* with reduplicated *berkumpul-kumpul* subject. In both cases, Indonesian dominates syntactically, embedding uninflected Arabic lexical items that serve distinct syntactic roles at the lexical level.

Hybrid phrase switching refers to code-switching where a phrase combining elements from Arabic and Indonesian is used within a predominantly Indonesian sentence. This phenomenon occurs when a phrase integrates elements from both languages into a single syntactic unit, with the phrase head originating from Indonesian as the matrix language and the modifier from Arabic as the embedded language. Such phrases take the form of nominal, verbal, or prepositional phrases. In the Instagram data from both groups, no instances of hybrid phrase switching were observed in the form of numeral or adverbial phrases.

(5)	NU	“Selanjutnya terdapat lima komponen pilar yang perlu diperhatikan	dalam membangun	Keluarga	Maslahah”
		AdvP_Ind. VP_Ind. NP_Ind.	PP_Ind.	N_Ind (head)	N_Ar. (modifier)
		Adjunct Predicate Subject	Complement	NP_Hybrid	
		Furthermore, there are five key components that need to be considered in building a family based on <i>maṣlaḥah</i> [public benefit in Islamic jurisprudence].			
(6)	Salafi	“Namun kurikulum khafiy	Juga	tidak bisa disepelekan”	
		NP_Ind. (head) AdjP_Ar. (modifier)			
		AdvP_Ind. NP_Hybrid	AdvP_Ind. AdvP_Ind.		
		Adjunct Subject	Adjunct Predicate		
		However, the <i>khafī</i> [hidden] curriculum should not be underestimated.			

Additional abbreviations: NP_Hybrid = hybrid noun phrase; AdjP_Ar = Arabic adjective phrase; AdvP = adverbial phrase.

Hybrid phrase switching, as shown in Data 5 (NU), illustrates the hybrid nominal phrase *keluarga maṣlaḥah* (Indonesian head *keluarga* + Arabic modifier *maṣlaḥah*) as a complement in a declarative clause headed by the existential predicate *terdapat* with the Indonesian stative prefix *ter-* in *terdapat*, and followed by the prepositional structure *dalam*. Data 6 (Salafi) employs *kurikulum khafī* (Indonesian head *kurikulum* + Arabic modifier *khafī*) as the subject in a passive construction with the predicate *tidak bisa disepelekan*, which contains the Indonesian passive prefix *di-* and the causative suffix *-kan*. In both cases, Indonesian provides the morphosyntactic frame, embedding uninflected Arabic modifiers to form hybrid noun phrases that demonstrate syntactic integration at the phrasal level.

Hybrid lexical insertion refers to code-switching in which a single Arabic word is combined with Indonesian affixes to form a hybrid word integrated into an Indonesian sentence structure. In essence, this process involves merging an Arabic base word with Indonesian affixes to create a single lexical item that adheres to Indonesian morphological rules. In Instagram posts from both groups, hybrid lexical insertion manifests through affixation and reduplication patterns.

- (7) NU “Beliau menjawab berziarah ke makam para wali Adalah ibadah yang **disunnahkan**”
 VP_Ind NP_Ind VP_Ind NP_Ind VP_Hybrid
 Adjunct Subject Predicate Complement
 He responded that visiting the graves of the saints is a recommended act of worship.

- (8) “[Hadis ini] **disahihkan** oleh Syekh Al-Albani dalam Shahih Sunan Ibn Majah”
 Salafi NP_Ind (implicit) VP_Passive hybrid PP_Ind (Hybrid) PP_ (hybrid)
 Subject (implicit) Predicate Agent Adjunct
 [This Hadith] was authenticated by *Shaykh* al-Albānī in [the book] *ṣaḥīḥ* Sunan Ibn Mājah.

Additional abbreviations: V_Hybrid = hybrid verb; VP_Hybrid = hybrid verb phrase; VP_Passive Hybrid = hybrid passive verb phrase.

Hybrid lexical insertion, as shown in Data 7 (NU), employs the hybrid verb *disunnahkan* (Arabic *sunnah* (noun) + Indonesian *di-kan*) as a predicate in a relative clause with the copula *adalah* and affix *ber-* in *berziarah*. Data 8 (Salafi) uses *disahihkan* (Arabic *ṣaḥīḥ* (noun) + Indonesian *di-kan*) as a predicate with prepositions *oleh* and *dalam*, and an implicit subject. In both cases, Indonesian dominates syntactically through affixation (*di-kan*, *ber-*) and prepositional structures, embedding Arabic lexical bases as hybrid verbs at the predicate level.

Formulaic insertion involves code-switching where expressive, idiomatic, symbolically graphemic, or acronymic Arabic expressions are embedded within Indonesian sentence structures. These elements do not alter the syntactic framework of Indonesian but serve sociological functions for speakers and their interlocutors.

- (9) NU “**Alhamdulillah** Rasulullah tidak anti Tradisi atau Budaya”
 Formulaic_Arab NP_Arab VP_Ind KoordNP_Ind
 Adjunct Subject Predicate Complement
Al-ḥamdu li-llāh, the Messenger of Allah is not [in principle] opposed to tradition or culture.
- (10) “Silakan bagikan ke orang-orang yang Anda sayangi **Barakallahu fiikum**”
 Salafi Part_Ind VP_Ind PP_Ind RelCl_Ind Formulaic_Arab
 Politeness Predicate Complement (recipient) Discourse-closing (formulaic insertion)
 Please share [this] with the people whom you love. May Allah bless you.

Additional abbreviations: Formulaic_Arab = Arabic formulaic expression; Part_Ind = Indonesian particle.

Formulaic insertion, as shown in Data 9 (NU), embeds the Arabic phrase *al-ḥamdu li-llāh* (‘expressive’) as an adjunct, reinforcing religious identity, within a declarative Indonesian clause with the predicate *tidak anti* and complement *tradisi* atau *budaya*. Data 10 (Salafi) uses *bāraka Allāhu fīkum* (‘supplicatory’) as a discourse-closing adjunct in a clause with the imperative predicate *bagikan* and prepositions *ke* and *yang*. In both cases, Indonesian dominates syntactically, embedding uninflected Arabic phrases without altering the clause structure, demonstrating formulaic integration with sociological functions.

Textual segment switching refers to code-switching at the discourse level, where standalone Arabic text segments, such as Quranic verses, Hadiths, or scholarly opinions, are inserted intact into Indonesian discourse without grammatical or morphological modification. Across both groups’ accounts, textual segment switching manifests in three forms: complete quotation paragraphs (unmodified Arabic sacred texts), composite paragraphs (combining Arabic text and transliteration), and narrative text blocks (extended narratives, such as scholarly opinions or excerpts from classical texts).

- (11) NU Indonesian “... diperbolehkan menyempurnakan bilangan rakaat shalat witr.” “... it is permissible to complete the number of *raka’āt* in the Witr prayer.”
 discourse Arabic وَيَتَذَكَّرُ أَصْلَ السُّنَّةِ عَنْ الْغُلَامِ بِشَاوَةَ وَاحِدَةٍ لِمَا رَوَى أَبُو دَاوُدَ بِإِسْنَادٍ
 discourse صَحِيحٍ أَنَّهُ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ عَنْ عَنِ الْحَسَنِ وَالْحُسَيْنِ كُنْشَا
 Indonesian Artinya “pokok kesunnahan aqiqah untuk anak laki-
 discourse laki...”
- (12) Indonesian “Saatnya kembali berhukum dgn sebaik-baiknya warisan” “It is time to return to the best source of law, namely the Quran
 Salafi discourse yaitu Al Qur’an dan As Sunnah Rasulullah and the Sunnah of the Messenger of Allah.”
 Arabic أَفَحُكْمُ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ يَبْغُونَ وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ مِنَ اللَّهِ حُكْمًا لِقَوْمٍ يُوقِنُونَ
 discourse “Is it the judgment of the Age of Ignorance that they seek? But
 Indonesian “Apakah hukum Jahiliah yang mereka kehendaki...” [in faith]?”
 discourse

Textual segment switching, as shown in Data 11 (NU), embeds a Hadith-based scholarly opinion as a narrative text block, legitimizing the claim of permissible *‘aqīqah*, followed by an *artinya*-led translation. Data 12 (Salafi) inserts a Quranic verse (al-Mā’idah: 50) as a narrative text block, reinforcing adherence to Islamic law, with an *apakah*-led translation. Indonesian dominates as the matrix language, embedding uninflected Arabic segments for authoritative legitimation without altering discourse structure, with translations enhancing accessibility for religious discourse.

Clause-level switching entails code-switching within a single sentence, where an Arabic clause is inserted into a predominantly Indonesian sentence. Such a clause typically forms a constituent part of a larger sentence, not functioning as a standalone utterance.

- (13) “Namun itu bukan berarti dia mengucapkan ‘*nawaitu an ashuma yauma kadza wa kadza*’”
 Salafi Conj_Ind Pron_Ind Neg_VP_Ind VP_Ind Clause_Arab
 Adjunct Subject Predicate Predicate complement

However, that does not mean that he said: I intend to fast on such and such a day.

Additional abbreviations: Pron_Ind = Indonesian pronoun; Neg_VP_Ind = Indonesian negative verb phrase.

Clause-level switching, as shown in Data 13 (Salafi), embeds the Arabic clause *nawaitu an ašūma yawman kadhā wa kadhā* (‘intention to fast’) as a complement, retaining its Arabic structure (perfective verb, infinitive clause, adverbial phrase) without modification. It complements the Indonesian predicate *mengucapkan* in a clause with the adjunct *namun* and negation *bukan berarti*. Indonesian dominates syntactically, integrating the uninflected Arabic clause as a constituent, demonstrating clause-level code-switching with preserved grammatical integrity.

B. Ideology Behind Code-Switching in NU and Salafi Contexts

Table 1 indicates that, beyond variations in code-switching forms, the quantitative distribution reveals distinct patterns within specific registers (Li et al., 2023). NU predominates in non-hybrid phrase-switching (141 cases) and non-hybrid lexical insertions (174 cases), primarily linked to registers of *fiqh*, juridical terminology, references to classical texts, and mentions of *ulama*. In contrast, the Salafi community excels in hybrid phrase-switching (119 cases), notably through Arabic titles reinforcing personal identity. Both groups extensively use formulaic insertions (NU: 132 cases; Salafi: 175 cases), dominated by prayer and religious expressions, while textual segment-switching is more prevalent in NU (26 cases) than Salafi (6 cases), typically involving Quranic citations and Hadith, with clause-level switching nearly absent (one case in Salafi). These patterns, clustering within registers such as *fiqh*, texts, *ulama*, prayers, and scriptural narratives, serve as markers of broader Islamic ideological orientations. This analysis now explores the embedded ideological dimensions, focusing on sources of religious authority, methods of interpretation, values and traditions, and strategies of *da‘wah*.

The Salafi community consistently employs textual segment switching, embedding direct quotations from the Quran and Hadith in Arabic (Tabti, 2020). Formulaic expressions in the form of prayers are also used, such as *ṣallā Allāh ‘alayhi* (‘peace of Allah be upon him’) for the Prophet, *raḍīya Allāh ‘anhu* (‘may Allah be pleased with him’) for the companions, *rahimahu Allāh* (‘may Allah have mercy on him’) for previous scholars, and *ḥafīzahu Allāh* (‘may Allah protect him’) for current Islamic scholars. Furthermore, the group's posts frequently employ hybrid and non-hybrid turns of phrase by citing prominent early Islamic figures such as the Prophet's companion, Abū Hurairah (d. 679), the classical hadith transmitter, Ibn Mājah (d. 887), and important works including *Uṣūl al-sittah* (‘The six principles’, by Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, d. 1792) and *al-Fatāwā al-kubrā* (‘The major fatwas’, by Ibn Taymiyyah, d. 1328), both considered fundamental sources of authority in the Salafi tradition. These patterns embody a hierarchical religious structure based on the Quran and hadith, which maintains legitimacy through the chain of transmission and early Islamic figures. The interpretation of these texts is also limited to certain figures, particularly early scholars and contemporary teachers recognized within the Salafi community (Sarwan et al., 2025).

In contrast, the NU community's insertion of Arabic quotations from the Qur'an and Hadith through the exchange of textual segments plays a secondary role. Typically, such insertions serve to validate and strengthen arguments drawn from the quotations of classical *fiqh* scholars. Meanwhile, in the exchange of hybrid and non-hybrid phrases, the community refers less frequently to the Prophet's companions, instead favoring classical scholars such as al-Khaṭīb ash-Shirbīnī (d. 1186). Moreover, the NU community utilizes quotations from classical *fiqh* texts, including *al-Fatāwā al-fiqhiyyah al-kubrā* (‘The Great Fiqh Fatwa’, by Ibn Hajar al-Haytamī, d. 1566) and *al-Ḥāwī li-l-fatāwā* (‘Summary of Fatwas’, by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, d. 1505), both authors of which were followers of the Shafi'i school of thought. On Instagram, the group's discourse also incorporates *fiqh* terminology, for example, *al-madhāhib al-arba‘ah* (‘The four Sunni schools of thought’). This code-switching pattern indicates that the NU community's framework of religious authority is based on the scholarly network of classical *fiqh* scholars, particularly within the Shafi'i school of thought (Suraiya, 2018). The Quran and Hadith are positioned as sources that must be interpreted through the interpretation of the imams of the schools of thought and their followers (Kamal & Muchtar, 2017).

In relation to ideology, code-switching reflects not only linguistic patterns but also different methodologies of religious understanding. For the Salafi community, hybrid code-switching with the names of Quranic suras such as *al-nūr* (‘light’) and *al-aṣr* (‘time’) serves as direct quotations that lead to a textual-literal method. This method is reinforced through the hybrid and non-hybrid lexical insertion of terms such as *ḍiṣāḥiḥkan* (‘authenticated’) and *sunnaḥku* (‘my tradition’). Such applications reflect a religious method in which the significance of hadith is considered embedded (intrinsic) in the text, directly accessible without the need for contextual or local interpretation (Tabti, 2020). In contrast, the NU community utilizes the transition of textual segments to integrate the texts of the Quran and Hadith into the interpretive methods of classical scholars. While non-hybrid phrase transitions are used by this community to explain methods of understanding religious issues, such as *‘ibārāt ṣarīḥ* (‘explicit formulation’) and *baḥṭh al-masā'il* (‘discussion of contemporary issues’). Similarly, the non-hybrid lexical insertion of *taqlīd* (‘adherence to precedent’)

and *ittibā'* ('following established law') explains the contextual method of this group, where the text does not stand alone but is explained through the tradition of interpretation, the framework of the madhhab, and the practices of Pesantren ('traditional Islamic boarding schools') that still persist to this day (Maula et al., 2024). These different patterns indicate different methodological constructs in shaping the religious discourse of the Salafi and NU communities on Instagram.

Code-switching within the NU and Salafi communities also highlights differences in religious traditions. For Salafists, formulaic expressions form a consistent set of prayer phrases addressed to their authoritative figures, for example, the frequently occurring closing phrase, *bāraka Allāh fikum*. Through hybrid and non-hybrid code-switching, the group also uses honorifics associated with scholarly level and capacity, such as *imām* for hadith narrators, *shaykh* for early Salafi scholars, *ustādh* for modern preachers, and *akh* ('brother') for younger Muslim intellectuals. Furthermore, non-hybrid code-switching and the lexical insertion of terms such as *salaf al-sāliḥ* ('pious predecessors') and *bid'ah* ('innovation in worship') underscore a textualist position that opposes cultural integration between Islam and local customs. In contrast, the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) community employs non-hybrid code-switching with more adaptive honorifics for authoritative figures. Classical scholars are generally referred to as imams, while sheikhs encompass both classical and contemporary scholars. Furthermore, NU uses the specific term *sayyid* for descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. Unlike the Salafis, NU's tradition embraces cultural assimilation, evident in the hybrid phraseological shifts and the non-hybrid lexical insertion of terms such as *maulid* ('the celebration of the Prophet's birthday'). This acceptance is further reinforced through the shifting of textual segments, as seen in the recitation of Surah al-Fatiha as a prayer for prophets, saints, scholars, and Muslims, both deceased and living. Together, these patterns highlight the contrasting religious traditions interwoven within the two communities' code-switching, reflecting unique formulations of Islamic identity on Instagram.

Another significant difference in code-switching between Salafi and NU communities is mirrored in their *da'wah* approaches on Instagram, particularly via visual content and comment. These *da'wah* strategies not only reflect the style of message delivery but also embody deeper theological perspectives regarding the intended audience, the manner in which truth should be conveyed, and the ultimate purpose of religious life (Jamal, 2025). The Salafi community, through the @muslimorid account, exhibits a directive and textually oriented *da'wah* approach, emphasizing the authority of sacred texts, characterized by a style that reproaches, satirizes, or directly warns against the behavior of the Muslim community. This approach is supported by non-hybrid lexical insertion of theological terms such as *shirk* (polytheism), as well as hybrid phrase switching with expressions like *bersyariat secara kaffah* (adhering to Islamic law comprehensively). Some users even deliberately engage critically with comments on @nuonline_id, reflecting ideological differences.

Conversely, the comments on @muslimorid are notably sparse, with the account tending to be unidirectional, primarily driven by administrators, and comments limited to supportive formulaic expressions such as *jazāka Allāh* (may Allah reward you). In contrast, the @nuonline_id account, exhibits a more inclusive and dialogic *da'wah* approach. The delivery style is gentler, employing embracing language and rarely conveying explicit warnings about paradise or hell. When these concepts emerge, they are framed not as an end in themselves, but as part of a journey toward God. Arabic code-switching is embedded through hybrid lexical insertions and hybrid phrase switching, using terms such as *mu'ādalāh* ('justice') and *muwāzanah* ('balance'), integrated into narratives that encourage and reinforce moral values, rather than correct behavior. Captions on @nuonline_id tend to be long and reflective-argumentative, utilizing textual segment switching to encourage readers to think rationally by including Qur'anic verses and scholarly opinions in Arabic with their translations. In the comments section, this interaction feels lively and interactive, with the account administrator occasionally replying to followers' comments to provide answers, clarification, or affirmation.

Despite these differences, Salafi *da'wah* themes extend to non-religious topics such as politics, education, ethics, health, and economics, and sometimes even include commercial promotion. Conversely, the discourse shaped by the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) community remains largely centered on Islamic jurisprudence. Although themes such as family, journalism, and social issues emerge, these remain secondary. This suggests that the Salafi community promotes a contemporary, practical, and needs-driven *da'wah* strategy, while the NU community upholds a traditional framework focused on fiqh. These patterns also explain the differences in ideological frameworks, religious traditions, and *da'wah* strategies between the Salafi and NU communities, reflecting their differing approaches to Islamic identity and engagement in digital platforms like Instagram.

V. DISCUSSION

This study's analysis of seven forms of code-switching, based on 366 Instagram posts and comments, provides a novel contribution to Arabic-Indonesian sociolinguistics by illuminating their role in digital religious discourse. Unlike Haugen's (1953) classical division of code-switching into inter-sentential and intra-sentential, this analysis reveals in the context of Islamic religious posts and comments on Instagram, such a division is less relevant because the spatial limitations of digital platforms hinder inter-sentence code-switching. Recent research like Yousif (2025), confirms the prevalence of intra-sentential mixing due to platform constraints. Only one clause-level switch was observed, with multi-level code-switching dominating.

This study also integrates code-switching and code-mixing within a single analytical framework, as supported by Auer (1999), since distinguishing the two is challenging in data that illustrates dynamic blending of Arabic and Indonesian. Garcia and Li Wei's (2014) translanguaging concept illuminates hybrid lexical insertion and hybrid phrase switching, reflecting flexible and dynamic language practices in digital spaces. Another finding is the use of Arabic terms adopted into the great dictionary of the Indonesian language (KBBI), such as *Allāhu akbar* (God is great), yet deliberately written in Arabic script or transliterated forms like *qadā'* ('fulfillment of religious obligations'), with some Arabic names incorporated as code-switching. This illustrates that such code-switching reinforces religious identity and ideology, as well as symbolic communication strategies (Eastman, 1990). Moreover, formulaic insertion, like acronyms like *swt.* (*subhānahu wa ta'ālā*, 'glorified and exalted is He') and graphemic symbols like *ﷻ* (*jalla jalāluhu*, 'may his majesty be exalted'), differs from Poplack's (1980) tag-switching due to its specific functions, including marking group identity, invoking prayers, upholding religious ethics, and signifying religious social strata.

Drawing on Myers-Scotton's (1993) code-switching framework and Fairclough's (2010) CDA, this research pioneeringly charts code-switching as a discursive instrument embedding Salafi and NU ideologies within digital environments. This approach explains that hybrid phrase shifts form different power dynamics, based on Fairclough's (1992) discourse analysis adapted to the digital religious context. In the Salafi context, direct quotation of Arabic establishes textual authority, in line with Gumperz's (1964) notion of situational shifts in communication being used to reinforce puritan identity. In contrast, NU utilizes code-switching for rituals such as *niṣf al-Sha'bān* ('the middle of Sha'bān'), consistent with Myers-Scotton's (1993) marked and unmarked choices, where the merging of Arabic and Indonesian serves as an unmarked alternative to promote a certain cultural inclusivity. These patterns contradict Myers-Scotton's (1993) premise that code-switching consistently seeks social accommodation, as Salafis use expressive formulaic insertion to assert textual authority rather than to encourage inclusivity and tolerance. Meanwhile, Fairclough's (1992) framework is supported by evidence that hybrid phrase switching mirrors power dynamics: Salafi resists local traditions, while NU reinforces the dominance of 'ulamā' (religious scholars). This shows that code switching goes beyond linguistic features and functions as a discourse of power that shapes a groups religious identity.

By expanding the study of ideologically influenced code-switching, the results of this study guide Arabic language pedagogy in Indonesia that Salafi hybrid phrase switching, which incorporates direct scriptural references, encourages literalist engagement and supports a curriculum that progressively builds Indonesian-Arabic vocabulary from partial words to complete discourses so as to improve the ability to read Arabic texts (Ataş & Sağın-Şimşek, 2021; Vilakazi et al., 2024). Similarly, this method strengthens Arabic speaking skills by integrating formulaic expressions into role-playing activities, imitating Instagram directive comments to convey religious identity through code-switching while improving communication fluency (Darginavičienė & Ignaitė, 2020). In contrast, NU's non-hybrid lexical insertion, illustrated by fiqh terms linked to classical scholars, enables culturally responsive pedagogy within pesantren traditions, enhancing comprehension and oral communication through dialogic multilingual approaches (Althobaiti & Alsaawi, 2025; Ezech et al., 2022). Within digital environments, NU's reflective Instagram captions inform online speaking modules, prompting students to express religious narratives and cultivate interpretive flexibility consistent with madhhab-mediated epistemology (Kumaravadivelu, 2001). By leveraging these patterns, educators can develop Arabic language curricula that reduce barriers to language acquisition, reflect the ideological underpinnings of the language, and utilize digital platforms to enhance language learning fluency, cultural sensitivity, and communicative competence, thus advancing socio-anthropological pedagogy (Baity et al., 2025).

Diverging from prior research centered on oral code-switching, this digital examination expands the theory by emphasizing Instagram's visual-narrative adaptations, including formulaic insertion in comments, which aligns with Heller's (1990) perspective of language as a symbolic resource. This research progresses Arabic-Indonesian sociolinguistics, providing worldwide perspectives on digital religious code-switching and informing Arabic curricula that leverage ideologically influenced switching to improve cultural and linguistic proficiency (Al Masaeed, 2018; Pujiati et al., 2025).

VI. CONCLUSION

This study determines that religious posts and comments from Salafi and NU communities on Instagram (@muslimorid and @nuonline_id, February 2025) display seven forms of code-switching: textual segment switching, clause-level switching, non-hybrid phrase switching, hybrid phrase switching, non-hybrid lexical insertion, hybrid lexical insertion, and formulaic insertion. These forms illustrate complex digital linguistic dynamics, marked by multi-level code-switching and Arabic-Indonesian transliteration. Ideologically, code-switching reflects differences in religious authority Quran and Hadith versus 'ulamā' [scholars], interpretation (literal versus contextual), traditions (rejection versus integration), and *da'wah* strategies (corrective versus inclusive). Unlike Haugen's (1953) classification, inter-sentential code-switching is absent due to Instagram's spatial constraints, extending Myers-Scotton's (1993) and Fairclough's (1992) frameworks. This study demonstrates theoretical implications for code-switching as a discursive map of ideology and practical implications for digital *da'wah* and culturally sensitive communication, with global relevance for religious communities. This study offers theoretical implications for code-switching as a discursive map of ideology, informs Arabic language curriculum development through scaffolded code-switching strategies to enhance

reading and speaking proficiency, guides inclusive da'wah digital communication, and enriches multilingual digital discourse studies.

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The Impact of E-Learning Training Strategies on Research Writing Performance: Perspectives of Saudi EFL University Students

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Abstract—This study examines Saudi EFL university students' perceptions of the impact of e-learning training strategies on their research writing performance and explores the influence of gender, GPA, and age. A quantitative cross-sectional questionnaire was used to collect the data from 160 EFL students at Saudi Electronic University (SEU). The data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 22. The findings revealed that most of the participants had positive perceptions toward e-learning strategies, such as using slideshows, word processors, interactive videos, collaborative e-learning tools, and e-discussion groups. Only a few participants reported some challenges, such as difficulty tracking their progress in e-learning, frustration with the online system, and having trouble maintaining focus. In addition, the findings showed that there is no statistically significant effect of gender or GPA on students' perceptions. However, the participants' age significantly influenced their perceptions. The study concludes with several recommendations for future research.

Index Terms—E-Learning, training strategies, research methodology, EFL research writing, Saudi students

I. INTRODUCTION

Education has witnessed a substantial revolution through new technologies and innovation. Technology, primarily through the use of the internet and computers, has enabled the provision of education in settings other than traditional classrooms. Consequently, many different terms in education have emerged to describe the learning process via technology, such as electronic learning (e-learning), mobile learning, online learning, digital learning, virtual learning, distance learning, computer-assisted instruction, technology-enhanced learning (TEL), and many other related terms (Kamarudin et al., 2024; Kumar Basak et al., 2018; Valverde-Berrocoso et al., 2020). Although some of these terminologies have been used interchangeably, several researchers have highlighted their similarities and differences (Kumar Basak et al., 2018).

Focusing on the e-learning concept, e-learning is defined as a method of facilitating, delivering, and enhancing the teaching-learning process using electronic technologies, including computers, mobile devices, and internet platforms. It utilizes interactive and multimedia content to increase learners' engagement and achievement (Belvin & Mamnzenzu, 2025).

Numerous research studies have examined the benefits and drawbacks of e-learning, concluding that its benefits outweigh its drawbacks (Abdalmenem et al., 2019; Amastini et al., 2025; Ebrahim, 2024; Ilie & Stefan, 2022). E-learning develops educational proficiency not only in education but also in research performance (Abdalmenem et al., 2019). E-learning promotes a student-centered approach, increases flexibility, offers communicative and interactive features, facilitates collaborative learning, caters to individual needs, and decreases expenses (Amastini et al., 2025; Ilie & Stefan, 2022). Despite the temporal and spatial boundaries, learners have unlimited access to lectures and other online material. In an e-learning environment, instructors serve as facilitators rather than content and material providers, and students become scholars and explorers of knowledge (Abdalmenem et al., 2019). In higher education, e-learning is utilized primarily to offer a highly qualified educational experience (Garrison, 2011).

Moreover, developing competence in research methods and research writing plays a critical role. Research methods courses are important for undergraduates to prepare and train them to conduct research and write research reports in their future graduate studies. Furthermore, these courses can help students not only to master research skills but also to use their critical thinking and identify answers to real-life problems (Erlinda et al., 2022; Setiawan & Sembiring, 2023). However, previous research studies confirmed that teaching and learning research methodology and research writing are considered challenging for both teachers and learners due to the complexity of the research content and students' low motivation (Qasem & Zayid, 2019; Sendi & Alhumsi, 2023). Mastering research writing and research skills would be even more challenging for EFL students who may face linguistic difficulties and, at the same time, have no prior experience in the research field (Bakhou & Bouhania, 2020; Gupta et al., 2022). To overcome the challenges associated with teaching research methods and research writing, several scholars argued that implementing and integrating e-learning

strategies can facilitate research methods teaching and learning, increase students' engagement and productivity, and improve students' research writing performance (Abdalmenem et al., 2019; Chakma et al., 2021; Eviyanti et al., 2020; Olivier, 2014; Wu & Patel, 2016). Hence, the current paper sheds light on e-learning strategies in a higher education institution in a context that requires more investigation, namely, Saudi Arabia.

A review of previous research on using e-learning strategies in teaching research methodology and EFL research writing showed some important gaps in the literature. Motjoloane (2021) reported that "despite challenges in teaching research methodology, historically, the area has received little attention in academic research" (p. 35). Furthermore, Setiawan and Sembiring (2023) pointed out that little research has been done on research courses at the undergraduate level compared to the graduate level. In addition, although there is an extensive body of literature on e-learning strategies in Saudi Arabia, few scholars have examined Saudi students' perceptions of e-learning (Alhumsi et al., 2021) and, particularly, in the EFL field (Mutambik, 2018). Moreover, limited studies have examined gender-based differences in students' perceptions of e-learning in the EFL context (Ramli et al., 2022).

Interestingly, this study addresses these gaps in the literature by examining the perceptions of undergraduates majoring in English Language and Translation at Saudi Electronic University (SEU). Therefore, this research investigates EFL students' perception of the impact of e-learning training strategies on their research writing performance. Furthermore, this study explores how variables such as gender, GPA, and age influence their perceptions. The research questions that guide this study are:

- 1- What are the EFL students' perceptions of the impact of e-learning training strategies on their research writing performance?
- 2- Is there a significant difference in how EFL students perceive the impact of e-learning training strategies based on their gender, age, and GPA?

This research study provides recommendations for teaching research writing courses in the e-learning environment. By answering the above questions, this study brings Saudi EFL students' voices to the literature. Furthermore, it contributes to the knowledge related to the fields of e-learning and research writing.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. E-Learning Training Strategies

The current students in higher education belong to a generation that witnessed a flow of digital transformation. This generation of learners is part of the digital native generation that relies on electronic devices for communication, education, and entertainment (Ilie & Stefan, 2022). Students in this generation have different learning styles. They use "exploratory learning to make sense of the multitude of information" (Ilie & Stefan, 2022, p. 228). They can interact with technology and use it in their learning process. According to Pikhart and Klímová (2020), this generation is the Google generation that uses the Internet as a source of information. E-Learning involves the design of various training strategies that can support achieving learning outcomes (Abdalmenem et al., 2019). Based on the degree of using online tools, training strategies are classified into traditional (no online tools are used), web-oriented, blended learning, and online learning. E-learning training strategies can provide an authentic learning experience, in line with the new expectations of today's society. E-learning strategies make traditional learning more effective and attractive by using images, videos, animation, etc. (Ilie & Stefan, 2022). According to Abdalmenem et al. (2019), e-learning strategies could be defined as:

An integrated curriculum that uses a variety of methods, tools, and programs related to improving and developing the educational process, which contributes to the process of increasing the efficiency of performance in universities, achieving their goals, in addition to improving the knowledge, and access by the learner and teacher. (p. 10)

Because today's learners are different and have different needs, e-learning training strategies provide them with different tools and different ways to access information and meet their needs. E-learning training strategies can also provide equal learning opportunities for learners by overcoming spatial and temporal boundaries. Through these strategies, learners can interact and collaborate with peers and use social media in their learning process (Abdalmenem et al., 2019).

Regarding strategy types, Ilie and Stefan (2022) mentioned that e-learning includes three types of strategies or tools: curriculum tools that offer a systematic and typical learning environment, digital library tools that enable students to have effective access to information, and knowledge representation tools that help in formulating and representing information. Abdalmenem et al. (2019) pointed out that successful e-learning starts with careful planning, including selecting the best strategies. Most of the e-learning strategies are student-centered learning strategies. Moreover, to have an effective e-learning environment, educators must not only offer quality course design and delivery, but they must also employ appropriate assessments and encourage collaboration (Encarnacion et al., 2021). In an e-learning environment, learners are given the chance to control and direct their learning, use technology, interact with other learners, develop their critical thinking skills, and use these skills in real life (Encarnacion et al., 2021).

B. E-Learning in Higher Education in Saudi Arabia

The global proliferation of e-learning has been accelerated due to many factors, including the COVID-19 pandemic, which expedited its widespread adoption in educational institutions. This global trend has also been observed in Saudi Arabia. E-learning was first implemented in Saudi Arabia in the early 1990s when the Ministry of Higher Education

established the Computer and Information Center (Aljaber, 2018). Subsequently, many universities have instituted centers for distance and online learning, with King Fahd University for Petroleum and Minerals, King Khalid University, and King Saud University among the first. The National Center of E-learning and Distance Learning (NCEDL) was founded in 2005 to enhance e-learning experiences in higher education institutions by incorporating the most effective e-learning practices from around the world (Alqahtani & Rajkhan, 2020).

Recently, the Saudi government has made major contributions to the country's digital transformation plan, with a particular emphasis on education. Saudi Electronic University (SEU) was founded by the government in 2011 with the primary purpose of pioneering the use of educational technology for national growth and development. The SEU aims to achieve this goal by incorporating the most recent educational technologies and providing high-quality, flexible learning experiences.

Many universities in Saudi Arabia have adopted pre-existing systems to facilitate the e-learning experience. According to Anas (2020), 90% of Saudi universities use Blackboard as their primary learning management system (LMS). Blackboard, an American-based company, is recognized as a leading provider of LMS services (Klašnja-Milićević et al., 2016). It has the capability to provide synchronous and asynchronous forms of e-learning, with many features that facilitate individual or collaborative learning for students.

E-learning in Saudi Arabia has a strong position in the literature (Alhumsi et al., 2021). However, few research studies have examined students' perspectives on e-learning in the Saudi context (Alhumsi et al., 2021; Mutambik, 2018). Some studies examined the barriers that influence the application of e-learning in Saudi universities (Naveed et al., 2017); other studies investigated the effectiveness of e-learning in Saudi higher education (Algahtan, 2011). In addition, some studies focused on students' perceptions and showed that most Saudi learners have positive attitudes toward e-learning (Alhumsi et al., 2021; Mutambik, 2018).

C. Teaching Research Methodology and EFL Research Writing

Research methodology refers to the process of how a researcher can design a research study to get valid and reliable findings. This process includes addressing the aims and objectives of the research and how each research piece will be carried out (Setiawan & Sembiring, 2023). Teaching research methodology courses has a significant role in higher education. These courses are beneficial for undergraduate students to prepare and train them to conduct research as part of their academic progression. Mastering research skills helps students use their critical thinking, analyze research findings, and find answers to real-life problems (Erlinda et al., 2022; Setiawan & Sembiring, 2023).

However, it is evident from prior literature that research methods courses are considered challenging for both instructors and students (Setiawan & Sembiring, 2023; Qasem & Zayid, 2019). Several factors contribute to the difficulty of teaching and learning research methods courses. First, the course content and materials are complex or do not meet learners' needs. Second, learners' motivation to learn this content is low. Third, some learners cannot find a connection between the research course and their future education or career. Fourth, many instructors teach research courses by using traditional teacher-centered approaches or by focusing more on theoretical information than on the application of research skills (Erlinda et al., 2022; Setiawan & Sembiring, 2023).

Despite the difficulties that students encounter in research methods, historically, this field has received little attention from scholars (Motjolopane, 2021; Sendi & Alhumsi, 2023). More specifically, little research has been done on undergraduate research courses compared to graduate ones (Setiawan & Sembiring, 2023). According to Erlinda et al. (2022), the studies that targeted undergraduate students' perceptions toward research methods courses showed that these students perceived research methods courses negatively, considering them difficult, stressful, and complex. Only limited studies revealed that some students found learning research methodology interesting, informative, and challenging.

D. E-Learning Training Strategies and EFL Research Writing Performance

To overcome the difficulties of teaching and learning research methods and research writing, several studies pointed out that implementing student-centered approaches such as collaborative learning (Sendi & Alhumsi, 2023), project-based learning (Braguglia & Jackson, 2012), and active learning (Hoon & Singh, 2019) in teaching research courses had a positive impact on students' performance. These approaches increased students' interest and engagement and improved their understanding of the course content. For example, Sendi and Alhumsi's (2023) qualitative case study explored 137 Saudi students' perceptions of using collaborative learning in a research methodology course conducted in a blended learning environment. The results indicated that most of the participants believed that collaborative learning positively impacted their performance on the research course.

Several studies focused on integrating e-learning strategies to facilitate teaching and learning research methods (Abdalmenem et al., 2019; Chakma et al., 2021; Eviyanti et al., 2020; Olivier, 2014; Wu & Patel, 2016). E-learning strategies helped educators to implement student-centered approaches and encouraged learners to discover, interact, and build their own knowledge (Abdalmenem et al., 2019; Listyani, 2021). Abdalmenem et al. (2019) stated that "the increasing efficiency of research performance is linked to the ability of universities to employ e-learning to improve research" (p. 9). In addition, Eviyanti et al. (2020) examined the effectiveness of e-learning in teaching a research methods course by using Google Classroom as an LMS. According to Eviyanti et al. (2020), LMS is "an application that contains features needed in the learning process. LMS can make students and lecturers enter forums to discuss with each other, work on online quizzes, and access learning material anywhere and anytime while connected to the Internet" (p. 1). The

researchers found that students positively perceived e-learning, and most students agreed that using Google Classroom in teaching the research method course motivated them and improved their performance. Moreover, Olivier's (2014) qualitative study demonstrated how technology, and specifically how wikis can be utilized effectively in teaching sociolinguistic research methodology at an undergraduate level. The researcher reported that wikis enhanced learners' opportunities to discuss, reflect, cooperate, and interact in learning sociolinguistic research methods. Also, the researchers argued that Wikis can be used effectively in language classrooms. Similarly, Wu and Patel (2016) investigated the integration of traditional teaching and e-learning strategies with group work, peer interaction, and role plays to teach a mixed-methods research course. The researchers pointed out that this blended learning helped students achieve the learning outcomes and improved their performance.

In the EFL context, e-learning strategies have been increasingly used as effective tools to improve English language skills, including academic writing (Alhumsi et al., 2021; Guo & Li, 2024; Pikhart & Klímová, 2020). Furthermore, e-learning strategies helped students increase their vocabulary and communicate their thoughts (Ilie & Stefan, 2022). For example, Chakma et al. (2021) examined the use of online collaborative sessions by graduate EFL students to write their theses during COVID-19. The researchers argued that these collaborative virtual meetings provided students with a highly productive environment in which each student was able to achieve progress in writing his/her thesis. These online research writing sessions gave students the chance not only to share their work but also to get instructive and critical feedback.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

This paper used a descriptive quantitative approach. According to Creswell (2012), this approach is relevant to numeric data collection as well as its statistical analysis. In the process of the data collection procedure, a cross-sectional questionnaire was adopted from Tsai's (2009) study. This tool identified Saudi EFL students' perspectives of the impact of e-learning training strategies on their research writing performance.

B. Participants and Instrumentation

The participants in the current study were students majoring in English Language and Translation who experienced e-learning sessions throughout their course of study. To identify Saudi EFL students' perspectives of the impact of e-learning training strategies on their research writing performance at Saudi Electronic University, this study included a total of 160 Saudi EFL university students, representing demographic features such as gender, diverse academic levels, and achievement backgrounds. The sample displayed a significant gender distribution pattern, with female students comprising 116 participants (72.5%) compared to 44 male students (27.5%). This ratio potentially reflects current enrollment trends in Saudi higher education, particularly in humanities and language-related disciplines. The distribution of students by academic years revealed that the largest group consisted of junior-level students (levels 5-6), accounting for 79 participants (49.4%). Freshmen (levels 3-4) comprised 45 students (28.1%), while seniors (levels 7-8) represented 36 participants (22.5%). This distribution provides comprehensive representation across different stages of undergraduate study, with particular emphasis on mid-program students who have substantial experience with university-level academic requirements. As for the academic performance factor, data showed that most participants maintained strong academic records. Fifty-nine students (36.9%) reported a "Good" GPA, followed by 49 participants (30.6%) in the "Very good" range and 42 students (26.3%) achieving "Excellent" standing. Only 10 participants (6.2%) fell into the "Pass" category, indicating that the sample predominantly consisted of academically high-achieving individuals. All demographic categories were mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive, forming the full sample size of 160 participants.

C. Data Collection

The data for this study were collected through an online questionnaire designed to assess Saudi EFL university students' perceptions of e-learning strategies in research writing. The survey instrument utilized a 5-point Likert scale, which includes 12 items, with response options ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." Before distribution, the questionnaire was validated through expert review by specialists in linguistics and applied linguistics. The final survey was administered online during the 2024-2025 academic year to 160 participants, ensuring broad representation across different variables (demographic characteristics). Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents. In addition, it took the respondents around ten minutes to complete the survey. To maintain data integrity, responses were anonymized, and the collected data were screened for completeness, with no missing values detected in the final dataset. Thus, this study adhered to strict ethical guidelines to ensure the protection of participants' rights and confidentiality. No personally identifiable information was collected, ensuring participant confidentiality. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. These measures were implemented to maintain ethical integrity following international research standards. It is worth mentioning that this paper has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee (SEUREC-4461) at Saudi Electronic University.

D. Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 22. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and percentages, were computed to summarize participant demographics and survey responses. The

reliability of the measurement scales was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha, which indicated high internal consistency ($\alpha=0.83$) for all constructs. To examine group differences, independent samples t-tests were conducted to compare responses based on gender (male vs. female). Additionally, one-way ANOVA tests were performed to assess variations across academic levels (freshman, junior, senior) and GPA categories (Excellent, Very Good, Good, Pass). Statistically significant ANOVA results were applied to identify specific group differences.

IV. FINDINGS

The study explored Saudi EFL university students' perspectives of the impact of e-learning training strategies on their research writing performance. Table 1 presents Saudi EFL university students' perspectives of the impact of e-learning training strategies on their research writing performance.

TABLE 1
SAUDI EFL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES OF THE IMPACT OF E-LEARNING TRAINING STRATEGIES ON THEIR RESEARCH WRITING PERFORMANCE

Items	Mean	SD
1. I think e-learning training strategies are activated in research writing performance	3.84	1.17
2. I think online sessions are convenient when using slideshow in performing research writing tasks.	4.06	1.17
3. I am attracted to online learning when employing interactive videos in performing research writing tasks.	3.73	1.24
4. I am excited when adopting collaborative e-learning in doing research writing assignments.	3.83	1.21
5. I think using PowerPoints in online sessions are necessary in facilitating research writing tasks.	4.21	1.21
6. I am able to take notes online using word processors or graphics tools in performing research writing tasks.	3.95	1.16
7. I am able to use e-learning discussion via e-discussion groups in doing research writing assignments.	3.74	1.38
8. I am able to download files from the Internet in relation to research writing activities.	4.06	1.28
9. I do not have a good understanding of my progress in e-learning training strategies.	2.44	1.40
10. Online learning system always makes me feel frustrated when performing research writing tasks.	2.27	1.22
11. I am worried about my achievements in research writing tasks in e- collaborative learning.	2.42	1.35
12. I cannot focus on my online learning when using the relevant e-learning training strategies in doing research writing assignments.	2.31	1.29

In response to the first research question, the current paper revealed that a majority of Saudi EFL university students hold positive perceptions toward e-learning strategies in research writing. Most participants agreed that these strategies effectively enhanced their performance ($M = 3.84$, Item 1), with a strong consensus on the convenience of online sessions using slideshows ($M = 4.06$, Item 2). Additionally, interactive videos ($M = 3.73$, Item 3) and collaborative e-learning ($M = 3.83$, Item 4) were widely viewed as engaging tools for research writing tasks. The highest agreement was observed regarding the necessity of PowerPoints in facilitating research writing ($M = 4.21$, Item 5), further underscoring the preference for visually supported learning. A significant majority also reported confidence in utilizing digital tools, including word processors ($M = 3.95$, Item 6), e-discussion groups ($M = 3.74$, Item 7), and downloading online resources ($M = 4.06$, Item 8).

Despite these favorable trends, a notable minority faced some challenges. Some students struggled to track their progress in e-learning ($M = 2.44$, Item 9), while others expressed frustration with the online system ($M = 2.27$, Item 10). Concerns about performance in collaborative settings ($M = 2.42$, Item 11) and difficulties maintaining focus ($M = 2.31$, Item 12) were reported, though these represented a smaller subset of respondents. Overall, the findings suggest that most students benefited from e-learning strategies in research writing, particularly through structured, interactive, and visually aided methods. However, targeted interventions—such as progress-tracking mechanisms and reduced technical barriers—could address the challenges faced by a minority, further strengthening the efficacy of online learning in this context.

The second research question examines potential variations in Saudi EFL undergraduate students' perceptions regarding the influence of e-learning training strategies on their research writing performance, with gender, GPA, and age as moderating variables. To address this question, independent samples t-tests were employed to evaluate gender-based differences, whereas a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to assess disparities across age groups and GPA levels. As illustrated in Table 2, the independent samples t-test revealed no statistically significant effect of gender on students' perceptions ($p = .24$), indicating that male and female respondents did not differ significantly in their perceptions of e-learning strategies' impact on research writing performance.

TABLE 2
INDEPENDENT SAMPLE T-TEST FOR UNDERGRADUATES' PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER

Items	Gender	N	Mean	SD	T	P
Responses of EFL undergraduates' perspectives of the impact of e-learning training strategies on their research writing performance	Male	44	39.50	2.68	-1.15	.24
	Female	116	41.35	2.92		

Concerning the age variable, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to examine differences in EFL undergraduates' perspectives of the impact of e-learning training strategies on their research writing performance. As demonstrated in

Table 3, the analysis yielded statistically significant variations among age groups ($p < .05$), suggesting that EFL university students' perspectives of the impact of e-learning training strategies on their research writing performance were indeed moderated by age.

TABLE 3
ANOVA FOR EFL UNDERGRADUATES' PERSPECTIVES AND THEIR AGE GROUP

Items	Age	N	Mean	SD	F	P
Responses of EFL undergraduates' perspectives of the impact of e-learning training strategies on their research writing performance	18-24	46	43.35	8.22	8.71	0.000
	25-34	91	40.85	7.56		
	35-44	12	42.17	2.03		
	More than 44	11	28.91	17.18		
	Total	160	40.84	9.06		

Table 4 presents the results of a one-way ANOVA examining potential differences in EFL undergraduates' perceptions of how e-learning training strategies influence their research writing performance across various GPA levels. The statistical analysis revealed no significant differences among GPA groups ($p = 0.15$), indicating that students' writing performance, as measured by GPA, did not substantially affect their perspectives of e-learning strategies' effectiveness for research writing performance.

TABLE 4
ANOVA FOR EFL UNDERGRADUATES' PERSPECTIVES AND THEIR GPA

Items	GPA	N	Mean	SD	F	P
Responses of EFL undergraduates' perspectives of the impact of e-learning training strategies on their research writing performance	Excellent	42	39.50	11.35	1.78	0.15
	Very good	49	43.31	7.66		
	Good	59	39.93	8.63		
	Pass	10	39.80	4.87		
	Total	160	40.84	9.06		

All in all, this study investigated how three key demographic variables, namely gender, age, and GPA, influence Saudi EFL undergraduates' perceptions of the effectiveness of e-learning strategies for research writing performance. Regarding gender, independent samples t-tests revealed no statistically significant difference between male and female students' evaluations ($p = .24$), indicating that perceptions of e-learning's impact were consistent across genders. In contrast, age emerged as a significant differentiating factor, with one-way ANOVA results showing substantial variations among age groups ($p < .05$), particularly in students' perspectives of e-learning strategies' effectiveness for research writing performance. However, academic achievement, as measured by GPA, demonstrated no significant effect on students' perspectives, with ANOVA results failing to reach statistical significance ($p = .15$). These findings collectively suggest that while learners' age meaningfully influences their reception of e-learning methodologies, neither their gender nor academic performance level substantially alters their assessment of these digital tools' efficacy for research writing achievement.

V. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight predominantly favorable attitudes among Saudi EFL university students toward the use of e-learning strategies in research writing. Moreover, the present study's findings align consistently with previous research on e-learning effectiveness in academic contexts. A significant majority of Saudi EFL university students in our sample ($M = 3.84$) reported positive perceptions of e-learning strategies for research writing, mirroring results from Ebrahim's (2024) study on Arab EFL learners, which found digital tools enhanced writing outcomes. The strong preference for slideshow-assisted online sessions ($M = 4.06$) corroborates Pateşan's (2018) findings regarding the pedagogical value of visual aids in EFL settings. Furthermore, the results demonstrating student engagement with interactive videos ($M = 3.73$) and collaborative e-learning ($M = 3.83$) are particularly consistent with Guo and Li's (2024) mixed-methods research, showing these methods significantly improve writing performance across Asian EFL contexts. The highest-rated aspect, PowerPoint utility ($M = 4.21$), reinforces similar conclusions in Almelhi's (2021) Saudi-specific study on presentation tools in academic writing. The reported proficiency with digital tools (word processors $M = 3.95$; e-discussions $M = 3.74$; online resources $M = 4.06$) parallels the findings from AbuSeileek's (2006) study on the use of word processors and Alhawiti's (2023) investigation of Saudi students' capabilities in academic contexts. Despite the lowest-rated aspects ($M=2.27$, $M=2.42$), the items dealing with frustration and worries in online collaborative learning settings echo similar results in a study conducted by Capdeferro and Romero (2012), suggesting these challenges require targeted interventions.

As for the second research question, the independent samples t-test revealed no statistically significant effect of gender on students' perceptions ($p = .24$), indicating that males and females did not differ significantly in their views regarding the impact of e-learning strategies on research writing performance. This finding aligns with prior research showing that gender differences in e-learning perceptions are often negligible, as both male and female participants similarly value the use of digital tools (Al-qdah et al., 2025), engage similarly in writing tasks during online sessions (Alsaedi & Alhumsi, 2024), and adopt online learning strategies (Ramli et al., 2022; Tsai, 2009). The lack of significant variation suggests that

e-learning strategies are perceived equitably across genders, which may simplify instructional design by reducing the need for gender-specific adaptations in digital learning environments.

In contrast, the analysis yielded statistically significant variations among age groups ($p < .05$), suggesting that EFL university students' perspectives on e-learning strategies were moderated by age. Older learners may have different technological competencies or preferences compared to younger students, influencing their perceptions of digital tools. For example, older learners tend to exhibit greater confidence in both computer proficiency and learning skills compared to their younger counterparts (Morin et al., 2019). This finding supports the study conducted by Morin et al. (2019), indicating that age can influence their participation in online learning. Educators should consider these age-related differences by offering differentiated training or support to enhance engagement across all student demographics. Finally, the statistical analysis revealed no significant differences among GPA groups ($p = 0.15$), indicating that students' writing performance, as measured by GPA, did not substantially affect their perceptions of e-learning effectiveness. This result goes in line with Alsaedi and Alhums's (2024) research.

VI. CONCLUSION

Through a quantitative research approach, this study explored Saudi EFL university students' perception of the impact of e-learning training strategies on their research writing performance. The data were collected by using a cross-sectional questionnaire from 160 participants. Descriptive analysis was used to analyze the data. The findings indicated that most of the participants held positive perceptions of e-learning strategies in improving their research writing performance, especially those strategies that were structured, interactive, and visually aided. Furthermore, the results revealed that there is no statistically significant effect of gender or GPA on students' perceptions; however, age was found to be an important influencing factor.

It is recommended that Saudi universities incorporate and activate e-learning tools to prepare students to meet the skills of the 21st century. Educators and curriculum designers should benefit from recent interactive and collaborative technologies, particularly those that offer visual support, in designing research writing courses. In addition, instructors in e-learning environments are facilitators of knowledge and are required to choose the most effective e-learning training strategies for their students based on the learning objectives, the course content, the availability of technology, and students' age (Ilie & Stefan, 2022). Instructors should encourage students to use these e-learning tools while providing supervision, clear guidance, and constructive feedback.

Regarding limitations, all the participants in this study were enrolled at a single university, SEU. Therefore, it is highly recommended that future research studies include participants from different universities across Saudi Arabia. In addition, this study examined students' perceptions of the impact of e-learning strategies on their research writing performance through a quantitative approach. Future research could further examine these perceptions using qualitative methods to obtain explanatory data that can reflect students' perspectives and views. Finally, future studies could consider other factors that may influence students' perceptions, such as socioeconomic class and gender segregation. For gender segregation, most Saudi universities are separated by gender, including SEU. Thus, future research can investigate whether this gender digital divide has any impact on students' perception or not.

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Facial Expressions as Non-Verbal Communication in the Arabic Corpus: A Semiotic Approach

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Abstract—This linguistic study takes an analytic semiotic approach to non-verbal communicative symbols, particularly the symbolism of the face in the Arabic corpus. This corpus includes the holy Quran, the noble Hadith, and Arabic poetry, proverbs, and dictionaries. The ‘face’ reflects multiple semantic expressions in different contexts, forming both positive and negative meanings and necessitating the clarification of their semantic and artistic functions. The aim was to identify the connotations of facial expressions in communicative uses by investigating the word ‘face’ and tracking its occurrences in the corpus. The positive and negative meanings of face as a term are also analyzed, as it comprehensively conveys meanings and symbolic connotations which express human states and emotions. The phenomenon is worth studying to reveal the symbolism of the ‘face’ and the diversity of its connotations, and to demonstrate its impact on the recipient. A descriptive-analytical approach was adopted by tracking the symbol of the ‘face’ in Arabic texts as a tool for communicative action, identifying its occurrences in Arabic corpora, describing and analyzing them to uncover the meanings and ideas conveyed by this symbol, and drawing conclusions about its various effects on the recipient. One key finding was the extensive functional scope of the word face, which encompasses a range of human experiences and emotions, primarily because the face carries various expressions reflecting the inner depths of the soul, making it the first thing perceived and the primary feature through which expressive cues are read.

Index Terms—Arabic corpus, non-verbal communication, face, semiotics

I. INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A. The Concept of Communication

Linguists define the concept of communication by stating that ‘to reach’ or ‘to connect’ signifies a process of linking. The term ‘connection’ is the opposite of estrangement. When something is connected to something else, it remains uninterrupted, and when something reaches something else, it arrives at or attains it. Linguistic studies indicate that language is not limited to the verbal (spoken) aspect alone but also extends to various forms of non-verbal (silent) communication. Accordingly, researchers have classified communication into two main types: verbal and non-verbal. Verbal communication involves spoken words and vocal symbols in interactions between individuals or groups (Abu Isba’a, n.d.), while non-verbal communication is the conveyance of messages through body language and various behavioral channels. The latter includes a range of explicit behaviors, such as facial expressions, body movements, vocal variations, hand gestures, body posture, and the spatial distance between individuals during interaction (Qadri, 2016).

B. The Face as a Mirror of the Soul

The face is fundamental to human communication as it conveys various expressions that reflect the inner self. It is the first feature observed and the primary aspect through which nonverbal expressions are interpreted. Through facial expressions, the recipient can perceive the emotions and intentions of the sender. The face serves as a representation of human identity in the eyes of others, revealing thoughts and sentiments that may otherwise remain concealed. As such, the face is an individual’s most visible and expressive feature (Ibn Faris, 1979), as it vividly reflects psychological states and serves as the primary medium for emotional expression (Al-Ansari, 2005). As the mirror of the self, the face represents identity and character, often being used metaphorically in Arabic to signify the self and one’s intention. Given its prominence, the face has also been associated with positive concepts such as honor, leadership, and dignity, as well as precedence, esteem, and modesty. Conversely, it can also signify negative attributes inherent in human nature. The face

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reveals a person's inner character and betrays their hidden thoughts, reflecting states of goodness or evil. Hence, it has been metaphorically linked to prosperity and abundance, as well as to poverty and hardship. It can symbolize generosity or miserliness, truthfulness or deception, contentment or anger, love or hatred, and beauty or ugliness (Al-Razi, 1420 AH). In Arabic literature, the face carries rich symbolic meanings, appearing in prose, poetry, the Quran, Hadith, and Arabic proverbs. It serves as a metaphor for a spectrum of human emotions, ranging from positive connotations—associated with beauty, tranquility, and happiness—to negative connotations, linked to alienation, anxiety, distress, and fear. The face, therefore, is a central motif in Arabic linguistic and literary traditions, encapsulating the depth of human experience through its expressions.

C. Research Gap

To the best of our knowledge, there is no specialized study that explicitly explores the symbolism of the face and its diverse meanings in the Arabic corpus, and none has systematically examined the uses of the face in Arabic texts in general. However, some studies have addressed the face as part of bodily attributes and non-verbal communication, particularly in the poetry of specific poets, such as Al-'Abbas ibn al-Ahnaf (Tabakhi, 2022) and Badr Shakir al-Sayyab (Ghaybi et al., 2021). Other studies have focused on the face in the Prophetic Hadith (Arar, 2009), body language in general (Zanjir, 2004), or more specifically, body language in the poetry of the Sa'alik (Qadira, 2013) and Abu Nuwas ('Abd et al., 2024). Another study explored aspects of non-verbal communication and its semantic role in al-Hariri's Maqamat (Rahmani et al., 2023). While previous studies intersect with our research in their discussion of non-verbal communication within specific samples related to a particular source, these have limited the significance of the face to a subheading that does not fully encompass its symbolism. In our study, we aim to reveal the symbolism of the face and document its uses and meanings in the Arabic corpus by showcasing diverse and comprehensive representative examples. Adopting a descriptive-analytical approach, we analyzed and classified these examples based on the meanings that necessitated the use of the face in Arabic texts, as well as its impact on the recipient. The research questions were as follows:

- How has the Arabic corpus employed the (face) symbol as a means of non-verbal communication?
- What meanings and connotations did the symbolism of the face convey in the Arabic corpus?
- How can we benefit from facial language in conveying our ideas to others on one hand, and in interpreting its meaning in the other party during the communication process on the other hand?
- What are the different effects conveyed by facial language in the Arabic corpus in general?

II. POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE CONNOTATIONS OF THE FACE

In order to effectively achieve the objectives of this study, we categorized the semantic connotations associated with the face into positive and negative implications, based on the context in which the word 'face' (wajh) appears in selected samples from the Arabic corpus, as in the following.

A. The Positive Connotations of the Face

An examination of the Arabic corpus reveals how the face has been utilized with various positive connotations in different contexts. The faces of Arab senders often act as a means of concealment by avoiding a direct expression; instead, the sender resorts to figurative language within the context, creating a captivating form of expression. This approach reveals the Arabic tongue's capacity for creativity and non-verbal communication within society. Rather than solely relying on direct language (or direct communication), Arabic speakers prefer to adopt symbolism to convey their meanings, wrapping them in layers of artistry and beauty. In this study, the positive meanings identified within selected models from the Arabic corpus are presented in the following sections.

(a). Beauty and Elegance

Beautiful faces captivate the human soul, because beauty brings joy to the heart and pleases the viewer with its charming features, making it difficult for the eye to turn away. The Arabic corpus is rich with references to facial expressions that indicate how beauty and elegance influence the observer. Poetry, in particular, is abundant with descriptions of facial beauty, as seen in the works of Abu Nuwas (2010), Al-Abshihi (2003), Al-Maghribi (1997), Al-Mutanabbi (2023), and Ibn Zaydun (1994). An example of this can be found in the poetry of Al-'Abbas ibn Al-Ahnaf, who praises his beloved's beauty, emphasizing that not only does her charm surpass all others but is renewed each morning (Al-Ahnaf, 1954): 'She is perfect, and beauty is perfected in her face/ Every beauty besides hers is impossible/ For people, the crescent appears once a month/ But in her face, I see a new crescent every morning'. In prose, Arabic expressions also convey this idea of beauty and elegance. For instance, an old Arabic proverb states: 'More radiant than two earrings with a beautiful face between them' (Al-Maydani, n.d.). Additionally, in classical Arabic, a handsome person is described as 'wasim' (Al-Jawhari, 1987). Similarly, 'qasim' means 'a person with a handsome face' (Al-Anbari, 1992), and 'muqassam al-wajh' refers to someone with well-proportioned and striking facial features. This theme continues in Arabic proverbs and popular sayings. One well-known expression states: 'Your face or the moonlight?' (Al-Zughoul, 2016), which is used to compliment someone's beauty, comparing their radiant face to the glowing light of the moon, a timeless symbol of beauty and brilliance in the night sky.

(b). *Joy and Good Rejoicing*

Among the expressions found in the Arabic corpus is the expression of joy and rejoicing through facial features. Allah says: ‘Some faces that day will be radiant, laughing, rejoicing’ (Abasa: 38–39). The meaning of ‘laughing and rejoicing’ is a person who is happy and joyful, having known the reward and bliss that await them, as well as the honor bestowed upon them by Allah (see: Al-Qurtubi, 1964; Al-Tabari, 2000; Ibn Kathir, 1419 AH). This joy is also expressed by radiant faces (Al-Insan: 11). The face of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was most frequently described as joyful, and it is narrated that ‘the features of his face (asareer wajhih) were bright and shining’ (see: Ibn Manzur, 1414 AH). Part of the meaning of joy is also expressed in the ‘welcoming, cheerful face’ as this open expression grants calm, comfort, happiness, and provides a sense of security and reassurance (Lashin, 2002).

In poetry, many Arabic collections express the radiant, joyful face, which is accompanied by the smiles that often accompany a joyful expression. One example is from Abu Nawas, who describes the face of his patron as having a radiance that brings peace to the soul (Abu Nawas, 2010): ‘You are protected from what you secretly rejoice in by the laughter of a face that does not disappoint you, shining brightly.’ It is also said: ‘A radiant man is one with a smiling, beautiful face’ (Ibn Sidhah, 1996). A popular saying states: ‘His face is always smiling’ (Al-Zughoul, 2016), referring to someone whose face is constantly smiling, full of vitality and cheerfulness.

(c). *Radiance*

By al-diyaa (radiance), we refer to the light that emanates from a person’s face as a reflection of the reward and bliss they experience. This concept is often expressed in Arabic through the phrase ‘bayād al-wajh’ (brightness or whiteness of the face), which conveys not only physical beauty but also inner tranquility and serenity. As stated in the Qur’an: ‘those whose faces will be bright’ (Al Imran: 107). According to Al-Qurtubi (1964), the brightening of the face signifies its illumination through divine grace. This meaning extends to the comparison of the face with the moon. When al-Baraa was asked whether the Prophet’s (peace be upon him) face resembled a sword, he responded, ‘No, rather it was like the moon’ (Al-Bukhary, 1422 AH), emphasizing the intensity of its radiance.

In Arabic lexicons, the notion of al-dyaa as related to the face is linked to expressions such as ‘talala’a’ (to sparkle or shine) — e.g., ‘Someone’s face sparkled’ (al-Anbary, 1992) — and also to verbs like ‘ashraqa’ (to shine), ‘azhara’ (to brighten), ‘abaa’ (to glow), and ‘saraja’ (to illuminate), as in the phrase: ‘May God make his face bright and radiant’, all metaphorical of joy, grace, and vitality.

In classical Arabic poetry, poets often portrayed the luminous face as pure and unblemished, radiating with brilliance and light, and likened it to stars for its shine (Ibn Aby Husayna, 1956; al-Du’aly, 1964; Ibn Al-Ward, 1966; Al-Shanfary 1991; Turfah ibn Al-Abd, 2002; Ibn al-Khayyat, 1377 AH). In prose and proverbs, the concept persists in colloquial expressions, such as the popular Arab saying: ‘His face is luminous’ or ‘You can see the light shining from his face’ (Al-Zaghul, 2016), referring to a person whose face appears radiant and joyful, a reflection of deep happiness, vitality, and optimism.

(d). *Affection and Clarity*

The face is often used when a person is inwardly pure; his facial features become clear and serene. When the soul is pleased and welcoming, facial expressions naturally reflect satisfaction and approachability. In Arabic literature, this clarity and receptiveness are frequently conveyed through facial expressions (Nukhbat min al-Ulamaa, 2012). In Arabic poetry, numerous examples explore this theme (al-Ahnaf, 1954; al-Bahily, 1982). One such verse is attributed to ‘Ali Ibn Abi Talib, who expresses inner purity and love through the clarity of facial expressions, ‘The clarity of water is reflected in his face, and thus the water appears pure through the purity of his face’ (Ibn Abi Talib, 2005). Here, the purity in his face seems to give the water its clarity, not the other way around — as if the purity in his face is the original source, and the water draws its clarity from him. Classical Arabic writings also often connect affection and inner clarity with a cheerful and welcoming face, which signals openness and emotional availability (Uwaydah, n.d.). Similar expressions of respect, warmth, and cordiality are found in idioms like ‘He extended (basatah) his face toward him’—a metaphor for showing kindness and welcome (Ibn Jaafar, 2003).

(e). *Bliss*

One of the positive connotations conveyed by facial features is the abundance of bliss and prosperity reflected in a radiant, well-nourished face. As stated in the Qur’an: ‘You will recognize in their faces the radiance of bliss’ (Al-Mutaffifin: 24). This ‘radiance of bliss’ (nadrāt al-na‘īm) is described as the joy, freshness, and luster associated with comfort and luxury (see: Al-Zamakhshari, 1407 AH; Al-Baydawi, 1418 AH). Ibn Kathir (1419 AH) interprets it as ‘a description of elegance, dignity, joy, tranquility, and status, which they enjoy in their state of great bliss.’ Similarly, Sayyid Qutb (1980 CE) noted that ‘radiance flows over their faces and features’. These radiant faces are described as cheerful, content, and blessed (Al-Alusi, 1415 AH). Arabic lexicons affirm this meaning, as expressions like ‘nadir al-wajh’ (radiant-faced) are used to denote grace, joy, and beauty (Ibn Faris, 1979 CE). Likewise, the phrase ‘a man with a bright face’ refers to one whose face reflects signs of prosperity and happiness (see: Al-Azhari, 2001 CE; Al-Zabidi, n.d.).

(f). *Elevated Status*

One of the semantic connotations associated with the symbolism of the face is elevated status; for example, ‘a wajih man’ is a man of prestige and high social standing. The expression ‘wujuh al-balad’ refers to the notables of a town (Ibn Manzur, 1414 AH; Al-Fayruzabadi, 2005 CE). Similarly, the expression ‘wujuh al-qawm’ signifies their leaders (Ibn Manzur, 1414 AH). It is also said: ‘Someone is the wajh of his people’, denoting a person of leadership and standing (Al-Asfahani, 1412 AH). Additionally, the expression ‘lahu wajh fihim’ denotes someone who holds a significant position or esteem among them (Al-Anbari, 1992). Arabs also use the color white (bayad) to denote purity, generosity, and goodness. When whiteness is attributed to the face, it signifies the pinnacle of honor, nobility, and virtue. This symbolism is often reflected in Arabic poetry; a poetic example is found in the verse by Thabit (1994): ‘They are white-faced, of noble lineage’. Here, the poet employs the imagery of the white face as a metaphor for their elevated status and esteemed social rank.

(g). *Dignity and Awe*

Dignity and awe are often manifested in men’s faces and their expressive features, particularly as depicted by poets who have portrayed the face as an embodiment of majesty and reverence (Al-Buhturi, 1964; Ibn Khaqan, 1320 AH; Al-Barquqi, 2012). A vivid example appears in Al-Mutanabbi’s praise of Sayf al-Dawla: ‘Your face wears a smile, and your lips glow with joy.’ This verse captures the image of a leader who smiles in the darkest hours of combat, standing firm as others flee. His radiant face amid the chaos of battle symbolizes awe-inspiring courage, unwavering resolve, and absolute fearlessness. Ibn Zaydun similarly praises Al-Mutamid ibn Abbad, saying: ‘A radiant face with sharp resolve, as pleasing as the edge of a polished sword’. The smiling or radiant face symbolizes a man of determination and strength—like a sword, beautiful in form yet sharp in function.

(h). *Uprightness*

Uprightness is one of the meanings alluded to by the symbol of the ‘face’ in Arab cultural corpus. It frequently appears in the Qur’an (see, for example, An-Nisa: 125; Al-A’raf: 29; Luqman: 22; Aal Imran: 20; Yunus: 105) as well as in Hadith (Al-Bukhari, 1422 AH). It is closely associated with the face of the Prophet and the faces of the believers, in whom the signs of uprightiness are visibly present (Al-Fath: 29), particularly those who pray frequently, as explained by Al-Zamakhshari (1407 AH), Al-Qurtubi (1964 CE, 16/293), and Al-Baydawi (1418 AH). This spiritual uprightiness is believed to manifest outwardly, such that their faces radiate light—a reflection of their inner values and moral integrity (Al-Shaarawy, n.d.).

One of the manifestations of a servant’s uprightiness is ‘submitting one’s face to God,’ which means showing humility in obedience to Him and complete surrender to His will. Allah says: ‘Yes, whoever submits his face to Allah...’ (Al-Baqarah: 112), with the meaning of making it purely and wholly for Allah (Al-Zamakhshari, 1407 AH). The ‘face’ is specifically mentioned because it is the most honored and visible part of a person, the center of sensory perception, and the place where dignity and humility are revealed. In Arabic tradition, the face often represents the whole person (Al-Qurtubi, 1964 CE; Al-Shawkani, 1414 AH; Al-Tabari, 2000 CE; Al-Sabuni, 1997 CE).

(i). *Dignity*

The face is considered the most distinguished and honored feature of the human being. Accordingly, Prophetic traditions have emphasized the importance of preserving the dignity of the face. Among these teachings is the prohibition against striking the face, as evidenced by the saying of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) (Al-Bukhari, 1422 AH; Muslim, n.d.; Al-A’yni, n.d.). This is out of respect for the face, as it contains the features that reflect a person’s beauty and character (Lashin, 2002 CE). Dignity is also expressed through the phrase ‘the water of the face’ (maa al-wajh), which conveys this symbolic meaning. Arabic lexicons emphasize this implication, as in: ‘He did this to preserve the water of his face’. Here, ‘the water of the face’ signifies dignity and modesty (Omar, 2008 CE). The term ‘horr al-wajh’ (the noble face) is also used to describe someone generous and honorable (Ibn Sidah, 1996 CE). Classical Arabic poetry also affirms this meaning, using ‘the water of the face’ to express dignity (Ibn Nubata, n.d.; Reinhart, 1432 AH; Ibn al-Khayyat, 1377 AH). The opposite expression, ‘he spilled the water of his face’, indicates a loss of dignity and is used when someone acts or speaks without shame (Ibn Jubayr, 1980 CE). Popular proverbs also reflect this concept, highlighting the symbolic power of the face in expressing dignity. For instance, the expression ‘bi-bayyid al-wajh’ (Zughoul, 2016 CE) — literally ‘he whitened the face’ — is used to praise someone whose actions have honored them in the eyes of others.

(j). *Purity and Innocence*

The face is used as a symbol of purity and innocence in certain Arabic contexts. One such example is a narration reported by Anas ibn Malik, describing the final illness of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). He states: ‘The Prophet lifted the curtain of his room and looked at us while standing, and it was as if his face was a page from the Qur’an. Then he smiled with joy’ (Al-Bukhary, 1422 AH). The comparison of the Prophet’s face to a page from the Qur’an conveys a striking image of radiant beauty, clarity of complexion, and spiritual purity (Al-A’yni, n.d.), as both the Qur’anic page and the face are united in purity and luminous elegance.

In classical Arabic literature, the face is frequently associated with nobility and inner refinement. For instance, Imru Al-Qays praises a tribe by saying: ‘The garments of the Banu Awf are pure and spotless, and their faces are bright as

guiding lights for travelers' (Imru Al-Qays, 2004). By describing their clothes as pure, he implies their freedom from disgraceful behavior, and by calling their faces radiant, he either refers to their moral purity, physical beauty, or both (Al-Al-Qurtubi, 1964). As Al-Musta'simi (n.d.) states, they are 'free from all defilements and flaws'. In this tradition, expressions like 'the water of the face' or 'the glow of the countenance' often denote chastity, purity, and honor (Ibn Khallikan, 1900).

(k). *Modesty and Shyness*

Modesty and shyness are among the most visible expressions that appear in facial features. The Arabic literary tradition has preserved some of the most beautiful portrayals of this association between the face and the emotion of modesty. An example of such aesthetic imagery appears in the poetry of Al-'Abbas ibn Al-Ahnaf (1954): 'She who captured your heart is a maiden, wide-eyed, covering her face with her arm'. This gesture—where the face is partially hidden by the arm—signifies shyness and modesty, which serve to enhance the beloved's beauty, charm, and allure. The Arabic tradition also contains many idiomatic expressions that link the face to modesty. For instance, 'His face softened' is used as a metaphor for feeling shy, while 'So-and-so is brave of heart but timid of face' means that a person is courageous but modest (Al-Zabidi, n.d., 25/355; Al-Yaziji, 1905). In contrast, other idioms reflect a lack of modesty and the degradation of dignity, such as: 'He spilled the water of modesty from his face' (Ibn Jubayr, 1980), or 'He is thick-faced'—meaning shameless (Ibn Faris, 1979; Al-Azhari, 2001).

(l). *Amazement*

There is no image more expressive than facial expressions when it comes to conveying amazement. One of the most powerful symbolic examples appears in the Qur'an, where Allah says: 'So his wife came forward with a loud cry, struck her face, and said, "[How can I have a child] when I am a barren old woman?"' (Adh-thariyat: 29). The phrase 'struck her face' indicates that she placed her hand on her forehead out of astonishment. In classical Arabic, *sakk* means to strike or slap. It has also been interpreted as gathering the fingers and striking the forehead with the palm (Al-Tabari, 2000). This is a physical gesture that strongly signals shock or amazement. A similar expression of astonishment appears in the poetry of al-Hudhlul ibn Kaab al-Anbary, describing his wife's reaction upon seeing him grinding grain for guests (Sharrah, n.d.): 'She said, and struck her face with her right hand/ "Is this my husband, bending over the millstone?" / I said to her, "Do not be surprised—you'll understand my endurance when warriors surround me"'. This poetic exchange illustrates the woman's astonishment at seeing her husband engaged in a domestic chore—grinding grain for guests—something she perceives as unbecoming of a man. Her reaction reflects social expectations around gender roles and labor. The husband, however, calmly responds, asserting that his capacity for endurance should not be judged by such a scene. His true strength, he explains, is revealed in the intensity of battle, when he stands firm while surrounded by warriors. In these examples, striking the face appears as a traditional and inherited gesture among women to express surprise or disbelief and this behavior is still observed today in some cultures, in which women slap their faces or foreheads in moments of emotional shock or astonishment.

B. *The Negative Connotations of the Face*

The Arabic corpus is rich in negative connotations associated with the symbolic use of the face to express a wide range of meanings, such as inner anger, emotional exhaustion, fear, sadness, spiritual pain, and related sentiments that convey unease, physical fatigue, aversion toward the intended goal, dissatisfaction, betrayal, and discontent. All these and more are often reflected through facial expressions. In our study, we observed numerous such connotations, summarized in the following negative meanings.

(a). *Anger*

The Arabic corpus documents expressions of this negative emotion primarily in contexts where the Prophet (peace be upon him) expressed anger in response to matters of religion. The state of anger could be read from the Prophet's face, even when not explicitly stated in words. Examples include expressions such as: 'his face changed, his face turned red, the face of the Messenger of Allah changed color, his cheeks turned red, anger was seen on his face, he became angry until the anger was known from his face' (Al-Bukhari, 1422 AH). One example of this is when the Prophet's face changed color in anger due to a man's insolence, as reported in Al-Bukhari (1422 AH) and Al-Musnad al-Sahih al-Mukhtasar (n.d.). The facial color change here reflects the Prophet's reaction, and its association with anger restricts the interpretation of this change to that specific emotional state.

In Arabic poetry, the symbolism of the face to denote anger also appears, for example, when 'Umar ibn Abi Rabiha describes a woman named Tuktam, whose face showed signs of anger: 'By my life, I clearly saw on Tuktam's face the signs of frowning and anger when we met' (Umar ibn Abi Rabiha, 1992). Arabic lexicons also attest to this symbolic association. For instance, the phrase 'He came with a flushed face' was used to describe someone who is angry (Al-Jawhari, 1987; Ibn Manzur, 1414 AH).

(b). *Worry and Distress*

The Arabic corpus is rich with facial symbolism that conveys worry and distress. Such symbolism appears in various Qur'anic contexts, often describing the reactions of disbelievers to particular events or situations (e.g., Al-Zumar: 60;

Abasa: 40). One notable example is the verse: ‘Their faces will be covered, as it were, with pieces of the night—utter darkness. Those are the companions of the Fire; they will abide therein forever’ (Yunus: 27). This verse has been interpreted to mean that their faces were covered with the darkness of the night, as if shrouded due to their deep sorrow and sense of loss, a figurative expression for the inner gloom and despair that manifests outwardly through facial darkness (Ibn Faris, 1979 CE). Another example can be seen in reference to the sorrow experienced upon the birth of a daughter, where the darkening of the face symbolizes grief and disappointment: (Al-Nahl: 58) The Arabs would say, ‘his face darkened with grief and sadness’ (Al-Qurtubi, 1964 CE). According to Al-Shanqiti (1995 CE), ‘the intensity of sadness and depression causes the face to darken’. This symbolic association between facial color and emotional states is also evident in the Prophetic tradition.

(c). *Fatigue and Emaciation*

In Arabic discourse, facial expressions are often used as symbols to indicate fatigue and emaciation—that is, weakness—in various contexts. However, they are most commonly associated with the color yellow. This color carries multiple connotations depending on the context. It may relate to a person’s physical health, where a yellowish face indicates illness or physical weakness. It may also have psychological implications, as a yellow face can express extreme fear or anxiety. In some cases, the expression may carry spiritual meaning, understood through context as a sign of sadness or distress reflected on the face—especially in Arabic poetry (Al-Shanfara, 1991; Al-Azhari, 2001; Al-Sayyab, 2017). Al-Tihami also illustrates this emotional and physical association in his poetry (Al-Tahami, 1982): ‘I still remember her face turning yellow from the pain of separation’. The expression ‘his face was expressionless (sahim)’ is also used to denote weakness and exhaustion (Diwan al-Hudhaliyyin, 1965; Al-Yusi, 1981). The term ‘eclipse’ is also used in this negative sense; for example: ‘there is an eclipse on his face’ means there is a yellowish discoloration and change. A ‘kasif’ man (literally: eclipsed) is someone whose color has changed and become weak due to sorrow (Al-Azhari, 2001). These expressions may also be associated with the color black, indicating facial pallor due to illness or grief. This is referred to as ‘sufaa’, which appears as darkness on the cheeks of a pale woman. A dove is also called ‘safaa’ because of the dark markings on its neck (Al-Jawhari, 1987).

(d). *Humiliation and Disgrace*

The face was used as a symbol to indicate humiliation and disgrace in Arabic discourse. In certain Arabic contexts, the face is used metaphorically to convey this meaning—such as the submissive and humbled faces described in the verse: ‘Some faces that Day will be humbled. Laboring, weary’ (Al-Ghashiyah: 2). That is, the faces of the disbelievers will be humiliated, having not worked for the sake of God in this world, so they are made to labor in the fire. This meaning also appears in the context of the face losing its dignity due to excessive asking and begging. As narrated from ‘Abd Allah ibn Umar (may Allah be pleased with him), the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: ‘A man will continue asking people until, on the Day of Judgment, he will come with no flesh left on his face’ (Al-Bukhary, 1422 AH; Muslim, n.d.).

This figurative use of the face also appears in poetry (Al-Hashimi, n.d.; Dik al-Jinn, 2004), where the loss of ‘the water of the face’ is linked to disgrace and dishonor due to persistent begging (Al-Sharif Al-Murtada, 1997; Al-Hanbaly, n.d.). Salih ibn Jinah said (Al-Yusi, 1981): ‘If the water of the face dries up, so does one’s sense of shame/ And there is no good in a face when its water is gone’. In Arabic dictionaries, it can also be seen that classical Arabic contains expressions related to the face to convey this meaning. For instance: ‘Akhlaha wajhahu’ means ‘he humiliated his dignity’ (Al-Saghani, n.d.), and ‘He dried out the water of modesty from his face and threw off the veil of shame’ (Al-Yaziji, 1905). In popular proverbs, this meaning is reflected in expressions such as: ‘Bissawwid al-wijh,’ ‘Sawayyid wijh,’ and ‘Tili biswad al-wijh’ (Al-Zughoul, 2016), where these sayings express shame or dishonor brought upon someone.

(e). *Frowning and Grimness*

In Arabic contexts, the ‘face’ is also used to indicate frowning and grimness. This is exemplified in the description of faces as basirah (Al-Qiyamah: 24). Al-Zamakhshari (1407 AH) interprets basir as someone frowning severely. These are the faces that are very grim, withdrawn, and miserable—shielded from hope due to their sins (see: Qutb, 1980). This meaning is also conveyed metaphorically with the term mukfahir (Ibn Sidah, 1996).

Additionally, the term kalih is used to describe frowning faces (Al-Mu’minun: 104). Linguists interpret kuluh as a grimace accompanied by frowning (Al-Qurtubi, 1964). Al-Shanqiti (1995) explains that a kalih face is one twisted by grimness and tension, with bared teeth from the severity of the frown. Al-Razi (1999) notes that jahm al-wajh means a kalih face. Abu Hayyan (1420 AH) also defines kuluh as the scowling of the face and its contraction, that is, frowning.

Dictionaries contain expressions related to this meaning, such as: ‘Qattaba wajhah taqtiban’, meaning ‘he frowned and became angry’ (Ibn Manzur, 1414 AH). In proverbial wisdom, the phrase ‘wajh kasif’—a sullen or gloomy face—is used to describe a frowning, stingy person: ‘Do you frown your face and withhold your wealth?’ (Al-Maydani, n.d.). Folk proverbs also reflect this concept. One example is: ‘His face doesn’t even smile at hot bread’ (Al-Zaghoul, 2016), indicating someone who is perpetually frowning and joyless.

(f). *Ugliness*

Ugliness may refer to both the physical and tangible lack of beauty in one’s face. Al-Tabari (2000) notes that the Qur’an characterizes these faces as ugly, revealing their hatred through frowns, scowls, anger, and emotional agitation. They

reject what they hear, and their internal hostility nearly turns into an outward rage against those who recite the Qur'an due to the evil and hatred within them (Al-Sha'rawi, n.d.). This notion also appears in prophetic tradition. It is mentioned in the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), which says: 'May their faces be disfigured (shahat al-wujuh)'—(Muslim, n.d.). The phrase *shahat al-wujuh* means 'their faces became distorted,' or in other words, 'ugly' (Ibn Manzur, 1414 AH). Another expression used to describe one who shamelessly reveals their ugliness is '*saafir al-wajh*' (one whose face is exposed), referring to someone who openly displays moral or social impropriety (Ibn Ja'far, 2003). Classical Arabic sources describe *shatim al-wajh* as one with a harsh, offensive appearance—'a face that invites insult due to its harshness and unpleasantness' (Al-Anbary, 1992; Ibn Sidah, 1996; Al-Farabi, 2003). Similarly, *mushawwah al-wajh* means 'disfigured or deformed face' (Al-Anbary, 1992), a description frequently found in classical poetry (Al-Du'ali, 1964; Al-'Askari, n.d.). For example, one poet states (Al-Maydani, n.d.) 'I see a face whose form God disfigured, cursed is that face, and cursed its bearer'. In proverbs, the expression 'The face of the slanderer is the ugliest' is cited, referring to one who brings insults or offensive words from others. It implies that a slanderer bears a face more contemptible than the slander itself (Al-Maydany, n.d.). In popular culture, a folk saying declares: 'His face is like the corn monkey' (Al-Zaghoul, 2016), humorously describing someone whose facial features are unattractive or off-putting. The phrase 'corn monkey' refers to a creature perceived as unappealing in appearance.

(g). *Hypocrisy*

In Arabic discourse, the term 'face' has been metaphorically employed to indicate hypocrisy. Expressions like 'the face of the day' suggest clarity and honesty, whereas 'the face of the night' symbolizes deceit and hypocrisy. The Arabic term *tho al-wajhayn* ('two-faced') also serves as a metaphor for a hypocrite—one who sows discord by presenting different faces and speech to different groups (Lashin, 2002). This is reinforced in the hadith where the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: 'Indeed, the worst of people is the one with two faces—he comes to some with one face and to others with another' (Al-Bukhary, 1422 AH; Muslim, n.d.). Al-'Ayni (n.d.) clarifies that this does not literally refer to two physical faces but is, rather, a metaphor for contradictory behavior and duplicity. This metaphor has been preserved in Arabic poetry (Ibn al-Jahm, n.d.; The One-Eyed Ash-Shayni, 1999; Al-Abshihi, 2003). A similar sentiment is echoed in a popular proverb: 'In front of you, a mirror; behind you, a sickle' (Al-Zaghoul, 2016), describing a person who presents an honest and pleasing appearance face-to-face.

(h). *Rejection and Aversion*

In the Arabic corpus we analyzed, we saw employed the symbol of the face to convey the notion of rejection and aversion, often drawing on nonverbal body language. The expression '*ashaha bi-wajhihi*' (he turned his face away) is used to indicate deliberate avoidance or turning away. Lexicographical sources confirm this meaning as a form of nonverbal communication, stating: 'We say: I spoke to him and he turned his face away, meaning he showed aversion' (al-Zamakhshari, 1998; Ibn Manzur, 1414 AH). This is a description of a physical gesture that indicates disapproval or intentional avoidance. It is also reported in descriptions of the Prophet (peace be upon him) that when he became angry, he would turn away and avert his face (Ibn Manzur, 1414 AH; Al-Bukhary, 1422 AH). This nonverbal figurative usage is found in poetry (Al-Ahnaf, 1954; Al-Shafi'i, n.d.), as well as in the verse by 'Umar ibn Abi Rabyah: 'She turned away and said: 'Liar! and frowned— My soul be a ransom for the one who turns away with scorn'. The phrase 'she turned away' is a metonym for aversion.

(i). *Hatred*

The Arabic corpus—particularly in the Prophetic tradition—preserves many instances in which the face serves as a nonverbal symbol for expressing hatred. It is reported that when the Prophet (peace be upon him) saw clouds or heard the wind, signs of unease and displeasure would appear on his face. This symbolic use of the face also appears in proverbs. One such proverb states: 'The face of your enemy reveals his intentions,' similar in meaning to the expression 'Hatred is shown through the eyes' (Al-Maydany, n.d.), which highlights the expressive role of the face in conveying inner resentment and hostility, especially in adversarial contexts.

(j). *Wandering (Loss of Direction)*

The Arabic linguistic corpus occasionally employs the symbol of the face as a metaphor for a state of disorientation or wandering. This symbolic use is evident in expressions such as 'falling on one's face', which denotes deviation from guidance (Al-Tabari, 2000), as illustrated in the Qur'anic verse: 'Is he who walks fallen on his face more rightly guided than he who walks upright on a straight path?' (Al-Mulk: 22). This bodily expression metaphorically represents misguidance in this life and, as such, the misguided will appear in the afterlife in a physically humiliated state—fallen on their faces—underscoring their spiritual loss. A related expression in Arabic is 'he wandered aimlessly' (*hama ala wajhihi*), which indicates someone who has lost their sense of direction or purpose (Al-Zughul, 2016). In proverbial usage, the expression 'the world has tightened around his face' (*idyaqqat al-dunya bi-wajhihi*) (Al-Zughul, 2016) is used to describe someone overcome with despair, unable to find a way forward. Here, the face is employed metonymically to represent the self and internal emotional state, particularly when facial expressions convey suffering, confusion, or hopelessness.

III. CONCLUSION

This practical linguistic investigation into non-verbal communication emphasizes the significance of symbolic meanings attributed to the face in Arabic linguistic heritage. The study focused on how contextual factors prompt the use of specific bodily gestures or expressions and explored the interplay between external physical signals and internal psychological, emotional, and ideological states. Accordingly, we found the Arabic corpus to be rich in positive connotations associated with the symbolic use of the face to express a wide range of meanings, such as beauty and elegance, joy and rejoicing, radiance, affection and clarity, bliss, elevated status, dignity and awe, uprightness, dignity, purity and innocence, modesty and shyness and amazement through facial features. However, negative connotations were also found in the Arabic corpus to express a wide range of meanings, such as inner anger, emotional exhaustion, fear, sadness, spiritual pain, and related sentiments that convey unease, physical fatigue, aversion toward the intended goal, dissatisfaction, betrayal, and discontent. All these and more are often reflected through facial expressions. In our study, we observed numerous such connotations.

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An Ecolinguistic Analysis of Advertising Discourse: How Framing Techniques Replace Natural Products With Marketed Narratives in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract—This study investigates the phenomenon of *erasure* in the commercial discourse of dairy product advertisements by multinational companies in Saudi Arabia. This research focuses on the packaging and promotional language of 25 dairy products from five major supermarkets in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The research employs Stibbe's (2021) ecolinguistic framework to examine key discursive strategies, including *metaphor*, *trace*, *facticity*, *greenwashing*, and *erasure*. While erasure remains the central analytical focus, the study also considers related narrative strategies such as metaphor and conviction, which support the ideological framing of dairy products as natural, pure, and wholesome. The analysis reveals that nature is often either partially or entirely erased through the use of vague and idealized expressions such as 'farm-fresh' and 'pure love,' which distance consumers from the environmental and ethical realities of dairy production. Animals are either rendered invisible or referenced only through abstract phrases like 'dairy goodness.' This language not only promotes consumer appeal but also performs ideological work by constructing narratives of ecological harmony and ethical production, even in conditions where such ideals may not exist. The findings contribute to the expanding field of ecolinguistics and critical discourse studies by highlighting the urgent need for ecological accountability in corporate communication.

Index Terms—Ecolinguistics, erasure, commercial discourse, dairy advertisements, greenwashing

I. INTRODUCTION

Language plays a crucial role in shaping our understanding of the environment and the relationship with the world around us (Ashraf et al., 2025; Berio & Musholt, 2023). As a powerful ideological tool, it influences the way ecological issues are perceived and addressed. Ecolinguistics, an emerging interdisciplinary field, explores how language influences ecological thinking, behavior, and sustainability (Prodanovska-Poposka, 2024; Stibbe, 2024). In simple terms, Ecolinguistics involves a varying degree of terminological complexity, as it borrows the concept of 'ecology' from the natural sciences and applies it to the study of language (Penz & Fill, 2022). It provides critical tools for analyzing how discourse, particularly in commercial and consumer contexts, either reinforces or undermines sustainable ideologies (Das & Albinsson, 2023; Laurie, 2023). In an age marked by climate change, resource scarcity, and ecological degradation, understanding the linguistic strategies that normalize or obscure environmental harm is more urgent than ever.

In the food industry, especially in dairy marketing, products are often portrayed as natural, wholesome, and environmentally friendly. Labels like 'fresh from nature,' 'pure milk,' or 'farm fresh' are frequently employed to evoke idyllic images of untouched rural landscapes and traditional farming practices. However, these portrayals often conceal the industrial reality of mass dairy production, which is associated with greenhouse gas emissions, excessive water use, and land degradation (UNICEF, 2023). This creates a tension between the discourse presented to consumers and the ecological truths behind food systems, a phenomenon that ecolinguists refer to as *the erasure of nature* (Ain et al., 2023). In Saudi Arabia, the expansion of global retail chains has introduced a wide array of dairy products from both local and multinational brands. Advertising in this sector often blends global sustainability rhetoric with regional themes of purity, tradition, and nature. While phrases like 'farm-fresh' and 'nature's gift' suggest authenticity and natural origins, they often mask the industrialized methods of production. Despite a growing awareness of environmental issues in the region, little research has explored whether this commercial discourse aligns with ecolinguistic principles or fosters ecological awareness, thereby reinforcing ecological disconnection.

This study investigates how dairy products in Saudi Arabian supermarkets use language to construct nature-based narratives. Specifically, it aims to determine whether these narratives foster environmental awareness or contribute to the symbolic erasure of nature. Drawing on the theoretical framework of ecolinguistics and critical discourse analysis,

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this research analyzes product packaging, slogans, and marketing language across a selection of local and international dairy brands. By identifying patterns in metaphor, ideology, and framing, the study seeks to reveal how commercial discourse influences public attitudes toward the environment and consumption. This work contributes to the broader field of ecolinguistics by focusing on the largely overlooked cultural and commercial context of the Gulf region. Ultimately, it also serves as a call to action for marketers, policymakers, and ecolinguists to recognize the influential role language plays in either promoting or undermining ecological values.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. *Ecolinguistics and Environmental Discourse*

Ecolinguistics is a critical and interdisciplinary field that examines how language influences the shaping of ideology and reflects the relationships between humans, non-human species, and the environment. As Ghorbanpour and Davari (2024) describe ecolinguistics as a branch of linguistic inquiry that not only investigates language use in environmental contexts but also evaluates the ecological impacts of discourse itself. Rooted in both critical discourse analysis and ecological philosophy, ecolinguistics examines whether our language practices support or undermine environmental well-being. Shah and Shah (2025) emphasize that one of the ecolinguistic core goals is to identify how daily communication narratives perpetuate environmental degradation or promote sustainability. A foundational concept in this field is what Stibbe (2015) calls ‘the stories we live by’, cultural narratives embedded in language that influence human behaviors, values, and environmental ethics. These stories often reflect in linguistic choices and shape how individuals conceptualize nature, frequently reinforcing anthropocentrism and consumerism. Burroughs (2022) further argues that such narratives play a vital role in framing consumption patterns, industrial activities, and how societies frame the human-nature relationship, making their critical examination essential.

Ecolinguistics thus functions as a toolkit for unveiling the hidden ideologies and assumptions in discourse (Ponton, 2024b). Through the analysis of metaphors, identity constructions, and framing techniques, it provides a lens to scrutinize how commercial and media language naturalize unsustainable practices (Ponton, 2024a). As a research approach, it aligns closely with environmental ethics by drawing attention to the linguistic practices that either harm or facilitate sustainable forms of living.

B. *Greenwashing and the Illusion of Nature*

Greenwashing is a key phenomenon in Ecolinguistics, where language is used to create a misleading impression of environmental friendliness (Shaikh & Khanda, 2023). Donato (2025) and Erhardt (2024) highlight that companies frequently use vague yet emotionally persuasive terms, such as ‘natural,’ ‘pure,’ and ‘eco-friendly,’ to present their products as sustainable, even when the actual practices behind them are ecologically damaging. This tactic is especially prevalent in the food and consumer goods sectors, where branding often takes precedence over actual environmental integrity. Mutum and Ghazali (2023) emphasize that these strategies exploit consumers’ emotional attachments to nature by evoking imagery of greenery, farms, and natural cycles. However, this imagery is often disconnected from the actual supply chains, which may involve deforestation, pollution, or animal exploitation. These linguistic choices contribute to what Ma and Stibbe (2022) refer to as ‘erasure,’ the process of systematically omitting references to the ecological or ethical costs of production. By erasing the realities of animal suffering, industrial farming, or environmental degradation, greenwashing constructs a sanitized version that reassures consumers while perpetuating ecological harm. As a result, greenwashing represents a powerful form of ideological manipulation, where discourse masks structural inequalities and environmental consequences (Williams, 2024). Through ecolinguistic analysis, researchers can expose the gap between linguistic representation and material reality, thereby challenging corporate narratives and advocating for more honest and accountable communication.

C. *Discourse Strategies in Dairy Product Marketing*

Dairy advertising is a prime site for examining the use of greenwashing and ideological framing (Garibay, 2023). Ain et al. (2021) conducted a detailed ecolinguistic analysis of dairy product advertisements, finding a consistent use of language that romanticizes rural life and traditional farming practices. Terms such as ‘farm-fresh,’ ‘crafted with care,’ and ‘from our family to yours’ construct an image of dairy as wholesome, ethical, and closely tied to nature, despite being the output of a highly industrialized system. Moore (2024) points out that this language relies heavily on pastoral metaphors, which obscure the environmental and ethical implications of dairy farming. These include greenhouse gas emissions from cattle, overuse of water resources, and the treatment of dairy animals. By presenting dairy as a natural and fundamental part of a healthy lifestyle, advertisements not only mask these issues but also reinforce societal norms around consumption.

Our common discursive strategy in dairy advertising is the use of identity frames that align corporate brands with consumers’ values. For instance, phrases like ‘we are farmers’ or ‘nature’s gift’ create a false sense of intimacy and trust, positioning multinational companies as small, ethical producers. Ecolinguistic analysis reveals how such framing reinforces consumer loyalty while bypassing critical reflection on production practices (Kovalchuk, 2020).

D. *Framing, Ideology, and Consumer Influence*

Framing is a central concept in ecolinguistic research. As Abdulaal et al. (2025) explain, frames are cognitive structures that guide perception and interpretation by emphasizing certain aspects of reality while downplaying or ignoring others. In the context of environmental communication, frames determine how issues are understood and prioritized. For example, if dairy products are framed primarily in terms of health and family values, concerns about animal welfare or climate impact may be overlooked. Stibbe (2015) argues that ideological framing in advertising often promotes anthropocentric values, prioritizing human comfort, pleasure, and identity over ecological concerns. These frames shape not only consumer behavior but also public discourse around what constitutes responsible or desirable consumption. Language becomes a tool for normalizing unsustainable practices and marginalizing alternative worldviews that emphasize ecological interdependence and restraint.

In dairy advertising, ideological frames, such as purity, nourishment, and tradition, are commonly used (Carreras, 2024). These frames are often supported by certainty markers, such as the omission of modal verbs (e.g., ‘will nourish you’ vs. ‘may nourish you’), which enhance the truth value of claims and discourage critical scrutiny. Ecolinguistic research suggests that these linguistic features can significantly influence consumer perceptions, making it essential to expose the ideologies they perpetuate.

E. The Ecolinguistics Gap in the Gulf Region

Although Ecolinguistics is gaining global attention, research on environmental discourse in the Arab Gulf region remains limited. Almaghlouth (2022) notes that much of the environmental communication in Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia, is modelled after Western discourse, which may not fully resonate with local ecological and cultural contexts. This gap is particularly evident in consumer marketing, where global branding strategies often override local environmental realities.

Badran et al. (2024) argue that sustainability claims in the retail sector in Saudi Arabia are inconsistently regulated. This lack of oversight allows companies to make unverified environmental claims without accountability, increasing the potential for greenwashing. The linguistic construction of nature in Saudi food marketing, particularly in the dairy sector, therefore warrants urgent scholarly attention. Zhdanova et al. (2021) further contribute to this discussion by analyzing vegan campaigns that comply with multimodal strategies to counter mainstream narratives. Their findings reveal that alternative discourses, when effectively designed, can promote empathy, ethical reflection, and sustainable behavior. Similarly, studies like Zanotto (2020) reflect the importance of discursive visibility, ensuring that ecological relationships and consequences are highlighted rather than erased in communication.

Despite increasing global attention to ecolinguistics, few studies have examined the linguistic construction of nature in Saudi Arabian food marketing, particularly in the dairy sector. This study addresses that gap by analyzing how dairy products in Saudi supermarkets use language to frame, erase, or commodify nature. The findings aim to provide insights into the rhetorical strategies employed by brands and contribute to a more localized understanding of ecolinguistic practices in the Gulf region.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a qualitative research methodology guided by critical discourse analysis (CDA) and structured according to the theoretical framework established by Stibbe (2024) in *Ecolinguistics: Language, Ecology and the Stories We Live By*. The primary objective is to investigate how nature is constructed, idealised, or obliterated in the commercial discourse of dairy product packaging available in supermarkets in Saudi Arabia. This approach enables a comprehensive analysis of verbal and visual strategies that influence consumer perceptions of environmental values and sustainability. The study encompassed publicly accessible packaging and marketing materials. The research included publicly available packaging and promotional materials. The names of all brands were used exclusively for analytical and scholarly purposes.

A. Data Collection

The data gathered for this study were obtained from five leading supermarkets in Saudi Arabia. The researcher labeled the supermarkets as Supermarket A, B, C, D, and E to preserve their anonymity. The reason for selecting these retail outlets was to represent a diversity of geographic and consumer contexts within the urban centres of Riyadh and Jeddah, where global and regional food brands are widely available. Moreover, five categories of dairy products were selected: full-cream milk, yoghurt, processed cheese, butter, and flavoured milk drink from each supermarket in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, a different brand was selected for each category, ensuring a diverse representation of local, regional, and international companies. This resulted in a total of 25 product samples (5 categories × 5 supermarkets). Only products featuring discernible packaging and marketing components in English or Arabic were considered. Both front and back labels were documented, along with promotional shelf displays when available.

B. Analysis Framework

To analyze the marketing discourse, the study employed Ma and Stibbe’s (2022) Ecolinguistics framework, which identifies and interprets recurrent linguistic patterns that influence environmental perception and behavior, commonly referred to as ‘stories we live by’. The following discursive features were analyzed: Framing, which examines how

nature is represented or excluded, as well as the emphasis on specific elements (e.g., freshness, purity) versus those that are concealed. Ideologies: Underlying values and assumptions, such as naturalness, consumer health, or pastoral nostalgia. Metaphors: Figurative expressions that align products with environmental imagery (e.g., ‘from nature to your table’). Identities: Construction of consumer and producer roles, such as ‘caring family provider’ or ‘traditional farmer.’ Erasure: The deliberate or unintentional linguistic omission of ecological realities such as production scale, environmental cost, or animal welfare. The research employed both textual and visual elements in its analysis. Texts were transcribed and coded for patterns, such as adjective-noun collocations (e.g., ‘pure milk,’ ‘fresh taste’), and multimodal markers, including nature-based colors, rural imagery, and eco-symbols (e.g., leaves, farms, cows).

C. Data Analysis

All 25 packaging samples were analysed through manual thematic coding, based on the ecolinguistic categories listed above. Each sample was examined independently to identify patterns of environmental discourse, green appeals, or omissions. Visual components were analysed through a semiotic interpretation of how imagery supports or contradicts textual claims. Emerging patterns were grouped under larger thematic categories, such as the romanticization of nature, Health-washing vs. green-washing, the erasure of environmental impact, and the cultural localization of *nature*.

These categories were continually refined through comparative analysis of products across supermarkets and brands. Interpretations were further grounded in recent ecolinguistic and critical discourse studies (Forte, 2024; Kamarullah & Yanti, 2024).

IV. RESULTS

A. Supermarket A

a. Product 1(A) – Full-Cream Milk

The advertisement for full-cream milk uses metaphorical language to portray the product as a nurturing, life-giving entity. It refers to the milk as being ‘delivered with care from nature,’ personifying both the product and the company, suggesting emotional value. This constructs the milk pack as an active participant, a doer rather than something that is done to, diverting attention from industrial processes. As Stibbe (2021) argues, when corporations or products are framed as acting beings, they absorb moral agency, while distancing themselves from the actual industrial practices that may harm ecosystems. The company claims that this milk ‘nurtures the body naturally,’ masking the artificial processes involved in production.

The story of erasure is evident in the complete omission of any reference to cows or the farming practices associated with them. Instead, abstract terms such as ‘from nature’ and ‘pure nourishment’ are used, which act as indirect allusions that obscure the actual animal sources and labour conditions.

b. Product 2(A) – Yogurt

The yoghurt advertisement employs absolute, assertive language such as ‘ideal choice for every family.’ The producers avoid modal verbs, which elevates the facticity of the claim and constructs an impression of scientific or perceived truthfulness. At the same time, the advertisement reinforces erasure by omitting critical details, excluding any reference to how the milk was sourced or how the yoghurt was processed. The text and imagery erase the animals involved, their welfare, and the underlying dairy infrastructure.

c. Product 3(A) – Cheese Slices

This product relies heavily on positive appraisals, such as ‘smooth,’ ‘wholesome,’ and ‘crafted to perfection.’ The claim that it ‘delivers authentic dairy taste’ carries high facticity due to the lack of modal verbs and the confident tone. In terms of erasure, the ad contains only a trace through the phrase ‘dairy-based richness.’ The term ‘dairy’ vaguely alludes to cows or milk but never explicitly refers to them. The origin of the cheese is decontextualized, reducing animals to abstract notions of ‘richness’ or ‘quality’.

d. Product 4(A) – Butter

The story constructed here aims to elicit notions of tradition and trust, exemplified by phrases such as ‘farm-fresh cream,’ ‘guaranteed quality,’ and ‘made for your family.’ The lack of modal verbs further contributes to a tone of certainty. The narrative of erasure is more nuanced. ‘Farm’ is referenced solely as a location, not as an environment inhabited by living beings (cows). According to Stibbe (2015), this nuanced technique eliminates moral consideration for animals by substituting them with their own settings.

e. Product 5(A) – Flavored Milk Drink

The metaphor in this product characterizes the milk drink as a source of mood enhancement and vitality: ‘A sip of happiness.’ The milk beverage is dynamic; the customer is inert. This illustrates the actor-goal model, in which the product influences human emotions and behavior. The erasure is complete; neither cow nor synthetic flavouring procedures are referenced. The term ‘natural strawberry flavour’ serves as a mask, blurring the line between natural and artificial elements without specifying their origin. The results are encapsulated in Table 1 below:

TABLE 1
ECOLINGUISTIC FEATURES IN DAIRY ADVERTISEMENTS – SUPERMARKET A

Product	Metaphor/Conviction	Type of Erasure	Example Phrase
Full-Cream Milk	'Delivered with care from nature' (personification)	Void	No mention of cows or farm practices
Yogurt	'Ideal choice for every family' (assertion)	Void	No mention of source or process
Cheese Slices	'Crafted to perfection' (superlative praise)	Trace	'Dairy-based richness'
Butter	'Farm-fresh cream' (romantic framing)	Trace	'Farm' without mentioning animals
Flavored Milk Drink	'A sip of happiness' (anthropomorphized product)	Mask	'Natural strawberry flavor'

B. Supermarket B

a. Product 1(B) – Yogurt

This product relies on assertion without justification, stating “perfectly balanced for your health,” with no modal verb to soften the claim. Words like ‘rich,’ ‘original taste,’ and ‘suitable for all ages’ amplify its appeal. The erasure comes through a trace of ‘natural dairy yogurt.’ While the word ‘dairy’ vaguely alludes to milk sources, it obscures the animal origin and conditions of production.

b. Product 2(B) – Processed Cheese

This product’s discourse emphasises health, marketed as a ‘calcium-rich snack,’ ‘fortified with vitamins.’ The high facticity is sustained by omitting modal verbs. Erasure appears as a void; there is no acknowledgement of cows, sourcing methods, or the process of making cheese. Instead, it focuses on consumption benefits, ignoring production realities.

c. Product 3(B) – Flavored Milk Drink

The product is framed through the metaphor ‘a bottle full of adventure,’ making the drink animate and emotionally impactful. The story of erasure shows up in the phrase ‘infused with real fruit flavors.’ Fruit is a co-hyponym with artificial flavoring, creating a mask that blurs the distinction between natural and synthetic ingredients.

d. Product 4(B) – Full-Cream Milk

The claim ‘straight from the farm to your table’ builds a pastoral fantasy. While this creates conviction, the farm here serves as a trace, concealing the presence of cows. The phrase ‘wholesome milk’ reinforces the product’s moral purity, while entirely omitting the reality of factory farming or environmental impact.

e. Product 5(B) – Butter

With a tagline like ‘a touch of nature in every meal,’ the butter is metaphorically animated and naturalised. Although there is no objective evidence to support these claims, the use of superlatives and certainty lends a sense of facticity to them. The erasure is total, with no mention of animals or environmental context, leaving only vague natural associations. The findings are illustrated in Table 2, presented below:

TABLE 2
ECOLINGUISTIC FEATURES IN DAIRY ADVERTISEMENTS – SUPERMARKET B

Product	Metaphor/Conviction	Type of Erasure	Example Phrase
Yogurt	'Perfectly balanced for your health'	Trace	'Natural dairy yoghurt'
Processed Cheese	'Calcium-rich snack' (factual assertion)	Void	No animal or process reference
Flavored Milk Drink	'A bottle full of adventure' (emotive framing)	Mask	'Real fruit flavours'
Full-Cream Milk	'From farm to table' (pastoral narrative)	Trace	The farm is used vaguely as a source
Butter	'A touch of nature' (symbolic language)	Void	No mention of production or animals

C. Supermarket C

a. Product 1(C) – Flavored Milk Drink

The product presents the drink as ‘bursting with fruity energy,’ personifying the product through metaphorical entailment as active and dynamic. The phrase suggests vitality and action, constructing the drink as an actor, while consumers are passive recipients. This reinforces Stibbe’s (2024) view that products are often granted agency, obscuring production realities. The story of erasure is present as a void. There is no mention of dairy sources or how the milk is combined with artificial flavourings. The use of ‘fruit flavour’ masks the possible synthetic additives, creating a false sense of freshness.

b. Product 2(C) – Yogurt

The ad features high-fact language, such as ‘an essential part of a healthy diet’ and ‘loaded with natural goodness.’ No modal verbs are used, making the claims seem objective and factual. The trace of nature appears in the term ‘natural goodness’ and ‘from the heart of the farm,’ which refers to the place, not the animals. This masks the presence of cows or the conversion process, turning nature into a background setting rather than an ecological subject.

c. Product 3(C) – Processed Cheese

Described as ‘rich and creamy,’ the product is given high appeal and factual credibility through superlative language and certainty markers, such as ‘guaranteed quality.’ The use of modal verbs is avoided entirely. The erasure is both trace and mask. The phrase ‘rich in dairy flavour’ uses the term ‘dairy’ metonymically to stand for cows, while focusing on taste rather than source. The reality of milk extraction and processing is silenced.

d. Product 4(C) – Butter

With claims like ‘as fresh as the farm,’ the metaphor evokes nostalgic rural imagery. The butter is framed as natural and immediate, though no evidence is provided. This boosts facticity through idealisation. Erasure is clear. There is no mention of animals, their feed, or their role in the ecosystem. “Farm” functions as a trace, removing animals while maintaining the rural fantasy.

e. Product 5(C) – Full-Cream Milk

The product is described as ‘pure and untouched,’ suggesting minimal human interference, a form of romanticised framing. The milk is metaphorically elevated to a sacred entity, further distancing it from industrial production. The void is complete. No details are provided about animals, machines, labour, or environmental impact. Nature is referenced only as ‘source,’ rendering it an abstract idea, not a reality. These results are summarised in Table 3 below:

TABLE 3
ECOLINGUISTIC FEATURES IN DAIRY ADVERTISEMENTS – SUPERMARKET C

Product	Metaphor/Conviction	Type of Erasure	Example Phrase
Flavored Milk Drink	‘Bursting with fruity energy’	Void	No mention of source or process
Yogurt	‘Essential part of a healthy diet’	Trace	‘From the heart of the farm’
Processed Cheese	‘Guaranteed quality’	Trace + Mask	‘Rich in dairy flavour’
Butter	‘As fresh as the farm’	Trace	Implies freshness but omits cows
Full-Cream Milk	‘Pure and untouched’ (sacral metaphor)	Void	Nature as an abstract source

D. Supermarket D

a. Product 1(D) – Yogurt

Framed as ‘packed with vitality,’ this yoghurt is positioned as a life-enhancing product. The use of present-tense, high-certainty verbs (e.g., ‘delivers,’ ‘enhances’) lends the discourse a high level of facticity. The trace is limited to the phrase ‘from natural milk,’ with no specification of animal type or farming practices. The yogurt’s link to nature is symbolic rather than ecological.

b. Product 2(D) – Flavored Milk Drink

Slogans like ‘fun in every sip’ anthropomorphize the product and associate it with emotional states. This metaphorical construction makes the drink seem interactive and emotionally engaging. The erasure story is prominent. The product is described using terms like ‘real taste of strawberry,’ yet there is no mention of the milk source or whether the fruit is real or artificial. This is a mask that blends synthetic and natural under a unified narrative.

c. Product 3(D) – Cheese Slices

The advertisement claims the product ‘brings families together,’ projecting emotional value onto cheese. This metaphor positions cheese as a social agent, not a processed item. The erasure is achieved through the phrase ‘natural dairy slices,’ where ‘dairy’ is a metonym for cows, and ‘natural’ substitutes for the actual farm-to-product process. Animals and environmental impact are fully excluded.

d. Product 4(D) – Powdered Milk

With claims such as ‘your everyday energy,’ this product is metaphorically presented as a lifeline, making it appear indispensable. Phrases like ‘packed with strength’ build high facticity. Erasure appears as a trace: ‘natural source of protein’ leaves the origin of that protein unspecified. There’s no indication of whether it is cow-derived or synthetically fortified. The term ‘natural’ is vague, serving as a semantic blanket.

e. Product 5(D) – Butter

This product is marketed with nostalgic and heritage-focused language, with lines like ‘bringing tradition to your table.’ These claims carry cultural weight and enhance facticity through emotional association. The erasure is complete. ‘Farm-churned’ is the only term that hints at origin, but the animals, environment, and labour involved are entirely absent. The word functions as a trace, replacing living beings with place and process. The results of the analysis are systematically summarised in Table 4 below, providing a clear overview of the dominant ecolinguistic strategies identified across the selected advertisements.

TABLE 4
ECOLINGUISTIC FEATURES IN DAIRY ADVERTISEMENTS – SUPERMARKET D

Product	Metaphor/Conviction	Type of Erasure	Example Phrase
Yogurt	‘Packed with vitality’	Trace	‘From natural milk’
Flavored Milk Drink	‘Fun in every sip’	Mask	‘Real taste of strawberry’
Cheese Slices	‘Brings families together’ (social metaphor)	Trace + Mask	‘Natural dairy slices’
Powdered Milk	‘Your everyday energy’	Trace	‘Natural source of protein’
Butter	‘Bringing tradition to your table’	Trace	‘Farm-churned a placeholder’

E. Supermarket E

a. Product 1(E) – Full-Cream Milk

The claim “pure as nature intended” reflects a deliberate metaphor that elevates nature to a moral authority. The milk is framed as unaltered and authentic, creating high facticity. Yet, the erasure is absolute. There is no mention of animals or practices. Nature is personified but decontextualized, a romantic ideal rather than a biological system.

b. Product 2(E) – Yogurt

Described as ‘made from nature’s best,’ the ad metaphorically assigns intentionality to nature itself. Nature is given agency, while real animals are removed from the scene. The phrase ‘from nature’ is a trace that hides the actual production chain. No reference is made to dairy animals or conversion processes, continuing the pattern of partial erasure.

c. Product 3(E) – Cheese

With slogans like ‘tradition meets taste,’ the narrative reinforces cultural pride while promoting modern consumption. Positive language such as ‘creamy delight’ and ‘healthy indulgence’ lends high facticity. Erasure occurs via metonymy: “dairy tradition” replaces any direct mention of cows, emphasising heritage over ecology. The product is divorced from its environmental context.

d. Product 4(E) – Flavored Milk

Framed as ‘a playful twist on classic milk,’ the ad uses metaphor and emotional triggers to market the product as a joyful experience. The trace is the word ‘classic milk,’ which is ambiguous and disconnected from its origin. There’s no discussion of how the milk is flavoured or sourced, erasing both animals and additives.

e. Product 5(E) – Butter

With phrases like ‘crafted with care,’ the butter is anthropomorphized and associated with intentional, human-like behavior. This raises the product’s perceived value and emotional appeal. Erasure is evident. ‘Farm freshness’ is used to imply rural origin, but without any details about how or from whom the product is derived. The void leaves nature and animals out of the narrative entirely.

TABLE 5
ECOLINGUISTIC FEATURES IN DAIRY ADVERTISEMENTS – SUPERMARKET E

Product	Metaphor/Conviction	Type of Erasure	Example Phrase
Full-Cream Milk	‘Pure as nature intended’	Void	No mention of animals or farms
Yogurt	‘Made from nature’s best’	Trace	Nature used abstractly
Cheese	‘Tradition meets taste’	Trace + Mask	‘Dairy tradition’
Flavored Milk	‘Playful twist on classic milk’	Trace	‘Classic milk’ with no source information
Butter	‘Crafted with care’	Trace	‘Farm freshness’ with no context

V. DISCUSSION

This study has revealed systematic patterns of ecological erasure, metaphorical distortion, and high-facticity persuasion in the commercial discourse of dairy products advertised across five supermarkets in Saudi Arabia. Using the ecolinguistic framework developed by Stibbe (2015), the analysis showed how language choices in advertisements do more than just sell products; they subtly conceal environmental realities, construct anthropocentric narratives, and manipulate consumer perception to serve market agendas. These linguistic strategies are not isolated; rather, they reflect broader discursive practices in global food marketing (Fernández-Vázquez, 2021; Mapes, 2021; Virdis, 2022).

One of the most striking patterns across the selected products was the erasure of natural agents, specifically cows and the processes involved in obtaining milk. Terms such as ‘natural,’ ‘fresh,’ and ‘farm-based’ were used across all companies as semantic masks, offering abstract notions of nature while removing traceable ecological or ethical realities. As noted by Hart (2024) and Re (2024), this kind of lexical abstraction obscures both the environmental cost and labour intensity behind food production, thereby promoting a form of discursive environmental disengagement. In our study, such erasure manifested in two forms: voids (complete absence of source animals) and traces (vague references, such as ‘farm’ or ‘nature’s gift’), rendering nature as a passive backdrop rather than an active participant in food systems.

Moreover, the advertisements consistently employed metaphors and personification to portray dairy products as nurturing and emotionally appealing agents (Boujena et al., 2021; Jabeen & Janjua, 2024). Examples like ‘pure love of milk,’ ‘fun in every sip,’ or ‘crafted with care’ are not merely rhetorical flourishes but serve as powerful linguistic tools. According to Ma and Stibbe (2022), these constructions foster destructive discourses that romanticize products while simultaneously distancing consumers from the unsustainable practices behind them. These findings align with recent research by Hirth et al. (2022), who found that corporate food discourse often ascribes emotional agency to commodities to divert environmental scrutiny and amplify consumer trust. In the Saudi context, where consumers increasingly associate health and naturalness with moral value, such metaphorical framing becomes even more persuasive, despite its ecological inaccuracy (Ain et al., 2021; Wang, 2024).

Another key significant discursive device identified across the dataset is the use of high facticity language, which presents claims with certainty and without modal verbs or hedging (Lenardič & Fišer, 2021). Statements such as ‘guarantees purity,’ ‘provides all essential nutrients,’ or ‘perfect for all occasions’ imply objectivity, even in the absence of verifiable evidence. As observed by O’Hagan (2021), high-factual constructions in food advertising exploit readers’ cognitive bias toward factual-sounding language, reinforcing perceived truthfulness and reducing critical engagement. In this study, such linguistic certainty appeared most often in relation to processed products, powdered milk, flavoured

dairy, and yoghurt, suggesting that language was employed to compensate for potential scepticism about healthiness or authenticity. This aligns with similar findings in regional food discourse by Alnasser (n.d.), who emphasises that Saudi marketing increasingly deploys emotional certainty to appeal to middle-class family-oriented consumers.

A further dimension to these findings involves cultural resonance. The frequent invocation of terms like ‘family,’ ‘homegrown,’ ‘tradition,’ and ‘local flavour’ suggests a localized marketing strategy that leverages cultural identity to enhance product appeal. However, these references are largely symbolic. As explained by Eyada (2024), cultural anchors in advertising often substitute for ecological transparency, replacing meaningful content (e.g., sourcing details, sustainability efforts) with emotionally resonant yet semantically shallow markers. The current data, powdered milk, and cheese products were repeatedly associated with ‘traditional purity,’ despite being highly processed, revealing a tension between cultural values and ecological reality.

Crucially, this observation aligns with a broader international concern regarding the greenwashing of language in food marketing (Szabo & Webster, 2021). According to recent work by Szabo and Webster (2021), corporate discourse increasingly exploits eco-semantics by using terms like ‘natural,’ ‘wholesome,’ and ‘organic’ without factual substantiation, thereby creating a false sense of environmental responsibility. This was evident in our results, where terms such as ‘farm-fresh,’ ‘natural dairy,’ and ‘pure ingredients’ were used across all five companies, with no indication of the actual production process. These terms serve as linguistic proxies for nature, thereby reinforcing consumer trust while avoiding accountability for ecological harm.

On one hand, there is a growing consumer consciousness regarding health, nutrition, and environmental sustainability; on the other hand, commercial discourse remains deeply rooted in consumerist ideology, prioritizing emotional gratification and satisfaction over ecological realities (Ersoy, 2023). This discrepancy underscores the urgent need for ecolinguistic reform, a shift toward language that recognizes nature not merely as a decorative backdrop, but as a vital, living agent within the food system. To redress this imbalance, it is imperative to promote ecolinguistic awareness and critical consumer literacy at institutional, educational, and policy levels. Such efforts can fundamentally reshape how nature is represented in commercial discourse, ultimately influencing how it is valued and treated in practice.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study examined how dairy product advertisements in Saudi Arabian supermarkets employ language to craft consumer-friendly narratives while obscuring ecological realities. Applying Stibbe’s Ecolinguistics framework, it revealed consistent use of strategies such as erasure, metaphor, and high facticity to portray dairy products as natural, wholesome, and culturally familiar without acknowledging the animals, environmental impact, or production processes involved. These linguistic patterns highlight the global marketing trends but are tailored to local cultural values, reinforcing consumerism while concealing ecological truth. Such a type of advertising in Saudi Arabia’s supermarket discourse poses a challenge to transparency and environmental awareness. The findings highlight the need for more ethically responsible and ecologically honest advertising, along with greater public Ecolinguistics literacy. By reshaping the way language practices shift, it can help bridge the gap between consumption and environmental responsibility, fostering a more sustainable and informed food culture.

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From Religious Pilgrimage to Planetary Traveling: A Cognitive Study of the History of English Travel Literature

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Abstract—Taking the history of English travel novels as the research object, this paper analyzes the relationship between the development of English travel literature and cognitive evolution from the perspectives of cognitive science theory, spatial theory and evolutionary theory, and constructs a set of cognitive evolution model throughout the history of English travel literature. This model reveals the deep relationship between the internal spatial representation of the text and human cognitive mechanism, and understands the evolution of the history of English travel novels as a cultural map from "embodied existence" to "cognitive evolution", covering embodied practice, social mind, psychological internalization and planetary scale expansion. By analyzing *Canterbury Tales*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Gulliver's Travels* and other works, this paper points out that travel novels not only record the cognitive changes of human beings in space, self and 'other', but also continuously push the boundary between literature and cultural thinking to the future, thus providing a new research path for understanding the dynamic relationship between literature and human cognitive system.

Index Terms—travel novels, travel narrative, travel literature, cognitive literature studies, cognitive evolution

I. INTRODUCTION

Travel, as a practice across geographical and cultural boundaries, has been deeply involved in the shaping process of human experience since the beginning of civilization. It is not only related to the movement of the body in geographical space, but also deeply embedded in cultural production, social structure and mental evolution. Travel has recently emerged as a key theme for the humanities and social sciences, accompanied by a proliferation of scholarly research work on travel writing (Hulme & Youngs, 2002, p. 1). The travel tradition formed in English literature since the Middle Ages—from the pilgrim narration in *The Canterbury Tales* to the modern planetary travel writing—not only reflects the migration and evolution of literary themes, but also witnesses the historical changes of human cognitive patterns. As Karin Kukkonen convincingly argues, the history of the novel can be aptly understood as the history of a lifeworld technology that affords the dynamical interaction of strongly embodied and embedded readers (and writers) with literary texts and other relevant material artifacts (2019, p. 197). Therefore, travel narrative is no longer simply regarded as a plot frame describing space movement, but is re-understood as a result of embodied cognition generated by interaction with social and cultural environment, as well as a process of the human mind modeling and projecting space, others, and the self. This theoretical turn enables us to re-examine travel literature from the perspectives of cognitive science, spatial theory and cultural evolution, and endow them with cognitive cultural value in the history of literature. It is in this interdisciplinary context that this paper systematically analyzes the cognition and evolution path of travel literature, aiming to fill the lack of understanding of the relationship between travel writing and human cognitive development in traditional literature research.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Although research on travel literature has grown substantially, most previous scholars predominantly focus on the analysis of colonial narratives, the construction of the other, or power mechanism (Pratt, 2008; Youngs, 2013) while relatively less attention has been paid to the internal cognitive structure and evolutionary logic of travel fiction. Particularly from the cognitive perspective of literature history, there remains a lack of a cohesive cognitive framework spanning from the Middle Ages to the contemporary era—one capable of integrating embodied experience, emotional construction, and spatial imagination. Furthermore, traditional literary theory has often treated "travel" merely as a theme or symbolic structure, failing to adequately reveal its generative mechanism as a "cognitive model" at the narrative level. The elements such as maps, paths, obstacles, directions and place names that frequently appear in travel novels are not just rhetorical devices, but constitute a part of "cognitive map", which reflects the way human mind constructs the world in different historical stages (Tuan, 1979; Moretti, 1998). Therefore, the core question put forward in this paper is how can travel novels, as a mirror image of the evolution of cognitive culture, present human cognitive style and spatial consciousness in different historical stages?

Literature and cognitive science are mutually enriching. According to Polvinen, “the cognitive sciences can offer literary studies both experimental results and philosophical insights into the reading mind”, while many cognitive scientists, in turn, use literary works as a rich source of insight into human mental life (2023, p. 2). Kolaiti states that “literature/art has distinct cognitive rather than linguistic properties” (2025, p. 2). Based on the theory of cognitive literature studies, this paper comprehensively applies embodied cognition theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999), the evolutionary model of culture and cognition (Donald, 1991), and introduces spatial turn (Tally, 2017) and planetary turn (Heise, 2008) and other contemporary theoretical paths, constructs a cognitive development model of travel literature: from the survival needs of the body, to the maturity and socialization of cognitive ability, and then to the planetary turn of cognitive scripts. Through this framework, this article regards travel novels as a “cognitive form”, that is, a way to organize body action, social interaction and spatial imagination into narrative structure. In terms of research methods, this paper adopts the analysis path of combining historical verticality with text close reading, starting from the subjective self-examination or construction, combining the perspectives of embodied experience, emotional construction and spatial imagination, and taking the cognitive affection theory as the main framework, selects representative English travel novels (such as *The Canterbury Tales*, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy*, *The Castle of Otranto*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Gulliver's Travels*, *A Passage to India*, *The Mars Trilogy*, etc.) to analyze them in different historical contexts.

III. EMBODIED COGNITION IN EARLY ENGLISH TRAVEL WRITING

From the perspective of evolution, human travel behavior originated from the demand for resources and survival. With the complex changes of the natural environment, human beings identify, evaluate and judge the environment in space, and their cognitive ability will gradually improve, which involves people's attention, perception, memory, categorization (Waller & Nadel, 2013, p. 3), way-finding, orientation, navigation and transport (Zunshine, 2015, pp. 225–238). The theory of embodied cognition emphasizes that many cognitive phenomena are enabled or influenced by the properties, movements, and physiological states of the body (Alber & Schneider, 2025, p. 303). In other words, people know the world in action, and travel is the concentrated embodiment of this “action-cognition” structure. Therefore, from the earliest human migration and tribal movement to the later trade routes, expeditions and pilgrimages, travel behavior has always been closely related to the evolution of human cognitive patterns.

In literature, early travel writing is usually closely related to religion, myth and the legend of heroes. As Laura Nenzi states that “pilgrimage has inspired the production of a large body of literature. It has also provided an important frame of reference for many other types of travel and travel writing” (Thompson, 2020, p. 217). Especially in medieval England, travel was not only a spatial movement, but also a process of spiritual cultivation and moral advancement. Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* is a literary representation of this cognitive structure. This work depicts a group of travelers who go on a pilgrimage to Canterbury. They tell their own stories during their journey. Travel here is not only the movement of the body, but also the framework for the tempering and narration of the mind. Pilgrimage narrative provides a structure that frames individual experience as a symbolic journey, so that readers can understand the tension between individual and collective, belief and secular through the journey. As a cultural cognitive script, pilgrimage is highly symbolic: it puts individuals in a cognitive environment of ethics and beliefs, making them constantly reflect on the relationship between themselves and society.

In line with the narrative tradition of Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, the 17th-century English religious literature master John Bunyan elevated the “cognitive journey” to a more profound spiritual dimension in his allegorical masterpiece *The Pilgrim's Progress*. The protagonist Christian leaves the “City of Destruction” in search of salvation, undergoes various trials and misdirections, and finally reaches the “Celestial Gate”. This is not only an individual soul's “cognitive journey” but also a symbolic construction of the “correct path of faith” within the religious society. Like Palmer said that narrative is the description of fictional mental functioning (2004, p. 12). In *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the path choice of characters, the symbol of obstacles and the cognitive judgment of companions and enemies constitute a dynamic mental simulation system. Through the repeated interweaving of geography and psychological space, the novel enables readers to “travel in the story” and experience the cognitive dilemma and emotional adjustment of the characters. This overlapping structure of “inner and outer space” provided a narrative template for later novelists, and also promoted the expansion of travel narrative from a single physical movement to a multi-dimensional cognitive space.

The early travel narrative does not emphasize individual desires or the complexity of the real world, but is characterized by symbolism and fable. Space is coded as a symbolic system of morality and religion here, and the cognitive goal of travelers is externalized as “God's will” or “the road to redemption”. This model embodies the “goal-directed action” in cognitive science, and the actions of characters always revolve around some ultimate truth or belief goal. It is in this narrative structure that travel, as a literary expression, gradually gained a stable prototype position, which provided the embryonic form of cognition and narrative for later secularized travel novels. Especially with the rise of rationalist culture in the 18th century, travel novels gradually broke away from the religious framework and turned to the exploration of the secular world. Therefore, the travel novels from the Middle Ages to the 17th century, although not divorced from the cognitive framework of religion and morality, have laid a foundation for the cognitive tradition of travel novels in narrative structure, mental modeling and spatial construction. In the interaction between embodied experience and symbolic space, literary travel shows a unique “cognitive simulation”, which is not only a

simulation of the real world, but also an exercise of mental growth under the framework of cultural cognition.

IV. SOCIAL MIND GROWTH IN 18TH CENTURY NOVELS

The 18th century is an important stage for the formation and rapid development of English novels, which marks the transition from religious narration to secular experience narration. During this period, travel gradually broke away from the religious symbol system and became the main means for individuals to explore their identity, social cognition and moral decision-making in the real society. This change is closely related to the empirical rationality and anthropocentrism emphasized by the Enlightenment (Porter, 2001). Travel novels not only continue the "moving" mode in narrative structure, but also gradually develop complex psychological description and social interaction mechanism. The travel novels at this stage highlights how the human beings, through engagement with others, spatial transitions, and the comprehension of causal relationships, gradually achieves social mind—the socialization and maturation of cognitive capacities.

The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling, authored by Henry Fielding in 1749, is widely regarded by academia as a representative masterpiece that embodies the mature form of the English novel in the 18th century. Centered on the journey of its protagonist, Tom Jones—marked by his departure from home, his fall into error, and his eventual restoration to recognition—the novel unfolds a richly realistic social panorama. Travel is not only a tool to promote stories, but also a process in which Tom gradually gains the ability of social cognition, moral judgment and emotional discrimination. During the traveling, Tom met people from different social classes and constantly shaped his mental structure through interaction and misunderstanding. This is the process of "mind modeling" emphasized by cognitive literature studies (Zunshine, 2006). The novel embodies the close relationship between travel and causal reasoning. For example, Tom was expelled from his home because of an impulsive mistake, which triggered a series of encounters and turning points in his travels. Every choice compels Tom to re-judge the way others and society operate. This "narrative causality" is not only the basic logic of the novel structure, but also reflects the cognitive mechanism between the internal mental development of the characters and the interaction of external social experience.

The evolution of human cognition is not only biological, but also driven by culture. As in Donald's theory of cultural cognitive evolution, he argues that specific types of human culture have direct effects upon individual cognition (Donald, 1991, pp. 9–10). We adapt to the new situation by developing new representation systems (such as language, images and external symbols), and these systems are preserved and integrated into the structure of modern mind during the evolution. At this time, the representative works of travel literature, from *"Tom Jones"* to Daniel Defoe's *"Robinson Crusoe"* (1719), can be seen as a progression from "cognitive exercises in real society" to "cognitive creation in wilderness environments." Although Robinson's life in isolated island is divorced from the social background, it constitutes a pure cognitive experimental field. He rebuilt social order on an isolated island, from cognitive confusion and emotional panic to the establishment of timetable, spatial order and value system, showing a high degree of "cognitive adaptability". This process can echo Donald's statement that "cultures restructure the mind... the brain sets fewer constraints than formerly thought on the process of cognitive evolution" (p. 14).

Meanwhile, Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) pushed the travel novel to the extremes of satire and cognitive reflection. Each of Gulliver's four voyages—to Lilliput, Brobdingnag, Laputa, and the Land of the Houyhnhnms—serves as a symbolic mapping of contemporary British society, politics, and science. Though these alien realms appear absurd, they constitute a sophisticated process of modeling of the Other (Said, 1993; Spivak, 1997). Through Gulliver's perspective, readers not only perceive the absurdities of society but are also prompted to reflect on their own cognitive blind spots and cultural biases.

In these three works, the role of travel as a cognitive framework is obvious. It is no longer a religious road to salvation, but a process of guiding individuals to constantly "calibrate" their cognitive maps in the reality. Obstacles and encounters, choices and misunderstandings in travel constitute "cognitive events" in narrative. The growth of characters and readers' understanding can be realized in parallel in these cognitive events. Generally speaking, the cognitive model embodied in English travel novels in the 18th century includes not only the ability to understand others and society, but also the ability to reflect on one's own mental state. The travel novels at this stage show that cognitive growth is not only the development of "inner psychology", but also a comprehensive process embedded in social interaction and spatial transformation. On this basis, travel novels have gradually become the core type of literature reflecting the evolution of mind, laying the foundation of narrative and cognitive structure for later emotional introversion, subconscious exploration and space reconstruction.

V. EMOTION AND COGNITION IN SENTIMENTAL FICTION AND GOTHIC

From the end of 18th century to the beginning of 19th century, English travel novels gradually turned from describing the external space to exploring the internal feeling, emotional fluctuation and psychological cognition of the subject, showing a significant trend of "introversion". This change is not only due to the change of travel concept from geographical practice to psychological experience, but also closely related to the development of Sentimentalism and Gothic tradition in English literature. Travel novels in this period often take mental space as the core, and reveal the subconscious activities and psychological complexity stimulated by travel behavior through emotional adjustment,

subjective perception and cognitive projection. This trend is reflected not only in the theme of the text, but also in the cognitive narrative strategy.

Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy* (1768) is regarded as a representative work of English sentimental literature in the 18th century, and it is also a symbolic text of the transition of travel narrative from external space to internal psychological space. As Zunshine (2006) pointed out, the 18th century novels used the strategy of "theory of mind" to express the psychological state and emotional reaction of the characters. In *A Sentimental Journey*, the protagonist Yorick does not focus on the curiosity for landscapes, historical relics, or ethnic customs as traditional travelers do, but rather concentrates on the emotional fluctuations, the awakening of sympathy, and the formation of moral judgments he experiences during his travels. Cognitive scientist Damasio (2006) proposed the "somatic marker hypothesis," which emphasizes that emotion serves as a central mechanism in cognitive decision-making processes, rather than being a peripheral factor. Yorick's journey can be viewed as a cognitive process guided by such somatic markers, where his moral judgments, social responses, and even aesthetic experiences are deeply rooted in embodied emotions and internal reactions. *A Sentimental Journey* employs a non-linear, fragmented narrative style, utilizing flashbacks, inner monologues, and emotional depictions to reveal the fluidity of subjective consciousness. This structure also reflects the theory of "mental space construction" proposed by Fauconnier and Turner (2003), which posits that humans create multiple interconnected mental spaces at the cognitive level during processes of understanding and narration. Consequently, *A Sentimental Journey* is not merely a novel about travel, but rather a narrative experiment on the workings of the mind. Yorick's compassion for beggars, his admiration for women, and his reflections on his own emotional fluctuations collectively constitute a form of "cognitive journey" grounded in embodied emotion. The novel's narrative perspective and emotional rhythm together mimic the non-linear structure of human mental activity, thereby evoking a "cognitive empathy" effect in readers, synchronizing them with the protagonist's emotional states.

If Sterne's novel initiated an "inward turn" in travel narrative, then Gothic novelists such as Ann Radcliffe further deepened the trend of "psychological spatialization" within the travel novel. The journeys depicted in Gothic fiction often unfold among gloomy castles, remote mountains, and mysterious ruins—spatial constructions that themselves constitute a symbolic reconstruction of characters' psychological states. As Botting (2014) notes, through strategies of "spatial personification" and "psychological landscaping," Gothic fiction transforms external environments into projections of inner fears and desires. "Physical locations and settings manifest disturbance and ambivalence in spatial terms as movements between inside and out... the castles, abbeys and ruins... transfer these institutions to zones outside a rational culture... they are located in isolated spots, areas beyond reason, law and civilised authority" (p. 4). "The internalisation of gothic forms represents the most significant shift in the genre, the gloom and darkness of sublime landscapes becoming external markers of inner mental and emotional states" (Botting, 2014, pp. 83–84). For instance, in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), the landscapes traversed by the heroine Emily are not merely geographical but function as affective mappings of her inner turmoil, sorrow, and curiosity. The intricately layered and obscured spaces in the novel form a psychological labyrinth, echoing Edward Casey's philosophical view that "place is a container of memory" (2013). These spaces are not merely backdrops for events but serve as extended platforms for characters' cognitive states.

Moreover, Radcliffe's characteristic use of the "explained gothic" structure—which rationally or naturally demystifies seemingly supernatural phenomena, ultimately revealing them as human deception, psychological illusion, or scientific occurrences—can itself be understood as a strategy of cognitive integration. By systematically resolving seemingly supernatural events through rational logic, Radcliffe not only dispels readers' fears but also alleviates the cognitive tension built into the narrative structure. This "explanatory narrative" satisfies, to some extent, the reader's expectation for coherence, resulting in a reading experience characterized by emotional stability.

From the perspective of cognitive psychology and spatial cognition theory, the recurring "castles", "mazes" and "dark passages" in Gothic novels are not only spatial images that create a horrible atmosphere, but also concrete expressions of an internal "psychological schema". The fuzzy structure, asymmetric layout and visual masking characteristics of these spaces are highly metaphorically consistent with the "subconscious depression" and "spatial anxiety" discussed in psychology. "Fundamental psychological mechanisms underlying navigation minimally include (a) piloting—the ability to use sets of landmarks to determine or maintain a direction of travel; (b) dead reckoning—the ability to determine one's position on the basis of information about one's velocity and acceleration; and (c) cognitive mapping—the use of a global mental representation of one's environment" (Waller & Nadel, 2013, p. 5). However, in Gothic novels, the author deliberately breaks the cognitive stability of characters and readers by disintegrating the spatial order on which these cognitive mechanisms depend, and pushes them into a state of "cognitive ambiguity". Taking *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Italian* as examples, through the constant dislocation of space and identity, the narrative gradually dives into multiple subconscious levels from the external geographical description. Travellers' wandering identity, ambiguous motives and broken memories together lead to their travel behavior breaking away from the logic of traditional geographical exploration and becoming a symbol of psychological fissure and cognitive maze.

VI. EXTENDED COGNITION IN MODERN ENGLISH TRAVEL WRITING

In modern society, the development of science and technology has brought about the evolution of culture and

literature, and human imagination has surpassed the development of science and technology. In the aftermath of the spatial turn, a “planetary turn” has caused many of the traditional discourses within modern language and literary studies to make fascinating connections among the local, regional, national, and global circuits of cultural production (Tally, 2017, p. 4). The production of space and geographical imagination bring human emotions into a new framework. With the rapid development of science and technology and the awakening of global consciousness since the middle of the 20th century, the spatial imagination of travel literature has undergone a fundamental change, which is no longer limited to the representation of geographical space, but towards the extended cognitive model of “planetary consciousness” and post-human. This evolution from “earth scripts” to “interplanetary scripts” is reflected in the deep transformation of travel writing, media technology and spatial cognition. “Travel” in literature has gradually become a process of cultural experiment and cognitive speculation in the post-human era.

In the travel narratives in the late 19th century and early 20th century, modern transportation, such as postal vehicles, railways and ships, did not exist simply as background, but formed a part of human travel experience itself, remolding human perception and time-space experience, and forming a brand-new cognitive framework in the period of industrial modernity. As Schivelbusch (2014) said, “annihilation of time and space was the topos which the early nineteenth century used to describe the new situation into which the railroad placed natural space after depriving it of its hitherto absolute powers” (p. 10). The traveler perceived the landscape as it was filtered through the machine ensemble (p. 24). When people sit in modern traffic vehicle, they could have “panoramic perception”, “in contrast to traditional perception, no longer belonged to the same space as the perceived objects” (p. 64). In Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*, the airplane, as a modern means of transportation, profoundly functions as a “cognitive-mediational technology,” reshaping the modern intellectual woman's spatial experience of the world. Anna Wulf, the protagonist of the novel, travels frequently between London and Africa. The “God's perspective” brought by high-altitude flight makes her accustomed to examining the context of the surface and the division of national boundaries from the cloud. This detached and panoramic sense of space has formed a profound fracture with the political turmoil and emotional entanglements she experienced on the ground. Air travel is no longer just the movement of physical location, it forcibly separates Anna's cognition from concrete and local life experience, forcing her to speculate on a global and abstract scale. The means of transportation mediates and reconstructs her spatial consciousness, making her constantly switch between the two identities of world citizen and individual woman, which has become the key medium for the formation of her split modern consciousness and global cognitive style.

From the second half of the 20th century to the 21st century, travel science fiction gradually expanded their perspective from the earth to the space, showing the “planetary turn” defined by Tally (2017). This shift transcends the framework of globalization and emphasizes the spatial consciousness based on the coexistence of ethics, ecology and multi-species. Heise (2008) proposed in *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* that “planetary consciousness” is not only the expansion of spatial scale, but also the innovation of cognitive structure and ethical vision. In this context, travel is no longer a single subject's observation of the external world, but a “relational space” composed of environment, others and non-human factors. Under this model, literary travel is transformed into an experimental field of ecological consciousness, technological perception and social symbiosis mechanism.

Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) is often interpreted as an allegory of gender politics. However, when approached from the perspective of planetary space, the novel presents a planetary cognitive experiment generated within a heterogenous environment. In the story's setting, the Ekumen envoy Genly AI is sent to the planet Gethen to persuade it to join an interstellar alliance. The inhabitants of this planet are androgynous, only undergoing gender differentiation during “kemmer”. This setup not only deconstructs gender binarism but also provides the backdrop for a cross-cultural, cross-cognitive travel narrative. This journey embodies not only the physical challenges of survival but also constitutes a profound ethical and cognitive experiment. The symbiotic relationship between Genly and Estraven on the ice sheet forms the core of the novel's narrative structure. During their months-long trek across the glacier, they share food, warm each other in snow caves, maintain each other's rhythm while skiing, and respect each other's distinct gender, cultural, and political barriers—vividly revealing the post-human attributes of planetary space. The icy expanse not only drives the plot but also serves as a cognitive exercise in “relational space”. Confronted by this pure, non-human natural force, all socially constructed human identities—envoy/exile, king/beggar, and even initial gender assumptions—are stripped away. Space compels the two individuals to revert to a most primitive state of symbiotic existence. Within this planetary space, the subject's perception and emotions are reorganized, ultimately enabling Genly to transcend a binary framework in understanding gender difference and cultural otherness. As Spivak notes in *Death of a Discipline*, the planet belongs to the “species of alterity,” “belonging to another system” (p. 72); planetarity requires us to acknowledge that we inhabit a planet we do not own and cannot fully comprehend. Ethical responsibility arises precisely from this fundamental difference and incommensurability, not from our ability to fully understand or empathize with the Other. We must learn to coexist with and take responsibility for this “Other” that we cannot fully control or comprehend. This responsibility toward the “incommensurable Other” represents an ethical turn in travel narratives within a planetary context. While academic discourse has largely focused on the text's deconstructive significance for gender politics, this paper argues that the reconstituted perceptual mechanisms of the subject within the planetary spatial environment not only challenge gender binarism but also reshape the traveler's cognitive schema. From the perspective of cognitive literary studies, this constitutes a form of spatial cognition

unfolding in a planetary environment—a powerful challenge to the "anthropocentric perceptual system".

VII. CONCLUSION

Travel is a common social phenomenon in western wandering culture, and it has also been fully reflected in the history of English literature. On the basis of outlining the history of British travel novels, this paper discusses the cognitive cultural characteristics and evolutionary implications behind them, constructs a cognitive evolutionary model that runs through the history of British travel novels, and reveals the deep relationship between the internal spatial representation of the text and the cognitive mechanism. The development of English travel novels can be understood as a cultural map from "physical existence" to "cognitive evolution", which has experienced physical practicality, social and mental development, psychological introversion and cognitive expansion on a planetary scale.

In this process, travel novels not only record the human understanding path of space, subjectivity and the other, but also constantly refresh the cognitive boundary and promote the common opening of literature and cultural thinking to the future. The cognitive development model constructed in this paper may provide a new research path for understanding the dynamic relationship between literature and human cognitive system. British travel novels not only reflect the historical evolution of cognitive model as cultural texts, but also actively participate in and shape the cognitive reconstruction of the relationship between self-other-world.

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Decoding the Impact of Language Contact on Saudi Arabic: A Cognitive Sociolinguistic Analysis

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Abstract—Based on the assumption that almost all languages are subject to change due to language contact, this study investigates the impact of language contact on Saudi Arabic, with a focus on lexical, syntactic, and phonological changes driven by foreign labor migration and Saudi students returning from abroad. While existing scholarship has documented pidginization and borrowing in Gulf Arabic, this paper provides a granular analysis of Saudi-specific phenomena, including the adoption of Hindi, Persian, and Turkish lexical items and structural shifts in emergent pidgin varieties. Additionally, it posits the understudied influence of Saudi returnees from Anglophone countries as catalysts for semantic broadening and code-mixing. In doing so, the study is grounded on the social cognitive theory to show the extent to which new varieties have been introduced to Saudi Arabic due to language contact. Findings reveal that lexical borrowing dominates current changes, while phonological and semantic shifts remain marginal but evolving. The study argues that economic globalization and educational mobility are central to these transformations, offering a timely update to frameworks on Arabic dialect evolution. By bridging gaps in prior literature and introducing new sociolinguistic actors, this work contributes to understanding how localized language contact shapes contemporary Arabic varieties.

Index Terms—cross-cultural communication, language contact, pidgins, Saudi Arabic, social cognitive theory

I. INTRODUCTION

As a cosmopolitan country, Saudi Arabia attracts a large number of people from different countries and cultures. The majority of those people come for work and better job opportunities, whereas others come for tourism, particularly religious tourism (Alanazi, 2013). A lot of those people come from non-Arabic-speaking countries, such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Nepal, Indonesia, and Malaysia, with different languages (Almathkuri, 2016). Such a multicultural community necessitates a new communication paradigm that manages to absorb all these cultures and languages and incorporate them within a new variety of language that functions to create a successful type of communication among all. In most cases, those people do not have the ability to speak Arabic, the mother tongue of Saudis, nor do they speak English as a lingua franca. However, they tend to use a mix of varieties that is created to facilitate communication and understanding between them and others. This has led to the creation of a new form of cross-cultural communication known as Gulf Pidgin Arabic (Avram, 2014).

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is an Arabic-speaking country in terms of its linguistic identity (Elyas & Picard, 2018). In other words, Arabic is used for most written and spoken communication in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Alrashidi & Phan, 2015). Furthermore, the prevalence of Arabic monolingualism is directly linked to the religious and cultural ethos and identity of the original Arabs (Begum & Haque, 2013). Aslam and AbuSa'aleek (2019) assert that language use is the foundation of communication and that the negotiation of a language's structure and meaning determines how it develops. Al-Ahdal (2020) illustrated the importance of language in supporting our comprehension and communication of the meaning of the content. Additionally, according to Alfallaj (2016), language is a social phenomenon that operates in accordance with cultural and societal standards. Nonetheless, English as a lingua franca allows people who speak it to communicate with others. However, this is not the study's primary focus. Instead, it is the exchange of information between individuals who do not speak the same language. Workers, plumbers, shopkeepers, mechanics, craftsmen, masons, painters, electricians, cleaners, sweepers, tailors, technicians, drivers, and others from non-Arabic-speaking countries do not speak the same language, not even English. Thus, the issue is how these employees communicate with Arabic speakers or their counterparts who speak other languages. A new form of cross-cultural communication known as Gulf Pidgin Arabic (GPA) has emerged over the last 40 years or so, and the vast majority of these foreign workers live and work in urban areas that have evolved into both linguistic laboratories and gathering places for people who speak different languages (Avram, 2014).

A. Research Objectives

This study attempts to achieve the following research objectives:

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1. To explore the impact of language contact on Saudi Arabic.
2. To shed light on the way language contact influences Saudi Arabic in terms of the lexical, syntactic, and phonological changes.
3. To show the extent to which language contact creates a new communication paradigm in the Saudi sociolinguistic context.

B. Research Questions

The current study tries to provide answers for the following research questions:

RQ1. To what extent does language contact affect Saudi Arabic?

RQ2. How does language contact influence Saudi Arabic in terms of the lexical, syntactic, and phonological changes?

RQ3. How does language contact create a new communication paradigm in the Saudi sociolinguistic context?

The rest of this study is organized as follows: Section 2 presents the theoretical background and literature pertinent to the current study, as well as reviews some previous studies relevant to the topic at hand. Section 3 offers the methodology of the study, in which data collection, description, and the analytical procedures adopted in this study are provided. Section 4 demonstrates the analysis and results of the study. Section 5 discusses the results obtained from the analysis of the selected data. Section 6 is the conclusion of the study, wherein some recommendations for further research are presented.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Language Contact and Language Change

For a plethora of reasons, languages around the world have been changing constantly since the dawn of time. Arabic has not been exempt from this phenomenon. It has branched into a large number of dialects that are as numerous as the communities and peoples that constitute the Arab world (Bassiouny, 2020). In this work, Saudi Arabic is brought under the spotlight as a case study. The changes that have occurred in this dialect of Arabic as a result of language contact are addressed. According to Ismail (2021), language change is a healthy phenomenon that languages have to go through in order to persist and thrive. If a language does not change, it will become stagnant, and it will fail to satisfy the communicative needs of its speakers. Language change means that new linguistic data are incorporated into the language as often as needed. These data can be in the form of borrowed words, modified grammatical structures, and stretching or narrowing of the meaning of lexical items. The data can even come in the form of abandoning items that have lost their value as useful linguistic material. These changes keep a language up-to-date and an optimal tool of communication.

Language contact is one of the strongest factors that plays a role in language change. Language contact comes into play when two or more linguistic communities, which speak different languages, coexist in the same region. Language contact is more prominent than ever before. It is hard to find a country in which there is no linguistic contact (Sankoff, 2001). This is in part the result of remarkable advancements in the fields of transportation and communication. Today, people are able to travel around the globe in a short period of time with exceptional ease. Language contact can influence languages in different ways. In some cases, the linguistic data of a language in contact would increase noticeably. However, in other cases language contact can render a language extinct after a period of contact with another language. An important distinction is that language contact can lead to change in both languages, in contrast to diglossic situations in which only the lower variety is subject to change (Sayahi, 2007).

There are several processes by which language contact leads to language change. First, it is uncontroversial that languages vary in their prestige. Assume that two languages, A and B, coexist in a single region. It is also assumed that language A is regarded as more prestigious than language B. In this situation, speakers of language B will likely borrow words and structure over time from language A for reasons of prestige (Backus, 2004). The fact that people speaking different languages have different cultures also needs to be considered. There are things and concepts that are unique to each group of people. This means that for the speaker of one language, it is obligatory or, in other terms, more convenient to borrow the relevant word from the other language. Language contact can result in several forms of language change. One evident change is structural convergence (Heath, 1984). Structural convergence, according to Heath (1984), occurs when the structure of one language or the structure of both languages becomes similar to one another.

Another, more prevailing, case of language change as a result of language contact is known as borrowing. When languages come into contact, there is an irresistible temptation to borrow words from each of these languages into the other. According to Heath (1984), borrowing is the partial or full usage of lexical items that are adopted from L2 into L1. Nicolaï and Comrie (2008) argued that borrowing is not simply the process of copying words from one language to another, but it is also the result of this process. If a word is adapted from one language to another, this word is regarded as a borrowing as well as the process of adopting it. Lastly, borrowing is not a bidirectional process in which the speaker can adopt words in L1 as well as in L2. Borrowing occurs only when the L1 speaker adopts items from L2 into his or her native language (Sankoff, 2001).

B. Causes of Language Contact

Tracing the reasons why language contact occurs, one can list many economic and sociopolitical factors. Concerning the economic factors, the search for better economic opportunities has been the greatest force behind the phenomenon of language contact. As a result, if a given language is spoken by an economically strong country or community, it will have an influence on many other languages since the speakers of these languages will come to this area in search of economic prosperity. However, they will end up influencing their L1 and the L2 (Al Amadidhi, 1990). These new workers, in most cases, arrive in their country of destination with zero or meager knowledge of the language spoken by the majority. These workers do their best to learn the new language, but the structure and patterns in their L1 play a large role in the way they produce phrases and sentences in the new language. Over time, the native speakers of the L2 start to adopt the new structures produced by the foreigners as a simpler way of successful communication.

Another phenomenon that is sometimes triggered by economic factors is the expansion of the lexicon. New economic opportunities call for new lexical items. An example of this is provided by Al Amadidhi (1990) in his study of the Qatari dialect of Arabic. In this study he argued that, before the discovery of oil, Qatari people used to depend heavily on fishing. However, when oil was discovered, they started to be involved more and more in this new arena. For that, new lexical items that are related to oil started to seep into the Qatari Arabic. These new lexical items were mostly imported by the foreign workers and technicians who dominated oil production. In short, the strength of the economy of a given region or country triggers language contact as a result of foreign workers seeking better opportunities. It also starts a process of lexical borrowing.

As for the sociopolitical factors, they lie in the assumption that politics and social factors are essential sources for language change. Language is a dynamic system that is always changing to adapt to new social, political, technological, and economic developments (Khafaga, 2023). The Arabic language, particularly the regional varieties of the language known as 'Saudi Arabic,' has changed significantly in the Saudi Arabian setting. The kingdom's changing sociopolitical environment is reflected in these changes. Every stage of Saudi Arabia's evolution, from tribal customs to fast industrialization, from oil wealth to globalization, and from conservative standards to social transformation, has left linguistic imprints. Globalization, in particular the Kingdom's greater engagement with the West, notably the United States, has been one of the most important sociopolitical forces. These days, English is a language of opportunity and prestige that is frequently connected to commerce, education, and modernity. Furthermore, throughout the course of history, there are examples of political systems that ban the use of certain languages. For example, Atatürk of early post-Ottoman Turkey ordered that the writing system of the country be changed from Arabic to Latin. He also ordered all lexical items of Arabic origin to be removed and replaced with new ones that were more Turkish.

C. Language Contact in Saudi Arabia and Languages in Contact With Saudi Arabic

Since oil was discovered, Saudi Arabia has become a haven for many individuals, mostly from Asia, looking for improved employment prospects. Usually, these laborers are from Asian nations like Bangladesh, Indonesia, Pakistan, India, and others. It is inevitable that they will employ their original languages or lexical components from their native languages because they typically know little to no Arabic. This is one of the main ways that Saudi Arabic interacts with these languages. According to AlRawi et al. (2022), many languages have interacted with Saudi Arabic as a result of the diversity of foreign workers in Saudi Arabia. It can be noticed that when it comes to their impact on Saudi Arabic, the languages used by Indian employees rank highest. The large Indian population in Saudi Arabia is the cause of this. Another significant demographic in Saudi Arabia is made up of Pakistani workers, who have a significant influence on Saudi Arabic. Khan (2012) argues that although the number of Pakistanis in Saudi Arabia is constantly growing, it was projected to be over 1.5 million as of 2012. There are other foreigners in Saudi Arabia besides Indians and Pakistanis. There are numerous additional nationalities in Saudi Arabia, but the majorities come from Yemen, Egypt, Lebanon, Ethiopia, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Indonesia, and the Philippines (Dawn Media Group, 2013, Para. 15). Because these employees speak a variety of languages, all of them are considered to be in a linguistic contact scenario with Saudi Arabic.

D. The Role of Saudis Returning From Other Countries

Saudis returning from other countries like the United States, Canada, Britain, Australia, and so forth, likely play a role in changing Saudi Arabic, which has been heretofore overlooked. In 2005, the government of Saudi Arabia initiated the Abdul Aziz Scholarship Program that allows thousands of Saudis to study at universities around the world. According to the Saudi Press Agency (2013), the Minister of Higher Education stated that the number of students who have benefited from this program to date has reached 148,229 individuals. As far as I know, there has not been any research that has addressed this form of contact, but one can be certain that this faction of the society is regarded as the elite of the educated people, and everyone else aspires to resemble them in one way or another. The fact that there is no literature on the issue does not stop one from postulating on the possible influence that these students have on the society in general and the language in particular. Noticeably, many of those who study abroad, particularly in the United States, tend to code-mix and borrow words from English, especially when it comes to things that are typically Western. I predict that with time, many of these lexical items will seep into the body of Saudi Arabic.

E. Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory

A strong foundation for comprehending language contact and evolution in Saudi Arabia is offered by Bandura's (1977a, 1977b, 1986) social cognitive theory (SCT). How people choose, acquire, and use languages is influenced by observational learning, self-efficacy, and the mutual interaction of behavioral, contextual, and personal factors. SCT encompasses the social and cognitive dynamics underlying a variety of activities, including dialectal convergence, code switching, intergenerational language shift, and media-mediated foreign language acquisition. Bandura (1986) created the psychological framework, which highlights the significance of modeling, imitation, and observational learning in human behavior. By including a cognitive component, it departs from conventional behaviorist theories by claiming that individuals actively understand and affect their surroundings rather than only being passive recipients of inputs (Khafaga, 2024). Behaviorism and cognitive psychology are connected by Bandura's (2003) social cognitive theory, which emphasizes three main factors: the social setting in which learning occurs, the part that self-beliefs, particularly self-efficacy, play, and the dynamic interplay of environment, behavior, and person. Reconciling with Bandura, LaMort (2019) argues that the social cognitive theory is entirely concerned with the contextual environment in which interaction occurs. For LaMort (2019), the context has an effective role in the process of learning behavior change and, therefore, contributes to language change that emerges as a consequence of language contact.

F. Related Studies

When addressing the issue of language contact and its impact on Saudi Arabic, one has to give credit to the pioneer of this domain, Smart (1990), who provided a firsthand account of the influence of European and Indian technicians on Gulf Arabic. In his 1990 work, which is regarded as the first work on language contact and its impact on Arabic, Smart explained the effect of pidginization on Gulf Arabic. The only drawback of this work is that it was focused on data that Smart extracted from newspapers, but he also referred to personal observations that he made between the years of 1966 and 1987. During his stay in Oman as a teacher, Smart started to realize the emergence of a new variety of Arabic. He ascribed this emergence to the presence of workers from Europe and India as well as to the advent of published newspapers. Smart, in his paper, discussed the different components of language that are subject to change, including phonology, morphology, and syntax. Among the changes that Smart (1990) came to realize was the overuse of demonstratives, which he linked to the influence the L1 of foreigners had on the way they speak Gulf Arabic. In other words, he argued that speakers of L2 tend to follow the patterning system of their L1, and he added that this process normally affects only the lower variety.

Another significant work that dealt more closely with the issue is Albakrawi's (2012) study about the effect Asian workers had on Saudi Arabic Pidgin. In this study, Albakrawi gathered data by recording excerpts from random conversations held by Asian workers and Saudis. He also conducted one-on-one interviews to enable him to address certain issues. In his analysis of the data, he looked into the syntax, phonology, semantics, and morphology of the constructions that these workers produced. He came to a number of conclusions that are addressed in the discussion in the coming sections. Al-Azraqi's (2010) study is another remarkable work that enriches the debate on this topic. In addition to one-on-one interviews, Al-Azraqi paid attention to media outlets like TV, radio, and newspapers in collecting her data. Her findings were very similar to those of Albakrawi (2012). For example, she argued that, as a result of pidginization, inflection and definiteness are widely discarded. Moreover, the use of demonstratives and pronouns is noticeably manipulated. In a further study on language contact in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Boyle (2012) argued that language contact in the UAE is very dramatic, to the extent that it triggered a process of nativization.

Additionally, Gomma (2007) carried out a sociolinguistic study in the Saudi context to characterize and examine Arabic Pidgin, which is spoken by Indian workers and Saudi Arabic speakers. He looked at the conditions that led to the emergence of this condensed form of Saudi Arabic as a linguistic phenomenon. Additionally, it aimed to situate Saudi Arabian Arabic Pidgin within the theoretical and historical contexts of pidgin languages. Albaqawi and Oakes (2019) compiled and analyzed a transcribed spoken GPA corpus to examine the impact of duration of stay in the Gulf on the GPA of foreign expat female speakers. They offered a quantitative analysis of linguistic variance in GPA based on five morpho-syntactic traits that are connected to the length of stay in the Gulf. Alshbiel's (2021) study identified the barriers that foreign students in Jordan face when trying to speak Arabic. He learned about the cultural, educational, and physiological problems that the foreign students faced. He continued by characterizing the physiological problems as being shyness, insecurity, and a fear of public speaking. Major educational problems include the absence of a suitable learning environment for Arabic speakers and the failure to plan classes where students can practice speaking the language. Cultural challenges are also linked to the lack of community involvement in language learning and the lack of an appropriate setting for speaking Arabic.

Although there are some previous studies that discussed the extent to which language contact influences Arabic in general and Saudi Arabic in particular, this study is anticipated to contribute to the sociolinguistic context in Saudi Arabia by reporting new sociolinguistic factors that might prove useful in bridging the gap in previous literature, particularly in terms of the lexical, phonological, and semantic changes emerging due to language contact.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

This study is basically qualitative. In addition to offering empirical evidence to support generalizability, this enables a thorough cognitive and sociolinguistic examination of language contact phenomena. Such a qualitative approach involves a tripartite combination of cognitive linguistics to examine how conceptualizations and mental images affect language use in contact, sociolinguistics to study how social factors affect and reflect language interaction phenomena, and language contact theory (Thomason & Kaufman, 1988) to recognize lexical and structural alterations brought on by interaction.

B. Data

The collected data constitutes a long list of borrowed words that were observed and recorded by the researcher, as well as a number of statements by foreigners living in Saudi Arabia, and are collected by conducting interviews with these foreigners. The researcher, who is a native speaker of Arabic, closely observed the speakers of the language as they engaged in oral communication in their mother tongue in a variety of social contexts in order to get the necessary data. The study's data collection sites were chosen to make sure that speakers from various social and professional backgrounds could be easily reached.

C. Procedures

The analytical procedures adopted in this study consist of three stages. The first stage is mainly concerned with data collection, which is conducted by close observation and interviews with many foreigners living and working in Saudi Arabia. The second stage comprises the classification of the collected data into three levels: lexical, phonological, and semantic, to identify how language contact influences Saudi Arabic in terms of these three linguistic levels. The third stage constitutes the discussion of the lexical, phonological, and semantic changes resulting from language contact. The three stages are incorporated to highlight the extent to which language contact serves to create a new paradigm of communication in Saudi Arabic.

IV. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

As mentioned earlier in this paper, language contact leads inevitably to language change. In this section, data are provided and analyzed that prove that Saudi Arabic has been changing as a result of being in contact with a number of other languages.

A. Lexical Changes: The Process of Borrowing

Borrowing is the process of adopting lexical items from another language into a native language. Saudis have been adopting many words from many other languages. These words are usually names of things that are not originally Saudi, things that are mostly imported, or things that foreigners in Saudi Arabia use. The data below contain a number of lexical items that have been adopted in Saudi colloquial Arabic. These lexical items come from different languages, as explained in the data.

TABLE 1
SOME BORROWED WORDS IN SAUDI ARABIC WITH IPA, MEANINGS, AND ORIGINS

Arabic Word	IPA	Meaning (English)	Origin	Arabic Word	IPA	Meaning (English)	Origin
بازار	ba:za:r	market	Persian	سمكري	samakri	tinsmith	Turkish
بقشه	baqʃa	bundle	Persian	شاكوش	ʃa:ku:ʃ	hammer	Turkish
بيرق	bajriq	flag	Persian	شال	ʃa:l	shawl	Persian
بلكونه او بلكون	balko:na	balcony	Persian	شطرنج	ʃatʁanʒ	chess	Persian
بيجاما	bija:ma:	pajamas	Persian	شيشه	ʃi:ʃa	hookah	Persian/Turkish
بلكي	bilki:	maybe	Turkish	طر بوش	tʁabu:ʃ	fez	Turkish
بخت	baxt	luck	Persian	طرشي	tʁuʃi	pickle	Persian
بويه	bo:ja	paint	Turkish	فشار	fɪʃa:r	popcorn	Persian
خانة او خان	xa:n / xa:na	inn / house	Persian	فنجان	fɪnnʒa:n	cup	Aramaic
الفندق	alfunduq	hotel	Latin/English/Turkish	فهولة	fahalwa	cleverness	Persian
خوش	xo:ʃ	nice / good	Persian	فوطه	fu:tʔa	towel	Turkish
درازين	dara:bzɪn	railing	Turkish	كشك	ku/k	kiosk	Persian
طابور	tʔa:bu:r	queue	Turkish	كشكول	ku/ku:l	notebook	Persian
طاسه	tʔa:sa	bowl	Persian	كفته	kifta	meatball	Persian
طشت	tʔaʃt	basin	Persian	كمر	kamar	belt	Persian
فهرس	fahras	index	Persian	جلاس	gla:s	glass	English
كريك	kri:k	scoop	Turkish	بريد	bari:d	bread	Greek
او ميزاب	mi:za:b / marza:b	gutter / spout	Persian	كوت	ku:t	coat	English
ميرزاب							
كمر	kamar	belt	Persian	جاكيت	ʒa:kit	jacket	English
جمرك	ʒumruk	customs	Turkish	سي اي	ʔe:si:	air conditioner	English
كانون	ka:nu:n	stove	Persian	هوز	hawz	hose	English
دوغري	duyri:	straight	Turkish	باغه	ba:ya	plastic sheet	Turkish
مهرجان	mihrʒa:n	festival	Persian	بفته	bafta	white cloth	Turkish
بعدين	baʔdajn	later	Mixed (Arabic-Persian)	بس	bas	enough / stop	Hindi
بوسه	bu:sa	kiss	Persian	بهار	baha:r	spices	Hindi
تمبل	timbal	lazy	Persian	تتن	titin	tobacco	Persian
تنورة	tannu:ra	skirt	Turkish	تجوري	tʒu:ri	safe / vault	Hindi
شرشف	ʃarʃaf	bed sheet	Persian	توله	tu:la	weight unit (India)	Hindi
بازنجان	ba:ʔindʒa:n	eggplant	Persian	تاوه	ta:wa	frying pan	Hindi
برغل	buryul	bulgur	Turkish	شوربا	ʃu:r.ba	soup	Turkish/ Persian
برنامج	barna:maʒ	program	Persian	خاشوقه	xaʃu:qa	spoon	Turkish
برواز	barwa:z	frame	Persian	خيشه	xi:ʃa	cloth bag	Turkish
بسبوسة	basbu:sa	semolina dessert	Uncertain	دربيل	darbi:l	telescope / binoculars	Turkish
بقسامط	baqʃama:t	rusk / dry bread	Turkish	دروازه	darwa:za	gate / door	Turkish
بنج	binʒ	anesthetic	Hindi	دريشه	dari:ʃa	window	Persian
بهلوان	bahlawa:n	acrobat	Persian	دسته	dasta	bundle	Persian/Turkish
بوز	bu:z	pout / lips	Turkish	ديرم	di:ram	pomegranate dye	Persian
تخته	taxta	blackboard	Turkish	زوليه	zo:lija	carpet	Persian
تفتة	tafta	taffeta	Persian	سرسري	sarsari:	unemployed	Persian
تكاية	takajja	cushion	Turkish	سروال	sarwa:l	trousers	Turkish/Persian
تمباك	tanba:k	tobacco	Hindi	شيرة	ʃi:ra	sugar syrup	Aramaic
جلة	ʒulla	iron ball	Turkish	طرمبة	tʔurumba	pump	Turkish/Italian
جنزير	ʒanzir	chain	Persian	غرشه	ʒarʃa	water jar	Persian
دادة	da:da	nanny	Turkish	قوطي	yu:tʔi	tin can	Turkish
دهليز	dahli:z	hallway	Persian	كندرة	kundara	shoe	Persian/Turkish
زنزانة	zanza:na	prison cell	Persian	موتر	mo:tir	car	Turkish
زير	zi:r	water jar	Persian	دورن	darʒan	dozen	English
سادة	sa:da	plain	Persian	واير	wa:jar	wire	English
سمسار	simsar	broker	Persian				

This is just a small sample of the plethora of lexical items that have made their way into the lexicon of Saudi Arabic, mainly as a result of the presence of foreign workers. As indicated in Table 1, numerous words come to be used in Saudi Arabic as a result of language contact. The table shows that there are so many languages from which these words are borrowed, including Persian, Turkish, Hindi, Aramaic, English, and Greek. These new borrowed words now enrich the Saudi Arabic lexicon in a way that creates a new paradigm of communication or pidginization in the context of Saudi Arabic.

B. The Nature of Pidginization in Saudi Arabic

The term 'pidgin' refers to a simplified form of communication that is like a language but usually is a mixture of more than one language; it can also be a simplified version of a given language. Usually, this occurs as the result of two or more groups of people who speak different languages coexisting in the same region, where they have to forge a way to communicate with each other (AlRojaie, 2023). There are a number of things that characterize pidgin language. First of all, no one speaks a pidgin as a native language. Actually, a pidgin becomes a creole language when it develops a number of native speakers. Another characteristic is the fact that pidgin usually imports its lexicon from one language, and it adopts its syntax from the other language in contact (Thompson, 2013).

In Saudi Arabia, a pidgin that has been used extensively as a means of communication with foreigners who have problems mastering Arabic is thriving remarkably. The use of this pidgin is not confined to adults but has spread to very young infants due to the growing numbers of babysitters who speak nothing but pidgin with these infants. This leads to the prediction that, sometime in the future, these kids might end up speaking this pidgin as a second native language, making the current pidgin language a Creole language. Linguists such as Albakrawi (2012) have identified a number of features that characterize this pidgin. These features are discussed below. Word order in this pidgin is slightly different from that of Arabic in one major aspect. Arabic favors the use of verb-subject-object (VSO) order but also allows subject-verb-object (SVO). In the pidgin, the use of SVO is predominant.

The element *fi*, while formally derived from Arabic existential usage, does not encode tense directly. Instead, it functions as a semantically light copula that combines with verbal predicates whose temporal reference is pragmatically or adverbially specified. As seen in examples (1-2) with *ams* ("yesterday") and *bukra* ("tomorrow"), the same verbal form is used to express past and future depending on contextual cues.

1. ?ana fi ?iġī ams
1SG in IMPV2MS.come yesterday

Intended meaning: 'I came yesterday.'

2. ?ana fi jimfi bukra
1SG in IMPV.2MS.go tomorrow

Intended meaning 'I will go tomorrow.'

Determiners—including definite articles and quantifiers—are typically deleted in this pidgin, following a common pidgin pattern of simplification as shown in example 3. This mirrors findings from Saudi and Gulf varieties, where reduced noun phrases without *al-* are systematically attested.

3. ?ana fi ?akl ?aʃa
1SG in eat.PERF dinner

'I'm eating dinner.'

In Arabic, nouns like *?aʃa* 'dinner' typically require the definite article */ʔal-/* in most natural contexts. A native speaker of Arabic would normally say */ʔal-ʔaʃa/* rather than *?aʃa/* in isolation. The same applies to the noun *bə:t* 'home' in example 4, which would usually appear as */ʔal-bə:t/*. However, in the pidgin variety, these nouns systematically occur without determiners—reflecting a broader trend of article omission common to pidgin and contact languages.

4. ?ana fi ruħ bə:t
1SG in IMPV.2MS.go house

Intended meaning: 'I'm going to the house.'

The lack of tense and articles is probably the result of imposing the syntactic structures of the native languages of these foreigners on the Arabic syntax. One major characteristic of this pidgin is the fact that it is very economic. For example, it does not use inflections in most cases. This is illustrated in the following example.

5. ?itnēn rɾʒāl

6. two man

7. Intended meaning: 'two men'

In Example 5, the canonical Arabic dual suffix is notably absent from the noun "man." This omission highlights a key structural simplification in the pidgin variety. Furthermore, the example illustrates a shift in word order: while Arabic typically places modifiers (such as numerals) after the noun they modify, here the numeral "two" precedes the noun. This reversal reflects influence from substrate languages or contact-induced restructuring (Ryding, 2005; Avram, 2014). Another example of this sort is provided below.

8. tala:ta seyara
three car

Intended meaning: 'three cars'

In Example 6, where the numeral *tala:ta* 'three' precedes the singular noun *seyara* 'car', without the expected plural morphology or agreement. In Standard Arabic, this construction would require the noun to be plural and in the genitive case (*thalāthu sayyārātīn*), but in the pidginized variety, both agreement and plural marking are omitted.

C. Phonological Changes

Phonologically speaking, Saudi Arabic has been influenced by speakers of other languages, but the impact of this influence has not been as noticeable as the impact on the lexicon. There are few cases that embody these phonological changes. These cases are discussed below.

First, the word /kellah/ is the original form used to mean “all of it.” After the advent of foreign workers, this form has changed to become /kulluh/. I attribute this change to a mispronunciation that has been normalized. There are, however, some Saudi Arabic native speakers who still use the original form, but a big faction has switched to using /kuluh/.

Second, the verb /naam/ “sleep” is the original form that was uncontested until a few decades ago. A new way of pronouncing this form has emerged recently as a result of mispronunciation as mentioned above. The new form is /noom/.

Third, the form /mafih/, meaning “there is no,” has changed to /mafi/. This change is triggered by articulatory simplification that led to the deletion of the final glottal fricative /h/. This is also a direct impact of the linguistic contact with speakers of other languages.

In brief, the phonology of Saudi Arabic has not changed dramatically as a result of language contact with speakers of other languages, and the changes that have occurred have not yet spread among all Saudi Arabic speakers.

D. Semantic Changes

The semantics of Saudi Arabic has proven to be even more resistant to change as a result of language contact than the phonology. There are, nevertheless, cases of semantic change, such as the following two cases.

The use of /seferi/, which originally meant something related to travelling. The meaning of this word has broadened and now includes “to-go,” as in when someone orders a meal from a restaurant “to-go”.

The word /fi/ (‘in’) has undergone notable semantic broadening in contact varieties of Arabic, particularly in the speech of non-Saudis. It is frequently reanalyzed as expressing possession, functioning similarly to “has” in English. For instance, in Example 7, *hādā fī mux kabīr* (‘this one has a big brain’) conveys the meaning ‘This person is brilliant’—a usage not attested in native Saudi Arabic but common in simplified or pidginized forms.

9. *hādā fī mux kabīr*

10. this has brain big

‘This person is brilliant.’

While *fī* displays a wide range of extended uses in contact varieties of Arabic, the two examples discussed here suffice to illustrate the breadth of its semantic flexibility. Due to space limitations, a fuller inventory of its functions is left for future work.

V. DISCUSSION

The above analysis demonstrates that one prominent and noticeable aspect of a language contact situation is the sharing of lexicon. Each of these languages has a distinct sociolinguistic perspective because in the Saudi Arabic speech community, Urdu, English, Persian, Turkish, and Arabic coexist side by side while fulfilling diverse sociolinguistic functions. One is utilized in a particular set of social situations, while the other is utilized in a completely different one. As a result of giving these languages important responsibilities, there has been a significant amount of linguistic fusion between them. The creation of a new paradigm of communication has been made possible by this linguistic fusion.

The results also show that non-Arab employees attempt to deduce meaning from context. They make predictions. But it appears that this kind of approach is ineffective. Every word sample used in this study demonstrates how important it is to seek assistance from friends or another person in order to resolve a miscommunication. The results further clarify that Gulf Pidgin Arabic was developed to facilitate communication between Arabs and non-Arabs in order to prevent misunderstandings. This result is consistent with a number of previous investigations (Smart, 1990; Gomma, 2007; Ferguson, 1968; Avram, 2014; Al-Azraqi, 2020). According to Al-Azraqi (2020), the language spoken by Asian immigrants who are not Arab in the southwestern Saudi Arabian city of Abha is distinguished by three grammatical categories: pronouns, definiteness, and predication. It concentrates on a pidgin that is primarily used. “Refunctionalization,” “generalization,” and “neutralization” were the labels used to characterize these three forms of multifunctionality. Arabic pidgins were used by Asian migrants in the Arabian Gulf states (Albaqawi, 2016). Migration in the Gulf region is the primary driver of conventionalization within GPA, according to the linguistic data and the analysis of the social context.

Furthermore, Smart (1990) confirmed that pidgin was created in the Sultanate of Oman between 1966 and 1968 while teaching Arabic to workers at oil companies. This simplified form of Arabic was already in use on the rigs at the time and was used for communication between the native Arab personnel and the foreign (European and Indian) supervisors and technicians. Additionally, Gomma (2007) examined and documented Arabic Pidgin, which is spoken by Indian employees and Saudi Arabic speakers in the Saudi environment. He looked at the conditions that led to the emergence of this condensed form of Saudi Arabic as a linguistic phenomenon.

In light of the results of the current study, non-Arab Saudi Arabian workers' use of pidgin Arabic provides some relief from the lack of a common language for contact, even though it is still insufficient for two-way communication. The nature of language as we know it is dynamic; it is always changing and developing. This reconciles with Elyas and Mahboob's (2021) and Elyas et al.'s (2021) argument that an interlanguage is likely to develop given the ongoing culture of interaction between Arabs and non-Arabs, particularly with technology helping language users. Each participant in this study had a smartphone, and with a little encouragement and incentive from their employers, they can use language learning apps to learn Arabic, lowering the language barrier with the natives. This is true even though the

non-Arab worker base included in this study is occasionally not educated enough to learn a language using the traditional pen-and-paper method, which is the trend worldwide.

It is analytically demonstrated that a complex interaction of sociopolitical factors shapes the evolution of the Saudi Arabic language. Every element has played a part in the language's dynamic growth, from the effects of globalization and modernization to educational reform, digital media, gender inclusiveness, and regional identity. These cultural as well as linguistic shifts are indicative of Saudi society's larger evolution. The future of Saudi Arabia's language will surely reflect the struggles and victories of its singular sociopolitical journey as it strives to strike a balance between tradition and modernization.

VI. CONCLUSION

Language contact has a significant and complex effect on Saudi Arabic. English is progressively influencing Saudi Arabic and English dialects through vocabulary, usage standards, education, media, migration, and urbanization. According to the cognitive sociolinguistic theory, speakers process, modify, and use these effects in accordance with internalized language models, pragmatic objectives, and identity concerns. Despite the practical benefits of English, Saudi society and its speakers must strike a careful balance between modernization and linguistic-cultural integrity. In addition to structural study, understanding this dynamic necessitates knowledge of social motivations, policy aspects, and mental processes. The analysis shows that the low variety of Arabic in Saudi Arabia has been changing in part due to the advent of foreign workers. These changes primarily have impacted the lexicon. Many lexical items have become part of the everyday communication of speakers of Saudi Arabic through the process of word borrowing. Another likely source of language change via language contact was also posited: Saudi students returning from abroad. Furthermore, morphology has been impacted, but to a lesser extent. It is relevant mainly in the pidgin that has been forged to bridge the gap between native speakers of Saudi Arabic and speakers of other languages who live in Saudi Arabia. Also, the area showing the least amount of change is phonology and semantics. Minor changes have been noticed, but these changes have not yet spread to the extent that they have become a norm for all Saudi Arabic speakers. Crucially, the process of language change is a long process, and the linguistic contact situation is relatively recent. That is the main reason change has not been great in many areas of the language. However, it is anticipated that the impact of this linguistic situation will become crystal clear in the future. Therefore, further studies are recommended to address the various lexical, morphological, syntactic, and phonological changes that occurred due to language contact in Saudi Arabic and beyond.

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Speech Acts, Figures of Speech, and Their Functions in the 2024 Presidential & Vice-Presidential Debates: A Pragmastylistic Study

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Abstract—This study examines the types and functions of speech acts and figures of speech employed by presidential and vice-presidential candidates in the 2024 Indonesian election debates. It also explores the rhetorical functions of figures of speech within political communication strategies, using a pragmastylistic approach. A descriptive qualitative method was employed, with data drawn from utterance excerpts transcribed from five official debates. The data were categorized by pragmatic function and stylistic form, followed by thematic analysis to reveal patterns linking communicative intent and rhetorical style. The results show that presidential candidates primarily used assertive, commissive, and directive speech acts, often accompanied by hyperbole, sarcasm, and parallelism. In contrast, vice-presidential candidates tended to use expressive, directive, and commissive acts, supported by personification, irony, and antithesis. These combinations served to reinforce political stances, construct leadership personas, and express ideological orientations. The findings confirm that speech acts and figures of speech were not used separately but functioned together as strategic tools in persuasive political discourse. The pragmastylistic approach proved effective in uncovering how political language is constructed as an intentional and context-sensitive discursive act.

Index Terms—political debate, speech acts, figures of speech, rhetorical strategy, pragmastylistics

I. INTRODUCTION

Political debates involving presidential and vice-presidential candidates constitute an essential aspect of contemporary political communication practices and attract widespread attention from various segments of society. Debate forums serve as structured spaces for interaction, allowing candidates to express their political ideas, build their image, and formulate rhetorical appeals aimed at voters (Mulyono et al., 2025). In this high-stakes communicative context, language assumes a strategic role. Each utterance not only conveys referential meaning but also reflects a communicative intent that is consciously constructed within discourse.

Within a pragmatic framework, political utterances are closely related to goal-oriented communicative acts in social interaction (Kasirzadeh & Gabriel, 2023; Mao & He, 2021; Warren & Call, 2022). The meaning of a message does not merely lie in its propositional content but in its impact on the audience, the manifestation of the speaker's intent, and the form of social relations it constructs. Each speech act indicates a communicative stance, interactional strategy, and the relationship between speaker and listener (Bohmann & Ahlers, 2022; Shahid, 2025; Tashiro et al., 2023). These elements serve as indicators of discursive strategies employed to assert authority, build personal credibility, and convey ideological stance.

Speech acts provide a dynamic analytical framework for understanding political discourse, particularly in debates that demand the delivery of both explicit and implicit positions (Lewński, 2021). The choice of utterance form reflects strategic considerations aimed at persuasion, rebuttal, or shaping public perception. Strategies in debates are reinforced by stylistic elements such as figures of speech (Fordjour & Sikanku, 2022). This serves to increase emotional appeal, stimulate cognitive engagement, and build symbolic associations. Figurative language enables speakers to express criticism implicitly, demonstrate empathy, and embed ideological cues within aesthetically crafted expressions

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(Mulyono et al., 2025a; Nawab et al., 2025; Nordensvard & Ketola, 2022). In this context, rhetoric becomes a performative tool for shaping public perception and fostering emotional proximity between speaker and audience.

In political debates, the construction of utterances is governed by the structural power of language strategically directed toward designing effective messages (Rasheed et al., 2024; Sutrisno et al., 2024). The representation of meaning in utterances reveals ideological orientations and rhetorical choices shaped by social relations and institutional contexts. Political candidates utilize specific linguistic structures as instruments to convey discursive positions to the public. Lexical choices, syntactic forms, and patterns of speech become crucial devices in crafting messages as organized social practices. Each utterance can be understood as a social action constructed in context and directed toward producing a particular impact in political interaction (Azam, 2024; Fischer et al., 2024; Khater et al., 2024). Sentences in debates reflect linguistic strategies employed to enhance symbolic influence and expand ideological reach in the public sphere.

The way speakers choose their expressions, organize utterances, and interact strategically with others reflects both individual intention and broader social conventions. In many societies, the structure of speech acts is closely tied to the speaker's awareness of politeness, hierarchy, and role expectations. Pragmatic choices may appear natural, but they are actually carefully guided by cultural logic and social position (Achmad et al., 2023; Shahi, 2022). Such dynamics demonstrate that speech is not merely constructed linguistically, but also negotiated socially through culturally embedded expectations.

Pragmatics, as a branch of linguistics, focuses on meaning formed in social contexts and actual communicative practices. Speech acts, understood as language actions motivated by intention, become the primary unit of analysis in revealing how speakers express opinions, issue instructions, or convey attitudes (Al-Shboul et al., 2024; Mardiana et al., 2025; Searle, 1979; Tajeddin & Bagherkazemi, 2021). Political debates provide a rich context for analyzing assertive, directive, commissive, and expressive speech acts as tools in constructing argumentation, responding to opposition, and influencing public belief.

Stylistics explains how linguistic forms, especially figures of speech, convey communicative and rhetorical functions in discourse. In political communication, figures such as metaphor, irony, hyperbole, and antithesis act as strategies to shape meaning, arouse emotion, and build symbolic associations (Gozali et al., 2025; Ilma et al., 2024; Keraf, 2007; Khasanah & Muslim, 2025). In the context of political debate, their use is strategic for delivering implied criticism, dramatizing policy stances, and eliciting audience emotion. Understanding these patterns provides insight into how ideology is shaped and disseminated through language.

The pragmastylistic approach is the result of an integration between pragmatic and stylistic studies, offering a comprehensive perspective on the relationship between communicative function and linguistic form. A pragmatic and stylistic approach allows for simultaneous analysis of the speaker's intention, verbal expression, language construction, and social context (Widiastuti et al., 2024; Yuwono et al., 2021). Within this framework, language is understood not merely as a medium for conveying meaning but as a symbolic and ideological act that is directly linked to the dynamics of political discourse.

Previous studies have shown that pragmatics and stylistics offer flexibility in analyzing various types of discourse. Widjaya (2021) examined the role of speech acts and figures of speech in *wayang kulit* performances, focusing on the cultural and moral values expressed through character interaction. Dawudi et al. (2020) investigated the illocutionary dimensions and stylistic expressions in the religious discourse of *Suluk Kanan Nabi*. Rahmanda et al. (2024) discussed stylistic strategies marked by snobbism in social media and their implications for the construction of social identity. Busairi (2023) highlighted elements of parody in *Republik Sentilan Sentilun* to demonstrate how language functions as a medium of critique through consciously designed speech acts and figurative styles.

The findings from these studies indicate a strong correlation between linguistic form and communicative function in producing discursive effects. Speech acts reveal the direction and intent of communication, while figures of speech provide expressive force and symbolic meaning that enrich the message. These two elements reflect the complexity of social interaction in discourse and the strategic role of language in the practice of political communication.

This study examines the relationship between speech acts and figures of speech and explores their communicative and rhetorical functions in the strategies of presidential and vice-presidential candidates during the 2024 Indonesian election debates. It is based on the assumption that in political debate language combines form and function to achieve persuasive goals. The analysis uses transcripts from five official debate sessions and treats each utterance as a pragmatic act shaped through stylistic choices to produce specific effects.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to explore linguistic strategies used in the 2024 Indonesian presidential and vice-presidential debates. The focus was to identify types of speech acts and figures of speech used by the candidates, and to understand their communicative and rhetorical functions within the debate context. A qualitative method was deemed suitable as the object of analysis is language as a vehicle for meaning-making, persuasion, and image construction within complex communicative structures.

The primary data were derived from five official presidential and vice-presidential debates conducted by the General Election Commission (KPU) in 2024. Complete and accurate transcripts were produced from video recordings,

preserving the context and interactional dynamics of each utterance. Quotations were selected based on pragmatic salience and rhetorical effectiveness, and classified into two main corpora: utterances by presidential candidates and those by vice-presidential candidates.

Data collection was carried out through systematic observation of debate recordings, with detailed note-taking of relevant excerpts. Quotations were selected according to criteria of contextual relevance, clarity of meaning, and expressive power. These excerpts were subsequently categorized based on types of speech acts and figures of speech, providing an initial map of linguistic patterns that reflect rhetorical strategies.

Data analysis proceeded through structured identification, classification, and interpretive processes. The analysis of speech acts was informed by pragmatic theory, while the categorization of figurative language followed conventional stylistic principles. The dialectical relationship between communicative function and linguistic form was analyzed through a pragmatylistic lens. Findings were then organized systematically to address the research questions, highlighting the interplay between communicative intention and rhetorical strategy in constructing influence and political image.

This research did not involve human participants, and all data sources are publicly available. Therefore, ethical clearance was not required.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Types of Speech Acts in the Presidential and Vice-Presidential Debates

Language plays a dual role as a tool for controlling discourse and as an effective instrument of persuasion for the public in political events. The candidates' statements contain strategic intentions that reflect their communication patterns, ideology, and systematic efforts to shape their image. In the 2024 presidential and vice-presidential debates, the types of speech acts used serve as a primary indicator for understanding how candidates position themselves within the open and competitive dynamics of political discourse. Figure 1 presents a classification of rhetorical devices that emerged in the presidential debates.

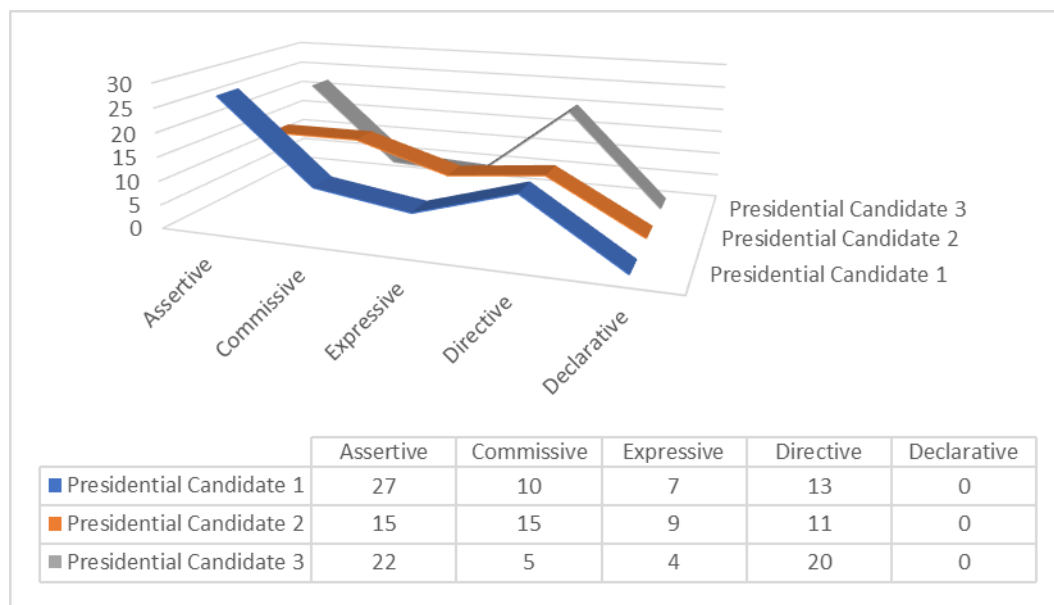


Figure 1. Classification of Speech Acts in Presidential Debates 1, 3, and 5

In the context of political debates, candidates' communication strategies serve as a medium that allows the public to assess their character, vision, and leadership approach. One of the main strategies that stands out is the use of speech acts as a tool for image building and persuasion.

Anies Baswedan's (Presidential Candidate 1) communication style shows a tendency toward a logic- and policy-based approach. Assertive speech acts are the most dominant form in Anies' discourse compared to the other two candidates, with content that focuses heavily on rational assessments and the presentation of policy solutions. For instance, in Debate 1, he stated:

"Koruptor digerakkan dengan undang undang perampasan aset... kpk harus menjadi lembaga yang kuat kembali..." 'Corruptors must be pursued through the asset forfeiture law... the KPK must once again become a strong institution.' (RI, 2023a)

This is an assertive speech act that expresses a firm belief in the need to strengthen the legal system. The strategy reinforces his image as an analytical, data-oriented, and policy-oriented leader.

The communication style of Prabowo Subianto (Presidential Candidate 2) focuses on the delivery of clear and repeated policy commitments, reflecting the reinforcement of political stance. Commissive speech acts were dominant across multiple segments of the debate, indicating a willingness to fulfill promises and implement programs directly. For example, in Debate 5, he declared:

"Kami bertekad menghilangkan kemiskinan dari Indonesia. Kami bertekad menghilangkan kelaparan dan kurang gizi bagi rakyat Indonesia." 'We are determined to eliminate poverty from Indonesia. We are determined to eliminate hunger and malnutrition among the Indonesian people.' (RI, 2024c)

This is a commissive speech act that affirms a serious intention to bring about tangible social change. The strategy strengthens his image as a decisive, action-driven leader who prioritizes public welfare.

The communication style of Ganjar Pranowo (Presidential Candidate 3) shows a tendency to urge the audience toward concrete action by issuing direct calls for policy change. Directive speech acts stand out in his statements that include instructions or demands. For example, in Debate 5, he asserted:

"Hentikan liberalisasi pendidikan. Hentikan hari ini. Berikanlah kepada para mahasiswa kita proporsi yang benar." 'Stop the liberalization of education. Stop it today. Give our students what is rightfully theirs.' (RI, 2024c)

This directive speech act is firm and directly targets higher education policy. The strategy enhances his image as a progressive leader committed to educational justice and vocal in defending the younger generation.

Within the structure of political debate, vice-presidential candidates play the role of strategic actors tasked with reinforcing arguments and building electoral support. Their speech style reflects responses to issues raised by the opposing presidential candidates. It also aims to portray them as strong companions, capable of standing equally in public discourse. The communicative character of vice-presidential candidates exhibits distinctive dynamics from their presidential counterparts. To better understand these tendencies, Figure 2 presents the classification of speech acts used by each vice-presidential candidate.

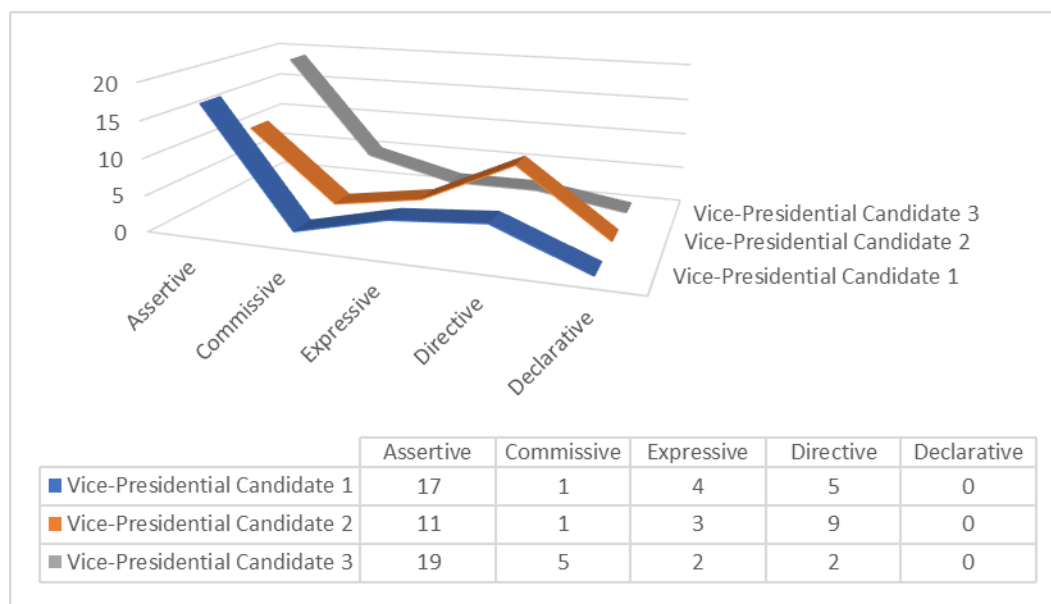


Figure 2. Classification of Illocutionary Speech Acts in Debates 2 and 4 – Vice-Presidential Candidates

In the dynamics of the vice-presidential debates, linguistic strategy functions as a tool for expressing ideological positioning, assertiveness, and leadership style. The dominant type of speech act chosen by each candidate serves as a key indicator of their rhetorical character.

Muhaimin Iskandar's (Vice-Presidential Candidate 1) communication style reflects an emotional rhetorical approach that is close to social reality, characterized by the dominance of expressive speech acts in conveying his stance on various social conditions. His statements often contain expressions of concern that show his alignment with marginalized groups. For example, in Debate 2, he stated:

"Investasi ini harus bergeser menjadi padat karya yang bisa melibatkan seluruh anak bangsa ini..." 'This kind of investment must shift to labor-intensive projects that can involve all of our nation's children.' (RI, 2023b)

The use of expressive speech acts was prominent in expressing concerns about investment practices perceived as unjust. This strategy reinforced Muhaimin Iskandar's image as a responsive leader who is sensitive to issues of social inequality and able to connect with the aspirations of the common people.

Gibran Rakabuming Raka's (Vice-Presidential Candidate 2) communication style reflects an instructional and technocratic leadership approach characterized by the dominance of directive speech acts. The data presented illustrates

a firm attitude in promoting policy implementation and directing concrete development strategies. For instance, in Debate 4, he said:

"Solusinya: IUP-nya dicabut... perusahaan besar wajib gandeng UMKM lokal, pengusaha lokal..." 'The solution: revoke their mining permits... large corporations must partner with local MSMEs, local entrepreneurs.' (RI, 2024b)

This is a directive utterance that urges action. The directive form indicates a communication pattern that is solution-oriented and focused on outcomes, reinforcing his image as a responsive, results-driven young leader committed to policy implementation.

The communication style of Mahfud MD (Vice-Presidential Candidate 3) shows a strong orientation toward legal commitment and concrete policy agendas. Commissive speech acts dominate his delivery, reflecting his seriousness about pursuing change in the national governance system. For example, in Debate 4, he stated:

"Kami akan mengembalikan secara bertahap hak rakyat dan... tagih dunia internasional untuk membayar utang yang merusak pembangunan." 'We will gradually restore the people's rights and... hold the international community accountable for the debt that has undermined our development.' (RI, 2024b)

This commissive act expresses a promise of action based on justice and national sovereignty. The style reinforces his image as a reformist figure who consistently advocates for legal integrity, ethical governance, and public welfare.

B. Types of Figurative Language in the Presidential and Vice-Presidential Debates

The language used in the 2024 presidential and vice-presidential debates was expressive, rhetorical, and deeply embedded in strategic communication. One of the key rhetorical tools employed by the candidates to generate persuasive impact and implied suggestion was the use of figurative language. In this study, the figures of speech identified were classified into four primary categories: comparison, contrast, satire, and emphasis. The comparison category includes metaphor, simile, personification, and cultural allusion. Contrast category consists of antithesis and hyperbole. The satirical category encompasses irony, cynicism, and sarcasm. Meanwhile, the emphasis category includes repetition, parallelism, and rhetorical questions. These four categories reflect the strategic functions of figurative language in conveying messages, reinforcing attitudes, and shaping the candidates' communicative style throughout the debates. Figure 3 below illustrates the distribution of these classifications, which serves as the analytical foundation for the subsequent discussion.

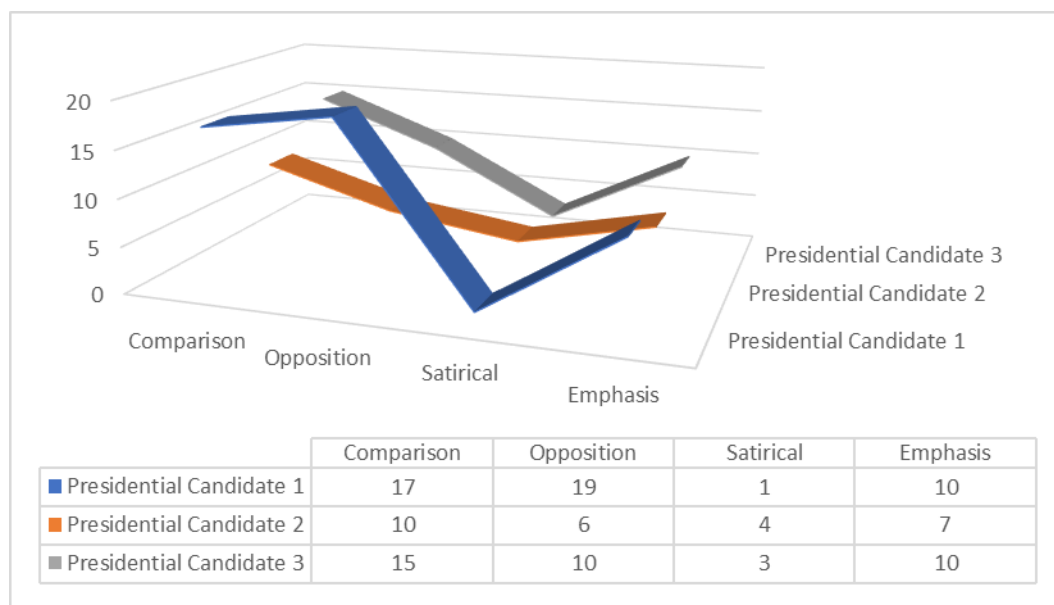


Figure 3. Classification of Figurative Language in Presidential Debates 1, 3, and 5

In the dynamics of presidential debates, figurative language serves as a rhetorical device employed to enhance the persuasive power of political communication. Each candidate demonstrates a distinct tendency in selecting specific types of figures of speech as part of their strategic message delivery. The dominant use of certain tropes reflects both the communicative character and the ideological stance that each candidate seeks to assert in the public forum.

The rhetorical style of Anies Baswedan (Presidential Candidate 1) tends to reflect a confrontational and emotional approach in critiquing policy. The use of hyperbole strengthens the intensity of rejection and amplifies the rhetorical impact of his statements. For instance, in Debate 3, he stated:

"bukan hanya di sektor pemerintahan, tapi di seluruh keluarga" 'not only in the government sector, but in every household' (RI, 2024a)

This is an example of hyperbole that exaggerates the scope of the issue to emphasize its perceived widespread impact. The purpose of such exaggeration is to highlight that the negative effects of certain policies extend into the very fabric

of everyday life. This strategy reinforces his image as a critical leader who dares to expose systemic problems to draw public attention.

Prabowo Subianto's (Presidential Candidate 2) communication strategy shows a tendency to convey criticism through the use of sharp sarcasm. Sarcasm is used to indirectly reject opponents' arguments, yet still deliver a strong semantic impact. In Debate 1, he remarked:

"Kalau gampang menyalahkan angin, hujan... tidak perlu ada pemerintahan" 'If we're quick to blame the wind and the rain... then we don't need a government' (RI, 2023a)

This is a sarcastic statement aimed at discrediting those perceived as deflecting accountability for policy failures. It expresses rejection without overt confrontation and portrays Prabowo as a firm communicator who is unafraid to respond forcefully using rhetorically charged language within the formal bounds of debate.

The rhetorical style of Ganjar Pranowo (Presidential Candidate 3) prioritizes semantic reinforcement through rhythmic and orderly language structures. He employs parallelism to convey ideas with consistent and systematic rhetorical force. In Debate 5, he stated:

"mereka akan melahirkan bayi-bayi yang sehat, yang kuat" 'they will give birth to babies who are healthy, who are strong' (RI, 2024c)

This demonstrates syntactic repetition to emphasize aspirations for the nation's future generations. The parallel structure delivers a persuasive effect by projecting consistency of thought and memorable cadence. This strategy supports Ganjar's image as an organized leader with firm convictions in the solutions he proposes.

Rhetorical style also shaped the performance of the vice-presidential candidates, each of whom projected a distinctive communicative character and strategy. Figurative language in their utterances reinforced their messages while shaping their persona as responsive partners capable of addressing issues with their own stylistic identity. In their supporting roles, the vice-presidential candidates embedded symbolic strength in their statements to counter opponents and construct narratives aligned with their respective presidential nominees. To illustrate these tendencies, Figure 4 presents the classification of figurative language used by each vice-presidential candidate across the five debate sessions.

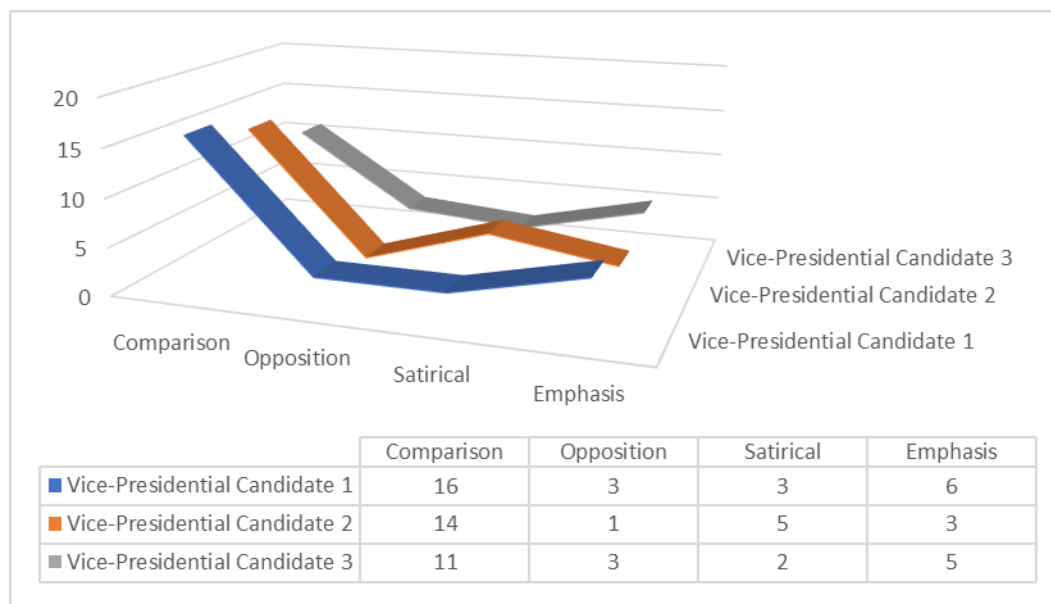


Figure 4. Classification of Figurative Language in Vice-Presidential Debates 2 and 4

In the interactions among vice-presidential candidates during the debates, the use of figurative language functioned as a communicative tactic to sharpen ideas and enhance rhetorical appeal. Tropes were employed not merely for stylistic embellishment, but to reinforce ideological positions and construct distinctive leadership impressions. Each candidate exhibited a unique tendency in their dominant use of figurative language to articulate key messages.

The rhetorical style of Muhaimin Iskandar (Vice-Presidential Candidate 1) reveals an effort to compare social realities with human-like entities through figurative expression. Personification was employed to portray institutions or abstract concepts as if they possessed human traits. In Debate 2, he stated:

"pemerintah memberi fasilitas yang memadai" 'the government provides adequate facilities' (RI, 2023b)

This is an example of personification in which the state is attributed agency and deliberateness. The purpose of using this trope is to emphasize that policy responsibility is not neutral or passive, but a result of conscious, directed action. This strategy reinforces critical messages through subtle rhetorical means while embedding evaluative positioning regarding the state's role in public service.

Gibran Rakabuming Raka (Vice-Presidential Candidate 2) adopted a communication strategy marked by indirect critique through refined insinuation. He employed irony to underscore dissonance between expectation and reality in a clever and implicit manner. For example, in Debate 4, he remarked:

“saya lagi nyari jawabannya Prof Mahfud... malah menjelaskan ekonomi hijau” ‘I was looking for the answer, Prof. Mahfud... but instead he explained green economy’ (RI, 2024b)

This is an instance of irony directed at an opponent, subtly expressing dissatisfaction with the course of the discussion without making it explicit. Such a strategy projects the image of a nimble communicator capable of delivering sharp criticism without engaging in overt confrontation.

The rhetorical strategy of Mahfud MD (Vice-Presidential Candidate 3) reflects an argumentative approach that emphasizes semantic contrast within the structure of his statements. He employed antithesis to stress conceptual opposition in a direct and logical manner. In Debate 2, he stated:

“infrastruktur itu tidak hanya jembatan... tetapi juga regulasi dan digitalisasi” ‘infrastructure is not just about bridges... but also about regulations and digitalization’ (RI, 2023b)

This antithetical construction contrasts physical and regulatory elements as two facets of development. It frames conceptual opposition within a unified sentence to assert that development should not be narrowly defined in material terms alone. This rhetorical structure enhances Mahfud’s image as a communicator who integrates rational principles with a deep understanding of policy formulation.

C. The Function of Figurative Language in Political Speech Acts Strategy

The use of figurative language in the 2024 presidential and vice-presidential debates is not merely a stylistic ornament but a strategic component that reinforces the function of political speech acts. The relationship between pragmatic intent and rhetorical form demonstrates how figurative language supports the framing of attitudes, thoughts, and the political persona of each candidate.

Anies Baswedan’s (Presidential Candidate 1) communication style reflects a logic-based approach and policy reasoning. Assertive speech acts are employed to deliver rational evaluations of the system and the proposed solutions. Debate 1 data *“Koruptor digerakkan dengan undang undang perampasan aset... kpk harus menjadi lembaga yang kuat kembali...”* ‘Corruptors should be acted upon through the asset forfeiture law... the KPK must become a strong institution again’ (RI, 2023a) expresses a belief in the necessity of legal reinforcement. The function of hyperbole intensifies criticism, as in Debate 3 *“bukan hanya di sektor pemerintahan, tapi di seluruh keluarga”* ‘not only in the government sector, but in every family’ (RI, 2024a), which exaggerates the scale of the issue to stress the urgency of change. This combination reinforces Anies’s rhetorical position as a critical, logical figure focused on systemic impact.

Prabowo Subianto’s (Presidential Candidate 2) communication style is characterized by straightforward and emphatic policy commitments. Commissive speech acts are dominant, reflecting a firm intention to implement social programs. Debate 5 data *“Kami bertekad menghilangkan kemiskinan dari Indonesia. Kami bertekad menghilangkan kelaparan dan kurang gizi bagi rakyat Indonesia.”* ‘We are determined to eliminate poverty from Indonesia. We are determined to eliminate hunger and malnutrition among the Indonesian people’ (RI, 2024c) demonstrates explicit commitment through repetition. Rhetorical force is also supported by sarcasm in Debate 1 *“Kalau gampang menyalahkan angin, hujan... tidak perlu ada pemerintahan”* ‘If blaming the wind and rain is that easy... then there’s no need for a government’ (RI, 2023a), which conveys sharp critique within formal constraints. Together, these strengthen his image as a decisive leader unafraid of direct criticism.

Ganjar Pranowo’s (Presidential Candidate 3) communication shows a tendency to drive concrete policy reform. Directive speech acts are employed in firm appeals, such as Debate 5 *“Hentikan liberalisasi pendidikan. Hentikan hari ini. Berikanlah kepada para mahasiswa kita proporsi yang benar.”* ‘Stop the liberalization of education. Stop it today. Give our students their rightful share’ (RI, 2024c), which expresses a clear demand for educational reform. The use of parallelism reinforces argumentative structure, as in *“mereka akan melahirkan bayi-bayi yang sehat, yang kuat”* ‘they will give birth to healthy babies, strong ones’ (RI, 2024c), creating a persuasive rhythm and semantic stability. This combination builds his image as a progressive, straightforward figure aligned with social justice.

Muhaimin Iskandar’s (Vice-Presidential Candidate 1) communication style expresses strong emotional responses to social inequality. Expressive speech acts are used to voice concern over policies considered unjust. Debate 2 data *“Investasi ini harus bergeser menjadi padat karya yang bisa melibatkan seluruh anak bangsa ini...”* ‘This investment must shift to labor-intensive programs that can involve all the nation’s children’ (RI, 2023b) highlights his alignment with marginalized groups. Rhetorical function is strengthened by personification, such as *“pemerintah memberi fasilitas”* ‘the government provides facilities’, attributing active agency to state institutions. This reinforces a sense of state responsibility as a proactive actor in public policy.

Gibran Rakabuming Raka (Vice-Presidential Candidate 2) exhibits a directive communication pattern focused on concrete problem-solving. Debate 4 data *“Solusinya: IUP-nya dicabut... perusahaan besar wajib gandeng UMKM lokal, pengusaha lokal...”* ‘The solution: revoke the permits... large corporations must partner with local MSMEs and entrepreneurs’ (RI, 2024b) shows directive speech acts in economic development. Stylistic function is reinforced by irony, as seen in *“saya lagi nyari jawabannya Prof Mahfud... malah menjelaskan ekonomi hijau”* ‘I was looking for your answer, Prof. Mahfud... but you explained the green economy instead’ (RI, 2024b), which subtly critiques the course of the debate. This presents Gibran as a responsive and tactically sharp communicator.

Mahfud MD's (Vice-Presidential Candidate 3) communication centers on commitment to law enforcement and justice. Commissive speech acts are used to assert readiness to implement governmental reforms. Debate 4 data "*Kami akan mengembalikan secara bertahap hak rakyat dan... tagih dunia internasional untuk membayar utang yang merusak pembangunan.*" 'We will gradually restore the people's rights and... demand the international world repay debts that harm development' (RI, 2024b) shows a pledge toward justice. Antithesis is employed to highlight semantic contrasts, as in Debate 2 "*infrastruktur itu tidak hanya jembatan... tetapi juga regulasi dan digitalisasi*" 'infrastructure is not just bridges... but also regulation and digitalization' (RI, 2023b), framing development beyond physical constructs. This builds Mahfud's persona as a thoughtful, strategic policymaker.

The function of figurative language in the debates lies in its ability to strengthen the pragmatic intention behind each speech act. Figurative expressions not only embellish structure but act as rhetorical strategies shaping public perception of each candidate's credibility and political posture. The integration of stylistic and pragmatic strategies indicates that political discourse is not merely informational, but a calculated tool to construct ideological positions and influence audience reception in a contested political arena.

IV. CONCLUSION

The communication strategies employed in the 2024 presidential and vice-presidential debates demonstrate an integration between speech act selection and rhetorical figures as part of a deliberate rhetorical construction. Assertive, commissive, directive, and expressive speech acts were used to convey attitudes, policy commitments, calls to action, and emotional responses to public issues. Each type of utterance reflects the candidates' communicative tendencies and ideological orientations.

The use of rhetorical figures such as hyperbole, sarcasm, parallelism, irony, personification, and antithesis served to reinforce messages, clarify meaning, and construct a distinctive leadership persona. Each rhetorical figure was strategically selected to produce rhetorical impact aligned with the pragmatic intentions of political utterances. Rhetorical strength was constructed not only through syntactic structure but also through the symbolic and aesthetic content of language style.

The analysis reveals that linguistic strategies in debates are not context-independent; rather, they are integral to efforts to construct public image, maintain ideological stance, and influence public opinion. The synergy between stylistic form and pragmatic function shapes political utterances as meaningful and context-sensitive communicative acts.

The pragmatylistic approach employed in this study has proven effective in uncovering both the functional and expressive dimensions of political language. These findings broaden our understanding of the role of language within the discursive arena of electoral contestation and contribute to the development of stylistic-pragmatic studies in the context of Indonesian political communication.

Methodologically, the analytical model developed here may be applied to other forms of political discourse, including parliamentary speeches, social media campaigns, and local-level debate forums. Future research is recommended to examine audience responses to these rhetorical patterns and to explore their relationship with persuasive effectiveness and the construction of public perception in competitive political contexts.

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Exploring the Impact of AI-Generated vs. Teacher-Developed Lesson Plans on EFL Instruction: A Comparative Study in the Saudi Arabian Context

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Abstract—The AI-powered tools are transforming instructional methods and teaching strategies across the world. As conventional methods of instruction no longer align with the preferences of today's tech-savvy young generation, AI-powered tools are increasingly incorporated to facilitate learning and instruction. While multiple studies have examined various aspects of AI integration, there is a lack of evidence on the comparative effectiveness of AI-generated and instructor-prepared lesson plans. Therefore, this study examines the comparative efficacy of AI-generated and instructor-prepared lesson plans on students' performance and engagement. Utilizing a quasi-experimental design, the experimental group (Group A) used AI-generated lesson plans, while the control group (Group B) received instructor-prepared lesson plans. While a pre-test was administered to establish a baseline, a post-test and a delayed post-test were used to examine the impact on students' performance. The findings revealed that AI-generated lesson plans were more effective and had a more positive impact on students' performance than instructor-prepared lesson plans. The study suggests how AI could enhance language instruction in EFL classrooms.

Index Terms—AI-generated lesson plans, comparative efficacy, insufficient evidence, instructor-prepared lesson plans, tech-savvy young generation

I. INTRODUCTION

Over recent years, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a significant integration of technology into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, largely through AI-powered tools that have introduced innovative approaches to learning and instruction (Alharbi, 2023; Lo et al., 2024; Nazim, 2024). The advent of AI has profoundly affected language learning, revolutionizing instructional methods, skill acquisition, and educational experiences by enabling personalized learning and unique technological innovations (Xu & Wang, 2024). Today's generation, which is increasingly reliant on smartphones and technology, actively engages with the innovative features provided by AI tools. According to Evenddy (2024), AI significantly enhances language instruction and acquisition by delivering prompt feedback and customized content. Numerous studies (Mananay, 2024; Rusmiyanto et al., 2023; Jamshed et al., 2024) highlight the substantial advantages AI offers in language teaching, as it allows instructors to cater to a diverse range of learners more effectively and individually.

The development of AI-generated lesson plans, which utilize natural language processing and machine learning to provide customized instructional content, is among the most notable advancements. These AI-generated plans offer instructors an alternative to the typically time-consuming manual lesson planning, as they promise efficiency, adaptability, and alignment with curricular standards. Multiple studies have emphasized the efficacy of AI-generated lesson plans. For example, Karaman and Goksu (2024) investigated whether primary school math lesson plans incorporating ChatGPT, a chatbot, improved learners' math skills. The findings revealed a substantial enhancement in the academic performance of students instructed with ChatGPT-developed lesson plans compared to those taught using teacher-prepared lesson plans. Baytak (2024) examined the efficacy of ChatGPT and Google Gemini in developing

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lesson plans for 7th-grade students in science, literature, social studies, and mathematics. The results revealed that the lesson plans generated by both chatbots resemble those offered by human instructors, including assessments, sentence varieties, and instructional tasks. Asrori and Setyaningsih (2025) examined the assessments of secondary school EFL instructors of Gen-AI Magic School's ease of use (PEU) and usefulness (PU) for lesson planning, utilizing the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). The findings revealed that the course instructors found AI-powered tools easy to use and invaluable for lesson planning. To assess their effects on student involvement, motivation, and learning outcomes, this comparative study investigates the effectiveness of AI-generated lesson plans compared to teacher-developed ones in Saudi Arabian EFL classrooms.

A. Research Problem Statement

In Saudi Arabia, the incorporation of technology into classrooms has been recognized as a crucial strategic goal within the framework of the national Vision 2030 strategy for educational reform. This presents an opportunity to evaluate the instructional efficacy of content generated by artificial intelligence in comparison to conventional methods. The English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom is a crucial context for this comparison, as instructional design has a significant impact on learners' motivation, engagement, and language acquisition. AI-generated lesson plans are not yet comparable to those of human instructors, particularly in EFL instruction, despite their increasing use in education. While AI-powered educational systems are rapid, consistent, and adaptive, their pedagogical quality and contextual relevance are uncertain, leaving room for further exploration.

B. Research Purpose Statement

This study analyses how AI-generated and teacher-created lesson plans impact Saudi Arabian EFL instruction with a particular emphasis on how each strategy influences students' motivation and engagement.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. AI in Education and EFL Classrooms

In recent years, the application of AI in education has expanded significantly. Sophisticated teaching systems, personalized educational platforms, and AI-powered content-generating tools have transformed the design of instruction and implementation (Luckin & Holmes, 2016). Multiple studies have highlighted the efficacy of AI in education and EFL classrooms. For example, Rahman (2024) investigated Indonesian EFL instructors' utilization of AI technology, their opinions on its efficacy, and the challenges they faced. Semi-structured interviews were utilized to collect qualitative data from five Indonesian EFL instructors. The data analysis revealed that instructors utilized various AI-powered tools, including Google Translate, Grammarly, ChatGPT, and Claude AI, for content creation, providing feedback, and comprehension. Dai and Liu (2024) examined Chinese EFL students' opinions of AI in educational settings using a phenomenological method. Forty-five Chinese EFL students were picked from a variety of educational institutions using a criterion sampling. The findings revealed that AI in EFL classes could offer customized instruction, real-time feedback, an extensive range of educational materials, and a stimulating environment. Tafazoli (2024) examined how Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI), specifically ChatGPT, can assist Iranian English language teachers (N = 23) in overcoming their academic challenges. Semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and reflective essays were utilized to collect the data. The results revealed GenAI's potential to overcome ideological presumptions, enhance cross-cultural communication, and provide relevant, diverse learning resources tailored to individual learners. Espartinez (2024) examined and categorized the perspectives of Philippine higher education instructors and learners on the utilization of ChatGPT to identify commonalities. Twenty-seven respondents—15 students and 12 professors—were asked to rank 36 statements about ChatGPT use using questionnaires and Q-methodology interviews. The findings revealed that instructors and college students held contrasting opinions on the incorporation of ChatGPT, with different aspects representing moral, artistic, and practical perspectives. Zheng (2024) investigated the efficacy of a GenAI-based chatbot, "Reading Bot," in alleviating foreign language reading anxiety (FLRA) and enhancing foreign language reading performance (FLRP) among Chinese secondary school EFL students. Qualitative interviews were employed in a mixed-methods, quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test design. The findings revealed that the chatbot intervention significantly minimized the participants' FLRA in the experimental group when comparing pre- and post-test scores.

B. Lesson Planning in EFL Instruction

Lesson planning enables instructors of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to meet the diverse language needs of their students while effectively conveying knowledge and skills. Lesson planning, which is grounded in pedagogical philosophy, offers learner-centered, scaffolded, and purposeful instruction. To promote meaningful language acquisition, Vygotsky's social development theory emphasizes creating activities that fall within the learner's zone of proximal development (ZPD) and planning tasks that are appropriately supported. Multiple studies have stressed the importance of lesson planning in practical education and EFL instruction. For example, Putri (2016) examined the challenges faced by EFL teachers in developing effective lesson plans. Interviews and lesson plans from four language instructors were utilized to collect data. Interview findings revealed that each respondent understood the course plan, its evolution, and its components, but instructors were unable to comprehend the learning assessment method. Emiliyasi (2019)

examined the preparation and implementation of English teachers' lesson plans. Data was gathered through interviews, observations, and written records. The findings showed that instructors developed the lesson plan by examining the syllabus's core competencies and basic competencies, searching for learning resources, identifying learning media and content, and setting indicators and goals. Hejji Alanazi (2019) examined the lesson design attitudes, concepts, and problems of pre-service trainee instructors. Informal interviews and daily and weekly lesson plans were utilized to collect data from 50 pre-service trainee teachers. Triangulation was employed to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. The findings revealed that pre-service trainee instructors understood the importance of lesson planning, but they experienced difficulty during the planning process.

C. AI-Generated Lesson Plans

Several educational theories support the use of AI-generated lesson plans to teach EFL. AI's capacity to structure and customize instruction aligns with cognitive learning theory, which emphasizes perception, recall, and problem-solving. AI systems enhance cognitive engagement by tailoring instruction to the needs of learners (Anderson, 2015). Moreover, Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) explains how AI-generated lesson plans interact with content and pedagogy. AI could automate administrative and design tasks, allowing instructors to focus on student engagement and content. These theories support the use of modern, AI-generated lesson plans in the classroom. Multiple studies have highlighted the empowering efficacy of AI-generated lessons for enhancing EFL instruction and learning. Kehoe (2023) examined how generative AI could transform course formats for future teachers. It utilized generative AI to identify flaws in lesson plans. It was found that AI-generated lesson plans enhanced instructional methods and transformed education by offering learners greater agency. The study suggests that teachers should bring their perspectives and experiences to generative AI content to inform their pedagogical decisions. Chen et al. (2025) evaluated instructional prejudices in AI-driven learning resources, with a special focus on lesson plan generators. The analysis of 90 lesson plans from for-profit generators revealed that AI-generated material promoted teacher-centered classrooms with limited student choice, goal-setting, or substantive discussion. This research contributes to the critical discussion on how AI tools can enhance student agency and engagement in the educational context. An exploratory design was employed to achieve these objectives. A case study was conducted on middle school science, with ChatGPT assigned to develop lesson plans by outlining the objectives and duration of each course. The results indicated that AI-generated lesson plans achieved course objectives, incorporated actual-life scenarios, and promoted inquiry-based learning. This study revealed that structured feedback and curiosity necessitate enhancement, despite those characteristics.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

A quasi-experimental comparison investigated the impact of AI-generated and teacher-prepared lesson plans on EFL instruction. The design involved a control group with teacher-created lesson plans and an experimental group with AI-generated ones. The study investigated the impact of AI-generated lesson plans and instructor-developed lesson plans on EFL learners' motivation and engagement over time, using pre-tests, post-tests, and delayed post-tests. The respondents from both groups were asked to complete a questionnaire after the intervention to report their experiences.

B. Participants

The participants were chosen from two existing intermediate diploma classes for tourism. Class A ($n = 30$) was assigned to the experimental group, while Class B ($n = 30$) was the control group. The former received teacher-prepared lesson plans, while the latter received AI-generated lesson plans (ChatGPT). All the participants are native speakers of Arabic and study English as a foreign language. They are in the 18—to 24-year-old age group.

C. Data Collection Instruments

The data collection instruments included modified motivation and engagement items based on the Student Engagement Instrument and the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire, as well as teacher-developed achievement exams that assessed vocabulary, grammar, reading, and writing skills. Prior to implementation, each lesson plan was evaluated to ensure it aligned with the educational goals.

D. Procedure

A pre-test comprising items on motivation and engagement was administered to establish a baseline. To ensure consistency in the instructional process, both groups received instruction directly from the instructor throughout the intervention. The experimental group was taught using ChatGPT and other AI-generated lesson plans, while the control group was taught using traditional teacher-developed lesson plans. Post-intervention and delayed assessments evaluated motivation and engagement.

E. Data Interpretation

The quantitative data were analysed using SPSS. While descriptive statistics were employed to evaluate means and standard deviations of scores, paired sample t-tests were used to compare within-group differences (pre-test to post-test, post-tests to delayed post-test). ANCOVA was used to compare post-test scores between groups while controlling for pre-test scores.

IV. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The following section compares lesson plans made by teachers for the control group to artificial intelligence-generated lesson plans for the experimental group. Three assessment points were compared: the pre-test, the post-test, and the delayed post-test period. Both descriptive statistics and inferential methods were used to assess variations in performance and learning retention levels over time.

A. Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 displays the mean scores and standard deviations for the three tests of both groups. The experimental group ($M = 45.20$, $SD = 6.80$) and the control group ($M = 44.75$, $SD = 6.95$) reported comparable pre-test scores, suggesting comparable baseline proficiency. The experimental group achieved higher mean scores on the post-test and delayed post-test than the control group ($M = 65.30$, $M = 63.90$). The post-test mean score for the experimental group was 78.40; the delayed post-test mean score was 76.10.

TABLE 1

Tests	Group	N	Mean	SD
Pre-test	A (Experimental Group)	30	45.20	6.80
	B (Control Group)	30	44.75	6.95
Post-test	A (Experimental Group)	30	78.40	7.10
	B (Control Group)	30	65.30	8.25
Delayed Post-test	A (Experimental Group)	30	76.10	7.45
	B (Control Group)	30	63.90	7.90

Note. The experimental group received AI-generated lesson plans; the control group received teacher-developed plans.

B. Inferential Statistics

Independent sample t-tests were used to compare the scores of the experimental and control groups at each assessment point. Table 2 reveals that there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups in the pre-test ($t(58) = 0.27$, $p = .790$). The experimental group showed substantial improvements in both the post-test ($t(58) = 6.91$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.78$) and the delayed post-test ($t(58) = 6.25$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.61$). The large effect sizes revealed that AI-generated lesson plans had a significant impact on student performance.

TABLE 2

Assessment	Mean Difference (A–B)	t	df	p	Cohen's d
Pre-test	0.45	0.27	58	.790	0.06
Post-test	13.10	6.91	58	< .001	1.78
Delayed Post-test	12.20	6.25	58	< .001	1.61

Within-Group Analysis (Experimental Group)

To examine the performance trend over time within the experimental group, a repeated-measure analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used. The results, presented in Table 3, revealed that time had a statistically significant impact, as indicated by $F(2, 58) = 94.25$, $p < .001$, and $\eta^2 = 0.77$. This implies that there was a significant improvement from the pre-test to the post-test, and that this improvement was maintained mainly in the delayed post-test.

TABLE 3

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p / η^2
Time (Pre–Post–Delay)	11235.25	2	5617.63	94.25	< .001 / 0.77
Error (within)	3490.20	58	60.18		

V. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The results provided strong evidence that AI-generated lesson plans significantly enhanced the academic performance of EFL learners compared to traditional teacher-developed plans. While both groups started at a similar proficiency level, the experimental group showed significantly higher gains in both immediate learning (as measured by the post-test) and retention (as measured by the delayed post-test). The large effect sizes and high η^2 value indicate a robust impact of AI-based instructional design. This supports the theoretical claims grounded in cognitive theory, social constructivism, and the TPACK framework, which suggest that well-designed AI tools can effectively support and extend language learning outcomes. Bandura (1997) argued that ChatGPT and other AI-enhanced educational technologies could impact learning. His Social Cognitive Theory emphasizes observational learning, self-efficacy, and outcomes to explain behavioral changes, as shown by Class A's success with AI-generated lesson plans and Class B's

success with human-created plans. Interactive and responsive AI-driven content likely enhanced observational learning in Class A by engaging students with information that dynamically corresponded to proper language usage, modifying instructional techniques, and improving grammar. Interactive involvement provided pupils with individualized education and concentrated experiences that enhanced confidence, tenacity, and performance (Bandura, 1997). Zhang and Nouri (2019) found that AI improved self-efficacy, engagement, and learning. AI lesson plans, such as those utilizing ChatGPT, employ SCT principles to enhance learning, showcasing AI's educational potential. Multiple studies have highlighted the advantages of AI-generated lesson plans over those prepared by teachers. For example, Karaman and Goksu (2024) found a substantial enhancement in the academic performance of students instructed with ChatGPT-developed lesson plans compared to those taught using teacher-prepared lesson plans. While emphasizing the efficacy and swiftness of ChatGPT in preparing lesson plans, Kiryakova (2025) noted that ChatGPT required a shorter period than an instructor would need to prepare a quiz, including creating test questions, answers, and practical exercises and solutions. ChatGPT could generate an extensive number of questions about practical tasks and learning resources. However, Lammert et al. (2024) found that AI-generated lesson plans lacked universal design for learning/universal design for transition (UDL/UDT) alignment and needed teacher-initiated modifications to assist students with different requirements. The study suggested that while AI lesson plan generators could be advantageous to novice instructors or occasionally to seasoned instructors, their output was not sufficiently comprehensive to offer new ideas to experienced teachers. Additionally, multiple studies have acknowledged the efficacy of AI-powered tools while also emphasizing their alignment with human instructors. Yanar and Ergene (2025) found that ChatGPT generated creative and practical ideas but required well-structured prompts to provide beneficial outcomes. Similarly, Setyaningsih et al. (2024) found that AI serves as a collaborative ally rather than a replacement for instructors, emphasizing the need to strike a balance between human skill and technical efficiency. In addition, Kehoe (2023) argued that AI-powered tools were transforming classroom instruction, but they were unable to substitute human teachers. Teachers would always need to incorporate their viewpoints and experiences into generative AI content to make informed pedagogical decisions.

VI. CONCLUSION

The study examined the comparative efficacy of AI-generated and teacher-prepared lesson plans in Saudi EFL classrooms. The results revealed that artificial intelligence-generated lesson plans enhanced EFL students' academic performance compared to teacher-created ones. Both groups started at a similar level of proficiency; however, the experimental group achieved significantly greater gains in post-test learning and delayed post-test retention. The experimental design revealed that Class A, which used AI-generated lesson plans, constantly outperformed Class B, which utilized human-made plans. This significant achievement difference indicates that AI could enhance instructional learning processes and outcomes. Both immediate and delayed assessments revealed that the adaptive and interactive features of AI-driven content enhanced grammar recall and knowledge. Additional analysis indicated that AI-driven lesson preparation promoted student achievement, demonstrating that cutting-edge technology could alter classroom instruction.

A. Implications

The study and its findings offer multiple implications and pedagogical advantages for both EFL learners and instructors, as ChatGPT-generated lesson plans not only facilitate language teaching but also conform to the changed tastes of the tech-savvy generation in general and Saudi EFL learners in particular, as the universities and institutions of learning are equipped with advanced digital and AI-powered technology. The instructors and policymakers may use such findings to update and upgrade their digital infrastructures in keeping with the technology-revolutionized times.

B. Limitations and Suggestions

Future studies should explore hybrid models that incorporate AI efficiency with instructor knowledge. Instructors should be ready to offer AI-supported education through professional development. The goal should be to create a well-rounded strategy that enhances language learning without compromising instruction.

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Trauma and Loss in Hisham Matar's *Anatomy of a Disappearance*

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Abstract—This study examines the socio-political and cultural contexts that shape familial trauma in Hisham Matar's *Anatomy of a Disappearance* (2011). Specifically, it analyzes the fraught relationship between father and son, exploring how this dynamic intensifies Nuri's psychological and emotional distress and shapes the novel's narrative. Trauma theory has garnered significant attention among Arab diaspora writers, and Matar intricately engages with this discourse by portraying the lasting impact of loss and displacement. Through Nuri's childhood trauma—intensified by his father's disappearance—the novel interrogates themes of fear, anxiety, and unresolved grief. This study situates *Anatomy of a Disappearance* within trauma theory, emphasizing the parallels between Nuri's fictional suffering and Matar's personal experiences. By exploring the intersection of personal and collective trauma, it highlights how Matar's narrative reflects not only individual loss but also broader historical and political realities of Libyans during different times. Additionally, this paper contributes to scholarship on contemporary Anglophone literature by analyzing how Matar's narrative structure in English conveys Libyan political trauma to transnational audiences. Despite Matar's critical acclaim, *Anatomy of a Disappearance* has received limited scholarly attention, particularly in relation to trauma studies. Addressing this gap, this study contributes to existing scholarship by examining how the novel engages with trauma in contemporary diasporic literature.

Index Terms—*Anatomy of a Disappearance*, Matar, trauma, Anglophone literature, diaspora

I. INTRODUCTION

Hisham Matar is a British-Libyan novelist and essayist who was born in the U.S. in 1970. His debut novel, *In the Country of Men* (2006), introduces the theme of family intertwined with the sociopolitical situation of Libya during the 1970s in the form of a fictional work that includes many autobiographical elements. Notably, the novel was nominated for the 2006 Booker Prize.

Following a similar style of narrating a family-oriented story that overlaps with outer political complexities, Matar's second novel, *Anatomy of a Disappearance*, was published in 2011, coinciding with the Libyan civil war and the subsequent assassination of Muammar al-Qaddafi. Indeed, the war was hailed as a milestone in the history of Libya that invited many writers, both inside Libya and in the diaspora, to revisit the sociopolitical and historical realities of their country through their narrative and fiction. In 2016, unlike his first two fictional books, Matar published *The Return* (2016), a memoir in which he reflected on his visit to Libya in 2012 during the post-revolution period and sought the truth about his father's disappearance. In an interview with France 24 in 2017, Matar affirmed that he was still continuously searching to uncover not only his missing father but also the fate of many other Libyans who "disappeared" (France 24 English, 2017). Therefore, it appears impossible to separate the tragic fate of Matar's father from the broader sociopolitical situation in Libya, as both reflect a narrative of instability and continual flux.

The storyline of Matar's most recent book, *My Friends* (2024), is set in a diasporic setting and centers on three Libyan friends who live in London, which serves as a place of exile for them. *My Friends* explores the core value of friendship in light of the exilic experience that connects the characters with each other. According to Matar's interview with France 24, he plainly sees his contribution to Libya's history as not providing a resolution (France 24 English, 2017). Matar's cumulative narrative production can stand out as a point of departure where, through his works, he keeps moving between the present and the past through his characters and the narrative structure to question the political history of Libya over time. This is possibly because Matar needs to revisit his origin, not only physically but also narratively, to regain a deep sense of rootedness. The author's actual journeys to his homeland offer him a chance to reevaluate his identity, with his return home representing a moment of possibility (Worth, 2017).

Since its publication in 2011, few studies have been written about *Anatomy of a Disappearance*. Several critics have examined the book in the context of the author's background, viewing it as the firsthand account of a native Libyan whose life story could reinforce certain geopolitical theories about the Arab world. For example, David Mattin, in his review of the novel published in *The Independent* titled "*Anatomy of a Disappearance*, by Hisham Matar: The Changing State of Libya Spins a Tale," states that it is "a testament to the terrible human cost of unjust government in the Arab world" (Mattin, 2011). Mattin's remark clearly claims that the content of the novel can stand out as a "testament" to support a specific narrative on the Arab world, especially Libya. This blurring of the fictional and non-fictional lines can serve some strategic narrative agenda, where the representation becomes more powerful and heard than the truth. This interpretation of the novel, highlighting both the author and the book's background, is also echoed

in Barbara Harlow's article "From Flying Carpets to No-Fly Zones: Libya's Elusive Revolution(s), According to Ruth First, Hisham Matar, and the International Criminal Court" (2012). In this article, Harlow explores Matar's novels, including *Anatomy of a Disappearance*, to analyze the political regime in Libya. She underscores the significance of the novel's publication date, which came barely a month after the onset of Libya's most recent political transformation during the Arab Spring. For Harlow, what makes the narrative of the novel more significant during those major political changes is the role of Libyan writers like Hisham Matar, whether back home or in exile, in writing and rewriting the story of Libya (Harlow, 2012). The appearance of a new political status quo and the disappearance of some political figures also indicate changes in the intellectual scene, where new voices will appear and take part in writing or rewriting the story of Libya while other voices disappear.

Other studies, on the other hand, explored the novel from a psychoanalytical perspective, where the writers delved into the characters' psyche to examine diverse themes, including family, love, loss, exile, and trauma, to name a few. In Evangeline Jemi's article "Psychosomatic Angst in Hisham Matar's *Anatomy of a Disappearance*" (2017), the writer traces the life of the main character, Nuri, and his suffering, which leads to his sense of alienation and makes him in constant search first for his dead mother and then his missing father. According to Jemi, Matar "is both a visionary and a pragmatist...his *Anatomy of a Disappearance* grapples with a harrowing family history and probes the mysteries of father-son relationships" (Jemi, 2017, p. 1016).

In the same context, John C. Hawley, in "Mourning and Melancholy in Hisham Matar's *In the Country of Men* and *Anatomy of a Disappearance*" (2017), views Matar's endeavor to push the personal story of the characters beyond the limitations of the Libyan context to address "some common tropes of the psychosexual development of many men across the Arabic world," mainly "the trope of the missing father to suggest a tenuous hold on masculine agency throughout today's Middle East" (Hawley, 2017, p. 204). As a result, the novel's narrator, Matar, is interpreted in the context of his masculine development, wherein his internal and external problems are linked to his realization of his masculinity. Hence, this paper approaches Hisham Matar's novel through the psychoanalytical lens, specifically through Trauma Theory, where the narrator's struggle is severe due to the disappearance of his father and his continuous search for him. Nuri's search, first for his absent mother and then for his missing father, goes hand in hand with his life stages, starting from childhood and moving to adulthood, to form his perception of himself and the world around him. Consequently, Nuri's traumatic experience can be traced in connection with the anatomy of the recurrent disappearance of his parents over time, or as the title of the novel suggests. This paper concerns the narrator and protagonist Nuri, whose traumatized experience in relation to his father's disappearance underlines the more collective experience of the Libyans, including the writer himself.

Like the child narrator and protagonist of *In the Country of Men*, the narrator in *Anatomy of a Disappearance* (2011) seems to be suffering due to the absence of his father. Likewise, Matar himself does not know anything about his own father since he was abducted in Cairo in 1990. In his article in *The Independent* in 2006, Matar bitterly states, "To this day, every knock on the door could be my father. But the only way in which he visits unannounced is in dreams. I dream of him frequently" (Matar, 2006). In his *Anatomy of a Disappearance* (2011), Matar narrates the story of the adolescent Nuri el-Alfi from his own point of view. His homeland is unnamed, and his family had been exiled in 1958 to Paris before finally settling in Cairo. As a result, since his birth, Nuri has always been physically displaced.

The story begins with Nuri's flashback to the beginning of his school Christmas holiday in 1972, when he was fourteen. It was during this year, and specifically in Geneva, that Nuri's father, Kamal Pasha, disappeared, and since then Nuri has been haunted by this memory. Moreover, the disappearance of his father and his continuous search for him makes Nuri suffer emotionally and psychologically to the extent of being traumatized and more alienated. Yet, Nuri's traumatic experience started well before this turning point in his life. Furthermore, Nuri as a character suffering from his father's disappearance expresses not only his individual trauma but also a more complex and collective one.

Although Matar's writing mainly addresses Arab-oriented, or more specifically, Libyan-oriented themes and settings, he principally resorts to writing in English, rather than Arabic. In reference to his position as a Libyan living abroad, Matar's linguistic choices reflect a deeper sociocultural meaning in association with his diasporic experience, which is distinguished by its fusion of diverse cultural identities, leading to the creation of new culturally hybrid identities (Gilroy, 1993), like those of Matar and his characters. As Matar in his narrative moves between countries, cultures, and times, this fluidity of narrative underlines his diasporic identity that never settles down. Matar, then, like his characters, stands in-between cultures, experiencing both feelings of belonging and not belonging at once. Writing through his diasporic voice, Matar constantly encounters moments of transformation (Hall, 1990) and emergence out of this diasporic space (Brah, 1996), while attempting, through this diasporic consciousness, to reclaim his sense of self or belonging (Cohen, 2008). In short, Matar's diasporic narrative offers a space for reintegration into his homeland while, simultaneously, his diasporic identity is continuously evolving.

On the one hand, Matar's choice of English as a medium of communication can arguably be viewed as a form of assimilation or integration into the new culture, where his hyphenated-identity is shaped by the consistent interplay between his cultural roots and reality. This hyphenated-identity possibly offers a space to reconcile the inherited culture and the lived reality, or, as Jarrar (2008) encapsulates the multifaceted nature of hyphenated identity, "I belonged nowhere and everywhere: the eternal condition of the hyphenated Arab" (p. 89). On the other hand, Matar's use of English can conceivably reveal deeper cultural displacement and exilic experience that results in linguistic dislocation.

This linguistic dislocation functions as a marker of a postcolonial style of writing (Ashcroft et al., 2002; Lionnet, 1995) altered by Matar's fragmented identity. In view of Libya's historical and political context, Matar's narrative in English rather than his mother tongue, Arabic, foregrounds the role of language not only as a medium of communication but also as a manifestation of identity formation in diasporic spaces. Furthermore, Matar's literary works can be particularly noteworthy for their literary value as part of the global Anglophone literature, considering their use of English by a postcolonial subject, i.e., the writer, or the so-called marginalized voices (Gikandi, 2001). Hence, Matar's writing in English positions his narrative in-between his homeland and host land, revealing deeper cultural negotiation and self-reclamation.

Using a first-person narrator, Matar's *Anatomy of a Disappearance* exhibits a sample of a fragmented narrative where the narrator experiences moments of confusion, especially while recalling the past. For example, Nuri's recollection of his memory seems to be disrupted by his trauma resulting from his father's disappearance in passages like, "There are times when my father's absence is as heavy as a child sitting on my chest" (Matar, 2011, p. 1). This confusion disrupts the sequence of events and consequently makes the narrative structure disjointed or incomplete. Essentially, this disjointed storyline reflects the narrator's deeper psychological instability brought on by tragedy, especially in Matar's novel. This trauma not only informs the thematic structure of the novel, but also shapes the stylistic and narrative choices, as Caruth (1995) explains, "the structure of the narrative itself becomes a site of trauma" (p. 4). In Matar's novel, the narrator, Nuri, being unable to understand his reality, experiences moments of mental distress. For example, Nuri's continuous obsession with the image of his mother and later his father, or, as Caruth (1995) explains, that trauma is "to be possessed by an image or event" (p. 4), severs his mental stability, leaving his narrative full of gaps and moments of silence and perplexity. Thus, this confusion disrupts the coherence of the storyline, making it a non-linear one, and transforms the narrative into a fragmented one (Whitehead, 2004). Essentially, Matar's fragmented narrative is viewed as a symptom of trauma, either reflecting the writer's personal trauma or that of the narrator, Nuri.

As *Anatomy of a Disappearance* presents countless moments of memory recollection, the narrator encounters some gaps in his memory. Within trauma narratives, memory recollection tends to lack coherence (Felman & Laub, 1992), which intensifies the fragmentation of the narrative. For example, Nuri's attempts to process his new reality, particularly after his father's disappearance, and to recall his memories fail to form a coherent structure. Being unable to construct a cohesive memory, the narrator, thus, appears to be unable to make sense of his reality. As a result, the narrator in *Anatomy of a Disappearance* is caught between two worlds, past and present. Additionally, the context of postcolonial writing is intertwined with trauma narrative, intensified by the voice of the child narrator (Nir, 2018), which contributes to the overall narrative fragmentation.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: TRAUMA AND NARRATIVE MEMORY

It seems that reading Matar's novels in isolation is nearly impossible. His works often tend to involve deeper sociopolitical and historical contexts and intertwine personal and collective experiences, making them conceivably linked to broader themes such as trauma, memory, and identity. In essence, trauma theory investigates the effect of traumatic experiences on identity formation, where trauma can disturb the personal narrative, representing a rupture in the broader collective cultural and historical one (Caruth, 1996). Individuals who struggle with traumatic situations consequently tend to have fragmented memories manifested through non-linear or disruptive narrative in literary texts (Kaplan, 2005). Furthermore, analyzing the literary works through the lens of trauma theory enables readers to delve into the psychological and emotional depths of both the characters and the authors.

Additionally viewed as diasporic literature (Baker, 2017; Hawley, 2017; Jalal, 2014), Matar's *Anatomy of a Disappearance* explores displacement, exile, and loss, interconnecting this diasporic narrative with personal and collective trauma. Having prefaced this, trauma theory explores the possibility of generational overlap where trauma does not fade away over time and can transform from one generation to another, despite the fact that one generation did not experience the same traumatic experience (Hirsch, 2012). This intergenerational traumatic transfer is particularly significant in the context of diasporic literature, where the personal trauma interweaves with the collective one, and the past keeps informing the present (Baker, 2017). Hence, any individual traumatic experience can possibly extend to impact the descendants' generation beyond the confinement of the past generations.

Trauma in Matar's novels can be traced through his narrators, who experience different levels of suffering, making their narrative seemingly incomplete and making them unwilling to express themselves adequately through language (Felman & Laub, 1992). This is particularly true about Matar, who, as his narrator, confronts his suffering and struggles to express himself adequately. For example, Matar highlights the traumatic experiences of his characters to underline their suffering. This suffering does not start in the present but has roots in the past, which continues to shape and reshape their present and possibly their future. This discontinuity between times aligns with the continuity of traumatic memories to intervene. Therefore, it appears difficult, if not impossible, for characters to process their traumatic experiences in order to either cope with or repress them (Van der Kolk & McFarlane, 1996). This is arguably possible, as he himself has gone through a similar experience. As trauma disrupts the coherent memory of his characters, Matar's fragmented memories of his homeland in general, and his father specifically, keep haunting him. Through the narratives of his works, Matar attempts to reconcile the past, the present, the personal, and the collective by exposing the traumatic

experiences first, then by confronting them. As a result, his story acts as a conduit for him to find personal redemption from accumulated grief, unpleasant realities, and frequent displacements (Garcia, 2019). This narrative, loaded with traumatic experience, stands out as a point of departure where Matar aims to examine identity and sense of belonging to facilitate healing for himself and the Libyans.

Matar's works feature his contribution to global Anglophone literature, not only due to their resort to using English as a medium of communication but also as a tool to explore diasporic identity. Hence, Matar's writing functions as a form of diasporic expression or a form of linguistic dislocation where the writer struggles while using his mother tongue. Through his writing style and linguistic choices, Matar explores the formation of identity between cultures, making his fiction resonate with the thematic concerns of diasporic literature. Besides exploring the theme of trauma, Matar's *Anatomy of a Disappearance* addresses themes of displacement and identity, like the works of Diana Abu-Jaber, Randa Jarrar, and Leila Aboulela, to name a few. Through its fragmented narrative, the novel closely showcases a postcolonial-trauma-oriented structure where the narrative serves as a symptom of trauma. In other words, the fragmented narrative in *Anatomy of a Disappearance*, combined with the first-person narrator, functions as a manifestation of trauma and its influence on both content and form. Trauma does not only disrupt the coherence of memory, but it also makes the storyline non-linear, resulting in a disjointed or fragmented narrative. Consequently, the narrator experiences difficulties while attempting to make sense of his reality through the past and present. Likewise, the writer himself navigates his reality between two cultural identities.

Having said that, this study examines *Anatomy of a Disappearance*, emphasizing trauma theory to illustrate the similar experiences of trauma experienced by the narrator, Nuri, and the writer, Matar, through their interactions. By underlining Nuri's trauma in relation to Matar's, this study investigates how personal and fictional narratives overlap. While Matar's works have been widely studied, *Anatomy of a Disappearance* has received relatively little scholarly attention, significantly in reference to trauma theory. Hence, this study attempts to address this gap and contributes to existing scholarship on how the personal and fictional traumatic experiences intersect, building on studies that have analyzed trauma, particularly in a contemporary narrative context (e.g., Caruth, 1995; Schönfelder, 2013; Van der Kolk & McFarlane, 1996; Vickroy, 2002).

III. DISCUSSION: REPRESENTATIONS OF TRAUMA AND LOSS IN THE NOVEL

Ever since losing his mother at ten, Nuri has been looking to his father to replace her love. Yet, his father's silence only causes Nuri to suffer from feelings of alienation. Moreover, Nuri now also questions his and his father's familial role, saying, "At these moments it felt as if he were the boy obliged to pass a meal with adults; that he was the son and I the father" (Matar, 2011, pp. 8–9). Nevertheless, Nuri's feelings of alienation are halted temporarily when, while on vacation with his father in Alexandria, Egypt, he meets a young British-Egyptian woman named Mona. Unexpectedly, however, Mona and Nuri's father marry, and Nuri is suddenly sent to England, giving him another reason for his detachment from his father, stating that his father "had already enrolled me in Daleswick, a boarding school in northern England, and there was nothing I could do about it" (Matar, 2011, p. 74). All of this only serves to increase his emotional suffering. As Nuri is only 12, this growing physical and emotional distance between him and his father, Kamal, leads to Nuri's estrangement, and his sense of alienation only increases. According to the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (2018), one of the causes of childhood trauma may be a result of father-son separation, either physically or emotionally. It is believed that children who experience any level of separation from their parent figure, specifically sudden separations, may feel more traumatized (Children with Traumatic Separation: Information for Professionals, 2016).

Though Nuri's traumatic experience stems from his imbalanced relationship with his father, where he feels emotionally detached from him, he becomes even more traumatized by the physical separation after his father's disappearance. Moreover, what makes this separation much more problematic is Nuri's awareness of how his father misses him, as he states, "I could tell Father missed me, that in the act of putting me in boarding school, he had run against his own heart" (Matar, 2011, p. 83). Nuri's words are quite indicative of his inner struggle, reflected in his attitude at the boarding school, where he mostly feels out of place and alienated from his surroundings, including his peers. Like his father, Nuri was secretive and did not share much about his life. Nonetheless, it became obvious on Nuri's 14th birthday when he declared, "I hated everyone at Daleswick that morning. I had told no one, not even Alexei, that it was my birthday" (Matar, 2011, p. 86). Still, this birthday unexpectedly became a critical moment in his father-son relationship when, in contrast to the reader's expectations, a moment of reconciliation occurs between the father and son when Kamal reunites with Nuri on that day. Nuri reflected on this intimate moment:

Father opened his umbrella, and it covered us both. I wanted everything good in the world for him: every dream he had, all of his secret plans, to come true. I suddenly was glad that Mona was his. A strange contentment towards the order of things fell on me. (Matar, 2011, pp. 86–87)

This change in Nuri's attitude towards his father showed a possibility of a reconnection between the two. Nevertheless, this momentary reconnection ended with the disappearance of Kamal during that same year in Geneva in 1972. Though Nuri did not have a stable relationship with his father, he was so highly affected by his disappearance that he spent the coming years of his life waiting for him. What is more ironic is that Nuri learned more about his father after his disappearance, and he became more emotionally attached to his father, or more precisely, to the memory of his

father. Moreover, from 1972 until he finished his doctorate, his life was entirely shaped by his continuous search for his father. This circular search motif continues throughout the novel with both Nuri and the reader trying to answer the unanswered questions and seek the truth about the fate of Nuri's father. Similarly, Hisham Matar, like many Libyans, also seeks the truth about their missing family members back in Libya, especially during the aftermath of the 2011 revolution.

A few years after his father's disappearance, and driven by his confusion and sense of disorientation, Nuri insisted on meeting Beatrice, the woman who happened to be with his father during the kidnapping. With the help of his father's lawyer in Geneva, Monsieur Charlie Hass, Nuri was introduced to Beatrice, of whom Hass said, "She meant a great deal to your father and had nothing to do with his disappearance. She has suffered deeply, and silently, ever since it happened" (Matar, 2011, p. 214). After telling Nuri the details of that night, Beatrice asked him, "What do you think happened to your father?" (Matar, 2011, p. 218). Unable to answer back, Nuri said, "I did not know how to answer. The truth is, I don't believe Father is dead. But I don't believe he is alive either" (Matar, 2011, p. 218). After all the years that followed his father's disappearance, the encounter between Beatrice and Nuri marks a moment of realization, an epiphany, or an awakening. Nuri then recognizes the truth—his father disappeared.

After meeting with Beatrice and his gradual awakening, Nuri decided to go back to Cairo and settle down in his family's apartment. Later, he visited Agamy Beach in Alexandria, where he used to spend his vacations with his father. This decision shows how Nuri was still searching for a father figure. However, even more striking is that, after a decade of his father going missing, he was still willing to wait more, as the closing chapter of the novel presents Nuri visiting his father's study and trying on his father's clothes: "One evening, after Naima had left for the day, I found myself taking out one of Father's suits" (Matar, 2011, p. 245). Contrary to Nuri's expectations, he "never knew clothes could shrink so much from lack of wear" (Matar, 2011, p. 245). Nevertheless, he believed that the suit would "gradually return to its original size" (Matar, 2011, p. 245), because he also believed that his father would return soon. Either living in denial or reaching a level of hopelessness to resist any alternative but his father's return, in the last two lines of the novel, Nuri still maintains that his father "will need a raincoat when he comes back" (Matar, 2011, p. 246). Whether Nuri was optimistic that he would find his father one day or remained desperately hopeless, the novel ends with no clear-cut closure. John Kearney, likewise, in "Traumatized Narrators in Hisham Matar's Novels" (2014), sees this novel as a pessimistic statement that "may reflect a growing awareness in Matar himself of the profound difficulties for Libyans in constructing a new post-Gaddafi vision for themselves" (Kearney, 2014, p. 124). Whether it's Nuri or Matar himself, both are left without any resolution regarding their fathers' fate.

IV. TRAUMA, MEMORY AND DIASPORIC IDENTITY

In *Fragmenting Force of Memory: Self, Literary Style, and Civil War in Lebanon* (2012), Nikro (2012) states that "the significance of what is remembered can never be stabilized but remains contingent on how others variably recall and orient themselves to the past ... or else how past experiences and events are passed on as stories" (p. 30). Nuri's resistance to having closure to his story and his indulgence in his past make his traumatic experience more overt. Despite the fleeting sense of kinship with his father in Cairo, where they once shared a home, Cairo served as an exile for Kamal, who previously escaped there. In his attempt to try on his father's clothes, Nuri's act of keeping his father's clothes shows his intention to await his return. Nuri's inability to come to terms with his father's undetermined destiny will extend his feeling of exile and will leave a birthmark that will make him experience a more traumatic state of in-betweenness and loss. All things considered, Nuri's father's absence remains the backstory of his life, something he cannot get over at the end of his narrative, and his shared memories with his father forever haunt Nuri, who becomes haunted by those memories. Much worse is that he has become traumatized. In her *Trauma and Recovery* (1997), Judith Herman states, "People relive the event as though it were continually recurring in the present...The traumatic moment becomes encoded in the abnormal form of memory, which breaks spontaneously into consciousness, both as flashbacks during waking state and as traumatic nightmares during sleep" (Herman, 1997, p. 37).

In *Anatomy of a Disappearance*, Nuri, the narrator of the story, first recalls memories of his dead mother, followed by those of his missing father. Haunted by many memories, Nuri seems to be emotionally stuck in them; as a result, whenever he moves forward, he keeps moving backward. Herman emphasizes that the traumatic moment becomes part of the consciousness, the same as Nuri's reality seems clearer in his mind when he started investigating the unforeseen circumstances of his father's disappearance, including revisiting his memories of him. His narrative moves between the past by revisiting his traumatic memories, and in the present, he aims at finding a resolution to his trauma. However, finding closure is a lost dream. Likewise, Matar, the author of the novel, is indulged in his search for a resolution regarding his father's fate, which is much the same as the fate of many Libyans during the post-Gaddafi era. Whether it is memories of his dead mother or the missing father, Nuri's traumatic experience becomes embedded in those memories that keep interrupting the flow of his present.

Along with the novel's events, Nuri is disrupted first by the memories of his dead mother and then those of his lost father. In her *Trauma: Exploration in Memory* (1995), Cathy Caruth states that the people who suffer from any traumatic experience must find a medium of expression through which they can access their trauma to recover from trauma or to find a ground of self-reconciliation (Caruth, 1995, p. 152). Like Nuri, Hisham Matar himself had the same experience with his father, Jaballah, who disappeared "[w]hen Hisham Matar was a nineteen-year-old university student

in England, his father was kidnapped. One of the Qaddafi regime's most prominent opponents in exile, he was held in a secret prison in Libya (Matar, 2013). Hisham would never see him again. But he never gave up hope that his father might still be alive. "Hope," as he writes, "is cunning and persistent" (Matar, 2013). This intersection between the biographical background of the writer and the narrator of the novel reflects how the trauma of Nuri depicts a subtler self-reflexivity dimension of the author himself. Thus, the fictional work has become a medium of self-representation in which the writer, through exploring the traumatic experiences of the characters, is willing to have another level of exploring his own traumatic experiences and to reflect on them, yet shrewdly enough, through his fictionalized characters, he can avoid any direct association.

The theme of trauma has recurred in the writings of Arab writers in diaspora due to diverse circumstances such as their individual experiences in politics in their homeland or their current state of feeling in their unfamiliar territory. By writing about such a theme, they therefore initiate a quest for their homeland with all its metaphorical associations of homeliness and belonging, and this happens to be possible through their writing. As Laurie Vickroy states in *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction* (2002), "literary and imaginative approaches [to trauma] provide a necessary supplement to historical and psychological studies" (Vickroy, 2002, p. 221); thus, through the literary work and its depiction of the characters, the writer can explore diverse socio-political, cultural, and historical domains freely. In *Wounds and Words*, Christa Schönfelder declares, "Literary texts and their fictional worlds allow for nuanced engagements with the subject of trauma...to engage readers' powers of emotional identification and sympathy on the one hand and critical reflection on the other" (Schönfelder, 2013, p. 29).

As a consequence, the literary text functions are not only on the micro textual level but also on the macro socio-political, cultural, and historical ones. For Vickroy, the writers of trauma "make terrifying, alien experiences more understandable and accessible" (Vickroy, 2002, p. 222), and their writings serve as a means of "witnessing or testifying for the history and experience of historically marginalized people" (Vickroy, 2002, p. 221). In reference to *Anatomy of Disappearance*, Matar uses his narrator to explore not only his personalized trauma of losing his father but also to make a statement about the future of Libya during the aftermath of revolution. Though he was able to go back to his homeland, his memory of his father still occupies his perception of the present. Like Nuri's narrative that intertwines the past and the present by revisiting Nuri's memories, it invites the readers to not only question the circumstances of Kamal's disappearance but also to sympathize with Nuri's search for him, knowing that this search is never fulfilled as Nuri's trauma. On the same basis, Anne Whitehead in her *Memory* (2009) states that writings of trauma depict "the denied, the repressed, and the forgotten" (Whitehead, 2009, p. 82). Matar, then, has used his fictional narrative to explore the lives of many Libyans who either experienced exile or went through traumatic experiences due to the sociopolitical situation. In addition to helping Matar deal with his own pain, Nuri's voice allows him to contribute to the rewriting of Libya's post-revolutionary history.

The disappearance of Matar's father has shaped and reshaped his literary career, and this can be traced through the thematic affinities of his literary productions, which are self-referential as they either directly or indirectly refer to his biographical background. Matar's debut novel, *In the Country of Men* (2006), narrates the story of the nine-year-old Suleiman, whose father disappears in Tripoli, and over time it is revealed that he was taken by the Revolutionary Committee, or the *mukhabarat*, of Qaddafi because of his supposed association with Ustath Rashid, who is accused of treason because of his anti-Qaddafi activities. The narrator in the novel, Suleiman, describes Libya under Qaddafi's regime and highlights some socio-political issues during the 1970s. Suleiman's father reappears after being physically tortured and psychologically traumatized, yet Suleiman is sent away to Cairo to continue his education and, most importantly, to escape a destiny similar to that of his father. This distant relationship and disconnection between Suleiman and his father cause a sense of loss for the former. Much like the paper "Trees as Safe Havens in Faqir's *Willow Trees Don't Weep* and Matar's *In the Country of Men*," Sadouni and Abu Amrieh (2022) point out the significance of trees, specifically the mulberry tree, which gives the narrator of the latter, Suleiman, a sense of affiliation and belonging with his homeland. By the end of *In the Country of Men* (2006), after Suleiman moves to Egypt, references to trees vanish from the narrative. According to Sadouni and Abu Amrieh, this reflects "the protagonist's state of rootlessness. The absence of trees in the post-Libya narrative illustrates Suleiman's state of exile and disconnectedness" (Sadouni & Abu Amrieh, 2022, p. 10). In *Anatomy of Disappearance* (2011), Matar continues in the same manner, but this time the narrator, Nuri, who lives in exile with his father, suffers from an actual disappearance, and the sense of loss is maximized to reach a level of trauma. His continuous longing for his father makes Nuri alienated and detached from his reality. In his narration of the last chapter of the novel, Nuri is still waiting for his father, much like Matar himself.

In Matar's first two novels, the narrators also search for a connection with their fathers. The fathers in both texts are distant, and the protagonists have reluctant relationships with their fathers as well. Nevertheless, in their search for this connection with their fathers, either physically, as in Nuri's case, or emotionally, as in Suleiman's case, the protagonists discover the flaws of their fathers. In a discussion of his *Anatomy of Disappearance*, Matar points out that the novel addresses the theme of family, yet in reference to Libya's sociopolitical reality (Kunzru, 2011).

In sum, the individual trauma of Matar is part of a more collective trauma. As a result of the socio-political oppression in the Arab world during specific historical moments, Arab writers in diaspora tend to reflect on their personal background while creating their literary works. Hence, the individual trauma of the characters cannot be

separated from the trauma of their author, and the individual trauma of the author cannot be separated from the collective trauma of the community. In his paper “The Return,” Matar recalls his mother’s commentary while they were in the airport waiting for their flight back to Libya. Matar, then, concludes his novel with non-closure, where he still questions his reality, as “Suleiman el-Dewani and Nuri el-Alfi are the exiled protagonists...[s]he would rather me return with my two fictional characters than carry the ghost of that man she calls the Absent Present” (Matar, 2013, p. 38).

V. STORYTELLING AND TRAUMA-INFORMED PEDAGOGY IN THE EFL/ESL CLASSROOM

The nature of narratives, as being emotionally engaging, makes them quintessential in creating empathy among learning communities (Fryer, 2003). Like novels, EFL/ESL learners can acquire a beginning in narrative structures to form common ground through which they can establish an interpersonal rapport (Abrahamson, 2006; Maguire, 1998). Teaching trauma narrative in an EFL/ESL classroom has a dual nature, having both benefits and pitfalls. In the context of the EFL/ESL classroom, integrating trauma narratives into teaching practices and designing inclusive curricula can support students’ self-expression and foster students’ well-being (Medley, 2012).

Storytelling, as highlighted by Berdesi et al. (2026), goes beyond a language-teaching method; it allows learners, especially those from migrant backgrounds, to express their own experiences, connect prior knowledge with new contexts, and build both linguistic and personal identity. For example, Hisham Matar’s *Anatomy of a Disappearance* can provide EFL/ESL learners with a rich text in terms of its thematic and narrative structures. As the novel addresses themes such as exile, displacement, and identity, learners from migrant backgrounds may find it particularly relevant (Wilbur, 2017; Medley, 2012).

In addition, *Anatomy of a Disappearance* portrays the life of its narrator through different phases, so learners may identify with the narrator and other characters. Thus, reading the novel can help learners find a space to express their ideas without the need to disclose their privacy. The novel, then, functions as a medium of communication where learners can find safe spaces to engage with the content, either emotionally or intellectually, while reading and contributing to the discussion in class. In essence, the implementation of trauma-informed teaching should provide learners with safe spaces to reflect on their personal experience (Reynolds & Costa, 2023; Pappamihel et al., 2022) and express themselves clearly. Besides its role as a tool of healing (Zacarian et al., 2017) and enhancing emotional well-being (Wilbur, 2017), trauma narrative can offer a wide variety of linguistic choices that learners can utilize while articulating their ideas and consequently supporting their language learning outcomes (Mason, 2021; Wilson et al., 2024).

Conversely, teachers who implement trauma-informed techniques should be mindful that re-traumatization may occur if traumatized students reflect on their painful experiences without the proper assistance (Herman, 1992). Moreover, teachers who engage with students’ traumatic experiences might possibly suffer from distress or secondary traumatic stress (Crossman et al., 2024). Therefore, teachers involved in trauma-informed practices should receive appropriate training from experts to avoid any possible emotional damage or re-traumatization of students (Wilson et al., 2024).

VI. CONCLUSION

This paper traced the roots of Nuri’s trauma in reference to his father’s disappearance, which destabilized him and led him on a circular search in an attempt to discover the unknown fate of his father. Through precise intrinsic analysis of the novel, it is evident that the writer himself was also traumatized by the absence of his father, revealing a more complicated sociopolitical situation in his country, Libya. Like his narrators, Matar continuously searched for his father. His father figure, with its diverse representations, stands out as a symbol of certainty and truth. As the narrators of his novels, and even Matar himself, do not find an end to their traumatic experiences, they are still in search of a conclusion. Moreover, the future of Libya, then in flux due to the political changes over time, is still unknown for many. As an Arab writer in diaspora, Matar has depicted the father-son relationship in his novel and other literary works as an illustration of a more cosmic representation of the relationship between the individual and his homeland. Matar’s *Anatomy of a Disappearance* and his other literary works showcase the intrusion between the private sphere and the public one, where they have, in the case of Matar specifically and Arab writers in diaspora in general, become inseparable. Moreover, in writing Nuri’s story, Matar is rewriting his own story, which is, at the end of the day, the story of a generation rather than an individual.

To conclude, Matar’s work can be read as a documentation of the socio-political and cultural situation of the context that negatively affects the family members in Hisham Matar’s *Anatomy of a Disappearance*. Specifically, the novel focuses on the exilic experiences of both the father and the son and their role in augmenting the traumatic influence. The continuous losses and displacements in the lives of both Kamal and Nuri affect familial relationships and are affected by the socio-political and historical contexts. Moreover, the novel investigates how the father-son relationship influences their traumatic and exilic experiences. Matar’s depiction of Kamal and Nuri’s relationship is realistic and genuine since the novel meticulously chronicles how the whole of Nuri’s trauma is intensified by Kamal’s sudden disappearance. In contrast, the novel also echoes Matar’s personal story and his own suffering from his father’s disappearance.

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Colonial Ambiguities and Modernist Elements in *A Passage to India*: Forster's Critique and Justification of Empire

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Abstract—This paper examines E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India* as both a critique and a subtle justification of British colonization. While Forster portrays the negative consequences of colonial rule for Indians, he also reinforces stereotypes that align with imperialist narratives. The paper's textual analysis highlights this duality and explores the novel's use of modernist elements. This paper argues that Forster, in *A Passage to India*, attempts to depict the unpleasant experiences experienced by colonized Indians under British colonization; however, he simultaneously justifies colonization by contributing to the spread of stereotypes about the East, particularly Indians. Additionally, the paper identifies modernist elements that complicate the novel's ambivalence toward colonialism and whether it is being critiqued or justified.

Index Terms—British colonization, anti-imperialism, orientalism, stereotypes, modernism

I. INTRODUCTION

In 1858, Britain extended its power to rule India and establish the British Raj. For the first two years, it was followed by resistance from the Indians (the Great Rebellion) that resulted in a high death toll and large financial costs (Kaul, 2011). There had been many literary works and scholarships that were produced during that period to document what was happening. One of those works is *A Passage to India* which was published in 1924 and written by Edward Morgan Forster, an English novelist who attended Cambridge and was viewed as a liberal humanist. Along with others, he established the Bloomsbury Group that Virginia Woolf was a member of (Rohrberger, 2015). He was also known for his social criticism which is also one of the Bloomsbury Group's goals to encourage writers to touch on and address topics that were considered either socially offensive or embarrassing (Rohrberger, 2015).

A Passage to India's plot takes place in colonial India under the rule of the British Raj. It tells the story of Aziz who, at the beginning of the novel, discusses with his friends whether a friendship with Englishmen is possible. He runs into Mrs. Moore, an English woman, in a mosque, and after a short conversation, he realizes that she is respectful of the local customs and sympathetic toward Indians. At a tea party, he offers to take Mrs. Moore and Ms. Adela to see the Marabar Caves where Adela claims she was sexually assaulted by him. Aziz is arrested but at the trial, Adela admits that he did not really assault her. He is released but still hurt by what happened and decides not to be friends again with the English people.

The novel was regarded as an anti-imperialist text by most critics; however, there are some who looked at the text as a way by Forster to justify colonization yet this can be easily refuted because there are instances where the negative side of colonization is portrayed. The use of the phrase "negative side" does have an implication that Forster, in fact, believes that there is a good side of colonization. This paper argues that Forster in *A Passage to India* attempts to depict the unpleasant experiences of British colonization that the colonized Indians had to endure; however, he justifies the colonization by contributing further to the spread of stereotypes about the East. In addition, the paper will also attempt to identify some of its modernist elements that complicate its aim to critique colonialism.

II. DISCUSSION

In his description of the fictional town Chandrapore where the story first takes place, Forster alludes to the inequalities that the colonization has created in areas where the British colonizers and the natives reside. The Indians live in the part of the city that is filthy and plagued with poverty and it has only "a few fine houses exist they are hidden away in gardens or down alleys whose filth deters all but the invited guest" (Forster, 1924, p. 1), while the part of the city where the British occupiers live is much better and "a tropical pleasaunce washed by a noble river" (Forster, 1924, p. 1). One city that has both the British and Indians but the land improves on the part where the colonizers live. Forster gives us a glimpse of the economic consequences of imperialism that the natives are victims of. The natives whose resources are being controlled and managed by the occupier live in poverty.

Major Callendar, a surgeon at the hospital and Aziz's superior, sends for Aziz, while he is with friends, to come to his home and then he leaves before Aziz arrives with no regard to his time or the distance it takes him to arrive. To add

insult to injury, two British women takes the carriage that he paid for to give him a ride to the major's home. The British Major is aware of the fact that Britain is the dominant power in India and can repress any type of revolution with an iron fist; therefore, it compels him to abuse his power and look down upon the Indians since they cannot push back against this unfair treatment. It has created a social hierarchy in which the Indians are at the bottom in the eyes of the British colonizers. Forster continues to report on the social division in Chandrapore when he introduces a club that is exclusive for the Anglo-Indians yet the natives are not allowed to be a member of. Ronny Heaslop, the city magistrate, a British who appears to loathe Indians and attempts to prevent any new English comers from meeting or interacting with the natives and believes the Indians should be thankful instead of criticizing the British colonizers.

Those mistreatments can all be traced back to the power that the British Empire gave to the Anglo-Indians as Hunt Hawkins asserts that, "Forster does much more in his book, however, than simply deride the intolerance of a few accidental individuals. He carefully shows how this intolerance results from the unequal power relationship between English and Indians, from the imperialistic relationship itself" (Hawkins, 1983, pp. 55-56) Heaslop believes that "the British were necessary to India; there would certainly have been bloodshed without them" and "he was here not to be pleasant but to keep the peace" (Forster, 1924, p. 41). He does not specify what would cause the bloodshed between the Indians, but it is obvious that Forster alludes to the rhetoric of the British Empire in which they claim that without their supervision, conflicts would break out between the followers of the main religions in India, but even if this claim is true, it still does not give the city magistrate the right to act this way toward Indians. Heaslop does not only intervene and try to prevent Miss Adela from accepting Aziz's invite to the caves, but he also asks Fielding not to leave Miss Adela alone with an Indian and justifies that by saying "I don't like to see an English girl left smoking with two Indians" (Forster, 1924, p. 25).

Indians were separated from the British at the Bridge Party that was organized at the request of Miss Adela Quersted to meet the natives. The British women despise the wives of the natives and do not talk to them. Mrs. Callendar shares her experience of interacting with the Indians and claims that she knows the truth about them, thus at the party she asserts that, "the kindest thing one can do to a native is to let him die" (Forster, 1924, p. 10). Furthermore, Mrs. Moore asks "Do kindly tell us who these ladies are" (Forster, 1924, p. 16), but instead, she was told "You're superior to them, anyway. Don't forget that. You're superior to everyone in India except one or two of the Ranis, and they're on an equality" (Forster, 1924, p. 16). This is an exemplary record on the impact of imperialism on colonized women.

Forster published *A Passage to India* in 1924 which was the time around the end of the first-wave feminism that advocated for the basic rights such as voting and education. British women, over the age of 30, were first granted the right to vote in 1918 and Oxford University started giving full admission to women in 1920. Apparently, the status for British women was improving but Forster notes as an imperialist woman, she believes she is superior to native women. Tavassoli and Mirzapour state that non-Western feminists criticized feminism due to its side with imperialism because Western feminists are "theorizing a universal history of women from its own particular history" (Tavassoli & Mirzapour, 2014, p. 74) and that the Bridge Party "result[s] in heightened suspicion between West and East, the narcissism of western woman's view toward third world women is depicted" (Tavassoli & Mirzapour, 2014, p. 73).

The inequalities between the British colonizers and the natives are emphasized again when Cyril Fielding visits Aziz after he becomes sick, he feels embarrassed by the poor conditions of where he lives. Moreover, an Indian woman and her husband invite Miss Adela and add that they will send her a carriage, but they do not keep their promise because they are ashamed of the poor living conditions in their home as opposed to the British houses. In this, Forster challenges this version of the British colonization that claims it is only there to improve the lives of Indians, and he informs the reader of the injustice towards them.

When Aziz is accompanying the ladies to the Marabar Caves, the narrator reveals that "His friends thought him most unwise to mix himself up with English ladies, and warned him to take every precaution against unpunctuality" (Forster, 1924, p. 55) it seems here that the natives have developed a feeling of fear from the colonizers and strive to please them even though they took over their land. On their way to visiting the caves, Aziz, the colonized, is pleased to accompany Mrs. Moore and Miss Adela. He says, "One of the dreams of my life is accomplished in having you both here as my guests. You cannot imagine how you have honoured me. I feel like the Emperor Babur" (Forster, 1924, p. 62). He has been subjected to feeling inferior to the British colonizers that now he feels honored and happy to be around them and always ready to help them. According to Frantz Fanon, in *Black Skin, White Masks*, the colonizers' feeling of superiority forces the colonized to develop a feeling of inferiority and in order for the colonized to overcome this, they have to understand and begin to use the colonizers' culture and act like them (Fanon, 2008, p. 69). Apparently, Aziz suffers from what is known as the inferiority complex that Fanon addresses as well. Aziz feels that it makes him civilized to talk to and go out with them as he thinks that it would help him to achieve equality by having them as guests while in reality, they invaded his land, and he does not really have a choice.

After the alleged sexual assault of Miss Adela by Aziz, and even before the trial starts, Forster confirms the mentality of British acting as a herd. When Fielding tries to get the facts by himself from Mr. McBryde, the Chandrapore superintendent of police, they try to stop him. He then asks for Miss Adela but the narrator observes that "He was still after facts, though the herd had decided on emotion" (Forster, 1924, p. 43). Unsurprisingly, the Major makes up a story about Aziz that he planned the whole thing; therefore, the point of the trip to the caves is to sexually assault Miss Adela and kill Mrs. Moore. When Miss Adela comes to her senses and realizes that her accusation of Aziz is a mistake, Ronny

tries to convince her to pursue her accusation and demands that she must testify. At the trial, Mr. McBryde, who is supposed to be neutral, says that the man is guilty and that “the darker races are physically attracted by the fairer, but not vice versa—not a matter for Bitterness” (Forster, 1924, p. 95). This exposes the kind of the degrading language and a sense of superiority over the natives in colonized India.

Although Forster criticizes the British Empire in all of the above examples, it becomes evident that he is in favor of colonization as there is an emphasis on stereotypes that are typically a part of the colonizer’s rhetoric in order to make their colonization acceptable. The most notable person whose famous work *Orientalism* sheds light on this matter is Edward Said. In *Orientalism*, Said remarks that in order for Europeans to identify themselves, they make comparisons with those who are not them, therefore, their sense of superiority, when comparing themselves with non-European peoples and cultures, is what enables their culture to be dominant (Said, 2003, p. 7). Said goes on to say, “There is in addition the hegemony of European ideas about the Orient, themselves reiterating European superiority over Oriental backwardness” (Said, 2003, p. 7) and that the oriental was seen by them as “backward, degenerate, uncivilized, and retarded (Said, 2003, p. 207). This was all used by the British Empire to justify their colonization since according to them, the Orientals are uncivilized, thus it is incumbent upon the British Empire to civilize those people.

Aziz along with his friends who are all educated are shown as people who make judgments and generalizations about the English people and their conversation is about the possibility of being a friend with them as if this is the only concern of the colonized Indians to seek friendship from the British colonizer. Their conversation revolves around topics such as friendship and marriage. Aziz and his friends are described as educated thus, they are supposed to be the intellectuals of the Indian society, yet they are the kind who spend their time gossiping and calling the English “red-nose” while smoking hookah that smells like “cow dung” (Forster, 1924, p. 2).

In addition, Aziz appears to be disrespectful of his late wife. When he shows her picture to Fielding who appreciates that, Aziz reply was “it’s nothing, she was not a highly educated woman or even beautiful” (Forster, 1924, p. 50). No one would ever say this kind of remark about their deceased partner but all of those characteristics that Forster uses to describe Dr. Aziz and his friends come from the comparison of the European with the Eastern. Aziz was shown as weak and naïve as opposed to the Anglo-Indians who are tough and experienced. He seems invisible to the British as when the two women at Callendar’s home take the carriage that brought him without even asking or noticing him. It is almost difficult to imagine that a man like Aziz would be able to even work as a doctor. Aziz and his friends are portrayed as ignorant and do not care about the filth in their city or talk about improving and developing it. This is crucial as it is implied that those people do not have much experience about life or the ability to manage their own affairs; therefore, they need to be taken care of by the British Empire.

One of the unfair images about Easterners and especially Muslims is that they are not accepting or intolerant toward people from other religions. Forster in setting Mrs. Moore’s first encounter with Aziz, he brings back that stereotype in Aziz’s reaction. Aziz sees a woman at a mosque, and he becomes agitated and shouts at her. This incident implies that the West is more tolerant toward people of other religions who visit their places of worship and Mrs. Moore as an example who goes to explore a Muslim’s place of worship even though she is Christian. This is the kind of irrationality that, Said argues, is attributed to the Oriental (Said, 2003, p. 40).

Moreover, Mohammed Latif is a servant of Aziz who does not work and in constant need of his relatives to provide for him. Latif has a wife but he lives very far from her and does not even visit her. Hamidullah’s wife is isolated from the gathering and she has to get her husband’s permission before she talks to men which also should be behind a purdah. It is of critical importance to note that the purdah is seen by West colonizers as a sign of oppression against women which has been a part of their ideology. In their article titled *Postcolonial-Feminist Elements in E. M. Forster’s A Passage To India*, Tavassoli and Mirzapour note that the West colonizers define ‘Third World women’ in relation to western female facets which “clearly ignores some very important differences in culture, history, language and social class” (Tavassoli & Mirzapour, 2014, p. 73). They also mention that Partha Chatterjee argues that “the colonizers were able to ‘transform this figure of the Indian woman into a sign of the inherently oppressive and unfree nature of the entire cultural tradition of country’ (118)” (Chatterjee, 1997, p. 73). This type of portrayal has been associated with Eastern females. Despite the fact that it is a popular misconception, the author reinforces this false image about females in that part of the world. Based on this image, the uneducated reader thinks that women in the East, as opposed to the West, are oppressed; therefore, it is the duty of British Empire to come and free those women.

Forster continues his emphasis on degrading the Eastern culture when the narrator comments “Like most Orientals, Aziz overrated hospitality” (Forster, 1924, p. 61). This exactly confirms Said’s argument of ‘us versus them’. Forster’s racist remark is a result of that comparison. He compared the European’s hospitality with the Eastern’s but then he realized that the Eastern’s hospitality is more generous and in order to make the European’s hospitality look normal and superior, he refers to its counterpart as “overrated”.

The rape incident is highly influential as it is not just the climax of the novel but also a continuation of the false images about the people from the East who have always been characterized as people who are not able to control their sexual urges and that they view woman as merely sexual objects who should be covered or otherwise, they have to bear the consequences for getting harassed because they evoke sexual desires in males. This sentiment, unfortunately, still exists in our present time. If a Western person commits a sexual assault, it is both condemned and publicized but it is not as much as if the perpetrator were Eastern due to this stereotype. Forster does not even completely clarify the

innocence of Aziz whether or not he sexually assaults Miss Adela or if she is assaulted by someone else. By creating this incident, Forster adds to the racist ideology that those people are viewed as sensual and promiscuous, thus he uses it to justify imperialism. Forster does not completely denounce colonization; instead, he seeks a new form of colonization.

Although it is difficult to pin down Modernism or limit it to an agreed-upon definition, it is only plausible to say that sometimes it could be identifiable through its numerous characteristics. In *A Passage to India*, the characteristics of modernism could be recognized in both its events and narrative. As it has been pointed out earlier, Forster uses some of the stereotypes in his description of the natives, thus it could be argued that this is some sort of modern racism. In his book *Modernism*, Michael Levenson explains that racism had existed through the growth of modernism and that:

Race was also constitutive to ideas of modernity, especially ideas of the primitive and the civilized, which helped to create the temporality of the modern. At the same time, whites considered nonwhite races to be raw material, meant to be organized by the administrators of the new economy, who often assigned skills according to racial and ethnic categories. (Levenson, 2011, p. 99)

Through his portrayal of the native Indians and reinforcement of the racist images about the east, Forster suggests that those are good enough reasons to confirm the need for colonization. He also attempts to come up with a new form of colonization.

If one were to write an anti-imperialistic text to criticize an empire, they could have done so without associating the colonized with racist images, especially, ones that are of stereotypical nature. Hunt Hawkins acknowledges this, "Several critics have asserted that Forster's attack on the bigotry of the imperialists is not necessarily an attack on imperialism itself" (Hawkins, 1983, p. 55). It is impossible to give Forster the benefit of the doubt, since those images are a systematic approach that the orientalist employs to defend colonization. He does not address the real reason behind colonization which is exploitation of the colonized country and its natural resources. Hawkins confirms that "there is no mention of England's economic exploitation of India. We see no plantations or mines in British India. Collector Turton presumably takes in tax, but we never see him doing so" (Hawkins, 1983, p. 60).

After the British Empire had left India, Indians had difficulty in reviving their country and recovering their economy because the colonization made India dependent on them. The British Empire also exploited the natives by forcing them to work in areas where their lives were in danger yet Forster does not even mention any of that. Forster's form of colonization that he seeks is portrayed through his character Mr. Cyril Fielding. Even though Fielding is presented as a virtuous person, he never condemns the British occupier's existence in India and when Aziz asks him to justify England's holding of India, he replies, "It's a question I can't get my mind on to" (Forster, 1924, p. 48). The narrator proceeds, "There is only one answer to a conversation of this type: 'England holds India for her good.' Yet Fielding was disinclined to give it" (Forster, 1924, p. 48). Forster was both imperialist and anti-imperialist. He bore a resemblance to Conrad in Said's discussion in *Culture and Imperialism*. Said points out that, "Conrad was both anti-imperialist and imperialist, progressive when it came to rendering fearlessly and pessimistically the self-confirming, self-deluding corruption of overseas domination" (Said, 1994, p. 18).

Moreover, the mode of narrative in *A passage to India* correlates with what Paul Sheehan, in *Modernism, Narrative, And Humanism*, refers to as "The modern mode" (Sheehan, 2002, p. 14). According to him, the mode tends to keep events unresolved and instead "[A] state of affairs is revealed" (14) and that the "plot development ... in modern narrative it is a 'displaying'" (14). Forster casts doubts on religion as a source of morality but not through the use of the typical omniscient narrator. It is referred to here as untypical because the narrator does not stay omniscient all the time. The narrator does not give their point of view about Fielding who possesses high moral standards. This makes the reader judge the characters without the influence of the narrator. Heaslop is religious but biased and cruel toward the natives while Fielding is not religious yet he is not corrupt and his moral sense prevents him from taking sides with the British colonizers in the conflicts throughout the plot. The reader starts to develop a sense of admiration for Fielding because of his courage to stand against injustice. The reader knows this from his actions and what the other characters' think of him. His atheism is only revealed by Fielding himself when he answers Syed Mohammed's question that he does not believe in God while they were at Aziz's home.

Furthermore, *A Passage to India* seems to be loaded with ambiguity that is repeated through its events. In her *Criminal Law and The Modernist Novel: Experience On Trial*, Cathrine Frank comments that:

Such uncertainty is already something that differentiates *A Passage to India* from a realist novel. However, what is really distinctive about the Marabar non-experience is the way in which its un-narrated quality functions within the text. Not only what happened to Adela never revealed, its unknown quality does not, ultimately, open up a gap in experiential knowledge that can, or should, be filled (as it would in a detective novel). (Frank, 2014 p. 54)

Its central event inside the Marabar caves is not fully explained. We still do not know what happens there and why it only affects Mrs. Moore and Miss Adela. It is mentioned that it is an echo but there are not enough details as where it comes from and what causes it. When she is in the caves, Mrs. Moore becomes irritated and has a breathing difficulty. She becomes occupied with strange feelings and anxiety which makes her leave and stay out of the caves. After what happens to her, she becomes somehow a different person that is doubtful and cynical. Miss Adela suffers from the same experience and becomes sick for a few days after that. She claims that she is sexually assaulted but when she feels herself again, she thinks she may have made a mistake. However, it is still unclear whether she is sexually assaulted by

Aziz or someone else or even if she is assaulted in the first place. Additionally, Aziz flatly contradicts himself when he answers Miss Adela's question that he is married and invites her to come and see his wife, whereas earlier in the novel he states that his wife is dead.

III. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Forster's *A Passage to India* does not completely oppose colonization yet it seeks to improve it. In addition, it attempts to describe people of the East from an orientalist's perspective through false images and stereotypes. This kind of ideology is obviously a way to show that those people are in need of colonization to assist them in achieving the colonizer's version of civilization with no regard for their differences.

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Metacognitive Keys to Decoding: A Low-Tech Scaffold for Reading Resilience Across Orthographies

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Abstract—Decoding breakdowns are often misinterpreted as deficits rather than framed as opportunities for strategic growth. The challenge is acute in opaque orthographies such as Arabic, where diglossia, morphological density, and diacritic omission impose heavy cognitive load. This study introduces *The Metacognitive Reading Keys*, a low-tech scaffold that externalizes expert-reader strategies into six student-owned prompts (*Sound It Out*, *Look at the Picture*, *Imagine It*, *Break It Apart*, *Reread the Sentence*, *Skip and Return Later*). Unlike scripted phonics programs, the Keys integrate phonological decoding, morphological parsing, imagery, contextual repair, and emotional regulation into a portable, recursive system privileging learner agency. Grounded in Cognitive Load Theory, Dual Coding Theory, and the Cognitive-Strategic Literacy Development framework, the Keys were refined through a five-year design-based research study in U.S. and UAE classrooms (N = 326, Grades 1–3). Mixed-methods analyses showed significant gains in decoding accuracy (+14.3%, $p < .001$, $d = 0.65$ – 0.88), with over 70% of students applying strategies independently within four weeks. Teachers reported less passivity, more self-correction, and greater engagement, particularly in multilingual, low-resource contexts. Findings demonstrate that decoding resilience is teachable, and that culturally responsive, low-cost scaffolds can bridge theory and practice while reframing literacy equity as cognitive dignity.

Index Terms—metacognition, decoding, literacy equity, Arabic, reading resilience

I. INTRODUCTION

Reading failure remains a global crisis: UNESCO estimates that more than half of children in low- and middle-income countries leave primary school without minimum reading proficiency, with decoding difficulties a central barrier (UNESCO, 2022). In PIRLS, Arabic-speaking students consistently score among the lowest in comprehension despite measurable gains in oral fluency, underscoring the fragile link between decoding and understanding in opaque orthographies (ESCWA, 2022; UAE MoE, 2021).

At the core lies what Cain and Oakhill (2007) call the *decoding–comprehension disconnect*: the moment an unfamiliar word halts meaning-making. This is less a learner deficit than a systemic failure to equip students with strategies for decoding resilience, the capacity to persist through breakdowns, repair errors, and resume comprehension. Interventions imported from transparent alphabetic systems are poorly suited to Arabic, where diglossia, diacritic omission, and root–pattern morphology impose sustained cognitive load (Saiegh-Haddad, 2005; Abu-Rabia & Taha, 2006; Tibi & Kirby, 2018). Even technically fluent readers disengage when meaning collapses, leaving teachers without tools to transform breakdowns into teachable moments.

This study responds to that gap. It introduces *The Metacognitive Reading Keys*, a child-directed scaffold that externalizes the invisible strategies skilled readers use when confronting difficult words. The six prompts, *Sound It Out*, *Look at the Picture*, *Imagine It*, *Break It Apart*, *Reread the Sentence*, and *Skip and Return Later*, normalize struggle, transforming breakdowns into recursive, student-owned opportunities for problem solving. Unlike scripted phonics or static comprehension lists, the Keys integrate decoding, morphology, imagery, contextual repair, and emotional regulation within a portable toolkit.

Their innovation lies not in the strategies themselves but in their delivery: tactile, visually coded, recursive choices embedded in daily routines. This design enables *tactile metacognition*, the physical externalization of strategy use that reduces load, offloads memory, and sustains comprehension in real time (cf. embodied cognition; Glenberg, 2008). Anchored in Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 2010), Dual Coding Theory (Paivio, 1990), and the Cognitive-Strategic Literacy Development (CSLD) framework advanced here, the Keys extend Scarborough’s (2001) “word recognition” strand by embedding metacognitive repair loops into decoding. Where the Simple View of Reading identifies decoding and comprehension as twin pillars, CSLD intervenes at the micro-level of breakdown, equipping students to enact expert-reader behaviors and recover meaning independently.

Refined over five years of design-based research in U.S. and UAE classrooms, the Keys signal a paradigm shift in literacy pedagogy. Rather than pathologizing struggle, they affirm it as essential to growth. By addressing cognitive, affective, and cultural dimensions simultaneously, they offer a low-cost, low-tech scaffold that advances literacy equity and student agency. In making repair visible, the Keys embody a pedagogy of *cognitive dignity*: resilience defined not

only as accuracy, but as the empowerment to persist, adapt, and self-correct, particularly in opaque orthographies such as Arabic.

A. Research Objectives

This study aims to:

1. Analyze the theoretical, neurocognitive, and linguistic foundations of the Reading Keys.
2. Evaluate the framework's alignment with models of decoding, comprehension, and self-regulated learning.
3. Examine its practical utility and impact among struggling readers in Arabic early-grade classrooms.
4. Illustrate how the Keys support independent strategy use and critical reading development over time.

B. Research Questions

1. What cognitive, linguistic, and developmental principles underpin the design of *The Metacognitive Reading Keys*?
2. How do the Keys scaffold the real-time decoding and meaning-making process among struggling readers?
3. How do teachers and learners perceive the tool's usability, cultural fit, and instructional impact?
4. How does the tool promote the gradual internalization of strategic reading and critical thinking?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite decades of progress in reading science, a gap persists between theory and practice. Models of decoding and comprehension describe what skilled readers do but rarely support struggling readers during real-time breakdowns. In complex orthographies, this fuels what Cain and Oakhill (2007) call the decoding–comprehension disconnect.

This review reframes early reading through strategic regulation and cognitive dignity, the learner's right to face difficulty with visible, usable tools. Within this frame, *The Metacognitive Reading Keys* are presented as the operational scaffold of the Cognitive-Strategic Literacy Development (CSLD) framework.

A. Rethinking Early Reading: Toward a Cognitive-Strategic Literacy Development Framework

Reading acquisition is shaped by cognitive, linguistic, and affective demands. Classical models such as Kintsch's Construction–Integration Model and Perfetti's Verbal Efficiency Theory emphasize decoding and semantic fluency but assume monolingual, shallow orthographies. They offer limited power in opaque systems like Arabic, Hebrew, or Amharic, where diglossia and morphological density intensify processing demands.

The CSLD framework reframes early reading as a strategy-regulated process. Drawing on Piaget, Sweller, and Vygotsky, it is operationalized through *The Metacognitive Reading Keys*, scaffolds that let learners shift strategies, manage load, and sustain meaning. Struggle becomes an opportunity for persistence, not a marker of deficit.

Building on Goodman's miscue analysis and culturally responsive approaches to Arabic literacy (Almazroui, 2021), the Keys emphasize visual prompts and reflective cues. They are not remedial but transformative: portable tools that externalize metacognition and reframe literacy as cognitive dignity.

The urgency is clear. The World Bank (2022) reports 64% of ten-year-olds in low- and middle-income countries cannot read a simple text; PIRLS (2021) shows over 65% of MENA Grade 4 students below benchmarks. Phonics reforms improve accuracy, but few interventions support strategy regulation in opaque orthographies. Arabic exemplifies the challenge: diglossia, root–pattern morphology, and diacritic omission impose what Almazroui (2021) terms *invisible cognitive debt*. The Keys address this debt by embedding flexible, culturally grounded strategies into the moment of disruption.

B. Struggling Readers and the Global Comprehension Crisis

Phonics reforms have raised decoding accuracy, yet comprehension gains remain limited in multilingual systems. Struggling readers often decode inefficiently, fail to self-monitor, and depend on teacher prompts (Afflerbach et al., 2008; Goodman, 1969). In opaque scripts such as Arabic, Hebrew, or Mandarin, the cognitive burden is amplified: spoken–written mismatches and complex morphology divert resources away from meaning-making.

Programs that reduce reading to retrieval risk reinforcing dependency and helplessness (Goodman, 1986). By contrast, CSLD frames decoding as both cognitive and affective, emphasizing flexibility, resilience, and learner agency. The Keys operationalize this vision by equipping students with recursive strategies to recover meaning and sustain focus. In this light, low comprehension despite phonics gains reflects design misalignment, not learner deficit.

C. Strategic Tools and Theoretical Integration: Bridging Research and Practice

Theories such as the Simple View of Reading (Gough & Tunmer, 1986) and Scarborough's Rope (2001) explain comprehension but remain diagnostic, not operational. This gap is most visible in multilingual contexts where disruptions derail meaning. What is missing is a bridge: a tool that embodies theory yet remains portable and learner-driven.

The Metacognitive Reading Keys provide this bridge. Each aligns with a process, phoneme–grapheme mapping, morphological parsing, imagery, contextual repair, or emotional regulation, and is externalized in a tactile, child-friendly format. Crucially, they are recursive: when “Sound It Out” fails, a learner can pivot to “Break It Apart” or “Reread the Sentence,” mirroring skilled reader behavior and supporting self-regulation (Zimmerman, 2002).

Table 1 highlights three distinctions:

1. Cognitive–affective integration: Key 6 (“Skip and Return Later”) embeds emotional regulation, teaching persistence (Sweller, 1994; Zimmerman, 2002).
2. Linguistic specificity: Key 4 (“Break It Apart”) scaffolds root–pattern parsing absent in Western models (Saiegh-Haddad, 2005).
3. Agency: Strategies are externalized in a student-owned format, reframing support as cognitive dignity.

Together, these distinctions confirm the Keys as a conceptual shift: from remediation to resilience, from linear scripts to recursive loops, from teacher dependence to learner agency.

TABLE 1
COMPARING THE METACOGNITIVE READING KEYS WITH ESTABLISHED LITERACY INTERVENTIONS

Feature / Dimension	Metacognitive Reading Keys	Orton-Gillingham	Reading Recovery	SQ3R / Strategy Models
Strategy Format	Six recursive, student-managed prompts	Scripted phonics sequence	1:1 teacher-led prompts	Pre-/post-reading strategy sets
Delivery Mode	Portable key ring; low-tech; child-led	Structured lessons; phonics drills	Intensive 1:1 tutoring	Teacher/textbook guided
Metacognitive Engagement	High: recursive loop fosters self-monitoring and adaptation	Low–Moderate: procedural mastery emphasized	Moderate: some reflection but teacher-directed	Low–Moderate: strategies taught as lists
Morphological Decoding (Arabic)	Explicit via Key 4 (“Break It Apart”)	Absent	Absent	Not applicable
Diglossia / Multilingual Support	Integrated into design; adaptable across orthographies	No (English-only)	No (English-only)	Limited (English-focused)
Emotional Regulation / Load Management	Explicit via Key 6 (“Skip and Return Later”)	Absent	Low: teacher encouragement only	Low
Dual Coding / Visual Scaffold	Yes: visual icons + verbal prompts	No	No	Minimal
Flexibility Across Orthographies	Yes: designed for opaque scripts (Arabic, Hebrew, Amharic) as well as English	Limited to alphabetic English	Limited to alphabetic English	Primarily English
Student Ownership and Agency	High: child chooses, sequences, and evaluates strategies	Low–Moderate: teacher-led progression	Low–Moderate: teacher models choices	Low: teacher/text-dependent

D. The Pedagogical Landscape: From Fragmentation to Strategy-Rich Instruction

In many Arabic-speaking classrooms, instruction remains procedural: drills dominate while strategy use and comprehension repair are neglected (Mahfoudhi et al., 2014). Even when curricula cite “strategic reading,” it is often reduced to questioning rather than explicit self-regulation. Students learn to pronounce text without sustaining meaning, the “decoding–comprehension disconnect” (Cain & Oakhill, 2007).

High-performing systems embed strategy early. Singapore’s STELLAR program integrates inferencing and visualization (Lim & Kim, 2021), while Finland fosters dialogic reading where comprehension develops alongside decoding (OECD, 2022). By contrast, MENA reforms import phonics models built for transparent orthographies, with little adaptation to Arabic’s diglossia and orthographic opacity (Saiegh-Haddad, 2005; Tibi & Kirby, 2018). Few interventions address the moment of breakdown, leaving students to guess or wait for teacher prompts.

Goodman’s (1986) principle, that comprehension must be constructed at difficulty, remains absent. Phonics reforms yield accuracy but not comprehension because they ignore learners’ lived struggles.

The CSLD framework calls for a shift: from fragmented drills to strategy-rich pedagogy that builds resilience. *The Metacognitive Reading Keys* operationalize this shift. Their portable prompts restore cognitive dignity and provide teachers with a shared language for modeling and reflection. Scalable and equity-driven, the Keys align literacy instruction with cognitive science and global equity goals.

E. Theoretical Foundations of The Metacognitive Reading Keys

The Metacognitive Reading Keys are not a new theory of reading but a practical operationalization of established principles from developmental psychology, sociocultural learning, neurolinguistics, and cognitive science. Their contribution lies in converting abstract constructs into a portable scaffold that renders invisible strategies visible, actionable, and culturally responsive in complex orthographies.

Several foundations converge in their design:

- Scarborough’s Reading Rope (2001): Targets the word-recognition strand, embedding recursive loops to repair decoding failures before comprehension is lost.
- Simple View of Reading (Gough & Tunmer, 1986): Extends this diagnostic model by equipping learners with concrete strategies at moments of breakdown.
- Developmental sequencing (Piaget, 1973): Progresses from concrete actions (Sound It Out) to abstract processes (Break It Apart), scaffolding readiness and internalization.
- Sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978): Provides external scaffolds that enable learners to act like expert readers within their ZPD, strengthening agency.

- Linguistic structuring (Chomsky, 1965; Saiegh-Haddad, 2005): Leverages children’s predisposition to extract patterns, foregrounding morphology in root–pattern systems.
- Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 1994): Uses tactile and visual prompts to reduce extraneous processing, freeing memory for meaning construction.
- Dual Coding Theory (Paivio, 1990): Pairs icons with verbal prompts to activate multiple channels, enhancing encoding and recall.
- Self-Regulated Learning (Zimmerman, 2002): Supports planning, monitoring, and evaluation of strategy use, fostering behaviors predictive of literacy achievement.

These foundations converge around the principle of cognitive dignity: the learner’s right to persist through difficulty with tools that transform breakdowns into opportunities for growth.

A distinct innovation is tactile metacognition. The physical act of selecting and flipping a card functions as both cognitive offload and metacognitive trigger, grounded in embodied cognition (Glenberg, 2008). Unlike abstract strategy lists, this enacted movement externalizes choice, reduces load, and signals the learner to persist. The result is strategy use that is not only recalled but performed, shifting control from teacher prompts to student agency.

Designed to be recursive and non-linear, the Keys mirror expert reader behavior, enabling flexible, self-directed choices that cultivate resilience. They do not merely aid decoding but provide a portable architecture of cognitive dignity, the learner’s right to persist with agency, confidence, and control.

Table 2 summarizes each Key’s prompt, cognitive focus, and theoretical grounding, showing how reading science is distilled into a child-friendly, classroom-ready scaffold.

TABLE 2
THE METACOGNITIVE READING KEYS: STUDENT PROMPTS, COGNITIVE FOCUS, AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Key	Prompt	Cognitive Focus	Theoretical Foundation(s)
1. Sound It Out	Apply phoneme–grapheme correspondence	Alphabetic decoding; orthographic mapping	Ehri (1995); Dehaene (2009); National Reading Panel (2000)
2. Look at the Picture	Use visual context to infer word meaning	Dual-channel encoding; semantic inference	Paivio (1990); Anderson (1984); Sadoski and Paivio (2001)
3. Imagine It	Create a mental image of the word or scene	Episodic memory; schema activation	Kintsch (2005); Sadoski and Paivio (2001); Cain and Oakhill (2007)
4. Break It Apart	Analyze root-pattern morphology; identify prefixes/suffixes	Morphological parsing; structural analysis	Saiegh-Haddad (2005); Abu-Rabia and Taha (2006); Carlisle (2000)
5. Reread the Sentence	Reintegrate word in context; infer from syntax	Cohesion repair; inferencing	Perfetti and Stafura (2014); Nation (2005); Kintsch (2005)
6. Skip and Return Later	Manage overload by deferring; reattempt with context	Emotional regulation; metacognitive monitoring	Sweller (1994); Zimmerman (2002); Afflerbach et al. (2008); Vygotsky (1978)

Figure 1 illustrates this design: six portable, ring-bound prompts symbolizing both accessibility and integration. Each Key reflects a distinct decoding or metacognitive strategy, from phoneme–grapheme mapping (“Sound It Out”) to morphological parsing (“Break It Apart”) and load management (“Skip and Return Later”). The circular arrangement emphasizes their recursive, student-directed use, mirroring expert reading behaviours.

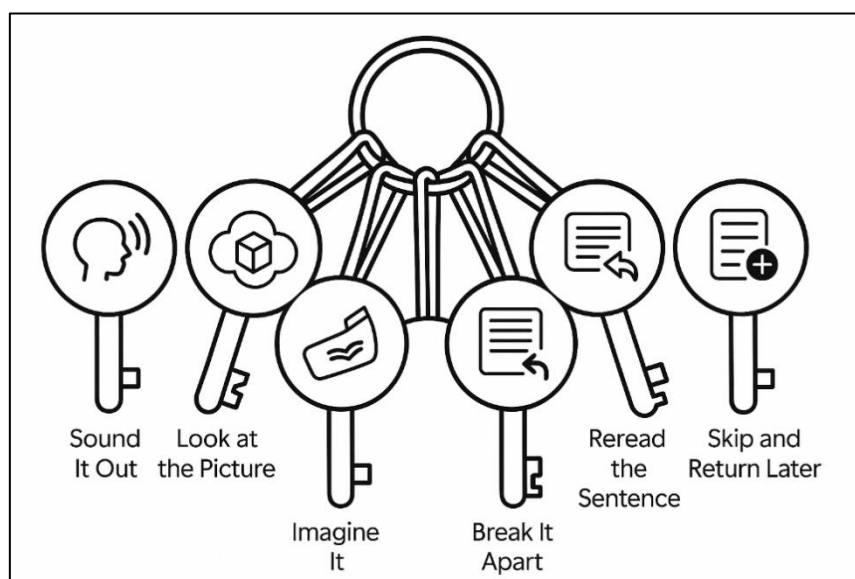


Figure 1. *The Metacognitive Reading Keys: A Cognitive and Pedagogical Scaffold for Struggling Readers*

Each Key is more than a procedural step; it embodies a cognitive and pedagogical function rooted in reading science, linguistic theory, and neurocognitive models. Together, the Keys form a low-tech yet high-cognition scaffold that democratizes strategy use and affirms students' right to cognitive dignity **amid linguistic complexity**.

F. The Metacognitive Reading Keys: A Neurocognitively Aligned Scaffold for Struggling Readers

A persistent barrier in early literacy is the inability of struggling readers to decode unfamiliar words, especially in diglossic and multilingual contexts. In Arabic, this is intensified by morpho-orthographic complexity, optional diacritics, and deep diglossia. Despite decades of reform, most interventions remain procedural, emphasizing drills over strategies for meaning recovery (Elbeheri & Everatt, 2007; Taouk & Coltheart, 2022).

The Metacognitive Reading Keys operationalize the CSLD framework into a scaffold that integrates three dimensions:

- Metacognitive strategy use: making decoding behaviors visible, recursive, and transferable.
- Emotional regulation: sustaining persistence under overload or frustration.
- Linguistic specificity: adapting to opaque orthographies.

A. Neurocognitive Alignment

Reading engages distributed neural systems: phonological mapping (temporoparietal), orthographic recognition (occipito-temporal), and semantic integration (prefrontal cortex) (Dehaene, 2009; Perfetti & Stafura, 2014). Breakdowns occur when working memory overload disrupts coordination. The Keys respond by:

- Reducing cognitive load (Sweller, 1994): tactile-visual prompts externalize choices, freeing memory for meaning.
- Activating dual coding (Paivio, 1990): icons paired with prompts engage verbal and visual channels.
- Promoting self-regulation (Zimmerman, 2002): recursive choices mirror natural monitoring systems.

Within this alignment, tactile metacognition is central. The embodied act of flipping a Key card transforms strategy selection into a physical cue that externalizes inner speech, anchors attention, and lowers load. By rendering choice visible, it affirms cognitive dignity, allowing learners to face difficulty with agency rather than stigma.

B. Classroom Relevance

Across 450+ U.S. and UAE classrooms, struggling readers often attempted strategies but abandoned them quickly. The Keys systematized these instincts into a deliberate process. Ring-bound cards, modeled by teachers and applied independently, reframed strategic struggle as autonomy rather than remediation. Teachers reported that students persisted longer and with greater confidence, evidence that dignity in struggle can be taught.

C. Policy Alignment

The Keys advance UNESCO's SDG 4.6, which targets universal youth literacy by 2030. With over 70% of children in low- and middle-income countries unable to read with comprehension (UNESCO, 2023), Arabic-speaking systems are particularly at risk. Scalable, low-cost, and linguistically adaptable, the Keys extend beyond Arabic to Amharic, Hebrew, and potentially logographic systems such as Chinese.

In sum, the Keys represent a neurocognitively aligned, equity-driven response to the literacy crisis: not a curriculum but a portable scaffold that externalizes strategies, regulates load, and equips learners to persist with cognitive dignity.

G. Implementation and Classroom Integration: From Theory to Practice

The effectiveness of any literacy tool depends on both theoretical grounding and adaptability. The Keys were refined over five years through design-based research (Brown, 1992; Reeves, 2006), ensuring responsiveness to science and practice.

A. Pathways of Integration

Implementation followed three pathways:

1. Direct Strategy Instruction: teachers modeled Keys through think-alouds, making strategy use explicit.
2. Independent Reading Support: students applied Key rings during reading, reducing avoidance and fostering ownership.
3. Reflection Logs: students tracked use, reinforcing metacognition and providing formative data.

Curriculum-neutral and low-stigma, the Keys embedded seamlessly into daily routines.

B. Teacher Perspectives

Teachers reported increased confidence, persistence, and decoding independence. Many noted a shift from passivity to problem-solving, particularly among disengaged learners. They also valued the Keys as professional development tools, offering a shared language for literacy across subjects.

C. Impact on Struggling Readers

The Keys were effective for students with weak phonological awareness, decoding delays, or working memory challenges. In Arabic classrooms, Key 4 ("Break It Apart") supported root-pattern recognition and eased the burden of diacritic omission (Abu-Rabia & Taha, 2006; Tibi & Kirby, 2018). By Week 4, many used the Keys spontaneously, reframing decoding as manageable and reinforcing self-efficacy.

D. Policy and Equity Dimensions

Low-tech and printable, the Keys are viable in under-resourced classrooms and align with SDG 4.6. Unlike commercial kits requiring costly training or proprietary materials, they scale affordably, suiting equity-driven reforms.

By embedding evidence-based strategies within the CSLD framework, the Keys function as both student scaffolds and teacher tools. Their integration demonstrates that transformative interventions need not be technologically advanced: their strength lies in aligning cognitive science with pedagogical pragmatism.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

This study employed a design-based research (DBR) framework (Reeves, 2006; Wang & Hannafin, 2005), chosen for its capacity to iteratively refine educational innovations through cycles of design, enactment, analysis, and redesign in authentic classrooms. DBR was particularly suited to evaluating *The Metacognitive Reading Keys*, a scaffold intended to strengthen decoding autonomy and metacognitive engagement among early-grade learners in linguistically complex environments.

Unlike controlled laboratory experiments, DBR situates intervention testing in real classrooms, enabling adaptation to cultural, curricular, and linguistic realities. This was essential for a tool designed to function across Arabic and English orthographies, where challenges such as diglossia, root-pattern morphology, and diverse learner profiles demand responsiveness beyond scripted instruction.

The project unfolded across five academic years, during which the Keys were co-designed with teachers, piloted, refined, and re-tested in U.S. and UAE classrooms. This iterative process ensured theoretical alignment with reading science while maintaining ecological validity in daily practice.

To capture both outcomes and processes, the study employed a convergent mixed-methods design. Quantitative measures (decoding and fluency assessments) were integrated with qualitative insights (observations, teacher interviews, and student logs), producing a comprehensive account of the tool's effectiveness, usability, and adaptability across sociolinguistic contexts.

B. Research Sites and Participants

The study was implemented in two phases across the United States and the United Arab Emirates, reflecting a hybrid researcher-practitioner model:

- Phase 1 (U.S., Year 1 – Pilot): Conducted in a Tucson, Arizona, public elementary school serving bilingual, low-income learners. Grade 2 students received researcher-led instruction to test feasibility, usability, and decoding behaviors.
- Phase 2 (UAE, Years 2–5 – Main Study): Conducted in three Abu Dhabi and Al Ain public schools (Grades 1–3) under the national Arabic curriculum, using both researcher-led and teacher-mediated instruction in mainstream and reading-support classrooms.

Participants (N = 326):

- 168 Arabic-speaking students (UAE).
- 158 English-speaking or bilingual students (U.S. and UAE).
- 27 classroom teachers and 8 literacy specialists.

Demographics:

- U.S. sample: 72% qualified for free/reduced lunch; 61% were English Language Learners, most commonly Spanish (48%) or Arabic (9).
- UAE sample: Predominantly Arabic L1 (79%) alongside bilingual peers (Arabic–English, Urdu–Arabic, Tagalog–Arabic). SES ranged from low- to middle-income, classified by parental occupation. About 34% were identified as at-risk readers on national benchmarks (PIRLS/EGRA aligned).

Reader Identification: Three converging criteria were applied, benchmarking tools (e.g., DIBELS in the U.S.; UAE national assessments), teacher referrals (decoding hesitation, low stamina), and enrollment in intervention programs.

Students engaged with grade-aligned instructional materials, including national textbooks, decodable readers, and leveled selections from UAE and U.S. intervention programs. Ethical approvals were secured in both contexts.

C. Tool Description and Localization

The Metacognitive Reading Keys are a portable, low-tech scaffold of six laminated strategy cards, ring-bound for individualized use. Each card includes:

- A child-friendly prompt (e.g., Sound It Out).
- A visual icon for dual coding.
- A brief explanation in Arabic or English.
- Space for student cues or teacher notes.

Grounded in Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 1994) and Dual Coding Theory (Paivio, 1990), the Keys externalize decision-making, reduce working memory load, and support internalization through visual–tactile reinforcement.

Localization:

- Arabic version: Prompts were adapted to Modern Standard Arabic and validated by literacy coaches. Key 4 (Break It Apart) emphasized root–pattern morphology.

- English version: Prompts and icons were piloted with U.S. teachers for cultural clarity, with minor revisions (e.g., replacing abstract with concrete visuals).

Integration occurred in guided reading groups, literacy centers, and one-on-one conferences. Teachers modeled strategy choice through think-alouds before gradually transferring responsibility, following a Vygotskian release model.

D. Instructional Timeline and Fidelity

Sites followed a 12-week cycle. Texts were tailored to context:

- U.S.: Leveled texts (Reading A–Z, Houghton Mifflin Journeys) matched RTI tiers.
- UAE: National Arabic textbooks supplemented with decodable texts and culturally relevant stories.

Fidelity safeguards:

- Two half-day teacher workshops prior to launch.
- Weekly coaching and collaborative planning with researchers.
- Bi-weekly fidelity checks using a 5-point rubric (1 = minimal; 5 = full fidelity).

Mean fidelity was 4.3 (SD = 0.47), reflecting consistently high adherence. Students also maintained reading logs tracking strategy use, difficulty, and outcomes, which doubled as formative data sources.

E. Data Collection

Four complementary strands captured learning outcomes and classroom processes:

- Pre-/Post-Reading Assessments
 - U.S.: DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency, TOWRE-2 Sight Word Efficiency.
 - UAE: Custom Arabic decoding assessments aligned with PIRLS/EGRA (Tibi & Kirby, 2018).
 - Administered Week 1 and Week 12.
- Classroom Observations
 - 450+ hours of structured observation.
 - Codes: strategy selection, persistence, time-on-task, frustration regulation, and help-seeking.
 - Data coded inductively in NVivo 14 ($\kappa = 0.87$).
- Student Work and Logs
 - Annotated readers, reflective journals, and strategy logs documenting frequency, sequencing, and effectiveness.
- Teacher Interviews and Focus Groups
 - Conducted with 27 teachers and 8 literacy specialists.
 - Topics: fidelity, student progress, cultural fit, instructional shifts.
 - Transcripts thematically coded; member-checking confirmed validity.

F. Data Analysis

A convergent mixed-methods design integrated quantitative and qualitative strands:

- Quantitative: Paired-sample t-tests assessed pre–post gains; ANCOVA controlled for baseline differences. Effect sizes (Cohen's d with CIs) were calculated in SPSS v29.
- Qualitative: Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis guided coding, later mapped to the CSLD framework. Reliability exceeded $\kappa = 0.85$.
- Integration: Findings were merged at interpretation, situating quantitative gains within qualitative evidence of strategy uptake and teacher/learner perspectives.

G. Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to the Declaration of Helsinki and international standards for educational research ethics. Approvals were granted by institutional review boards in the U.S. and UAE (anonymized for review).

Safeguards included:

- Written parental consent and student assent.
- Voluntary teacher participation.
- Full anonymization of all student data.
- Encrypted digital storage.
- Findings shared in participatory workshops where teachers co-interpreted results, reinforcing ownership and sustainability.

This ethical design underscored the project's participatory ethos: the Keys were co-constructed with practitioners, ensuring rigor, transparency, and contextual fit.

IV. FINDINGS

This section reports quantitative gains, classroom behaviours, teacher feedback, and patterns from student logs. Results are thematically aligned with the research questions, evaluating the theoretical and practical impact of *The Metacognitive Reading Keys* on decoding performance, metacognitive awareness, and instructional integration.

A. Gains in Decoding and Fluency Across Contexts

Analyses indicated notable improvements in decoding accuracy and fluency across Arabic and English classrooms. Paired-sample t-tests showed a mean gain of 14.3 percentage points from pre- to post-assessment, $t(325) = 11.84$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [11.8, 16.7], with moderate-to-large effect sizes ($d = 0.65$ – 0.88). ANCOVA models controlling for baseline levels, gender, and SES supported the robustness of these gains, $F(1, 323) = 18.72$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .06$.

In UAE classrooms, where diglossia and morphology intensified decoding load, the strongest improvements were associated with Key 4 (Break It Apart). Morphological segmentation correlated with outcomes ($r = .72$, $p < .001$). One teacher noted:

“When students learned to ‘break apart’ the root, they stopped guessing and started building meaning piece by piece”.

In U.S. classrooms, English learners, particularly Arabic- and Spanish-speaking students, advanced most with Keys 1 (Sound It Out) and 2 (Look at the Picture). Key 3 (Imagine It) supported narrative comprehension and episodic recall, consistent with dual coding (Cain & Oakhill, 2007; Kintsch, 2005). As a bilingual teacher explained:

“The Keys gave my students options. Instead of freezing, they tried something else, and that confidence made all the difference”.

Table 3 summarizes decoding gains by language group and frequency of Key use. Students who consistently applied Keys independently outperformed peers reliant on teacher prompting, $t(174) = 6.21$, $p < .001$. This pattern addresses Research Question 2, suggesting that the Keys were associated with more resilient, self-regulated behaviors that enabled students to sustain meaning and exercise cognitive dignity when encountering difficulty (Zimmerman, 2002; Afflerbach et al., 2008).

TABLE 3
DECODING SCORE GAINS BY LANGUAGE GROUP AND FREQUENCY OF KEY USAGE (N = 326)

Language Group	N	Mean Gain (%)	Consistent Key Users (N)	Gain for Consistent Users (%)	Effect Size (d)
Arabic-speaking	168	13.5	92	18.2	0.81
English-speaking	158	15.1	84	19.4	0.88

Note. “Consistent Key Users” = students documented (via logs and teacher reports) as applying ≥ 3 strategies independently in $\geq 70\%$ of sessions. Effect sizes = Cohen’s d for pre–post gains. Both groups showed significant improvements, with consistent users achieving substantially higher gains.

B. Strategy Use and Metacognitive Growth: A Cross-Site Perspective

Beyond decoding gains, the most significant effect of the Keys was behavioral. Students shifted from passive guessing to active, recursive strategy use, consistent with Zimmerman’s (2002) model of self-regulated learning and addressing Research Question 4 on the internalization of strategic reading.

By Week 4, 71% of observed students independently used their key rings, verbalizing prompts such as “I’ll try to break it apart” or “I’ll skip and come back.” This externalization of inner speech reflected deepening metacognitive control. Teachers recorded a 42% decline in helpless hand-raising and a parallel rise in productive self-correction, particularly with Keys 4 (Break It Apart) and 5 (Reread the Sentence).

Student logs (N = 2,100) showed readers attempted an average of 2.3 strategies per difficult word (SD = 0.9), indicating flexible, recursive engagement. A chi-square test confirmed preferences varied significantly by language group, $\chi^2(5, N = 326) = 36.7$, $p < .001$ (see Table 4).

TABLE 4
FREQUENCY OF STRATEGY USE BY LANGUAGE GROUP (N = 326)

Key Strategy	English Speakers (n = 158)	Arabic Speakers (n = 168)
Sound It Out	83%	56%
Look at the Picture	77%	41%
Imagine It	61%	58%
Break It Apart	48%	79%
Reread the Sentence	52%	72%
Skip and Return Later	37%	44%

Note. Percentages = students using each strategy at least weekly, based on logs and observations. English learners favored phonological/visual scaffolds (Keys 1–3), while Arabic learners relied on morphological and syntactic repair (Keys 4–5), consistent with orthographic transparency models (Seymour et al., 2003).

Notably, 63% of UAE students and 69% of U.S. students customized their Keys with drawings, mnemonics, or color-coding. This symbolic ownership reflects Vygotsky’s (1978) view of mediated tools, where external aids become internalized. As one student explained: “I drew a lightbulb so I remember it means ‘try again.’ It makes me feel like I’m the boss of the word”.

Educators likewise stressed diagnostic and pedagogical value. A U.S. coach observed: “The Keys let me see which part of the word was tripping them up.” An Emirati teacher added: “For my students who hated reading, the Keys gave them hope. They were no longer stuck”.

Together, these findings suggest the Keys were associated not only with stronger decoding fluency but also with cognitive agency, reframing strategy instruction from teacher-led correction to learner-driven problem-solving.

C. Teacher Perceptions and Pedagogical Shifts

Teacher reflections across both contexts indicated a shift from teacher-led remediation to student-driven strategy use. In semi-structured interviews and focus groups with 27 teachers and 8 literacy coordinators, participants consistently described the Keys as practical, motivating, and empowering.

Systematic coding revealed three recurring themes:

- Externalization of metacognition (24/27; 89%)
- Growth in student independence (23/27; 85%)
- Increased diagnostic value for instruction (21/27; 78%)

Teachers emphasized that the Keys made invisible thinking visible. Students articulated and justified decoding choices, initiated strategies without prompting, and modeled them for peers. These recursive behaviors aligned with Freire's (1970) dialogic learning, Vygotsky's (1978) mediated tools, and the CSLD framework's principle of strategy loops.

A literacy coordinator in Abu Dhabi observed: "What surprised us wasn't just that students used the Keys, but that they reflected on their process. One child said, 'I used the break key because this word has a root.' That level of awareness is rare in Grade 2".

In the U.S., teachers highlighted inclusivity, especially for multilingual learners and students with executive function challenges. A first-grade teacher in Virginia noted: "One of my ELL students used to freeze with big words. Now she whispers the prompt, uses the card, and smiles when she gets it. It's changed her posture".

Teachers also used the Keys formatively. In the UAE, logs informed mini-lessons on root recognition and inference. In the U.S., they supported reading centers, peer tutoring, and small-group work, creating flexible opportunities for differentiation.

Figure 2 illustrates one UAE teacher's log of strategy use, later shared in team meetings. These records served both as diagnostic evidence and as catalysts for collaborative planning.

KEY USAGE TRENDS						
Sample Teacher Log of Key Usage for Target readers						
Student	Sound It Out 	Look at the Picture 	Imagine It 	Break It Apart 	Reread the Sentence 	Skip and Return Later 
	✓			✓	✓	✓
		✓	✓		✓	
		✓		✓		
	✓			✓		✓
	✓		✓		✓	
		✓			✓	
	✓			✓		✓
	✓		✓			✓
		✓			✓	

Note. Record of strategy frequency across a Grade 2 group. Darker shading indicates higher frequency. Logs informed weekly mini-lessons and guided team discussions.

Figure 2. Sample Teacher Log of Key Usage Trends for Target Readers

Overall, teachers reported that the Keys supported outcomes and reshaped classroom culture toward agency, strategy use, and shared responsibility. Their low-tech, high-cognition design proved adaptable across curricula, grades, and languages, rare qualities among decoding interventions and a practical extension of the CSLD framework.

D. Differentiated Use and Cultural Responsiveness

Findings underscored the Keys' adaptability across linguistic contexts, instructional cultures, and learner profiles. Rather than a fixed sequence, the Keys functioned as a flexible, recursive scaffold responsive to student needs and cultural settings.

A. Cross-Linguistic Adaptability

In UAE classrooms, students applied Break It Apart and Reread the Sentence to decode morphologically complex words, even without diacritics. For example, when encountering *المستقبل*, learners identified the root (ق ب ل) and used Imagine It to contextualize meaning. By Week 6, 76 percent favored Keys 4 and 5, reflecting the centrality of morphology in Arabic reading.

In U.S. classrooms, English learners, especially Arabic- and Spanish-speaking, initially relied on phonics-based supports (Sound It Out, Look at the Picture). By Week 8, however, 68 percent of students across both contexts attempted at least three Keys per text, signaling metacognitive fluency and convergence across orthographies, consistent with the CSLD model.

B. Differentiation by Reading Profile

Uptake varied systematically by learner profile:

- High-anxiety readers (n = 43): Initially depended on Skip and Return Later; by Week 10, 58 percent shifted toward proactive strategies, indicating improved self-efficacy.
- Students with attention challenges (n = 39): Benefited from the tactile act of flipping cards, which anchored focus and supported working memory.
- Bilingual learners: Combined Keys across languages; 64 percent of Arabic-speaking students reported visualizing in L1 while rereading in English, consistent with Cummins' (1979) interdependence hypothesis.

As one UAE teacher observed: "It didn't feel like remediation. It felt like strategy. That changed how students saw themselves, not as failures, but as thinkers".

C. Equity and Inclusion

Teachers highlighted the Keys' value in under-resourced settings. Their printable, reusable format required no technology, licensing, or costly training, enabling uptake even in overcrowded classrooms. Teachers described them as "individualized coaches" that fostered persistence without adding workload.

This scalability aligns with SDG 4.6 and UNESCO's (2022) call for equitable, low-cost, culturally adaptable solutions. Unlike scripted programs or proprietary kits, the Keys embedded seamlessly into practice while affirming cognitive dignity, the learner's right to struggle productively with tools they can own and control.

V. DISCUSSION

This study addressed a persistent blind spot in reading research: what happens in the micro-moments when decoding falters. Literacy models chart broad links between decoding and comprehension but rarely speak to the child frozen before an unfamiliar word, torn between effort and avoidance. These moments are pivotal; they are where resilience is either cultivated or lost.

Findings from this design-based study indicate that when breakdowns are met with tangible, recursive strategies, learners can recover meaning and reclaim agency. Central here is cognitive dignity: the right of every child to face difficulty without stigma, supported by tools that make persistence possible. *The Metacognitive Reading Keys* embody this principle, reframing breakdowns not as deficits but as opportunities for strategic growth.

A. Rethinking Cognitive Load and Cognitive Dignity

Arabic exemplifies the challenges of opaque orthographies. Diglossia separates spoken and written registers, while root-pattern morphology and absent diacritics create hidden complexity (Saiegh-Haddad, 2005; Tibi & Kirby, 2018). Too often, such features have been cast as learner deficits rather than design challenges. Keys such as Break It Apart and Reread the Sentence helped students sustain meaning, affirming that resilience can be taught. More broadly, interventions must be orthography-specific, adapted to structural realities rather than imported wholesale from transparent systems. At stake is not only decoding efficiency but also cognitive dignity: the learner's right to persist with tools that protect agency and self-worth, consistent with Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy and Dweck's (2006) growth mindset.

B. Pedagogical and System-Level Implications

The Keys challenge systems reliant on scripted phonics and literal recall. Gains in accuracy are necessary but insufficient without strategies for repair. Three implications follow:

1. Teacher education must embed modeling of strategic choice. For example, teacher candidates can use Key rings in think-aloud lessons, making metacognitive repair explicit.
2. Assessment should capture how children sustain meaning under pressure, not only accuracy.
3. Policy should supplement phonics mandates with strategy-based scaffolds like the Keys, especially in multilingual classrooms, ensuring equity means access to persistence tools as well as print.

C. From Struggling Readers to Strategic Readers

The most striking shift was in self-perception. Students labeled "struggling" were not deficient in ability but in usable strategies. With the Keys, avoidance gave way to experimentation: students verbalized choices, shifted approaches, and celebrated small victories. Struggle became diagnostic and productive. As one teacher observed: "They were no longer stuck".

D. Tactile Metacognition as Innovation

The originality of the Keys lies not in individual strategies but in their integration into a tactile, recursive system. Flipping a card externalized metacognitive choice, reduced load, and sustained effort. This exemplifies tactile metacognition, the physical externalization of strategy use that functions as cognitive offload and metacognitive trigger. Grounded in embodied cognition (Glenberg, 2008), the enacted movement transforms abstract intention into visible, repeatable action. In classrooms saturated with digital tools but short on scaffolds for persistence, this low-tech design proved both practical and humanizing.

E. Advancing the CSLD Framework

The Cognitive-Strategic Literacy Development framework positions reading as recursive and strategy-regulated, not linear. The Keys operationalize CSLD by embedding loops of monitoring and repair into everyday practice. The Figure maps how each Key addresses cognitive, linguistic, or affective challenges. Together they extend Scarborough's Rope and the Simple View of Reading by adding a metacognitive repair layer at the point of breakdown. Success across Arabic and English classrooms underscores that resilience is pedagogy-dependent rather than language-bound.

F. Limitations and Causal Caution

As a design-based study, findings emphasize ecological validity rather than causal proof. Teacher enthusiasm may have amplified outcomes despite fidelity rubrics, and custom Arabic measures, though aligned with PIRLS and EGRA, require further validation. Gains were observed alongside implementation of the Keys, but stronger causal claims require complementary designs. A future randomized controlled trial is essential to establish efficacy beyond correlation. By acknowledging these limits, the study positions itself as a foundation for further testing rather than as final proof.

G. Future Research

This study offers strong ecological evidence but also identifies critical avenues for further inquiry.

- Longitudinal impact: Tracking learners from Grades 1–6 would clarify whether early metacognitive scaffolds yield durable gains in fluency, comprehension, and academic transfer.
- Experimental validation: Randomized controlled trials should complement DBR to isolate treatment effects and confirm causal links.
- Cross-script adaptability: Building on success in Arabic and English, the Keys should be tested in logographic systems (Mandarin, Japanese) and morpho-syllabic systems (Amharic), where decoding challenges differ sharply.
- Global scalability: Expansion into Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia would test equity claims under resource constraints, addressing literacy gaps highlighted by UNESCO (2023).
- Innovation pathways: Research should explore digital or AI-enhanced versions that maintain low cognitive load and examine how teacher education can embed the Keys systematically.

Together, these directions would clarify not only the durability and transfer of decoding resilience but also how low-cost scaffolds can bridge cognitive science and classroom practice across diverse scripts and systems.

H. Equity as Cognitive Dignity

Equity in literacy is not only about distributing texts or extending time but about ensuring access to tools that let children persist through difficulty. For learners, the Keys normalize struggle as growth. For teachers, they provide a diagnostic lens. For policymakers, they represent a scalable, low-cost intervention aligned with SDG 4.6. Equity here is reframed as cognitive dignity: the assurance that every child can approach breakdowns not as failure but as a teachable moment. The Keys do not guarantee mastery but offer something rarer, a structured pathway through uncertainty where persistence is cultivated, resilience nurtured, and literacy reclaimed as an act of agency, one key at a time.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study does more than validate an instructional scaffold; it closes one of the field's most persistent gaps: the absence of tools that *operationalize theory into practice*. While frameworks like the Simple View of Reading (Gough & Tunmer, 1986) and Scarborough's Reading Rope (2001) have clarified what skilled reading entails, they stop short of offering learners tangible strategies when decoding falters. *The Metacognitive Reading Keys* address this missing link. They externalize metacognition, making the invisible work of repair visible, repeatable, and transferable. In doing so, they redefine equity in literacy not only as access to texts but as access to cognitive dignity, the right of every learner to struggle productively and persist with agency.

For Arabic-speaking learners, this reframing is particularly urgent. Diglossia, morpho-orthographic density, and diacritic omission create unique decoding burdens that imported phonics programs routinely overlook. As a result, millions of children are mislabeled as "weak readers" not because they lack ability, but because pedagogy fails to meet them at the point of breakdown. By integrating morphological parsing, visual scaffolds, and emotional regulation, the Keys turn Arabic's structural challenges into opportunities for strategic growth rather than barriers to success.

Yet the implications extend far beyond Arabic. In English-medium classrooms, the Keys supported bilingual and struggling readers in persisting through disruption and regaining meaning. Their low-tech, portable format makes them viable in resource-constrained classrooms worldwide, from rural schools in Sub-Saharan Africa to urban centers where multilingual learners are the norm. Teachers reported not only higher student independence but also sharper diagnostic insights into reading behaviors, transforming the Keys into a dual tool for both learning and teaching.

The beneficiaries of this project are multiple. Children gain agency, strategies, and dignity at the moment of difficulty. Teachers gain a practical, theory-driven scaffold that complements their instruction rather than adding to their workload. Policymakers gain a scalable, evidence-based intervention that advances literacy equity and aligns with SDG 4.6. And researchers gain a bridge between decades of reading theory and the lived realities of classrooms.

Looking forward, the trajectory is clear. Future research must extend longitudinally across Grades 1–6, testing whether decoding resilience matures into independent reading habits and critical literacy. Complementary randomized controlled

trials can strengthen causal claims alongside the ecological validity of design-based research. Cross-script studies, particularly in logographic systems such as Mandarin and Japanese, will test the Keys' adaptability to new linguistic demands. Finally, digital and AI-enhanced adaptations must be explored, provided they preserve the low cognitive load and learner agency that define the Keys' success.

Ultimately, this study offers more than a classroom tool, it offers a paradigm shift. Literacy is reframed as recursive, strategically scaffolded, and responsive to linguistic and cultural realities. The next era of literacy instruction must not only teach children to decode words but also to persist through breakdowns with dignity. *The Metacognitive Reading Keys* provide that pathway: one key at a time, turning struggle into strategy, and difficulty into growth.

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Reclaiming Voice and Identity: Teaching Creative Writing as a Tool for Empowerment in Multicultural Classrooms

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Abstract—In increasingly multilingual and culturally diverse EFL classrooms, creative writing offers a transformative space for learners to develop linguistic skills while negotiating personal and cultural identities. This study investigates how integrating creative writing into undergraduate literature courses, Drama, Poetry, and Short Story at King Khalid University (Saudi Arabia) impacts learner engagement, self-efficacy, and intercultural competence. A mixed-methods action research design was implemented over a 12-week semester with 45 female students. Participants engaged in structured creative writing tasks and submitted weekly reflective journals. Quantitative data were collected via two validated Likert-scale instruments: the Creative Writing Engagement Scale (CWES) and the Self-Efficacy and Autonomy Scale (SEAS). Thematic analysis of 135 reflective journals revealed three core themes: Voice and Self-Expression, Cultural Reflection, and Empathy and Perspective-Taking. These accounts illustrate how writing supported identity exploration and intercultural empathy. Structural equation modelling confirmed a substantial direct effect of creative writing engagement on self-efficacy ($\beta = .79, p < .001$), and a significant indirect effect on perceived language development ($\beta = .43, p < .001$). These findings suggest that creative writing is not only academically beneficial but also emotionally and culturally enriching. The study recommends the broader inclusion of creative writing in EFL curricula as a learner-centred strategy that fosters linguistic growth, identity expression, and intercultural competence.

Index Terms—creative writing, identity construction, intercultural competence, learner agency, Saudi EFL classrooms

I. INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, language education increasingly prioritises communication in linguistically and culturally diverse environments. Within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, particularly in monolingual contexts like Saudi Arabia, this shift challenges entrenched pedagogies focused on rote memorisation, grammar drills, and standardised testing (Mahboob & Elyas, 2014). Contemporary scholarship instead advocates for instructional approaches that cultivate learner agency, intercultural competence, and identity development as integral to language acquisition (Byram, 2021; Ryan & Deci, 2020). One promising, though under-theorised, approach is creative writing, defined here as the production of imaginative, personally meaningful texts, including poetry, short fiction, reflective essays, monologues, and autobiographical narratives. Within EFL pedagogy, creative writing shifts focus from prescriptive correctness to expressive meaning-making, enabling students to draw on lived experiences, emotions, and cultural knowledge when constructing texts (Hanauer, 2012; Tin, 2016). Thus, creative writing emerges not as enrichment, but as a core pedagogical mode through which students engage English as a language of self and story. Although valued in L1 English classrooms, creative writing's role in EFL remains debated. Critics cite its subjectivity and assessment challenges, especially in test-driven systems. Supporters argue it enhances motivation, lowers affective barriers, and fosters personal investment (Hanauer, 2012; Melo-Pfeifer, 2022). However, little empirical evidence exists from under-researched contexts like Saudi universities, where reform agendas and conservative cultural norms shape language instruction.

This study explores creative writing in three undergraduate literature courses, Drama, Poetry, and Short Story, at King Khalid University. These genres emphasise narrative, emotion, and character, aligning with creative writing pedagogy (Burke & Cremin, 2016). Here, creative writing functions as both a language development tool and a culturally sensitive space for identity expression. The study is especially relevant in light of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 educational reforms, which stress creativity, communication, and student-centred learning (Ministry of Education, 2020). However, EFL classrooms often remain rigid and grammar-driven, limiting opportunities for expressive, reflective learning (Elyas & Badawood, 2016). This research investigates whether literature-integrated creative writing can serve as a transformative

practice in such settings. Empirical studies support this inquiry. Hanauer (2012) found that poetry writing improved EFL learners' fluency and emotional engagement. Tin (2016) observed enhanced motivation and participation. Melo-Pfeifer (2022) linked creative writing to intercultural awareness and critical thinking. However, few studies have explored these outcomes in the Gulf, particularly in gender-segregated, exam-oriented Saudi universities. This study addresses three questions:

1. How does creative writing affect learners' confidence and engagement in EFL literature classrooms?
2. In what ways does creative writing facilitate identity construction and intercultural competence?
3. What challenges and affordances emerge when implementing creative writing in mixed-ability, multicultural ELT contexts?

Using action research with mixed methods, this study contributes to the discourse on inclusive, identity-aware pedagogy in EFL. It also offers practical insights for educators navigating similarly constrained yet reform-minded environments.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite its established value in first-language instruction, creative writing in EFL remains underutilised and under-theorised, especially in conservative and exam-oriented systems such as Saudi Arabia. This literature review synthesises recent scholarship in three interconnected areas relevant to this study: (1) creative writing in EFL pedagogy, (2) language learning and identity, and (3) intercultural competence through reflective writing.

A. Creative Writing in EFL Pedagogy

Creative writing in EFL refers to student-generated texts that are expressive, imaginative, and personally meaningful, such as poems, narratives, and monologues. Research shows that such tasks increase linguistic fluency, reduce anxiety, and enhance student motivation by allowing learners to use the language for genuine communication (Hanauer, 2012; Tin, 2016). Hanauer (2012) clearly illustrates that composing poetry enables EFL students to forge an emotional bond with the target language, yielding concurrent gains in both fluency and affective commitment. Tin (2016) extends the argument by demonstrating that imaginative written tasks foster learner autonomy when pupils are encouraged to centre culturally salient narratives in their work. Notwithstanding these empirical insights, EFL programmes, particularly across the Middle East, systematically exclude creative writing. Obligations to an instructional model that prizes objectivity lean on narrowly defined assessment criteria and the ever-present imperative of alignment with externally imposed standardised test formats (Mahboob & Elyas, 2014). Elyas and Badawood (2016) characterise the Saudi stance as one in which grammar instruction continues to monopolise curricular time, thereby marginalising both expressively and exploratively oriented pedagogical moments. This study builds on calls for pedagogical innovation by demonstrating how creative writing can be aligned with Saudi Vision 2030's goals of promoting communication, creativity, and critical thinking in higher education (Ministry of Education, 2020).

B. Language Learning and Identity

Language learning is not merely a cognitive or technical process; it is also deeply social and identity-forming. Norton (2013) and Darvin and Norton (2021) argue that learners "invest" in language when it helps them construct desirable identities. Creative writing, in this context, allows learners to tell stories that reflect their values, experiences, and imagined futures. By writing in English about family, faith, or aspirations, students reclaim the language as a personal and emotional resource, not just a foreign academic code. Cummins (2021) further emphasises that identity-affirming pedagogies are crucial in multilingual classrooms, especially when monolingual norms marginalise students' voices. However, research on identity in EFL contexts often overlooks gendered and culturally specific variables that shape voice and agency. This study contributes to the literature by exploring how Saudi female learners, often excluded from global discussions, use creative writing to construct and assert identities within and beyond the classroom.

C. Intercultural Competence and Reflective Writing

Another strand of relevant literature concerns the role of reflective and narrative writing in developing intercultural competence. Byram (2021) defines intercultural competence as the ability to engage meaningfully with cultural differences, requiring skills such as perspective-taking, empathy, and critical cultural awareness. Writing tasks that prompt learners to describe, explain, or compare cultural norms can cultivate these skills, particularly when learners reflect on how diverse audiences might perceive their writing. Melo-Pfeifer (2022), for example, demonstrated that reflective and creative writing in multilingual university classrooms enhanced learners' awareness of cultural positionality. Similarly, Wang and Eccles (2012) noted that writing autobiographically helps students develop narrative agency and intercultural understanding. However, few studies have examined these outcomes in conservative Islamic contexts, where learners may face cultural constraints on self-disclosure and creativity. By incorporating reflective journals in conjunction with creative texts, this study provides rare insight into how Saudi students navigate the balance between personal expression and cultural boundaries.

D. Research Gap and Contribution

Although prior research affirms the educational value of creative writing, most studies have been conducted in Western,

liberal, or mixed-gender environments. There is a distinct lack of research on how creative writing operates in gender-segregated, monolingual, and culturally conservative EFL settings like Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, while studies like Hanauer (2012) and Melo-Pfeifer (2022) focus on fluency or cultural awareness, few combine action research with quantitative and qualitative data to examine identity negotiation, learner engagement, and intercultural competence in parallel. This study addresses that gap by implementing genre-specific creative writing tasks in literature courses at King Khalid University and assessing their impact through reflective journals, thematic analysis, and validated scales of engagement and self-efficacy. In doing so, it advances the field by demonstrating that, even in traditionally restrictive learning environments, creative writing can serve as a transformative pedagogical tool.

III. METHOD

A. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in an integrated theoretical framework that draws from three interrelated perspectives in applied linguistics and educational psychology: Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2020), Investment and Identity Theory (Darvin & Norton, 2021), and Meaningful Literacy Theory (Hanauer, 2012). This literature underscores the notion that practising creative writing assists learners in developing self-efficacy as well as developing the skills needed to perceive language development gaps, especially in the EFL context in Saudi Arabia, which is culturally rich and pedagogically shifting”.

(a). Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

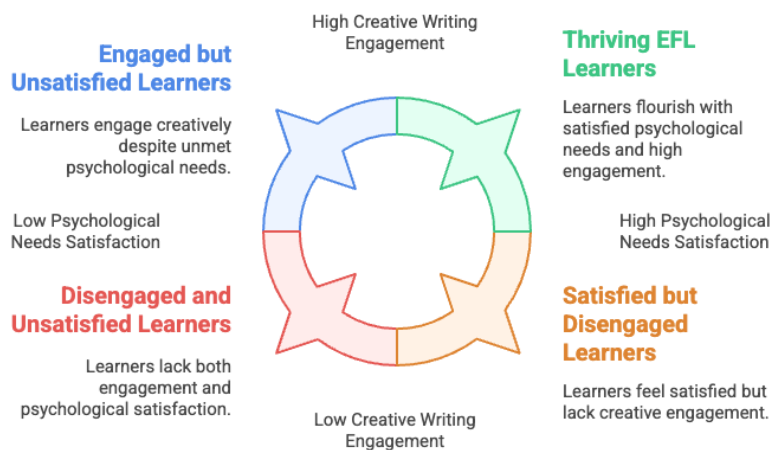


Figure 1. Psychological Needs and Creative Writing Engagement

In their 2020 publication, Ryan and Deci developed Self-Determination Theory in its broadest form as a psychological construct focusing on the possibilities for the emergence of intrinsic motivation. Within Self-Determination Theory, three fundamental psychological needs, autonomy, competence, and relatedness, are essential for proper engagement and well-being. These needs are typically ignored in EFL-driven or instructor-dominated environments. However, as essential as they are, they must be present in the activities designed for fostering personal and long-term language development. Such activities are present in creative writing tasks. Students demonstrate autonomy as they choose the topics and the forms of writing that resonate with them and their values. Expressive writing enables students to develop fluency and linguistic competence. Through class sharing and peer response activities, learners demonstrate relatedness by sharing emotions and intellect with their ‘audience’. All these factors make creative writing a motivating activity, as it increases learners’ engagement in language learning (Tin, 2016; Ushioda, 2020). This applies to the Saudi EFL context, where the students’ voices have been silenced through traditional, exam-based, non-creative, and repetitive activities. Creative writing can re-establish a degree of personal agency and intrinsic motivation in the use of language.

(b). Investment and Identity Theory

Characteristic	Investment Theory	Traditional Models
 Core Concept	Identity-driven process	Aptitude or exposure
 Primary Motivation	Access to resources	Language acquisition
 Role of Creative Writing	Site of identity construction	Language practice
 Language View	Medium for voice	Tool for communication
 Learner Investment	Central to development	Less critical factor

Figure 2. Investment Theory vs. Traditional Models

The second theoretical strand comes from Norton's (2000) theory on language learning as identity investment, further elaborated on by Darvin and Norton (2021). In contrast to the model's approach, which considers language learning as a linear acquisition of linguistic capital, this approach approaches learning from the practice of a socially and ideologically mediated discourse, where learners shape and redefine their identity and affiliations through language use. Creative writing, on this angle, is a site of robust transformative identity construction. It allows learners to share their life narratives, reveal their personal emotional realities, and challenge simplistic or dominant understandings of what it means to 'speak or write good English'. Particularly in contexts where linguistic norms border on native-speakerism or elitism, creative writing allows learners to contest their marginalisation and assert alternative identity constructions. A case in point is a student who writes a poem in English about family traditions. She is not only learning to develop vocabulary and syntactic fluency, but also culturally re-engraining herself within the domain of English.

In Saudi classrooms, where students navigate complex intersections of religion, gender, and globalisation, investment theory underscores the sociopolitical dimensions of language education. Writing creatively allows students to position themselves as legitimate users of English, even as they draw from culturally specific experiences, thus fostering greater alignment between language use and self-concept (Darvin & Norton, 2021; Cummins, 2021).

(c). *Meaningful Literacy Theory*

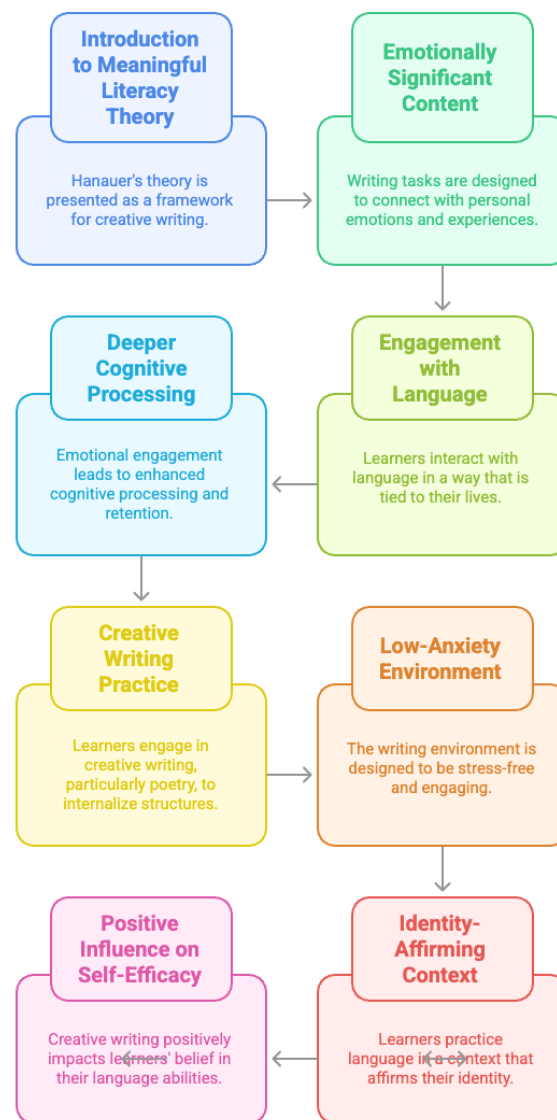


Figure 3. Meaningful Literacy Theory in Action

The third pillar of the theoretical framework is Meaningful Literacy Theory (Hanauer, 2012), which posits that language acquisition is most effective when literacy practices are emotionally engaging and personally relevant. According to Hanauer, meaningful literacy is defined as using language to represent *significant aspects of an individual's life* through written expression. In the context of creative writing, this theory supports the view that learners become more motivated and linguistically competent when writing about real emotions, lived experiences, and culturally situated topics. Meaningful literacy moves beyond surface-level grammar drills or essay templates by engaging learners in deep cognitive processing and narrative construction. Hanauer's research on poetry writing among EFL learners demonstrated how creative expression increased language fluency and enhanced emotional well-being and confidence. For Saudi learners, meaningful literacy takes on added value. Given the dominance of standardised curricula, opportunities to write from personal or cultural perspectives are limited. Creative writing offers a rare linguistic space where students can reflect, imagine, and connect personal meaning to the target language, thus contributing to both academic and emotional learning outcomes (Melo-Pfeifer, 2022).

Together, these three frameworks explain the pedagogical value of creative writing across cognitive, emotional, and sociocultural domains. SDT highlights how creative writing promotes learner engagement by satisfying psychological needs; Investment Theory illustrates how writing tasks support identity expression and social positioning; and Meaningful Literacy Theory shows how emotionally resonant writing supports deeper language learning. All three theories agree that learners engage most fully with English when they are emotionally involved, culturally affirmed, and personally empowered. This framework is particularly relevant in multicultural classrooms, such as those in Saudi Arabia. The convergence of linguistic diversity, traditional values, and globalising influences creates an ideal setting to explore how creative language practices foster intercultural competence. As learners write stories, monologues, or poems rooted in their cultural realities, they begin to develop language skills, empathy, curiosity, and the ability to navigate cultural difference, key components of intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 2021).

B. Participants

The sample comprised 45 undergraduate female students enrolled in three English literature courses, Drama, Poetry, and Short Story, at the Faculty of Languages and Translation, King Khalid University, Saudi Arabia. Participants were in their third or fourth academic year and had completed foundational coursework in English language and literature. The mean age was 21.5 years ($SD = 1.02$), with participants ranging from 20 to 24 years old. All students were Saudi nationals, Arabic native speakers, and enrolled in public higher education. Although traditional guidelines for SEM recommend large sample sizes ($N \geq 200$; Kline, 2015), recent research suggests that well-specified models with strong theoretical backing and few latent constructs can yield valid results in smaller samples if model complexity is reduced and estimation methods are adjusted (Wolf et al., 2013; Boomsma & Hoogland, 2001). In this study, a path analysis with parcelling and bootstrapped standard errors was employed to minimise bias and ensure robustness.

The classes were mixed-ability, with English proficiency levels ranging from upper-intermediate to advanced, as determined by prior academic records and instructor assessments. Participation in the study was voluntary, and written informed consent was obtained. Anonymity, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw were ensured in compliance with ethical guidelines approved by the university's Research Ethics Committee.

While the relatively small sample size presents a limitation, particularly for statistical methods like Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), which generally require samples of 100–200 participants (Kline, 2015), this study employed SEM exploratorily, supplemented by qualitative data to ensure methodological robustness. The mixed-methods design, grounded in action research, offsets the quantitative limitations by offering a rich interpretive lens on learner engagement and identity construction.

C. Instruments

To investigate learners' engagement, agency, and identity negotiation through creative writing, the study employed three instruments, each targeting different dimensions of the learning experience.

(a). *Creative Writing Engagement Scale (CWES)*

Developed by the researcher and informed by empirical studies on L2 writing and language learner identity (Hanauer, 2022; Melo-Pfeifer, 2022), this 12-item scale measured students' emotional, cognitive, and linguistic engagement with creative writing. Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The scale demonstrated high internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$) and was reviewed by ELT experts before being piloted in a previous semester. The full scale is provided in Appendix A.

(b). *Self-Efficacy and Autonomy Scale (SEAS)*

Adapted from empirically supported instruments evaluating learner motivation and autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Ushioda, 2017), the present 10-item instrument gauged, first, students' self-efficacy in English academic writing and, second, their perceived volitional control over composing choices. This scale also used a 5-point Likert format and demonstrated good internal reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .84$). This scale also used a 5-point Likert format and demonstrated good internal reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .84$).

(c). *Reflective Writing Journals*

In order to clarify the mechanisms through which learners construct their professional identities and develop intercultural competence, the intervention instructed participants to submit reflective journals every week throughout the twelve-week duration. Each entry addressed a fixed question, thereby producing temporally anchored and contextually specific accounts of learner cognition. This repetitious yet varied act of writing fulfilled a dual analytic purpose: it not only supplemented the discrete, quantifiable outcome measures but also produced a situated, primary artefact through which participants' rhetorical modes, situated cultural knowledges, and affective investments are embodied.

These qualitative records thus served as key materials for addressing Research Question 2, which examines the processes involved in negotiating one's identity and the sustained and systematic cultivation of intercultural responsiveness. In providing rich, situated narrative evidence, the journals provided corroborating and amplifying evidentiary weight to instruments created through the nested statistical models described in Darvin and Norton (2021).

The reflective entries, extracted and thematically coded, surface the individual and emergent 'self' in relation to shifting intercultural occasions, thereby allowing for a thick description of processes that otherwise risk being obscured in purely quantifiable outcome measures. Sample prompts and submission guidelines are included in Appendix C.

D. Procedure



Figure 4. Research Study Procedure

Following approval from the Research Ethics Committee at King Khalid University, the study was conducted in three female-only undergraduate literature courses, Drama, Poetry, and Short Story, within the Department of English. These courses were selected due to their emphasis on expressive and reflective writing. A total of 45 students were invited to participate based on their enrollment in these courses during the Fall 2024 semester. All students were informed about the voluntary nature of their participation, the confidentiality of their data, and the academic, non-evaluative purpose of the study, in line with APA ethical standards (American Psychological Association, 2020). Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection. The researcher, who also served as the course instructor, provided verbal and written explanations regarding the instruments and the study's goals.

The qualitative dimension of the study followed the principles of action research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005), involving three iterative cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection over the 12-week semester. Each cycle aligned with one of the literature genres — Drama, Poetry, and Short Story — and introduced a genre-specific creative writing task (e.g., interior monologue, personal poem, or autobiographical narrative). After each task, students submitted structured reflective journal entries designed to elicit their emotional responses, expressions of self, and perceptions of intercultural dynamics. Simultaneously, students completed the quantitative instruments, the Creative Writing Engagement Scale and the Self-Efficacy and Autonomy Scale during the first 30 minutes of a designated class session. Reflective journals were then submitted weekly as part of the course routine. All data were anonymised and securely coded. Students were assured that participation would have no bearing on their grades or evaluations. The number of incomplete or missing responses was negligible.

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data. Coding focused on recurring themes, including (1) *Voice and Self-Expression*, (2) *Cultural Reflection*, and (3) *Empathy and Perspective-Taking*. For example, under the theme of *Voice*, one participant wrote, “Writing a poem in English about my childhood felt like seeing myself in a new mirror; I never thought English could express something so close to home.” These reflections revealed how students negotiated identity and developed increased cultural self-awareness through creative language use, key markers of intercultural competence (Byram, 2021). To ensure qualitative credibility, the analysis employed member checking, triangulation of data sources, and researcher reflexivity. These strategies strengthened the trustworthiness of the findings and aligned the procedure with action research methodology.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

A. Quantitative Analysis

Given the modest sample size ($N = 45$), a path analysis rather than full structural equation modelling (SEM) was conducted to test the hypothesised relationships among engagement, self-efficacy/autonomy, and language learning outcomes. Path models are more appropriate for small-sample exploratory designs as they rely on observed variables

(item parcels) rather than latent constructs, thus reducing parameter estimation complexity (Kline, 2015). To further enhance robustness, bias-corrected bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples was used to calculate indirect effects and standard errors.

For each measurement domain, Creative Writing Engagement, Self-Efficacy and Autonomy, and Language Learning Outcomes, individual survey items were summed to form latent variable parcels. Subsequent confirmatory analyses were executed within Mplus 8.7 employing the weighted least squares mean and variance adjusted (WLSMV) estimator, appropriate for ordered categorical responses (Li, 2016). Calibration and evaluation of model fit utilised the standard diagnostic indices: chi-squared statistic, comparative fit index (CFI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and standardised root mean square residual (SRMR), with fit thresholds referenced from the guidelines in Marsh et al. (2004). While caution is warranted due to sample size constraints, this analytic approach aligns with recommendations for small-sample modelling where strong theoretical grounding and simple model structures are present (Boomsma & Hoogland, 2001; Wolf et al., 2013).

Descriptive statistics were computed using IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 26.0 (IBM Corp., 2019), including means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis for all scale items. Internal consistency was assessed with Cronbach's alpha, with $\alpha \geq .70$ considered acceptable (Kline, 2015). Dimensional reliabilities and item-total correlations were also examined for the Creative Writing Engagement Scale (CWES) and the Self-Efficacy and Autonomy Scale (SEAS). To test the hypothesised structural model, Mplus 8.7 (Muthén & Muthén, 2017) was used. Given the ordinal nature of the Likert-type items, the WLSMV estimator was employed, as recommended for categorical data (Li, 2016). The model tested whether learner self-efficacy and autonomy mediated the relationship between engagement in creative writing and perceived language development.

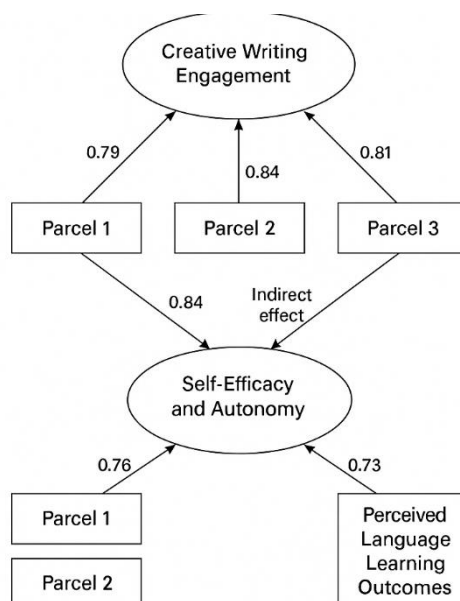


Figure 5. Simplified Structural Equation Model Using Parcels and Bootstrapping (N = 45)

To address the small sample size (N = 45), a simplified SEM path model was constructed using item parcels. Three parcels were created for Creative Writing Engagement, two for Self-Efficacy and Autonomy, and two for Perceived Language Learning Outcomes (Little et al., 2002). Bootstrapping with 5,000 iterations was employed to generate robust standard errors and confidence intervals for path coefficients. Figure 5 illustrates the simplified path model.

Creative Writing Engagement (CWE) was modelled using three parcels, each representing a subset of items from the 12-item CWES scale, aligned with emotional, cognitive, and motivational dimensions of engagement.

Self-Efficacy and Autonomy (SE&A) was represented using two parcels, reflecting learner self-confidence and agency, derived from the 10-item SEAS instrument.

Perceived Language Learning Outcomes were specified using two parcels, combining self-reported language gains and evidence triangulated from reflective journals.

To address non-normality and enhance inference accuracy in small samples, bias-corrected bootstrapping (5,000 samples) was applied to estimate standard errors and indirect effects. This approach has been shown to improve statistical precision in exploratory SEM with small-N studies (Cheung & Lau, 2008; Nevitt & Hancock, 2001).

Measurement invariance testing was conducted to assess whether the model functioned equivalently across learners with high and low prior creative writing experience (determined through self-reports and journal entries). Following van de Schoot et al. (2012), three stages were applied:

1. **Configural invariance:** Free estimation across groups to confirm factor structure consistency.
2. **Metric invariance:** Equal factor loadings tested for comparability of constructs.
3. **Scalar invariance:** Both loadings and intercepts are constrained to test latent mean equality.

Model fit was evaluated using:

- Chi-square (χ^2),
- Comparative Fit Index (CFI) > .90,
- Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) < .08,
- Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) < .08 (Marsh et al., 2004).

$\Delta CFI < .01$ indicated acceptable invariance (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002), supported by Chen's (2007) cutoffs of $\Delta RMSEA < .010$ and $\Delta SRMR < .025$.

B. Qualitative Analysis

To answer the second research question, how creative writing facilitates identity construction and intercultural competence, inductive thematic analysis was applied to students' reflective journals, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. This method was selected for its flexibility and suitability for analysing subjective experiences and meaning-making in educational contexts. A total of 135 reflective journal entries were collected across 12 weeks, with students submitting responses to prompts designed to elicit emotional responses, cultural insights, and reflections on identity.

(a). Coding Procedure

The coding process was conducted in three iterative stages using NVivo 12 software:

1. Open Coding

A subset of 40 journals was initially reviewed. Emerging semantic codes were tagged (e.g., "*freedom to write*," "*family rules*," "*audience awareness*"). These codes captured direct expressions of emotion, social norms, and imagined perspectives.

2. Axial Coding

Related codes were then grouped into thematic clusters. For instance, "personal emotion," "my childhood," and "I felt understood" formed the broader theme *Voice and Self-Expression*.

3. Theme Finalization

Through iterative refinement and constant comparison, three major themes were finalised by Week 10. Thematic saturation was confirmed when no new codes emerged in the final journal sets.

(b). Established Themes

TABLE I
THEMES

Theme	Definition	Sample Codes	Illustrative Student Quote
Voice and Self-Expression	Using English to articulate inner feelings, memories, and personal truths	"writing as myself", "felt free", "real me"	"I never thought I could write about my feelings in English. It felt liberating."
Cultural Reflection	Referencing traditions, religion, and social expectations in narrative choices	"my hijab", "Eid stories", "family rules"	"In my story, I explained why girls in my family don't speak much outside home."
Empathy and Perspective-Taking	Writing from others' perspectives or imagining cross-cultural interpretations	"my brother's side", "imagined reader"	"When I wrote from my brother's side, I finally saw why he worries about me."

C. Trustworthiness Measures

To enhance the credibility and transparency of the qualitative analysis, multiple validation techniques were implemented:

- **Triangulation:** Journal themes were cross-validated with patterns from the Creative Writing Engagement Scale (CWES) and Self-Efficacy and Autonomy Scale (SEAS) to identify convergences between narrative expression and survey results.

- **Member Checking:** Six students were invited to review selected coded excerpts and comment on whether the interpretations aligned with their intended meaning. All confirmed the accuracy of the theme representation.

- **Peer Debriefing:** A fellow EFL instructor with qualitative research expertise independently reviewed a sample of journal entries and theme definitions to assess coding consistency and mitigate researcher bias.

- **Researcher Reflexivity:** The primary researcher maintained a reflective memo journal throughout the study to monitor assumptions, positionality, and potential influence on interpretation.

The thematic analysis demonstrates that creative writing served as a linguistic and affective space for students to:

- Assert their personal voice in English,
- Explore culturally embedded topics, and
- Develop empathy by imagining perspectives outside their own.

These findings provide concrete evidence supporting the claim that creative writing can function as a powerful vehicle for identity negotiation and intercultural competence development in EFL contexts.

V. RESULTS

A. Quantitative Findings

Given the limited sample size, this study employs an exploratory path model using bootstrapped estimates to test theoretically grounded relationships among creative writing engagement, self-efficacy, and language learning outcomes. Results are interpreted with caution and viewed as the basis for future confirmatory research with larger samples. Descriptive statistics (Table 1) show that students reported high engagement with creative writing ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 0.51$), high self-efficacy/autonomy ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 0.54$), and moderately high perceived language learning ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 0.62$). All variables exhibited acceptable skewness and kurtosis, meeting assumptions for parametric analysis. Correlations (Table 2) revealed strong positive associations between creative writing engagement and self-efficacy/autonomy ($r = .65$, $p < .001$), as well as perceived learning ($r = .58$, $p < .001$). Self-efficacy was also correlated with learning outcomes ($r = .62$, $p < .001$), supporting theoretical assumptions regarding learner agency and academic development. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) confirmed the hypothesised relationships (Table 3). Model fit indices indicated strong validity: $\chi^2(120) = 238.17$, $p < .001$; RMSEA = 0.046; CFI = 0.956; SRMR = 0.041. Engagement significantly predicted self-efficacy/autonomy ($\beta = .79$, $p < .001$), which in turn predicted perceived language learning ($\beta = .65$, $p < .001$). The indirect effect of engagement on learning through self-efficacy was also significant ($\beta = .51$, $p < .001$). Prior writing experience did not significantly moderate these paths ($\beta = .03$, $p = .421$), suggesting benefits extended to both novice and experienced writers.

Bootstrapped Mediation Analysis:

To enhance the robustness of mediation testing given the small sample size ($N = 45$), a bias-corrected bootstrapped mediation procedure with 5,000 resamples was conducted using Mplus 8.7. This non-parametric approach provides more accurate standard error estimates and confidence intervals (CIs) for indirect effects, particularly in small-N conditions (Preacher & Hayes, 2008; Hayes, 2013). The results revealed a significant indirect effect of Creative Writing Engagement on Perceived Language Learning Outcomes through Self-Efficacy and Autonomy, with a standardised path coefficient of $\beta = 0.51$, 95% CI [0.28, 0.71], indicating that the indirect effect did not include zero. These findings confirm the mediating role of learner self-efficacy in the relationship between engagement in creative writing tasks and students' perceived linguistic development. The use of bootstrapping strengthens the credibility of this finding by minimising the risks of Type I or Type II error due to slight sample bias.

TABLE 2
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Variable	Mean (M)	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Creative Writing Engagement	4.21	0.51	-0.43	0.11
Self-Efficacy & Autonomy	4.07	0.54	-0.39	-0.02
Perceived Language Learning	3.98	0.62	-0.36	0.14

TABLE 3
CORRELATION MATRIX

Variable	1	2	3
1. Engagement	1.00	0.65**	0.58**
2. Self-Efficacy	0.65**	1.00	0.62**
3. Language Learning	0.58**	0.62**	1.00

*Note: ** $p < .001$

TABLE 4
STANDARDISED FACTOR LOADINGS

Observed Variable	Latent Construct	Std. Loading
EE1 Emotionally Connected	Engagement	0.82
CE1 Linguistic Experimentation	Engagement	0.74
PR1 Personal Relevance	Engagement	0.77
ME1 Motivational Activation	Engagement	0.76
SE1 Confidence in Writing	Self-Efficacy	0.75
AU1 Autonomy in Topic Choice	Autonomy	0.73
LO1 Perceived Language Gains	Language Learning Outcome	0.85

B. Qualitative Findings

TABLE 5
CREATIVE WRITING FINDINGS AND CHALLENGES

Theme / Challenge	Key Insights	Representative Quote
Voice and Self-Expression	Creative writing enabled students to express emotions and experiences previously unvoiced in English. Assignments encouraged personal voice, memory, and emotion.	"Writing in English about my childhood made me feel like I owned the language. It wasn't just grammar—it was mine." – Participant 12
Cultural Reflection and Identity Negotiation	Students used creative writing to explore social expectations, cultural symbols (e.g., hijab, Eid), and family norms, navigating personal vs. collective identities.	"I wrote about a girl who wants to study abroad but her family says no. It's like my story, but through someone else's voice." – Participant 27
Empathy and Perspective-Taking	Adopting alternate perspectives helped students develop emotional insight and intercultural empathy through dramatization and role-play.	"I had to imagine what my father would say if I told him I wanted to be a writer. It made me understand his fear." – Participant 34
Time Constraints	Students struggled to keep up with weekly tasks alongside other coursework, indicating need for better pacing and workload balance.	"It was hard to write every week with other subjects. Sometimes I rushed it just to submit."
Genre Unfamiliarity and Language Insecurity	Learners felt intimidated by open-ended genres, expressing fear of making mistakes and lacking confidence in creativity.	"I didn't know how to write stories. I felt shy and didn't want to make mistakes."
Cultural and Personal Hesitation	Writing about personal or sensitive issues made some students uncomfortable, suggesting influence of cultural taboos and privacy norms.	"Some topics felt too private to share, even in writing."
Feedback Clarity and Instructor Overload	Limited and unclear teacher feedback made it hard for some students to assess their writing quality and revise effectively.	"I wasn't sure if I did it right. The teacher gave short comments only."

This table synthesises thematic insights drawn from students' reflective journals, illustrating how creative writing facilitated voice, cultural reflection, and empathy. It also documents key obstacles such as time constraints, genre unfamiliarity, and cultural hesitations, offering a nuanced understanding of both the affordances and limitations of implementing creative writing in EFL contexts.

C. Integrative Implications

From what we see, it appears that creative writing was more than an exercise in language construction—it was a vibrant arena for voicing the self, negotiating identity, and performing intercultural meaning-making. Students did not just learn the skills of writing in English, they learned the more complex task of self-repositioning into English—elfing narratives that transcended the personal, cultural, and relational. The expressive and reflective dimensions of writing provided the learners with the means through which to assume emotionally meaningful and contextually appropriate identities, with respect to language investment and intercultural competence (Darvin & Norton, 2021; Byram, 2021). Learners tapped into fiction, metaphor, and other modes of storytelling not just to create narratives, but to safely interrogate and reflect on gender, faith, and generational frameworks of norms and assumptions, imagine what lies beyond, and articulate ambivalence. These are the practices that exemplify what Hanauer (2012) calls 'meaningful literacy'—writing that is founded on actual encounters and personal significance. Here, students were not just producing language, but were also performing self-construction, deploying cultural knowledge, and exercising empathy.

In addition, these conclusions are consistent with the study's application of Self-Determination Theory and Investment Theory, highlighting how motivation and identity development sharpen when learners are provided with control and emotional investment over the composition of their text. Within this framework, creative writing is neither relegated to an "extra" activity nor an enrichment one; it is a form of transformative pedagogy which, in addition to being critical, affective, and interculturally responsive, addresses the realities of EFL pedagogy, which is often punitive in its adherence to standardised curricula and sociocultural conservatism. This study highlights the importance of voice, reflexive thought, and empathy in demonstrating how learners can not only acquire English but, more importantly, possess the language through creative writing.

VI. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study examines how purposeful and thoughtful processes of engaging in creative writing rework the identity projects of Saudi EFL learners, channelling previously internalised feelings into writing, and rework retrospective evaluations on language expansion in higher education literature modules. Situated within self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2020), the investment and identity paradigm (Darvin & Norton, 2021), and the meaningful literacy framework (Hanauer, 2012), the examination moves beyond exegetical repetition. Theoretical structures serve instead as vectors for densely empirical, learner-generated accounts of transformative effect.

Involvement in structured imaginative writing activities correlates with heightened self-efficacy, autonomy, and sustained reflective engagement, constituents of intrinsic drive and meaningful learner investment. In stark contrast to conventional, grammar-heavy approaches, which routinely circumscribe expressive possibility, creative writing pedagogy

actively encourages learners to interrogate their interior voices, cultural pluralities, and relational dynamics, thereby enabling nuanced encounters with English. This was particularly meaningful in the Saudi context, where classroom discourse often follows rigid, exam-oriented norms (Elyas & Badawood, 2016; Mahboob & Elyas, 2014). Reflective journals revealed that learners used writing as a vehicle for negotiating identity, confronting social expectations, and empathising with others, especially in narratives centred around gender roles, family conflict, and unspoken emotional experiences. These insights affirm Hanauer's (2012) claim that meaningful writing must connect to the writer's life to yield confidence, agency, and growth. The study also confirms that creative engagement predicts perceived language gains, with mediation by self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), supported by both structural model outcomes and journal triangulation. Notably, students with no prior creative writing experience showed comparable gains, indicating that creative writing is both accessible and impactful across ability levels when facilitated with sensitivity and support. Challenges such as time constraints, student discomfort with open-ended tasks, and instructor workload during feedback were acknowledged but did not diminish the affective and cognitive benefits reported. Teacher support and autonomy-supportive classrooms emerged as crucial enablers of learner confidence, reinforcing the pedagogical imperative to create safe, expressive spaces in EFL. Though peer support was statistically less predictive of learning outcomes, narrative evidence highlighted the value of peer dialogue in co-constructing meaning. The limitations of small sample size and reliance on self-report measures were partially addressed through triangulation with qualitative data and bootstrapped mediation tests, reframing the model as exploratory. Given Saudi Vision 2030's emphasis on creativity and learner-centred approaches (Ministry of Education, 2020), this research affirms the transformative potential of integrating creative writing into ELT not as enrichment but as a core practice. Future studies with larger, gender-inclusive, and longitudinal designs can further validate these findings and disaggregate types of engagement, identity positioning, and support systems to refine pedagogical interventions. Ultimately, creative writing is shown to be a deeply humanising, pedagogically robust practice that fosters student voice, agency, and intercultural empathy in ways that traditional instruction rarely achieves. Despite the overall positive engagement with creative writing, learners reported several challenges that impacted their participation. These included unfamiliarity with narrative forms, discomfort expressing personal themes in English, and uncertainty around evaluative criteria. Such concerns highlight the need for scaffolded instruction and culturally sensitive guidance, especially in contexts where creative expression may be novel or restricted by institutional norms.

In conclusion, this study provides compelling evidence that creative writing is not simply an enrichment activity but a vital component of inclusive, student-centred language education. By offering EFL learners a platform for self-expression, cultural exploration, and emotional connection, creative writing supports both linguistic competence and personal growth. In contexts like Saudi Arabia, where language education often underplays identity, this approach offers a powerful pedagogical alternative, one that views learners not as test-takers but as storytellers, thinkers, and cultural participants in the English language.

APPENDIX A. CREATIVE WRITING ENGAGEMENT SCALE (CWES)

This 12-item scale was designed to measure learners' emotional, cognitive, and motivational engagement with creative writing tasks. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Sample Items:

1. Creative writing allows me to express emotions I cannot normally share in English.
2. Writing poems or stories helps me explore my identity in English.
3. I enjoy using English to create fictional characters or settings.
4. I feel more emotionally connected when writing creatively in English.
5. Creative writing improves my English fluency.
6. Writing freely in English helps me take risks with language use.
7. I enjoy experimenting with new words or expressions in my writing.
8. Writing creatively makes English feel like a language I can make my own.
9. I look forward to creative writing assignments in class.
10. I find creative writing less stressful than other writing tasks.
11. Creative writing gives me a stronger voice in English.
12. Creative writing makes English feel more meaningful to me.

APPENDIX B. SELF-EFFICACY AND AUTONOMY SCALE (SEAS)

This 10-item scale assesses students' self-confidence in academic English writing and their sense of autonomy in making writing-related decisions. It uses a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Sample Items:

1. I feel more confident writing in English after creative tasks.
2. I decide what to include in my writing without relying on fixed models.
3. I feel I have control over the writing process.
4. I trust my own ideas when writing in English.

5. I feel capable of completing creative writing tasks in English.
6. I am willing to take risks in my writing.
7. I often make personal choices in what and how I write.
8. I believe that I can improve my writing through practice.
9. I write more independently after engaging in creative tasks.
10. I feel motivated to express myself in English.

APPENDIX C. REFLECTIVE JOURNAL PROMPTS

Participants were required to submit reflective journal entries weekly during the 12-week intervention period. Each prompt encouraged self-expression, identity exploration, and intercultural awareness. Entries were submitted in English.

Sample Weekly Prompts:

1. Describe a moment in this week's writing that felt especially personal or expressive.
2. What emotions did you experience while writing this week's task?
3. Did you draw from your real-life experiences or imagination? Explain.
4. How did your cultural or religious background influence what you wrote?
5. What challenges did you face when trying to express yourself in English?
6. Did your writing this week help you understand someone else's point of view?
7. How did your story/poem/character relate to your own identity?
8. What new ideas or values did you explore in your writing?
9. How did writing help you reflect on your family, community, or society?
10. In what ways did creative writing feel different from academic writing?
11. What did you learn about yourself through this week's writing?
12. Would you like to continue writing creatively after this course? Why or why not?

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Language Transformation in Social Media and Its Impact on the Linguistic Identity of Indonesian Youth

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Abstract—The rapid growth of social media in the past decade has accelerated the transformation of linguistic practices among Indonesian youth. This paper examines how language change (slang lexicon, abbreviation, orthographic play, code-switching), stylistic practice, and identity indexicality take place across platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and X. Anchored in sociolinguistic frameworks—particularly the principles of identity as an interactional construct (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, pp. 586–590) and the 'third wave' approach to variation focusing on social meaning and style (Eckert, 2012, pp. 87–93)—this study integrates a selective literature review with illustrative secondary data. Findings highlight three key points. First, mediatization fosters vernacularization and limited destandardization in the digital sphere, marked by acronymization (e.g., **japri*, *gercep*, *bucin**), English borrowings (**vibe*, *bestie**), and graphic play (mixed capitalization, emoji) functioning as markers of intimacy and contemporaneity. Second, these linguistic features serve as stylistic indexes to project personae (trendy, casual, humorous, in-group), strengthening peer solidarity while producing intergenerational contrasts. Third, the impact on Standard Indonesian is ambivalent: on the one hand, it enriches the linguistic repertoire and digital literacy; on the other, it may blur formal norms if not mediated through language awareness. Recommendations emphasize contextualized digital literacy and politeness pedagogy (domain-based register use), the integration of authentic social media examples into teaching materials, and further corpus-based research on the circulation of viral terms across platforms and regions.

Index Terms—sociolinguistics, social media, language identity, youth language, linguistic variation

I. INTRODUCTION

As the national language, Indonesian plays a vital role in shaping national identity, fostering unity, and serving as a means of cross-ethnic and cross-cultural communication. However, in the last two decades, the development of digital technology and the massive penetration of social media have given rise to new dynamics in the language practices of the younger generation. According to a 2024 survey by the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII), the number of internet users in Indonesia has reached 221.6 million people, or 79.5% of the total population (APJII, 2024, p. 12). The majority of active social media users are teenagers and young adults (aged 15–30), which indirectly makes social media the main arena for language transformation.

The urgency of this discussion lies in the fact that social media is not merely a space for communication, but also an arena for the construction of social identity. As previous studies indicate, social media texts are not neutral but are continuously reinterpreted and negotiated within online interactions, reflecting deeper social meanings (Hasyim & Arafah, 2023). The language used by the younger generation on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, WhatsApp, and X (Twitter) often displays new forms that are far from the standard norms of Indonesian. This phenomenon is in line with the views of Bucholtz and Hall (2005, pp. 586–590) that linguistic identity is relational and emergent, formed through interaction and characterized by the use of certain styles of language. The changes in language style that appear on social media signify not only linguistic creativity but also the process of forming individual and group identities.

From a contemporary sociolinguistic perspective, particularly the “third wave” approach to language variation studies, language change among the younger generation cannot be viewed solely as a deviation, but rather as a social practice laden with meaning (Eckert, 2012, pp. 87–93). However, what is concerning is when such linguistic innovations erode the understanding of proper and correct Indonesian, leading to a degradation of language norms in formal and academic settings. Androutsopoulos (2014, pp. 10–16) refers to this phenomenon as digital vernacularization, where non-standard speech dominates online communication and slowly displaces standard speech.

Many cases indicate the transformation of the language of the younger generation on social media. First, the use of acronyms and abbreviations in online conversations is becoming more widespread. Words such as *bucin* (*budak cinta* or slave of love), *mager* (*malas gerak* or lazy to move), *gercep* (*gerak cepat* or move fast), and *japri* (*jalur pribadi* or private channel) are examples of creative shortening that serve to speed up communication but ignore systematic language structures. When these terms are used excessively, the younger generation tends to be more accustomed to using acronyms than standard vocabulary (Putri et al., 2023, pp. 507–510).

Based on the above description, several issues have been identified, such as:

1. How does language transformation in social media affect the linguistic identity of Indonesia's younger generation?
2. To what extent do new linguistic forms (slang, acronyms, code-mixing, spelling games) contribute to shifts in Indonesian language norms?
3. What are the negative impacts of this phenomenon on the development of the Indonesian language in academic and formal settings?
4. How can digital and linguistic literacy strategies be developed to balance linguistic creativity with the preservation of standard norms?

These questions are important because they concern the sustainability of the Indonesian language as the national language, as well as the challenge of maintaining national cultural identity amid globalization.

This study is expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, this paper expands our understanding of how language transforms in the digital context and how linguistic identity is formed through the language practices of the younger generation. Practically, the results of this study can be used as a basis for designing more contextual language and digital literacy policies, such as integrating authentic examples from social media into Indonesian language learning in schools. Thus, the younger generation will not only be able to use language appropriately in context, but also uphold standard linguistic norms.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Basic Concepts of Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistics is the field of linguistics that studies the relationship between language and society. According to Holmes (2013, p. 2), sociolinguistics examines how language is used in various social contexts and how social factors such as age, gender, social class, and ethnicity influence language choice. Wardhaugh and Fuller (2015, p. 3) emphasize that language variation is not a deviation, but a natural manifestation of language use in a heterogeneous society. Thus, language transformation in social media can be understood as part of language variation influenced by social, cultural, and technological factors.

In Indonesia, Chaer and Agustina (2010, p. 5) refer to sociolinguistics as the science that discusses differences in language variation based on speakers, situations, and communication purposes. In the context of social media, this variation can be seen in the use of slang, acronyms, and mixed codes that dominate the conversations of the younger generation.

B. Language, Identity, and Social Interaction

In addition to being a means of communication, language is also a symbol of social identity. Bucholtz and Hall (2005, pp. 586–590) formulated five principles of linguistic identity analysis: (1) identity is emergent in interaction, (2) relational, (3) indexical, (4) contextualizable, and (5) participatory. With this framework, the language used by the younger generation on social media can be understood as a way for them to build their persona and assert their membership in a community with the same social status as the younger generation, which has language characteristics and variations that can identify them as the younger generation. Eckert (2012, pp. 93–97), through the theory of “third wave variation,” emphasizes that young people's language choices are not only phonological or lexical differences, but also stylistic strategies to display certain social identities, such as “cool,” “up to date,” or “ironic” identities.

C. Language Transformation in the Digital Age and Social Media

Social media has become a catalyst for language transformation. Androutsopoulos (2014, pp. 10–16) refers to this phenomenon as “mediatization,” defined as the process by which media becomes not only a means of disseminating messages but also a space for producing new forms of language. The language used on social media tends to be informal, creative, and expressive; however, it also carries the risk of marginalizing standard language norms. Moreover, studies show that social media has increasingly become a primary source of information for young people, reinforcing its role as both a communication tool and a driver of linguistic transformation (Arafah & Hasyim, 2023a).

In Indonesia, Putri et al. (2023, pp. 507–510) found that slang trends on social media contributed to the younger generation's decreased preference for standard Indonesian, particularly in semi-formal contexts.

Slang is the most dominant form of language variation on social media. According to Eble (2012, p. 15), young people use slang to build group solidarity and distinguish themselves from other groups. In the Indonesian context, terms such as *bucin*, *mager*, *gabut*, *halu*, and *gercep* symbolize the identity of the digital generation.

Code-mixing is also becoming increasingly prevalent. Poplack (1980, p. 585) states that code-mixing is a linguistic strategy in which speakers use two languages to reinforce a message. On social media, the younger generation often uses English code-mixing to appear modern and trendy (Kusuma, 2024, pp. 20–22).

D. Language Variation, Slang, and Code-Mixing Among the Younger Generation

Slang and colloquial language are the most dominant forms of language variation on social media. According to Eble (2012, p. 15), slang is used by young people to build group solidarity and mark differences with other groups. In the Indonesian context, terms such as *bucin*, *mager*, *gabut*, *halu*, and *gercep* serve as symbols of the digital generation's identity.

The phenomenon of code-mixing is also becoming increasingly prevalent. Poplack (1980, p. 585) states that code-mixing is a linguistic strategy that arises when speakers use two languages to reinforce a message. On social media, the younger generation often uses mixed English code to give a modern and trendy impression (Kusuma, 2024, pp. 20–22).

E. Mediatization, Vernacularization, and Digital Language Style

Androutsopoulos (2014, pp. 21–24) explains that social media encourages vernacularization, namely the increased use of non-standard varieties in digital communication. This can be seen in the shortening of words (*japri*, *mantul*, *cuzz*), orthographic variations (*gemoyyy*, *kangen bgt*), and the use of emojis as substitutes for words.

Crystal (2011, p. 152) in *Internet Linguistics* emphasizes that digital language is multimodal, combining text, images, emojis, and other symbols. This style of language forms a new “semiotics” that is unique to online communication.

F. The Phenomenon of Dysphemism, Politeness, and Language Ethics

In addition to positive innovations, social media has also led to an increase in the use of dysphemism or harsh words. Allan and Burridge (2006, p. 32) define dysphemism as a form of expression that is deliberately used to offend, belittle, or cause negative emotional effects. In social media interactions, dysphemism is used by the younger generation as a spontaneous expression, but it has the potential to form impolite language habits.

Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 61), through their politeness theory, emphasize the importance of maintaining the “face” of the interlocutor. When the younger generation becomes accustomed to using harsh language on social media, the norms of politeness in direct communication also have the potential to erode. Strengthening digital literacy has been identified as a crucial strategy to mitigate these problems, ensuring that online interactions remain ethical and culturally appropriate (Arafah & Hasyim, 2023b).

G. Recent Research Related to Social Media Language in Indonesia

Several recent studies in Indonesia reinforce the importance of this issue. The PROTASIS team (2024, pp. 114–119) found that the use of slang on TikTok creates closeness among peers, but also widens the language gap between the younger generation and their parents. Research by Yanti et al. (2023, p. 508) confirms that the massive use of slang makes students less skilled at using standard language in academic tasks. This indicates the need to strengthen students' self-regulated strategies in language learning, which play an important role in helping them adapt informal practices to academic writing requirements (Arnawa & Arafah, 2023). Kusuma (2024, pp. 18–25) states that the intensity of TikTok use correlates with changes in the speech style and social behavior of adolescents.

Thus, these studies demonstrate that language transformation on social media is not only a local phenomenon but also a national issue requiring serious attention in the context of preserving the Indonesian language.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Research Approach and Design

This study employs a qualitative, descriptive approach within a sociolinguistic framework. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018, p. 4), the qualitative approach focuses on understanding the meaning, process, and interpretation of social phenomena through data collection in a natural context. Mile et al. (2014, p. 31), on the other hand, emphasize that descriptive research aims to describe phenomena in detail to find patterns and meanings in the data.

In this study, the phenomenon is the transformation of language used by Indonesia's younger generation on social media and its impact on their linguistic identity. The research design combines the analysis of primary data obtained through direct observation and interviews with the analysis of secondary data from digital documents, previous studies, and social media archives.

B. Data Sources

Primary data was obtained through direct interaction with young people, particularly teenagers aged 13–24, in Makassar City who actively use social media, such as TikTok, Instagram, WhatsApp, and X.

The data consist of oral statements from interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) and written statements from WhatsApp chats, Instagram comments, TikTok posts, and tweets on X.

Secondary data was obtained from:

- (a) Academic literature (books, reputable international journal articles, and conference proceedings).
- (b) Previous research results related to slang, digital slang, language identity, and mediatization (e.g., Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Eckert, 2012; Androutsopoulos, 2014; Putri et al., 2023; Kusuma, 2024).
- (c) Social media content published openly.

C. Population and Data Sample

The research population comprises all forms of speech used by the younger generation in Indonesia on social media. Since this population is very broad, purposive sampling was used for the research. According to Palinkas et al. (2015, p. 534), purposive sampling is used when researchers select informants or data based on criteria relevant to the research objectives.

Sample selection criteria:

- Aged 13–24 years.
- Active users of at least two social media platforms.
- Use slang, colloquialisms, or mixed codes in daily communication.

Sample size:

- 50 primary data from interviews and direct observation.
- 100 secondary data from public social media posts or comments between December 2023 and June 2025.

D. Data Collection Methods

- Participant Observation: Conversations among adolescents in public spaces (e.g., schools, caf  s, and communities) and their social media activities were observed. These observations aimed to record the natural emergence of language forms (Spradley, 2016, p. 78).
- In-Depth Interviews: Twenty adolescent respondents were selected purposively for in-depth interviews. Questions included reasons for using slang, perceptions of Standard Indonesian, and views on linguistic identity.
- Focus Group Discussion (FGD): Group discussions were held to explore the language attitudes of the younger generation and how they negotiate identity through language on social media.
- Secondary Data Documentation: The researchers collected data in the form of screenshots of public posts on TikTok, Instagram, and X. They did so with due regard for research ethics, collecting only public data and avoiding the involvement of personal identities.

E. Data Analysis Techniques

The analysis was conducted using the interactive model developed by Mile et al. (2014, p. 33).

1. Data reduction: Grouping data based on categories (acronyms, mixed codes, spelling games, and dysphemisms).
2. Data presentation: Creating tables that show the distribution of language forms and their identity functions.
3. Conclusions and verification: Linking empirical findings with the theoretical frameworks of Bucholtz and Hall (2005), Eckert (2012), and Androutsopoulos (2014).

Additionally, the analysis employs a sociolinguistic discourse approach to examine how language choices index social identity, style, and position in interactions.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Language Transformation as a Practice of Style and Identity Among the Younger Generation

Overall, the findings indicate that young people use linguistic resources—acronyms/clippings, English–Indonesian code-mixing, orthographic/graphemic play, and multimodality (emojis, GIFs, stickers)—to construct a “cool, relaxed, funny, in-group” persona that reinforces peer solidarity. Within the sociolinguistic framework of identity, these patterns function as indexical cues (identity markers) that emerge and are negotiated in interaction (principles of emergence, relationality, indexicality), rather than being inherent characteristics of the speaker (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, pp. 586–590) (Mary Bucholtz).

The “third wave” approach to variation asserts that these linguistic forms are stylistic practices that carry social meaning (not merely structural variation), allowing young people to position themselves in the online social landscape—for example, “trendy,” “joking/ironic,” or “bestie solidarity” (Eckert, 2012, pp. 88–94, 97) (Stanford University, Annual Reviews).

The context of mediatization explains why vernacular varieties are increasingly dominant in the digital realm: the boundaries between “media language” and “community language” are blurring, media language is becoming more

colloquial/vernacular, and media fragments are being recirculated in conversation (Androutsopoulos, 2014, pp. 3–5, 21–24, 37–38) (Jannis Androutsopoulos, De Gruyter Brill).

The implications are ambivalent: on the one hand, it enriches digital repertoire and literacy; on the other hand, it spills over into semi-formal/academic contexts, blurring norms if not balanced by register awareness. The Internet/Digital Linguistics framework helps to read multimodality (text-emoji-image) and changes in online conventions (Crystal, 2011, pp. 1–5, 148–156; Barton & Lee, 2013, pp. 1–7, 44–51) (Taylor & Francis, Internet Archive, PagePlace).

B. Categories of Linguistic Forms and Their Functions in Relation to Identity

(a). Lexical–Morphological: Acronyms, Clippings, and Innovations

Data example A (TikTok, challenge caption):

“*Fix aku bucin parah* 🙄 ♀, *harus gercep nonton live-nya malem ini!*”

Analysis. *Bucin* (love slave) and *gercep* (move fast) are clipping-acronym forms typical of the digital realm. The economy of form enables speed and intimacy of style, while also indexing the in-group persona that “understands the code” of the community. In the third wave framework, this variable functions as a semiotic resource to indicate closeness/membership (Eckert, 2012, pp. 90–94) (Stanford University).

Analysis. The combination of English lexical borrowings (vibes, literally) with Indonesian intensifiers (*enak banget*) indexes a cosmopolitan-casual persona. In terms of identity, this is in line with the principle of indexicality: lexical choices evoke an “up-to-date” persona while marking a distance from formal standard varieties (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, pp. 586–590) (Mary Bucholtz).

(b). Graphemic–Orthographic: Letter Aesthetics, Capitalization, Elongation, Emoji

Example of data C (Instagram, comments): “*gemoyyyy bgt pls* 😭😭”

Analysis. Letter elongation (*gemoyyyy*), aesthetically pleasing lowercase letters, and stacked crying emojis indicate intense emotion and familiarity. From a mediatization/digital discourse perspective, this visualizes the prosody of writing and multimodal stance-taking (Crystal, 2011, pp. 148–156; Herring, 2013, pp. 3–8) (Taylor & Francis, homes.luddy.indiana.edu).

Data example D (X/Twitter): “I DON'T WANT TO DEBATE.”

Analysis. Total capitalization increases the “volume” and assertiveness of the stance. Stylistically, this is an emphasis strategy that forms a firm/ironic persona, often combined with sarcasm. At the footing level (Goffman), there is a shift in footing from casual to authoritative (Goffman, 1981, “Footing”, pp. 124–159) (eClass UOA, sil.org).

(c). Code-Mixing: Structural Patterns and Stylistic Motivations

Data Example E (WhatsApp, peer conversation):

“*Nanti aku submit tugas dulu, abis itu healing bentar di kafe.*”

Analysis. Code-mixing occurs intra-clausally (Poplack, 1980, pp. 581–590), combining English verbs (submit, healing) within an Indonesian syntactic frame. As a form of stylistic practice, this choice produces a modern-professional effect (Eckert, 2012, pp. 93–97), while also functioning as audience-tuned speech toward peers who are equally accustomed to academic or workplace terminology (Bell, 1984, pp. 145–150) (ResearchGate, Stanford University).

Data Example F (X/Twitter):

“*Lowkey pengen resign, tapi savings belum aman* □.”

Analysis. The pragmatic marker *lowkey* mitigates stance (signaling a desire not to appear excessive) and indexes a comical-honest persona typical of shitposting culture. This aligns with findings in CMC pragmatics regarding the marking of subtle stance through English particles embedded in Indonesian texts (Herring, 2013, pp. 12–18) (homes.luddy.indiana.edu).

(d). Dysphemism, Sarcasm, and the Risk of Norm Erosion

Data Example G (public TikTok comment):

“*Kontenmu toxic, mending unfollow aja ga sih?* 😏”

Analysis. The negative label (toxic) and the push toward exclusion illustrate a mild form of dysphemism as well as a call-out practice. From the perspective of politeness theory, this strategy aligns with bald-on-record acts that threaten face (Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp. 60–68). At the level of linguistic ethos, such practices—if they spread into non-digital domains—carry the potential to blunt politeness norms and weaken academic ethos. (Note: this finding is consistent with literature highlighting the rise of face-threatening acts in CMC) (eClass UOA).

C. Interactional Dimension: Stance, Footing, and Audience Design

(a). Stance and Footing

The stylistic shifts observable in Data C – D demonstrate a change in stance (from admiration → assertiveness), which simultaneously alters the speaker’s footing or participation framework in relation to interlocutors/audiences (Goffman,

1981, Footing, pp. 124–159). Footing is indexed through the choice of graphemic resources (capitalization), intensifiers (elongation), and emojis, which collectively construct a situational persona (eClass UOA).

(b). *Audience Design and Stylistic Tuning*

The principle of audience design also applies: speakers adjust their style according to the type of audience (addressee, auditor, overhearer) and the affordances of the platform. For instance, WhatsApp (close-knit network) → intimate/familiar style (acronyms, inside jokes); Instagram (public/aesthetic display) → image-curated style (lowercase aesthetic, bestie); X/Twitter → concise-sharp style (light sarcasm, capitalization). Bell (1984, pp. 145–160) demonstrates that style shifts are responses to audiences rather than fixed attributes of the speaker (ResearchGate, Cambridge University Press & Assessment).

Data Example H (cross-platform comparison, same topic “tired of studying”):

WhatsApp: “capek bgt sumpah 😩👉”

Instagram caption: “semester ini vibes-nya roller coaster tapi we made it 🌟”

X/Twitter: “MAHASISWA BUTUH TIDUR PANJANG.”

Analysis. The three styles represent audience-tuned adjustments: (i) intimate-private → short emotive expression; (ii) semi-public aesthetic → curated vibes; (iii) public opinion → emphatic maximization. This corresponds to the framework of style as audience-responsive (Bell, 1984, pp. 145–150) and studies of meaningful variation (Eckert, 2012, pp. 88–94) (ResearchGate, Stanford University).

D. *Digital Practices and Mediatization: Why is the Vernacular Strengthened?*

The stylistic transformations in §§2–3 are closely tied to the ecology of platforms: features such as hashtags, duets, and remixes (TikTok) accelerate the diffusion of forms (acronyms, catchphrases), while Stories/Reels sustain ephemeral-aesthetic styles. Theoretically, this exemplifies mediatization: media are not neutral, but design the arenas of linguistic production such that language becomes more conversational and vernacular; media fragments are then recontextualized by users (Androutsopoulos, 2014, pp. 3–5, 21–24, 37–38) (Jannis Androutsopoulos).

The framework of Internet Linguistics highlights the importance of multimodality (text–emoji–image–sound) and online conventions that shape a kind of “written prosody” (Crystal, 2011, pp. 148–156). Meanwhile, Language Online (Barton & Lee, 2013) argues that online language practices require new research approaches—such as the analysis of user practices and small stories—to uncover the social meanings behind stylistic choices (Barton & Lee, 2013, pp. 1–7, 44–51) (Taylor & Francis, PagePlace).

E. *Detailed Category Analysis with Supporting Evidence*

(a). *Acronyms/Clippings and the Economy of Interaction*

Data I (TikTok comment): “TIL dia ternyata anak rantau 😬”

Data J (Instagram DM): “ok OTW”

Data K (WhatsApp): “BT bgt kelas tambah.”

Interpretation. Universal acronyms (TIL, OTW, LOL) are blended with local acronyms (BT = bad mood), illustrating the hybridization of global–local digital repertoires. Acronyms facilitate rapid rhythm and familiarity that index in-group solidarity (Eckert, 2012, pp. 90–94). In the long run, however, over-generalization into semi-formal contexts renders sentences less informative and less standard, creating ambiguity for out-group readers (Stanford University).

Identity relevance. The choice of particular acronyms signals community affiliations (e.g., fandom, gaming, studygram). This resonates with the principle of relationality (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, pp. 586–590): identity is constructed through processes of similarity and differentiation (Mary Bucholtz).

(b). *Code-Mixing and Structural Types*

Referring to Poplack (1980), code-mixing can be classified into intersentential, intrasentential, and tag switching (Poplack, 1980, pp. 581–618) (ResearchGate).

Intersentential

Data L (Instagram caption): “Akhirnya skripsi selesai. I did it!”

Function. Marks a peak of affect and cosmopolitan self-branding.

Intrasentential

Data M (X/Twitter): “Besok mau submit paper; mohon feedback ya.”

Function. Facilitates terminological efficiency in academia and indexes a competent/professional persona.

Tag switching

Data N (WhatsApp): “Kamu jadi datang, right?”

Function. Softens invitations and mitigates modality.

From the perspective of stylistic practice, these patterns convey interactional intentions (requesting help, strengthening self-image, maintaining familiarity) in concise form. Audience design explains who is imagined as the audience and why the particular code choice is made (Bell, 1984, pp. 145–160) (ResearchGate).

(c). *Orthographic/Graphemic Play and Affect*

Data O (Instagram Story): “capek bangett tapi happy 🍀”

Data P (X/Twitter): “BESOK SIDANG. DOAKAN.”

Analysis. Elongation marks affective intensity, while capitalization signals urgency or exhortation. In CMC pragmatics, such markings function as substitutes for offline intonation and gestures (Herring, 2013, pp. 6–12). From an identity perspective, these practices construct an expressive persona (Crystal, 2011, pp. 148–156) (homes.luddy.indiana.edu; Taylor & Francis).

(d). *Multimodality (Emoji, GIFs, Stickers)*

Data Q (WhatsApp): “Mantap!” + 🍀🔥

Data R (Instagram comment): “Aduh lucu 🤔🤔🤔”

Analysis. Emojis function as affect intensifiers and stance markers. The repetition of the 🤔 emoji reinforces expressions of being moved or entertained. From a digital-linguistic perspective, emojis are part of a new semiotic repertoire in communication that enriches pragmatic nuance (Crystal, 2011, pp. 148–156) (Taylor & Francis).

(e). *Dysphemism and Politeness Norms*

Data S (X/Twitter): “Argumenmu lugu banget, baca dulu dong.”

Analysis. The use of a derogatory label constitutes a mild dysphemism that threatens the positive face. According to Politeness Theory, this escalates the risk of conflict and spirals of aggression (Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp. 60–68). Within mediatization, platform logics (engagement-driven algorithms) often “reward” highly emotional content, thereby amplifying sharp expressions (Androutsopoulos, 2014, pp. 21–24) (Jannis Androutsopoulos).

F. *Impact on Language Identity and Standard Norms*

(a). *Positive Contributions*

Expanded repertoires. Young people acquire digital registers relevant to the creator economy (e.g., captioning, community talk).

Multimodal literacy. The ability to orchestrate text–emoji–visuals (semiotic assemblages) is crucial for contemporary communication (Barton & Lee, 2013, pp. 44–51) (PagePlace).

Identity discourses. Youths manage personae through stylistic and stance-taking strategies (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, pp. 586–590; Eckert, 2012, pp. 88–94) (Mary Bucholtz; Stanford University).

(b). *Challenges*

Spillover of vernacular styles into formal/semi-formal contexts, reducing adherence to norms (orthography, diction) and lowering information density (due to excessive acronymization).

Intergenerational divides. In-group codes (slang, inside jokes) may alienate out-group readers.

Reinforcement of face-threatening practices through dysphemism and sarcasm, with the potential to shape offline communication patterns (Herring, 2013, pp. 12–18; Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp. 60–68) (homes.luddy.indiana.edu).

From a global sociolinguistic perspective, these challenges arise under conditions of mobility and scalar shifts (local–global). Thus, the competence required is not merely “standard vs. non-standard,” but rather the management of repertoires across scales (Blommaert, 2010, pp. 1–5) (Cambridge University Press & Assessment; Cambridge Assets).

G. *Integration of Findings: The “Register-Switch Pedagogy” Model*

Based on the analysis, we propose a two-track pedagogical model:

- (a) Path of Digital Creativity Appreciation. Examine students’ digital practices descriptively (rather than pathologically): identify categories of forms (acronyms, code-mixing, graphemic play, emojis) and their identity functions (solidarity, humor, stance). Ground this in the theory of stylistic practice (Eckert, 2012, pp. 90–97) and indexicality (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, pp. 586–590) (Stanford University; Mary Bucholtz).
- (b) Path of Register Discipline. Train register-shifting (register-switching) between digital vernacular ↔ formal standard through:
 - Contrastive rewriting (transforming colloquial captions into standard paragraphs).
 - Audience re-design (rewriting messages for different audiences) based on audience design (Bell, 1984, pp. 145–160) (ResearchGate).
 - This model is not an attempt to restrict creativity, but rather to sharpen contextual awareness so that expressive digital identities can coexist with competence in standard language.

H. *Theoretical Implications*

The findings reinforce three theses:

- Identity as emergent and relational—as shown in how the same form (e.g., lowkey) indexes different personae depending on context/audience (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, pp. 586–590) (Mary Bucholtz).

- Variation as social semiotics—acronyms/code-mixing/graphemic practices are not deviations, but meaningful resources for stance-taking and positioning (Eckert, 2012, pp. 88–94) (Stanford University).
- Mediatization—platform ecologies facilitate vernacularization and the recontextualization of media fragments in interaction (Androutsopoulos, 2014, pp. 3–5, 21–24, 37–38) (Jannis Androutsopoulos).

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The ongoing linguistic transformation on social media demonstrates that Indonesian youth use language not merely as a tool of communication, but also as a medium for identity construction and stylistic practice. Linguistic innovations such as acronyms (*bucin*, *mager*, *japri*), code-mixing with English (vibes, literally, healing), orthographic play (*gemoyyy*, capitalization, and letter elongation), as well as multimodality (emojis, GIFs, stickers), indicate that social media has become a dynamic space of linguistic creativity. This is consistent with findings on Generation Z's digital culture literacy, which show that young netizens actively engage as readers, producers, and publishers of digital texts. This aligns with evidence that interactive and collaborative practices play a key role in fostering linguistic competence (Kaharuddin et al., 2025).

From a sociolinguistic perspective, these findings align with the concept of identity as an interactional construct (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, pp. 586–590), the third wave of variation theory emphasizing the social meaning of language (Eckert, 2012, pp. 93–97), and the framework of mediatization, which posits that media act as agents of linguistic change (Androutsopoulos, 2014, pp. 21–24). Digital language enriches the linguistic repertoires of young people, sharpens multimodal literacy, and creates opportunities for creative expression.

However, another impact that cannot be ignored is the potential degradation of standard norms and the shift in linguistic ethics, particularly when digital vernacular styles spill over into formal domains such as academia, education, and official communication. The frequent presence of dysphemism and sarcasm in online spaces also risks eroding the cultural value of politeness in language. Thus, linguistic transformation on social media is ambivalent: it presents both opportunities and challenges for maintaining Indonesian as a national identity. Similar to how cultural stereotypes are reproduced in foreign language textbooks (Taqdir, 2025), the linguistic practices of Indonesian youth on digital platforms also reflect broader cultural ideologies that shape identity and social values.

To address these dynamics, several recommendations can be proposed:

1. **Strengthening Language and Digital Literacy.** Programs are needed that emphasize register awareness, i.e., the ability to distinguish and adjust language varieties according to communicative contexts. Youth should be trained to switch between digital colloquial styles and standard Indonesian in academic and formal settings.
2. **Integrating Digital Language into Education.** Teachers and lecturers can use authentic examples from social media as language-learning materials. For instance, exercises can involve rewriting colloquial captions into standard paragraphs or analyzing stylistic differences across platforms. This approach aligns with research highlighting the value of combining explicit and implicit methods in grammar learning, which shows that students benefit from both rule-based and contextualized instruction (Kuswanti et al., 2023). Furthermore, studies on the integration of artificial intelligence in language education indicate that digital tools can provide effective feedback and enhance students' literacy (Kaharuddin et al., 2024).
3. **Further Research.** It is essential to build cross-platform corpora that monitor the development of viral expressions and youth linguistic styles over a longer time span. Such research is crucial for identifying digital linguistic trends that influence the evolution of Indonesian.
4. **Public Policy.** The government, language institutions, and academic communities can collaborate to formulate digital politeness guidelines that emphasize communicative ethics, appropriate language variety selection, and the preservation of Indonesian identity in online spaces.

Through these strategies, the linguistic transformation of social media can be directed toward a positive force: fostering youth creativity while simultaneously safeguarding the continuity of Indonesian as the language of unity and national identity.

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Exploring EFL Learners' Use of AI Outside the Classroom

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Abstract—This study investigates the use of ChatGPT by students as foreign language (EFL) learners in doing English homework, especially regarding acceptance and use. Based on the technology acceptance model (TAM) and self-directed learning (SDL) theory, the proposed model investigates the impact of perceived usefulness (PU), perceived ease of use (PEOU), and learner autonomy on behavioral intention and actual use. A mixed-methods design was employed, using a questionnaire based on previously validated TAM-based instruments. The tool included three sections: a) a section for demographic information, b) 21 total Likert-scale items organized into three sub-sections measuring PU, PEOU, and AIU (attitude and intention to use), and c) four open-ended qualitative questions. Questionnaires were distributed to 157 EFL learners. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlations, and regression analyses were applied to the quantitative data, while thematic analysis was conducted on the qualitative responses. Results identified ChatGPT as the most frequently used for grammar correction, vocabulary enhancement, and content generation, with PU significantly increasing the positive effect on AIU. Likewise, PEOU was high, reflecting positive views of ChatGPT's usability. The study presents both theoretical and practical implications for integrating AI into language learning and highlighting the key role of critical evaluation skills in this context.

Index Terms—ChatGPT, EFL learners, technology acceptance model, self-directed learning

I. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of large language models and generative AI tools such as ChatGPT has significantly influenced educational environments, especially English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. ChatGPT is widely used as a writing companion to build vocabulary and facilitate practice activities (Gutai et al., 2024). EFL learners use AI systems beyond the classroom, raising concerns about language development, learner independence, and pedagogy. While early research reveals both enthusiasm and apprehension, a comprehensive exploration of EFL learners' application of such tools in academic activities is still needed.

This study investigates ChatGPT as a homework assistant for EFL learners. Grounded in the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), it examines perceived ease of use (PEOU), perceived usefulness (PU), behavioral intentions, and self-efficacy in using ChatGPT for homework tasks. The study contributes to pedagogical and ethical debates on AI in language education.

Theoretically, the research extends TAM to informal, unsupervised AI use among EFL learners outside the classroom. Unlike prior studies (Lubis, 2024; Othman, 2024) focusing on academic writing instruction, this study emphasizes ChatGPT as a homework tool. It highlights learners' attitudes, motivations, and competence in predicting AI engagement in self-regulated settings (Gutai et al., 2024; Khampusaen, 2025). Thus, the study adds to the literature on agency, technological dependence, and transformations in literacy practice in the age of AI (Octavio et al., 2024).

In practice, findings help educators, policymakers, and institutions implement AI in EFL settings. Learners appreciated ChatGPT's fast feedback, explanations, and 24/7 availability, which aligned with Barabad and Anwar's (2024) findings. This can then inform teaching methods that counterbalance the benefits and challenges. However, ChatGPT also poses challenges: overly abstract language or inappropriate output in context (Lubis, 2024; Othman, 2024). Balancing AI-enabled independence with human oversight.

Furthermore, the study supports the ethical use of AI by promoting digital literacy and critical thinking. Gutai et al. (2024) and Khampusaen (2022) argue that students rely on AI for grammar checks, paraphrasing, and writing assistance; thus, teachers must learn to analyze whether AI outputs are accurate and to model ethical use. Such competencies extend beyond language acquisition into academic integrity.

Qualitative insights underscore the evolving dynamics among teachers, students, and tools. AI is no longer peripheral but central to learners' routines (Octavio et al., 2024). Recognizing this shift is vital to designing curricula, homework guidelines, and teacher training that are responsive to learner realities.

Saudi Arabia provides a unique backdrop given its expanding EFL sector. This study captures how generative AI reshapes student practices in such contexts, echoing Barabad and Anwar (2024) and Gutai et al. (2024), who highlighted evolving feedback mechanisms. Findings show a transformation in EFL guidance through ChatGPT, with implications that are relevant globally.

Focusing on learner experience, this study urges a reassessment of pedagogic standards in a technologically disruptive

context. It emphasizes both opportunities and challenges of integrating AI into language education, positioning ChatGPT as a valuable yet carefully managed support in contemporary EFL learning.

A. Problem Statement

Despite the increasing integration of AI in education, particularly language learning, the practical, learner-driven uses of ChatGPT remain underexplored in empirical research. Most existing literature focuses on the in-class applications, writing enhancements, or theoretical affordances of AI (Lubis, 2024; Othman, 2024). However, learners' independent use of ChatGPT for English homework outside the classroom remains a gray area. Research by Khampusaen (2025) and Octavio et al. (2024) underscores how student engagement with ChatGPT differs from teacher-led interaction, suggesting that informal and personal use contexts deserve special attention.

Furthermore, concerns have been raised that students may become overly dependent on AI tools, thereby compromising their critical thinking and authentic writing skills (Lubis, 2024). However, learners continue to report that ChatGPT is a helpful tool for vocabulary acquisition, grammar correction, and writing ideas (Barabad & Anwar, 2024). This contradiction between perceived support and potential overreliance forms the core problem of this study: How do EFL learners strategically or habitually use ChatGPT for homework, and what are the implications for their academic autonomy and language development?

B. Scope of the Study

This study is delimited to the investigation of university-level EFL learners' experience with ChatGPT in out-of-class settings. It focuses on how learners interact with the tool to complete homework assignments, particularly in grammar, vocabulary, writing, and reading. The scope includes both qualitative and quantitative components: survey data measuring variables from the TAM framework and open-ended responses exploring learners' reflections on the tool's utility and limitations.

Rather than evaluating learning outcomes longitudinally, the study focuses on students' perceptions, attitudes, and usage patterns at a given point in time. This strategy captures a snapshot of current trends in AI-assisted self-directed learning, especially in a post-pandemic context where blended and remote education formats have increased learners' technological agency.

C. Research Objectives

This study aims to investigate the frequency and primary purposes for which EFL learners use ChatGPT in completing English homework, examine their perceptions of its usefulness and ease of use for grammar, vocabulary, and writing support, assess their attitudes toward continued independent use of the tool outside formal instruction, and explore their personal experiences, including perceived benefits and challenges.

D. Research Questions

The study addresses the following questions: How often do learners use ChatGPT to support homework tasks, and for what specific purposes (e.g., grammar, vocabulary, idea generation)? How do they perceive its usefulness and ease of use in completing assignments? What attitudes do they hold toward continued independent use beyond classwork? Finally, what benefits or challenges do learners report from their autonomous use of ChatGPT?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Introduction to Generative AI in Applied Linguistics

The integration of generative AI tools, such as ChatGPT, has significantly reshaped applied linguistics, especially in EFL contexts. Unlike earlier forms of computer-assisted language learning (CALL), which were static and drill-based, ChatGPT represents a shift toward interactive, generative, and learner-responsive technologies (Xiao & Zhi, 2023). As a large language model producing coherent, contextually relevant text, ChatGPT offers a conversational interface that simulates peer-to-peer engagement. This enables learners to engage in real-time written interactions that resemble human dialogue, supporting naturalistic language production and experimentation.

A key pedagogical change is the movement away from teacher authority toward learner autonomy. Yang and Li (2024) described how learners can use ChatGPT as a conversational partner to gain clarification, generate examples, and explore syntactic structures without direct teacher input. Such dynamics encourage a student-centered model of language use, where students have greater agency.

Duong et al. (2023) found that generative AI fosters lexical diversity and syntactic progression. Students are exposed to a broader vocabulary, context-appropriate constructs, and idioms through interactions with AI. These tools allow for recursive writing and self-monitoring of output. One of the things ChatGPT enables learners to do is rephrase, edit, and otherwise fine-tune their output.

B. ChatGPT's Linguistic Potential in Enhancing Writing Proficiency

ChatGPT has recently been identified as a valuable resource for EFL learners' writing. A recent study highlighted its versatility as a tool for vocabulary practice, syntax learning, and international written fluency (Han et al., 2023). Unlike static grammar checkers, ChatGPT can adapt its feedback to the user's context, allowing learners to reformulate a sentence

directly in response to it. It ensures they are grammatically correct and elevates their language use, since it is interactive.

With students using ChatGPT on a larger scale, there has been a more careful selection of lexical items and better genre awareness. Furthermore, ChatGPT-assisted academic writing improved EFL learners' language use compared to traditional methods, as they wrote more academically and appropriately, with more explicit topic elaboration and better word choice (Baskara & Mukarto, 2023). This is particularly important in non-classroom settings, where learners may lack direct instructor feedback but still need to produce high-quality assignments. ChatGPT fills this void by providing a round-the-clock assistant that reinforces the writing process with customized conversation.

The platform's capabilities to improve fluency and structural cohesion were also noted in studies on collaborative self-regulated learning. One study found that students believe ChatGPT may help improve clarity, structure, and transitions between ideas (Vo & Nguyen, 2024). Some students treat ChatGPT as a co-author, enlisting it to help write introductions, flesh out ideas, and polish conclusions—thus enhancing their confidence and willingness to write independently.

C. Learner Interaction Patterns With ChatGPT Outside the Classroom

The use of ChatGPT for language self-study is a matter of acceptance and trust for the user. Perceived usefulness and ease of use are key drivers for its adoption. Based on the findings of Vo and Nguyen (2024), when learners believe that ChatGPT can enhance their linguistic skills through a user-friendly interface, they are more likely to interact with it. This result supports broader research indicating that acceptance of educational technologies is highly contingent on the expectation that their use will help individuals achieve their goals. Second, the second big reason for this trend is trust: trust in ChatGPT to make the right suggestions about the words to use, the correctness of grammar, and appropriate syntax. Gutai et al. (2024) even found that when the AI explains its reasoning or provides illustrative examples to support its corrections, learners are more likely to trust the AI's response. Repetitive, consistent, positive interactions with a tool that acts and walks like a peer or tutor strengthen this trust. Casual users think of AI more as a one-time approach to learning; users who feel empowered by AI will use it more frequently every day (Çobanogullari, 2024). It is concluded that this tool cannot be very effective for language learning due to the subjective nature of trust and the learners' long-term perceptions of its benefits.

D. Challenges and Risks in ChatGPT Mediated Linguistic Practice

While the applied linguistics literature reveals growing interest in ChatGPT, its use remains restricted, especially regarding autonomous LD. The biggest worry is that students will become dependent on structures that AI creates and lose the agency to create language on their own, both critically and creatively. According to Woo et al. (2023), excessive exposure to artificial intelligence can lead to a form of linguistic debilitation, in which students adopt clichéd or formulaic structures thoughtlessly, losing the capacity to express themselves in an authentic voice. Thus, overuse suggests the loss of creativity and the ability to expressiveness in L2 writing.

Another serious issue is that ChatGPT's linguistic output sometimes contains errors. While the tool usually generates fluent text, it can sometimes introduce lexical vagueness, syntactic anomalies, or pragmatic errors, especially in infrequently taught languages and in complex writing genres (Han et al., 2023). If learners fail to detect such inaccuracies, these inaccuracies can not only propagate a fossil error but also lead to misconceptions. Subsequently, ChatGPT also generated L1 interference and culturally loaded expressions, but this occurred primarily when the user prompts lacked clear context.

On an academic level, it has undoubtedly sparked debate over whether edits written by AI programs should be considered real help for schoolwork. However, the distinction between genuine revision support and plagiarism blurs when ChatGPT is used as a self-editing tool, potentially leading to diminished cognitive effort and a lack of genuine self-expression (Fütterer et al., 2023). Pedagogically, these concerns highlight the need for instructors to guide students in using AI tools responsibly and critically. Ultimately, although ChatGPT offers valuable linguistic support, the risks it poses to autonomy, originality, and accuracy necessitate an informed, reflective, and ethically grounded approach.

E. Future Directions in AI-Mediated Linguistic Research and Practice

As ChatGPT and similar generative tools become widespread in applied linguistics, significant gaps remain in the empirical understanding of their outside-of-class impact on language development. Current literature primarily focuses on classroom-based use and general user attitudes (Xiao & Zhi, 2023), with limited attention to how EFL learners utilize ChatGPT for independent lexical or syntactic practice. There is a need for robust studies that explore AI-mediated interaction through corpus-based and discourse analysis methods. Such studies could examine how AI influences collocational range, code-switching behavior, or pragmatic adaptation in the learner's language over time.

Future work should also move beyond purely textual interactions. According to Katinskaia (2025), multimodal AI tools that combine text, audio, and visual aids may enhance students' phonological awareness, prosody, and discourse cohesion. Future directions include developing linguistically grounded evaluation rubrics to assess AI responses, as existing rubrics fail to capture subtleties such as vocabulary selection, adherence to genre, and syntactic innovation. Gamper and Knapp (2002) highlight the importance of autonomy and genuine production in AI scaffolding.

Advancements may further models of AI-mediated learning informed by sociolinguistics, corpus linguistics, and psycholinguistics, investigating cultural and cognitive aspects of adaptation. Given ChatGPT's rise, the field must shift toward systematic, theory-driven, linguistically rich evaluations.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The current research employed two well-established theories, the TAM and self-directed learning (SDL), to examine EFL learners' informal use of ChatGPT. These frameworks enabled us to examine not only learners' acceptance and use of AI tools, but also linguistic independence in self-managing language development.

TAM, proposed by Davis (1989), asserts that acceptance of a specific technology depends primarily on two factors: PU and PEOU. PU is the extent to which a person believes the system will help in doing their task, whereas PEOU is the extent to which a person believes using the system will not require effort. In this study, these constructs are closely related to how EFL students perceive ChatGPT as applicable to their English homework assignments (and other tasks, such as grammar correction, vocabulary, and writing) and as easy to use. Results showed that PU was a significant predictor of learners' AIU, and that learners generally rated ChatGPT's ease of use as high. Numerous recent studies (e.g., Dahri et al., 2024; Liu & Ma, 2024) have successfully applied TAM to examine learners' behavioral intentions toward ChatGPT in language-learning environments, and the current findings further reinforce TAM's validity in this context.

Complementing TAM, SDL (Knowles, 1975) emphasizes the learner's role in initiating, managing, and evaluating their learning without direct supervision. SDL is particularly relevant to this study because learners were using ChatGPT autonomously for their homework, without teacher mediation. This preference was reflected in both the survey and qualitative responses, where students shared how they used ChatGPT to troubleshoot grammar, clarify vocabulary, or generate writing ideas—on their own terms and at their own pace. The SDL framework enables us to interpret learners' behaviors as acts of self-regulation, where they identify linguistic challenges, seek help (through prompts), and evaluate ChatGPT's output to enhance their language performance. The use of ChatGPT for independent learning tasks reflects an evolving model of AI-supported learner autonomy, in which the learner acts as both initiator and evaluator of language input and output.

In combination, TAM and SDL provide a robust foundation for analyzing how EFL learners interact with ChatGPT, not just as a tool but also as a linguistic resource in their self-directed language-learning journey. The patterns of high PU, PEOU, and autonomous usage evident in this analysis suggest the relevance of these frameworks, which strongly validate their application in examining modern learner engagement with AI technologies.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a mixed-methods design to examine how EFL learners use ChatGPT for English homework. Combining quantitative and qualitative approaches allowed both statistical analysis and deeper insights through triangulation.

A. Participants and Sampling

The sample consisted of 157 undergraduate students in English Literature or Linguistics from two universities in non-English-speaking contexts. Purposive sampling was applied, focusing on learners who had previously used ChatGPT for vocabulary support, grammar checking, paraphrasing, and writing practice. The size was sufficient for both statistical testing and thematic exploration (Bryman, 2016). Ethical clearance was obtained, and participants gave informed consent.

B. Research Instrument

Data was gathered through a structured questionnaire divided into two parts. The first part contained 21 Likert-scale items adapted from technology adoption models and studies on AI in language learning. These measured frequency of use, perceived usefulness, ease of use, trust, and impact on linguistic development. The second included four open-ended questions that invited reflection on ChatGPT's role in grammar editing, vocabulary selection, sentence restructuring, and writing support.

C. Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaire was distributed via Google Forms. Responses were anonymous, ensuring unbiased feedback. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS v26, applying descriptive statistics and inferential tests such as t-tests and ANOVA (Field, 2024). Reliability was checked with Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha \geq 0.7$). Qualitative data were coded thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step method to identify patterns, including autonomy, trust, lexical benefits, and grammar awareness.

D. Validity and Limitations

Trustworthiness was enhanced through triangulation, peer debriefing, member checking, and pilot testing with ten learners. The study's main limitations were reliance on self-reports and a non-random sample, which may restrict generalizability. A more integrated or eloquent picture of EFL learners' out-of-class use of ChatGPT in Homework for English is obtained through a mixed-methods research design, including a questionnaire used in the present study. This methodology sought to achieve breadth and depth of understanding and confirmation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), with quantitative trends triangulated with qualitative findings.

V. DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter presents the analysis of data collected to address the research objectives and answer questions. It includes descriptive statistics, reliability testing, and both quantitative and qualitative analyses. The findings offer insights into learners' perceptions, usage patterns, and behavioral intentions regarding ChatGPT in English language learning contexts.

A. Quantitative Analysis

(a). Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics provide a general overview of the demographic characteristics and usage patterns of the 157 EFL learners who participated in the study. The descriptive spread is illustrated in Table 1. The sample consisted of 73.2% male and 26.8% female students, with the majority (59.2%) falling within the 20–29 age group. 73.9% of participants reported advanced English proficiency. The vast majority (98.7%) reported using ChatGPT.

TABLE 1
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	115	73.2
	Female	42	26.8
Age Group	Under 20	59	37.6
	20–29	93	59.2
	30–39	5	3.2
English Proficiency	Intermediate	41	26.1
	Advanced	116	73.9
Access to ChatGPT	Yes	155	98.7
	No	2	1.3

(b). Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's alpha was computed to assess the questionnaire items' internal consistency reliability. An overall reliability score ($\alpha = 0.776$ across 21 items as shown in Table 2) indicates an acceptable-to-good level of reliability.

TABLE 2
RELIABILITY STATISTICS
Cronbach's Alpha: **0.776**
Number of Items: **21**

(c). Objective 1: Frequency and Purposes of ChatGPT Use

Research Objective 1 (RO1) aimed to investigate how frequently EFL learners use ChatGPT and for what specific English homework-related purposes. This objective also relates to Research Questions 1 and 2.

Frequency of ChatGPT Use

Table 3 summarizes the overall frequency of ChatGPT use during English homework tasks. Most respondents reported **frequent use**; only a small fraction reported using it "sometimes," "rarely," or "never".

TABLE 3
FREQUENCY OF CHATGPT USE (N = 157)

Frequency	Count (N)	Percent
Never	1	0.6%
Rarely	2	1.3%
Sometimes	9	5.7%
Often	87	55.4%
Always	58	36.9%

These results demonstrate a **high level of engagement** among EFL learners with ChatGPT for homework support.

Purposes of ChatGPT Use

Table 4 displays the number and percentage of participants who reported using ChatGPT for various English-related tasks. The results show that ChatGPT is used **multifunctionally** across a range of learning needs.

TABLE 4
PURPOSES FOR USING CHATGPT IN ENGLISH HOMEWORK (N = 157)

Task	Frequency	Percentage
Grammar correction	157	100%
Vocabulary help	151	96.2%
Generating ideas for writing	148	94.3%
Sentence rephrasing	147	93.6%
Translation	135	85.9%
Reading explanations	125	79.6%

These findings indicate that **grammar correction** is the most common use, followed closely by **vocabulary enhancement**, **idea generation**, and **sentence rephrasing**. These findings indicate widespread and multifaceted use of ChatGPT across a range of linguistic functions. This usage pattern highlights the perceived utility of ChatGPT in supporting diverse aspects of English language homework among learners.

Figure 1 illustrates the widespread and multifaceted adoption of ChatGPT, with most students utilizing the tool for more than one task. This visual reinforces the descriptive findings and supports the **first objective**, confirming that students used ChatGPT **frequently and in diverse ways** to support various aspects of English language learning outside the classroom.

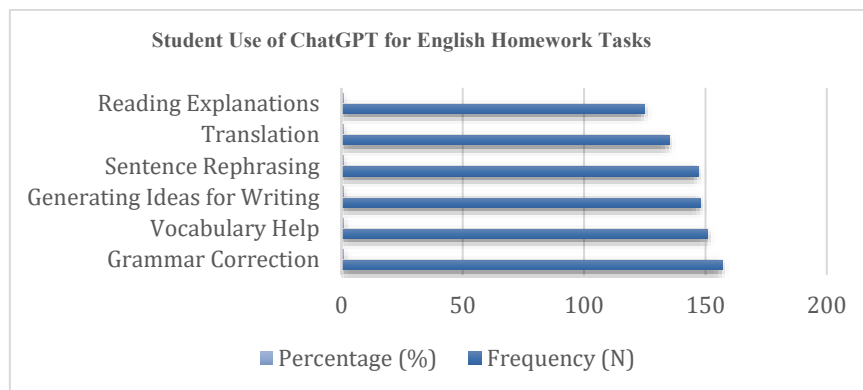


Figure 1. Student Use of ChatGPT for English Homework Tasks

(d). *Objective 2: Learners' Perceptions of ChatGPT's Usefulness and Ease of Use*

Descriptive and Correlational Analysis

To assess **PU** and **PEOU** in relation to behavioral responses, such as **usage frequency** and **intention to use ChatGPT**, descriptive statistics, and correlation and regression analyses were conducted. As depicted in Table 5, PU has a mean of 4.33, PEOU is slightly higher at 4.40, and AIU has a mean of 4.42, all on a 5-point Likert scale. The low standard deviation indicates consistent positive perceptions among participants of ChatGPT's utility, ease, and desirability in supporting their English learning tasks.

TABLE 5
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF VARIABLES

Variable	Mean	SD
PU	4.33	0.31
PEOU	4.41	0.34
AIU	4.43	0.35

Correlation Between Perceived Usefulness and Intention to Use (H2b)

A **Pearson correlation** test revealed a statistically significant positive correlation between PU and AIU. This answers the second RQ, demonstrating that perceptions of usefulness are positively associated with behavioral intentions. The correlation results are shown in Table 6.

TABLE 6
PEARSON CORRELATION BETWEEN PU AND AIU

Variable	1	2
1. PU	—	0.271**, p < 0.001
2. AIU	.271**, p < 0.001	—

Correlation Between Perceived Usefulness and Frequency of Use (H2a)

A **Spearman's rho** correlation between PU and actual frequency of use showed a **weak and nonsignificant** correlation, shown in Table 7. This suggests that although many learners perceived ChatGPT as applicable, this perception did not

significantly predict how frequently they used it.

TABLE 7
SPEARMAN'S RHO CORRELATION BETWEEN FREQUENCY OF USE AND PERCEIVED USEFULNESS

Variable	1	2
1. Frequency	—	0.105
2. PU	0.105	—

Regression Analysis

To further explore the predictive value of **PU** and **PEOU** on **AIU**, a **multiple linear regression** was conducted with **PU** and **PEOU** as independent variables and **AIU** as the dependent variable.

TABLE 8A
MODEL SUMMARY FOR MULTIPLE LINEAR REGRESSION PREDICTING AIU FROM PU AND PEOU

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	SE of the Estimate
1	0.281	0.079	0.067	0.34208

TABLE 8B
ANOVA FOR MULTIPLE LINEAR REGRESSION PREDICTING AIU FROM PU AND PEOU

Model	SS	Df	MS	F	P
Regression	1.550	2	0.775	6.624	0.002
Residual	18.021	154	0.117		
Total	19.571	156			

TABLE 8C
COEFFICIENTS FOR MULTIPLE LINEAR REGRESSION PREDICTING AIU FROM PU AND PEOU

Predictor	B	SE B	B	T	P
Constant	2.784	0.487	—	5.711	< 0.001
PU	0.299	0.091	0.258	3.294	0.001
PEOU	0.079	0.082	.076	0.969	0.334

Tables 8a, b, and c show that **R² = 0.079**, indicating that approximately **7.9%** of the variance in students' intention to continue using ChatGPT is explained by the model. The overall model was statistically significant, suggesting that the predictors collectively have a meaningful impact on **AIU**. According to Table 8c, **PU** had a **significant positive effect** on **AIU**, indicating that higher **PU** predicts a higher intention to continue using ChatGPT. **PEOU**, on the other hand, was not a significant predictor, suggesting that although learners may find ChatGPT easy to use, ease of use alone does not strongly influence their intention to keep using it.

(e). Objective 3: To Examine the Influence of Perceived Usefulness on Learners' Intention to Continue Using ChatGPT for English Homework

This section addresses **Research Question 4 (RQ4)**, which posits that learners who perceive ChatGPT as applicable are more likely to continue using it.

Correlation Analysis

To explore the relationship between **PU** and **AIU**, a Pearson correlation test was conducted. The results are presented in Table 9.

TABLE 9
PEARSON CORRELATION BETWEEN PERCEIVED USEFULNESS AND INTENTION TO USE

Variables	PU	AIU
PU	1	0.271**
AIU	0.271**	1

p < 0.01

The results show a **statistically significant positive correlation** between **PU** and **AIU**, suggesting that students who found ChatGPT helpful were more likely to continue using it. Although the correlation is moderate, the significance indicates a meaningful association in the context of technology adoption in language learning.

Regression Analysis

To further assess the predictive power of **PU** for **AIU**, a simple linear regression was conducted with **PU** as the independent variable and **AIU** as the dependent variable.

TABLE 10A
MODEL SUMMARY

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error
1	0.271	0.074	0.068	0.34201

The model explains approximately **7.4% of the variance** in the intention to use ChatGPT. Although the model's

explanatory power is modest, it remains significant and relevant for understanding user behavior.

TABLE 10B
ANOVA FOR REGRESSION MODEL

Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	1.440	1	1.440	12.314	0.001
Residual	18.131	155	0.117		
Total	19.571	156			

The ANOVA results demonstrate that the regression model is statistically significant, confirming that perceived usefulness is a significant predictor of continued use intention.

TABLE 10C
COEFFICIENTS OF THE REGRESSION MODEL

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
(Constant)	3.068	0.389	–	7.887	0.000
PU	0.314	0.090	0.271	3.509	0.001

The **unstandardized coefficient** suggests that for every unit increase in perceived usefulness, the intention to use ChatGPT increased by 0.314 units. According to Table 10c, the **standardized beta coefficient** further supports the conclusion that PU exerted a moderate, statistically significant effect on AIU. The analysis indicates that **perceived usefulness significantly influenced learners' intention to continue using ChatGPT** for English homework tasks.

B. Qualitative Analysis

Based on the qualitative responses provided, a thematic analysis was conducted for each open-ended question to address Objective 4 and the related research question.

Thematic Analysis

ChatGPT's Impact on English Homework

Five themes were deduced from responses to Question 17 and are elaborated below.

Theme 1: Grammar and Vocabulary Support. A dominant theme in students' responses was the correction and enhancement of grammar, sentence structure, and vocabulary. Learners reported using ChatGPT to identify and correct grammatical mistakes, expand their vocabulary, and improve their understanding of article usage, verb tenses, modal verbs, and cohesive devices.

Theme 2: Writing Organization and Style. Many learners highlighted how ChatGPT helped them structure various forms of writing, such as essays, letters, speeches, and reports, into clear introductions, bodies, and conclusions. It assisted with transitions, topic sentences, and paragraph development.

Theme 3: Task-Specific and Exam Preparation Support. Students used ChatGPT to complete specific assignments, including poem analyses, comprehension questions, summaries, vocabulary tasks, and even drama scripts. Additionally, it was seen as a tool for test preparation, helping students brainstorm ideas, simulate interview responses, and rehearse for oral exams.

Theme 4: Concept Clarification and Learning Reinforcement. Students turned to ChatGPT to clarify complex grammar rules and concepts, such as passive voice, phrasal verbs, and writing tone. ChatGPT's ability to provide examples, mini-quizzes, and simplified explanations was particularly valued.

Theme 5: Confidence and Autonomy Building. ChatGPT encouraged self-directed learning by enabling students to work independently, often outside of school hours. Its nonjudgmental, accessible, and patient interface allowed students to engage in error correction and language learning without fear of embarrassment, thereby increasing confidence.

Benefits of ChatGPT in Learning English

Five distinct themes emerged from the responses to Question 18 and are discussed in detail below.

Theme 1: Instant Feedback and Availability. Having instant availability was the most highly valued feature. It was not always possible for students to have a teacher present for assistance, which is why many students appreciated being able to access ChatGPT whenever they needed it.

Theme 2: Clarity and Simplicity. Students often said that ChatGPT explained grammar and vocabulary approaches more clearly than their textbooks or classroom instruction. To personalize their understanding, users also found it helpful to request rephrasing of responses on demand.

Theme 3: Creativity and Fluency. ChatGPT was praised for generating ideas and assisting with creative tasks, such as storytelling, writing speeches, and improving writing fluency. Learners experienced a smoother writing flow and a more natural expression of ideas.

Theme 4: Confidence and Independence. ChatGPT was a patient, anonymous listener, allowing learners to experiment at their own speed. This encouraged students to take risks with language, edit their work independently, and understand the logic behind corrections, all of which fostered self-regulated learning.

Theme 5: Structural and Formal Support. Students liked the structured templates, step-by-step format, and emphasis on writing styles. This scaffolding helped them complete formal assignments and learn to use an academic tone and appropriate manners.

Limitations and Problems Associated with the Use of ChatGPT

The answers to Question 19 revealed five key themes.

Theme 1: Overload of Information. One common concern was that ChatGPT sometimes provides long, detailed explanations that may be beyond students' understanding. These explanations resulted in considerable confusion and had to be corrected manually.

Theme 2: Formality and Language Appropriateness. In this study, ChatGPT was noted for using unnecessarily formal or technical vocabulary, misaligning it with classroom expectations or peer-level communication in informal or creative tasks.

Theme 3: Lack of Contextual and Cultural Awareness. Some learners shared that ChatGPT was unable to comprehend their school-specific needs or cultural backgrounds. Some examples incorporated American norms that were at odds with local learning standards.

Theme 4: Dependence and Misalignment. Some students feared becoming too dependent on ChatGPT. Some said that its corrections or suggestions sometimes contradicted what their teachers had taught them, leaving them unsure which standard to adopt.

Theme 5: Nonverbal and Pronunciation Limitations. There was a consensus that ChatGPT could not replace teachers in helping with pronunciation, intonation, body language, and tone of voice. These are essential oral communication skills that the tool cannot address.

Balancing AI and Human Roles in the English Language

Responses to the last question led to the identification of three main themes, detailed in the following discussion.

Theme 1: Complementary Role of ChatGPT. Most students acknowledged that ChatGPT was a helpful support tool, especially for grammar correction, writing structure, and vocabulary enhancement. However, they stressed that it could not fully replace human instruction.

Theme 2: Teachers as Emotional and Contextual Guides. Students emphasized the irreplaceable human elements that teachers bring, such as empathy, motivation, emotional understanding, real-life examples, and personalized attention. These affective and pedagogical functions were consistently marked as absent in ChatGPT.

Theme 3: Classroom-Specific and Oral Skills Support. ChatGPT was unable to provide knowledge of classroom syllabi, school-specific grading rubrics, and performance expectations. Students also highlighted that teachers are essential for face-to-face speaking practice, pronunciation feedback, and guiding group discussions, areas where ChatGPT fell short.

This thematic analysis revealed that although ChatGPT significantly enhanced students' ability to complete English homework, especially in grammar, vocabulary, writing structure, and idea generation, it was not perceived as a substitute for a human teacher. Students valued its speed, accessibility, and clarity, but also expressed concerns about over-formality, a lack of context, and an inability to support the oral and emotional aspects of learning. Therefore, ChatGPT serves as a valuable supplementary tool that promotes self-directed learning and task completion. However, it is best used in conjunction with traditional instruction for a holistic educational experience.

VI. DISCUSSION

This section provides an interpretation of the most important findings from the perspectives of literature, theory, and practice. It demonstrates how the results advance knowledge of AI use in EFL learning, with implications for future research and practice.

A. Findings of Research

The present study addressed four key objectives concerning the use of ChatGPT by EFL learners for English homework. First, the findings revealed that a majority of learners frequently used ChatGPT for grammar correction, vocabulary enhancement, and content generation, confirming its integration into their academic routines. Second, the quantitative analysis revealed that learners regarded ChatGPT as helpful and easy to use, and the descriptive statistics results showed that PU and PEOU had high mean scores. However, the correlation results suggested a weak but nonsignificant relationship between PU and frequency of usage, compared with the stronger association PEOU had with learners' continued use of ChatGPT. Third, regression analysis confirmed that PU and AIU were positively and significantly related, indicating that PU is a strong predictor of learners' intention to continue using ChatGPT in self-directed learning. Finally, the thematic analysis of open-ended responses revealed that learners valued ChatGPT's immediate feedback, ease of use, and assistance with vocabulary and grammar. However, the limitations included occasional inaccuracies and learners' overreliance on it, particularly at the vocabulary and grammar levels. These findings collectively emphasize ChatGPT's role as an enabling assistant in EFL homework while also indicating pathways to pedagogical support and critical AI literacy.

B. Theoretical Implications

This study extends the TAM's application by validating its constructs in the context of generative AI-assisted English homework among EFL learners. The significant positive association between PU and AIU supports the predictive strength of TAM in determining learner intention, confirming that if students find a technology beneficial, they are more likely to

adopt it in self-directed contexts. Interestingly, the weak link between PU and usage frequency suggests that behavioral intention in AI use may not always align with practical usage patterns, especially when shaped by task-specific needs. This nuance invites expanding TAM frameworks to account for context-driven usage behaviors in AI-mediated learning. Additionally, the inclusion of qualitative insights reinforces the model's adaptability by capturing learners' emotional and cognitive reflections, which are often absent in quantitative-only studies. Thus, this research not only confirms the relevance of TAM but also highlights the importance of integrating task-based contexts and qualitative evidence into its theoretical framework.

VII. CONCLUSION

A. Final Reflections

The current study investigated EFL learners' perceptions of ChatGPT as a homework assistant, focusing on PU, PEOU, and continuous intentions to use ChatGPT for self-directed English learning. The results indicated that learners commonly employ ChatGPT in their studies for grammar checking, vocabulary expansion, and writing assistance. PU was found to be significantly positively related to the intention to continue using ChatGPT in the core TAM framework. PEOU also rated highly but had less predictive power. Learners' perspectives on the findings were further contextualized through qualitative analysis, which revealed that students valued rapid support and tailored responses but feared overreliance on the tool and the risk of incorrect answers from ChatGPT. Together, these insights suggest that although ChatGPT is a valuable tool with potential applications in language learning, its integration into education should be purposeful, critical, and pedagogically informed.

B. Pedagogical and Practical Recommendations

Based on the results of this study, the following recommendations are proposed for stakeholders:

For Educators: Integrate ChatGPT as an assistant into English learning areas, specifically for grammar and writing. Educators should also nurture students' digital literacy and critical thinking skills so they can interact appropriately with AI-generated content.

For Students: Use ChatGPT as a tool to support language learning in addition to (but not instead of) participation. Critically review AI output and talk to instructors and others to achieve a better understanding and learning.

For Developers: Enhance EFL ChatGPT's usability with features such as grammar feedback, vocabulary levels, and context-aware explanations tailored to learners' levels.

For Policymakers: Include AI literacy in standard language education curricula. Policymakers should encourage strategies that orient students and instructors to the ethical, efficient, and instructional methods for implementing generative AI applications in academic settings.

C. Limitations and Future Scope

Although this study adds to the literature, it is not without limitations. The first limitation concerns the sample size: only 157 EFL learners participated in the survey, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Second, this is a cross-sectional design that cannot inform us about how learner behavior or perceptions may change over time. Third, the research limited its focus to only three variables (PU, PEOU, and AIU) from the TAM and failed to consider other potential factors, such as self-efficacy or prior experience with digitization, which may influence the dependent variables.

In future research, longitudinal designs should be explored to determine how learners' perceptions and patterns of use may change or develop each time ChatGPT is introduced. A more comprehensive view could lead to a greater understanding of variables such as motivation, learning outcomes, and ethical awareness. Furthermore, more comparative studies across various contexts and between high- and low-proficiency EFL learners would help determine best practices for incorporating AI into EFL education.

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Depictions of Youth Challenges in Jennifer Niven's *All the Bright Places* and John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*

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Abstract—The study attempts to investigate John Green's and Jennifer Niven's representation of young adult challenges and how they cope with them in their novels, *The Fault in Our Stars* and *All the Bright Places*. Both novels are analyzed by using the lens of postmodernism. The significance of the study lies in its singularity in establishing connections between the chosen novels aiming to find the interrelationship between the struggles, challenges, and issues faced by young adults, and the way they deal with them. It also highlights the power of speaking up and the significance of human connection in supporting young adults. The significance of this study also lies in its singularity in establishing connections between two novels by comparing between them, aiming to find the interrelationship between the struggles, challenges, and issues faced by youth, the way they cope, deal, and interact with them and how these challenges construct their identities and build their characters. Another reason is that the study highlights the power of speaking up and the significance of human connection in supporting young adults in responding to the demands of their lives.

Index Terms—young adult, challenges, mental health issues

I. INTRODUCTION

Young adulthood is a unique developmental period during which there are critical milestones of growth and maturation that allow the young adult to participate in self-exploration and identity formation. This period of transformation, when young people move from childhood to adulthood, is full of immense possibilities and potential. This phase is considered the second most critical developmental period in young people's lives after early childhood. It is also filled with challenges and obstacles. Arnett (2004) affirms that the transition faced when leaving childhood and entering adulthood is a difficult time for emerging adults, laden with many changes and important decisions.

Mitchell (2002) highlights that young adult literature's range and intensity are comparable to any other genre, with recurring themes such as love, death, loss, racism, and friendship, with even more current issues represented. Mitchell (2002) also argues that young adult novels have the power to make certain issues, which are very complicated, concrete, and comprehensible. This genre provides insights into the journey of growing up and navigates the complexities of a young adult's life. It has the power to inspire, empower, and provoke thought, contributing to personal growth, social awareness, and cultural dialogue by depicting the experiences and challenges faced by young adults.

All spheres of life have changed between the past and the present: society, culture, technology, and economy. There are unimaginable differences between youth and their challenges today and in the past. Szafraniec (2019) and Yousef (2024) note that due to social, economic, and cultural changes occurring in the contemporary world, social roles are being profoundly redefined, familiar rhythms of living are being disturbed, and developmental standards are being altered. Because of the rapid advancement of life, there has been a gap between the generations, which is why challenges vary significantly from one era to another.

Contemporary challenges and issues, as mentioned before, are different from those faced by previous generations for many reasons, such as shifts in social norms, technological advancement, and economic changes. In the past, young adults faced challenges that seemed different and less severe than nowadays. However, historically, young adults faced significant challenges such as racial discrimination, limited access to education and career opportunities, social codes and heavy family obligations. They struggled to fit into societal molds amidst economic downturns. Additionally, the lack of education and mental health awareness made these struggles even more daunting.

Crockett and Silbereisen (2000) show a great example of how social changes and new circumstances cause serious challenges for young adults through Elder's (1974) studies of The Great Depression. During the 1930s, the economic downturn created financial strains for many families in the United States, so they had to reduce their expenses and find ways to generate additional income. In response to this challenge, young adult-males initiated income-earning activities earlier than usual by finding work opportunities outside home. In addition, young adult females contributed to the family economy by helping their mothers produce goods for the family's uses. Consequently, young adults gained independence,

exhibited more autonomous behavior, and developed higher self-esteem.

In this contemporary intertwined world, youth are confronted with a myriad of serious challenges and obstacles that constitute their experiences, identities and characters on their journey to adulthood. Contemporary challenges and issues are different and new, and it can be challenging for older generations to relate to or to understand what makes young adults worry today, simply because contemporary life is much more complicated, advanced and developed. These challenges and problems influence young adults' perspectives, aspirations and identities. Coping with such a variety of challenges and issues adds layers of complexity to young adults' lives nowadays.

Young adults' problems initially attracted scholars in the 1920s, and after the Second World War, they grabbed more attention because this genre's audience became much broader. According to Cart (1996), the 1960s would be "the decade when literature for adolescents could be said to come into its own" (p. 43). This genre of literature still occupies one of the most critical places in contemporary literature as it comprises the radical challenges of society.

Contemporary young adult novels contain themes that mirror the problems facing many of today's young people. Stallworth (1998) mentions some of the reflected themes in contemporary literature such as identity, violence, social alienation, illness, relationships, community impact, mental health, marginalization, racism, inequality, faith, social integration, loss, bullying and suicide. These themes are challenges and obstacles that shape young adults' identities, foster their resilience, build their character and promote personal growth. These challenges and obstacles teach essential life lessons, provide valuable learning experiences and strengthen young adults' problem-solving skills. On the other hand, they might draw them into the ocean of lost souls.

Considering the presented topics, the chosen works of the contemporary young adult writers John Green and Jennifer Niven were a case in point because their chosen novels feature young adult protagonists grappling with a multitude of complicated challenges and issues. They also tackle themes of love, racism, friendship, identity and existential questions, often accompanied by sensitive topics such as loss, mental illness, grief and self-discovery. John Green and Jennifer Niven are celebrated for their writing styles and ability to craft compelling narratives that match the experiences and emotions of young adult readers nowadays. Their literary works portray young adult challenges, experiences and emotions, which are relevant and relatable to many young adults who navigate the challenges of young adulthood.

All the Bright Places is a young adult novel written by Jennifer Niven. The novel seems like a regular young adult novel. Still, in fact, it contains interesting events, incidents, and young adult characters that are related to this study when they are analyzed thoroughly. The novel follows the story of Violet Markey and Theodore Finch, two high school students who meet under unusual circumstances and embark on a school project together. As they embark on a journey of exploration filled with both sadness and joy to various places and landmarks in their hometown, Indiana, they discover themselves, and it turns out that this journey of exploration is not only physical but also a spiritual quest of self-discovery. Markey and Finch forge a deep bond with each other as they grapple with their own personal struggles.

The Fault in Our Stars, a novel by John Green, narrates the story of two young adults who fall in love with each other, but their relationship is quite complicated because of their medical conditions. Both Hazel Grace and Augustus Waters suffer from their experiences with cancer. Hazel Grace is a sixteen-year-old girl who has been dealing with thyroid cancer since she was a child. She is in an advanced stage, and her treatment options are limited. She meets Augustus Waters in a support group for cancer patients. Augustus Waters lost his leg to cancer, but his medical conditions are stable at the right moment; he has got Hazel's attention. As they bond over their shared experiences and love for literature, they embark on a journey of love and self-discovery.

The current study aims to explore young adult challenges in John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* and Jennifer Niven's *All the Bright Places*. It also aims to investigate how young adult characters deal with these challenges and issues throughout the narratives. Both novels can serve as an extension to raise awareness for young adults, and assure them that even during struggles and challenges, life can hold moments of joy, beauty, connection and purpose. The significance of this study also lies in its singularity in establishing connections between two novels by comparing between them, aiming to find the interrelationship between the struggles, challenges, and issues faced by youth, the way they cope, deal, and interact with them and how these challenges construct their identities and build their characters. Another reason is that the study highlights the power of speaking up and the significance of human connection in supporting young adults in responding to the demands of their lives.

In the current study, researchers employ a thematic analysis under the umbrella of postmodernism to investigate the challenges young adults confront in Jennifer Niven's novel *All the Bright Places* and John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*, in addition to exploring the role of human connection, communication and support systems in helping individuals surpass serious challenges and problems and enhancing the quality of their lives. Grenz (1996) defines postmodernism as an intellectual mood and a range of cultural expressions that challenge the core ideals, principles, and values that lay at the heart of the modern mindset. It refers to the emerging epoch, the era in which we live. This phenomenon encompasses many dimensions of contemporary society. Grenz (1996) claims that the emerging generations are no longer confident that humans will be able to solve the world's great problems and that they perceive life on Earth as fragile. He also claims that they believe that the survival of humankind is now on the line.

II. DISCUSSION

Interpersonal Relationships Challenges

According to Feldman (2000), an interpersonal relationship is a contribution of a person to a well and great relationship through an internal factor within the person himself/herself. Paulhus and Martin (1988) define it as the relation between friends, family and the social circle whom we hang with. In literature, relationships allow scholars to delve deeply into the characters' lives and psychology, as well as to explore the variety of human connection and conflict that shape the characters' inner growth.

There are three categories of interpersonal relationships that are depicted in John Green's novel *The Fault in Our Stars* and Jennifer Niven's novel *All the Bright Places*: romantic relationships, through which challenges of love, and heartbreak are analyzed; familial relationships which capture family members bonds and the tensions between them; friendships, which are a space that provides the characters with support and helps them to discover themselves.

Relationships are meant to be a source of comfort and mutual understanding. They are supposed to be young adults' anchor through hard times, but they sometimes can be challenging for them as they navigate this transitional phase. Especially when young adults experience mental or physical illness, relationships can become significantly challenging. Manne and Badr (2008) mention that Partners or couples deal with challenges, such as worry about the likely loss of their partner and their ability to provide support to the patient.

Social Interaction Challenges

Social interaction is part of human nature. Kurniawan (2012) notes that humans are social beings, they need each other. They go on this complicated journey of forming new relationships and participating in activities adapting to new social, cultural and institutional frameworks because they need to feel a sense of mutual understanding, belonging and connection creating a status of balance that fosters social harmony. But sometimes the interaction between people in society itself shows a conflict or problem (Harris & Orth, 2019). In both novels, social interactions often waver between moments of integration and alienation.

In Green's novel, social interaction is a great mixture of meaningful integration and painful alienation. Hazel and Augustus are exposed to a totally different social experience than other young adults, their social interactions are controlled by the health conditions that their illness implies. Their experience with cancer forces them to live in a world that is defined by medical treatment, hospitals and support groups. Their interactions with others reveal both the healing power of interaction and sometimes a profound isolation that their illness brings.

Hazel's struggle with cancer separates her from normal young adult life which involves attending school, parties, travelling and fun activities. This alienation intensifies when her condition worsens. The way she feels is clear and obvious in her speech to her parents (Green, 2012). Her illness makes her feel like a grenade that might explode anytime, the thing that drives her to push people around her away. She tightens her circle to only include her parents. She fears the pain and grief that her death could cause for her beloved ones. She does not want them to suffer from the feeling of loss.

She meets Augustus in a support group, her relationship with him starts to consolidate which represents integration at its most profound levels. She finds someone who sees the world the same as she does based on their shared experience with cancer. Their bond gives her a sense of personal fulfillment as she has him besides her sharing love and support, until she loses him.

Augustus is more socially connected than Hazel. He attends support groups; he also has his friend Isaac by his side. When his relationship with Hazel develops, he starts feeling more accepted and loved. Their relationship provides him with the courage to confront his fear of being forgotten. But after the aggressive return of cancer, he starts feeling a sting of alienation. His relationship becomes a burden on his shoulder because of his own fears. He fears that Hazel sees him weak and pitiful. He also suffers from losing his sense of control and dignity, so he distances himself from her.

In Niven's novel, social interaction reveals both the beauty and the alienation that can accompany relationships, especially for young adults who face personal struggles. Anwar (2023) states that Violet possesses a limited social network. Violet isolates herself after the tragic car accident. This kind of self-imposed isolation has a profound impact on her ability to interact with others and weakens her social relationships. Although she used to be outgoing, popular, and actively engaged in school activities before, her grief creates a barrier between her and the world of young adults at her age. Her healing journey begins when Finch pushes her to re-engage in activities that help her to confront her grief and overcome it. Her relationship with Finch guides her to the right path and gives her the strength to rebuild her social ability, she starts to trust people, involves herself with them more and experiences joy again. This shows that meaningful relationships can be a powerful force that helps young adults to break free from their struggles because they serve as coping systems.

On the other hand, Finch experiences a paradoxical social world that both embraces and rejects him in different ways. He is sometimes welcomed, loved and accepted, but other times he is bullied, labelled and subjected to stigma because of his mental issues as well as unpredictable behaviour that form a huge challenge for him. His social interactions waver between moments of integration and deeper alienation. Cahya et al. (2022) demonstrate that Theodore Finch underwent social conflicts. The causes of these conflicts refer to the difference in his perception and the difference in his personality.

Navitha and Pettugani (2019) show that most young adults are socially alienated because of the lack of attachment with parents, sudden changes in their comfort zone, lack of interactions with their friends, lack of friendly environment and bullying. Theodore Finch suffers from most of the mentioned elements. He struggles with mental issues and the fear of vulnerability. He believes that if he reveals his mental health issues, he will be judged and labelled. He is already labelled

as a “freak” due to his unpredictable extreme behaviors, and this label frustrates him a lot. He feels like an outsider among his peers, which is the reason that pushes him to avoid interaction furthermore to isolate himself for days, sometimes for weeks, whenever he feels low or overwhelmed. Confronting society, peers and parents adds layers of complexity to his challenges, so he develops self-defense mechanisms by avoiding the pressure of people and social interaction.

On the other hand, Finch maintains good interpersonal relationships with Violet Markey. She symbolizes a haven for him, as she provides him with a space where he feels that he is loved and understood, which encourages him to confront his struggles. She inspires him to unconsciously enhance his coping mechanisms, because her presence alone offers him a sense of stability. She is his companion who colours his life (Niven, 2015). Through his relationship with Violet, he finds some sense of belonging, solace and healing.

Health Challenges: Physical Illness, Mental Illness and Mental Issues

Physical and mental illness reflect the complexities of the human experience. These two novels delve into the challenges that mental and physical illness imply on young adults' lives, their relationships, and the way they perceive life. Physical and mental illness, especially if the physical illness is terminal like cancer, cause immense suffering, pain and loss sometimes accompanied with stigma and isolation. They reshape young adults' identities, the way they perceive life and influence their interpersonal dynamics. Both novels portray how physical and mental illness can be challenging to young adults. Green highlights the impact of stage IV thyroid cancer and osteosarcoma, which are incurable illnesses, on the young adult characters Hazel Grace and Augustus Waters. On the other hand, Niven portrays several mental health issues that confront young adults, with a focus on bipolar disorder, depression, and the effects of unresolved trauma.

Young adulthood is normally marked by its unique emotional, multiple physical and social changes that help young adults to develop their personalities as well as build their identities. But there are young adults with serious illnesses that force them to fight for life every day or count days to live. They are different from other young adults who are in good physical health and have stable minds. Illness redefines young adults' lives. The more complex and incurable the illness is, the harder the challenges and the limitations it imposes, especially if the illness is cancer.

Cancer imposes a range of limitations that significantly affect young adults' daily life and emotional well-being. It makes simple tasks feel overwhelming. It disrupts young adults' routines and plans because of its unpredictable development and furthermore aggressive attacks. As mentioned before, it affects their social interactions, relationships become strained, it also prevents full participation in activities because of the regular medical examinations, appointments and treatments, which lead to alienation or a sense of exclusion from communities. In addition to the fear of being misunderstood or judged because of their bad conditions and sometimes disabilities, young adults fear the future because no one can predict what awaits them and their loved ones.

Green's novel reflects the real image of the struggles and challenges that cancer fighters face. It is about two young adults who suffer from two different types of cancer. Hazel Grace suffers from thyroid cancer that has affected her lungs causing respiratory issues and Augustus Waters suffers from osteosarcoma accompanied with leg amputation. Each of them is a warrior who fights the enemy which was made up from their own cells. As the novel suggests, cancer is a side effect of evolution.

Hazel's cancer physical challenges lie in all the pain that she constantly feels, in addition to the fluid which drains her lungs causing her choking attacks. She always needs to stay connected to supplemental oxygen to compensate for her reduced lung function and because of her weak respiration (Green, 2012). Her physical challenges also lie in the fluid that fills up her lungs. In addition to the physical limitations that restrict her mobility and her ability to engage fully in everyday activities. She often tires quickly, which makes even simple actions such as going upstairs exhausting. Hazel's advanced case has made her dependent, which adds a layer on her challenges.

Augustus is a 17-year-old young adult, who is diagnosed with osteosarcoma. He has his leg amputated after a long battle with cancer. The amputation of his leg prevents him from participating in activities and playing basketball, which is his favourite hobby. He feels discomfort from his prosthetic; he tries to adapt to life with it. At first Augustus appears so pleased with his stable health condition, as he answers when Patreick asks him how he feels (Green, 2012). His chances of living appear to be better than Hazel's, whose health condition grows worse throughout the novel. Unexpectedly, cancer returns to Augustus and spreads aggressively. He becomes more vulnerable, exhausted and independent. He always prides himself on being strong and in control, which makes the way his illness strips him of his physical capability hard for him to accept.

On the emotional level, dealing with cancer symptoms alongside life goals adds layers of stress, exhaustion and complexity to the character's life. It also contributes to their mental health challenges such as anxiety and depression. Besides, cancer affects the way they perceive life, its physical limitations defeat their dreams, ambitions and confidence. Both experience feelings of regular fear, pain and sadness. Furthermore, they feel overwhelmed because of the bad conditions they are put in.

The most emotional portrayal of cancer's reality is Augustus himself after the aggressive return of his cancer. Soon enough he loses his strength, and Hazel is forced to witness all the disgrace and pain her lover suffers from. Augustus becomes terrified and pitiful while trying to hide his feelings from his family and from her. His deepest fears are losing control, living unnoticed and to be forgotten. He fears oblivion but he ultimately confronts fears. Jebaselvi and Sivakumar (2022) portray the emotional and the psychological struggle of young adult cancer patients. The study shows that the emotional complications which are not dealt with can lead to anxiety, sadness, withdrawal, or no interest in living. Onthoni

et al. (2022) conclude that Hazel Grace is in a dominant state of anxiety because of her illness. Anxiety has an adverse impact on the social interaction of the patient. Hazel's worry about her parents and Augustus and the way she tries to isolate herself because she does not want anyone to get hurt or suffer from the pain of her loss, prove that she is trapped in a loop of worry and anxiety (Green, 2012).

Mental issues and disorders impose serious challenges on young adults' lives. Whether these challenges and the struggles are diagnosed mental illness or just mental issues which arose in response to stress or specific situations, they are still a burden that falls heavily on young adults' shoulders. Young adults who confront mental challenges start to have mood swings; their social engagement and their behaviour usually change which impacts their ability to function. It is important to highlight that mental issues can develop into a mental illness if they are left unaddressed although they are generally less severe and often situational. In contrast, mental illness or disorder is more persistent and more recurring, with a deeper impact on young adults' lives.

Anwar (2023) mentions that *All the Bright Places* provides a platform of psychological and social problems. It delves into the complexity of two young adults' minds and the emotional struggles that accompany their psychological challenges. Each one of them has their own struggles and challenges which eventually push them to attempt suicide at the ledge of the school's bell tower, where they first meet.

Finch is an unstable young adult who fights alone in a battle against his asleep periods, racing thoughts of death and suicide, as well as mood swings. His young adulthood phase is marked by intense mood swings, deep depressive periods or manic episodes, insomnia or hypersomnia, lack of interest and recurrent thoughts of worthlessness or guilt. These symptoms that are clearly portrayed in the novel indicate that he suffers from depression which makes him feel detached and exhausted.

According to Krog (2023), Finch has no established or named mental diagnosis, but he struggles with a variety of symptoms. He addresses his symptoms such as awakening and sleep, which reflect his alternating periods of depression and mania. When he experiences the asleep period, he isolates himself and avoids any kind of social interaction (Niven, 2015). He prefers being awake, because he has a lot of energy during this period, this energy allows him to engage in physical activities and fall in love. Krog (2023) sees that these alternating periods of depression and manic episodes align with the American Psychological Association's definition of bipolar disorder.

Ratushima (2017) concludes his study of Finch's mental health with the following result, all the constant verbal and physical abuses from his father or from his peers who bully him at school make his mental illness, which is bipolar disorder, develop. Finch's external conflict affects his mental stability leading to internal struggles. Bipolar disorder has two states or episodes as it is called, and it is possible to have a mix of both episodes. He mostly experiences mixed episodes as mentioned before. He is described as depressed, moody, suicidal, aggressive, smart, caring, and anxious. All these descriptions reflect Finch's suffering from a mental illness, especially bipolar disorder.

Violet is not officially diagnosed with mental illness but suffers from clear symptoms that appear throughout the novel as challenges that she tries to get rid of. Everything starts after she loses her beloved sister Eleanor in a car accident. Before her sister's death, Violet had a close, cozy relationship with her older sister, she was her role model and her best friend. They shared interests, both loved writing as well as running online magazines. Violet and her sister shared a strong bond filled with laughter, dreams, and mutual hobbies. Eleanor gave her a sense of purpose; she encouraged and inspired her to live a wild young adult life. But after Eleanor's traumatic death, Violet becomes a new girl without purpose, she feels lost and detached, she struggles to reconstruct her identity without her sister by her side. She also suffers from survivor's guilt, especially when she tells her sister to take the road on which the accident occurs, and she is the one who survives. This feeling of guilt compounds her grief which prevents her from going back to her normal life and living it fully like she once did with her sister.

Hermanto and Prasaja (2023) analyze Violet's character using Freud's Theory of Personality and show that Violet's car accident and her sister's death have an impact on her psychology. The mental effects that she experiences consist of anxiety, trauma, depression and suicide. Her mental instability, her struggle with sadness, guilt and grief, push her to lose her interest in social interaction as well as engagement in school activities. All these challenges eventually lead her to have suicidal thoughts.

Abu Bakar and Abidin (2020) prove that the novel has explored depression and suicide. According to Abu Bakar and Abidin (2020), all elements of cognitive distortions in Beck's cognitive theory of Depression are evident in the novel such as all-or-nothing thinking, magnification and minimizing, overgeneralization, mental filter, personalizing, jumping to conclusions, labelling, mind reading, emotional reasoning and disqualifying the positive. Each element is portrayed to varying degrees as shown by the two main characters Finch and Violet. Violet's depression is characterized by her weak social interaction and lack of motivation.

Trauma

Trauma manifests itself in the effect of a physical or mental painful catastrophe and the extreme circumstances that an individual goes through, which might cause damage to the body or shock to the mind. There are different viewpoints on the nature of the bond between trauma and literature but all the theorists who are specialized in analyzing the connection between trauma and literature agree that literature can deal with various traumatic experiences with specificity and is able to portray the exclusive nature of each experience in its social and cultural contexts Davis and Meretoja (2020). The chosen novels examine the traumatic experiences of the main characters and the ways they respond to it.

The characters cope with the trauma of being cancer victims. The novel illustrates the traumatic lives of Augustus and Hazel that are haunted by their painful experiences with illness. The two main characters confront the psychological consequences of dying (Green, 2012). Augustus' and Hazel's fear of death unfolds through their relationship as they keep discussing and thinking about their lives and shared experiences together. They appear to be preoccupied with finding an answer to the question of what will happen after they die. The shadow of death does not just haunt them, it also reshapes their priorities, relationships and the way they find meaning in their life. Peter (2015) shows that trauma theory can be applied easily in Green's novel since the effect of grief and trauma are evident in the surface level of the narrative.

Thyroid cancer has caused Hazel to be traumatized; she always keeps thinking about death. Her daily routine is ruled by medical treatments and appointments which is unusual at this age. She was thirteen when she was first diagnosed with cancer, she grew up threatened by sudden death. The fluid that fills her lungs gets worse each time which causes her panic attacks that it will be her last day each time she enters the hospital (Green, 2012). This demonstrates how traumatic Hazel's experience with her deadly illness is.

Likewise, Augustus' trauma stems from his illness in addition to the existential fears it brings. Cancer strips him of his sense of ability as well as control. It makes him feel helpless as it forces him to be dependent on what he detests the most. His deepest fear is oblivion, that is the reason why he always tries to leave an unforgettable legacy behind him. When his illness comes back aggressively, he becomes traumatized by the realization that his life might end before he can achieve his goals. For him, he would not consider himself remembered at all if he was not remembered greatly (Green, 2012). Augustus yearns to do something heroic before he dies. He wants to be remembered for something great but being a cancer patient has made his dream a million times more difficult to achieve.

Mahdani (2023) notes that many of the inner problems the characters must deal with are brought on by prior traumas and open wounds that have never healed. Gorat's (2020) study proves that the two main characters are found suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms. Gorat (2020) also mentions that an accident which involves death, bullying and a bad family environment are the causes of their traumatic experiences.

Finch's traumatic experience lies in his turbulent dysfunctional family, bullying and his struggles with mental illness. Finch is haunted by his past which is filled with violence and rejection, his father used to physically and emotionally abuse him and his mother when he was young. His father abandoned them and started a new family, but he still holds Sunday meetings in which he never misses a chance to bother Finch. Finch always feels like an outsider even at his school where he is bullied and labeled as a "freak" by his peers. He also is traumatized by his battle with his undiagnosed bipolar disorder which manifests in extreme mood swings, unpredictable behaviour and the periods.

Violet's trauma lies in the loss of her sister Eleanor in a car accident. Violet blames herself and holds herself responsible for the accident because she was the one who told Eleanor to take Bridge Street that night. She becomes consumed by her grief which makes her withdraw from her past life's activities, hobbies and even her friends. Her trauma manifests in her feeling of fear, guilt, avoidance and anything that reminds her of her sister, including writing. Violet creates barriers between her and socializing to protect herself from further pain. Edeh (2023) notes that Finch and Violet experience trauma and conflicts that influence them to become who they are. Peter (2015) states that the central claim of contemporary literary trauma theory is that trauma creates a speechless fright that divides or destroys identity. Finch breaks down and escapes from his challenges by committing suicide, whereas Violet gains a profound understanding of how to keep living and build resilience.

Existential Challenges: Life, Destiny and Fate

Life is a complex journey filled with purpose and uncertainty. It portrays an image of the possibilities which are shaped by personal choices and the forces that go beyond people's control. Some of the characters in both novels carve out their own futures, meanwhile some of them are just forced to face their fate. These characters face dilemmas that influence their moral values and aspirations. Their unpredictable lives may lead to either triumph or tragedy. Fate adds a layer of complexity, because it is predetermined, and it is beyond human control. When the main characters of the novels mentioned embark on their journeys, they confront existential questions about their purposes and the meaning of their lives. Existential challenges arise from the fundamental questions of existence that the characters start to have such as the meaning of life, the purpose, and the inevitability of fate. Fate is often connected with loss and the unpredictability of the future. The characters face challenges in accepting the inevitable twists of life such as incurable illness and death. Together, life, destiny, and fate form existential challenges and struggles for all the characters. Peter (2015) notes that existential agony is a concept that is in general held to be a negative feeling which arises from the experience of human freedom and responsibility. Xayrulloeva (2023) emphasizes that the characters suffer from challenges of the inevitability of fate, accepting harsh realities and the inevitable defeat faced by cancer patients in their inglorious battle. Anusi et al. (2017) illustrate how fate can be challenging to young adults. They add that fate separates Hazel and Augustus, ends their love story and their hope of being together, it also leaves Hazel with the agony of loss.

Hazel believes that her death will be devastating to the ones who love her, and it will hurt them, especially her parents and Augustus. Through the novel Hazel seems to be preoccupied with searching for answers to her questions at the end of her favourite book *An Imperial Affliction*. She wants to find out what happens to the characters after Anna's death, especially her mother who is left alone. She compares Anna's mother to her mother. That is the reason why she becomes obsessed with the ending and tries to reach out to the author just to calm herself on what will happen to her own parents after her death. She tries to minimize the impact of her death on others to protect them from the pain of losing her. Peter

(2015) mentions how Hazel's philosophical standpoint changes through her strong bonds with Augustus.

On the other hand, Augustus Waters sees life from his idealistic viewpoint, he is determined, and he craves to leave a great legacy after he dies. Regardless of his struggles with cancer, he strives to live his life to the fullest and refuses to let his illness control him or define him. He is concerned with making an everlasting impact on this world because he wants to be remembered. Life is his opportunity to create a meaningful impact. He enjoys being in control, this is evident through his metaphor for the unlit cigarettes. He carries a cigarette and places it in his mouth to show that he can face danger without giving it the power to destroy him. He approaches life with a sense of humor and charm, masking his weakness.

When his health conditions deteriorate, Augustus struggles with the loss of his independence and the shocking reality that he may not achieve his goal of leaving a grand legacy which he has always hoped to achieve. This twist forces him to realize the value of personal connections. When Hazel reads "*I got my wish, I suppose. I left my scar*" (Green, 2012, p. 313). Hazel realizes that Augustus desires to be remembered after his death, which is his main purpose. This mentioned quotation emphasizes the dual nature of pain in the novel. The scar Augustus leaves is an emotional scar which brings pain to Hazel.

Deeb (2016) notes that love gives them both the power to fight their disease. Their philosophical perception of life intensifies when the idea of inevitability and death are intertwined. They are aware that human beings are bound to die, hence the pressing need to be remembered. Hazel's experience of losing Augustus allows her to recognize the fact that her family will be able to make it through her own devastating death. Life is defined by the individual's relationships with others, and the meaning of these relationships is conveyed through the pain which is felt when a loved one dies.

Both Finch and Violet experience existential challenges. Finch's existential challenges stem from his struggle to find meaning in a world where he feels like he is out of place. His undiagnosed mental disorder makes him doubt and alienates himself. He strives to be understood, but his fear of labels, rejection and his unpredictable behavior push people around him away. Finch's existential challenges also lie in his search for a purpose that can make him hold on to life. He is deeply empathetic and attuned to the beauty in the little things, finding joy in moments others might overlook. Rahmawati (2021) lists the reasons behind Theodore's frequent suicide attempts that led him eventually to end his life successfully. The inferior feeling caused by his mental illness, his low self-esteem, his striving for superiority whenever a schoolmate bullies him, his style of life, social interest, creative power and the desire to decide on his own death.

Finch's perception of life is so badly influenced by his mental health challenges. He sometimes views life as boundless and full of chances, when he is in his awakening status. But during his depressive episodes, asleep as he refers to, his perspective shifts. Life feels overwhelming and meaningless. He struggles with a constant inner conflict between these two episodes, which shapes his random behaviors and unstable relationships. His connection with Violet offers him a sense of purpose temporarily, but his unresolved issues and pain, in addition to his inability to escape from his inner struggles force him to view life as something he cannot sustain. His negative perception of life reflects the depth of his challenges and the profound impact of mental illness on his life perception.

Rahmawati (2021) notes that Finch's feeling of inferiority enhances his thoughts of committing suicide. Finch also strives hard to overcome his mental illness by acting as if he is superior, which is clear in his rebellious behavior. She also mentions that his chaotic lifestyle contributes to his instability. Azzaharah (2023) notes that everyone controls his choices since they are free to choose whatever they want. Everyone has the right to make their decision, and they also have reasons for their choice.

On the other hand, fate interrupts Violet's quiet life. When it steals her only sister from her leaving her struggling with existential challenges. Her perspective on life revolves around her grief and her sister's loss in the car accident. She has all these questions in mind about why she is the one to live and Eleanor is the one to die. She struggles with survivors' guilt, she blames herself and she believes that she does not deserve to move forward, she thinks it would be a betrayal to her sister. Violet begins to overcome her existential challenges and starts to change the way she perceives life after her relationship with Finch develops.

He challenges her to step outside her social restrictions that are put by her, he also pushes her to overcome the past and embrace the present. He opens her eyes allowing her to rediscover the beauty of the world through their wander. Violet learns to connect with life and find meaning even in the small and unseen moments. Her perception of life shifts to resilience and hope because of Finch, whose influence helps her to understand that even during pain and grief, life is worth living. In the end, Finch's tragic destiny forces Violet to accept the fact of the unpredictability of fate as well as life. She also learns that it is important to cherish every single moment in life with those who she loves before fate steals them from her.

III. CONCLUSION

The Fault in Our Stars and *All the Bright Places* share both similarities and key differences, reflecting the diverse plethora of young adult challenges. The characters in both novels experience distinct yet overlapping challenges that demonstrate their personal struggles. Hazel and Augustus in *The Fault in Our Stars* struggle from the physical burdens of their terminal cancer and the emotional consequences that accompany their illness. In contrast, Finch and Violet in *All the Bright Places* battle their mental health issues and illness. Finch confronts bipolar disorder and feelings of alienation, while Violet struggles with grief and survivor's guilt after her sister's death. Another difference that is observed is the familial atmosphere of the characters; Augustus, Hazel and Violet enjoy good familial relationships which serve as a

source of support and understanding. Meanwhile, Finch's familial relationships are bad, which is another factor that contributes to his tragic end. The three mentioned characters managed to overcome their struggles and to start a new beginning except Finch whose struggles exceeded his capacity leading him to end his life as a way of escape. Despite these differences, the four characters share common challenges, including illness, emotional challenges, and the difficulty of finding meaning and purpose in life amidst hardship.

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Readers' Engagement With and Perception of AI-Generated Narratives in the Context of Digital Literature

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Abstract—With the growing capabilities of advanced language models, artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly contributing to storytelling, raising questions about narrative coherence, emotional resonance, and the impact of authorship disclosure. The research explores how readers engage with and perceive AI-generated narratives in the evolving landscape of digital literature. It examines six key factors: Narrative Coherence (NC), Emotional Resonance (ER), Disclosure of AI Authorship (DAI), Reader Engagement (RE), Narrative Preference (NP), and Narrative Genre Preference (NGP) through a structured survey of 500 participants using a five-point Likert scale. The research has used the SPSS-29 and considers statistical methods like ANOVA, Chi-Square tests, and descriptive statistics. Hypothetical pathway analysis was employed to evaluate reader responses and identify significant patterns. Findings reveal that NC and ER positively influence RE, while DAI negatively affects NP. Among all hypotheses tested, the most significant was H5, demonstrating that reader engagement strongly enhances narrative preference ($\beta = 0.47$, $p = 0.000$). ANOVA results confirmed meaningful engagement differences across demographic groups ($F = 4.73$, $p = 0.003$), and Chi-Square tests indicated significant associations for all six variables, especially DAI ($\chi^2 = 15.87$, $p = 0.0001$). Descriptive statistics highlighted high overall scores for NC and RE, and mixed responses for DAI. These results emphasize the importance of emotional and structural quality in AI storytelling and illustrates reader sensitivity to machine authorship. The research contributes to the understanding of AI's role in narrative creation and offers a data-driven framework for designing engaging, emotionally compelling, and contextually aware AI-generated literature.

Index Terms—AI-generated narratives, authorship disclosure, digital literature, reader engagement, narrative perception

I. INTRODUCTION

Digital literature is redefining narratives in ways that are broader, interactive, and more algorithmic in nature (de Lima et al., 2025). AI technology has recently taken center stage, offering powerful storytelling tools with the ability to generate coherent narrative structure, characters, direction, and dialogue (Floridi, 2025). As a result, these stories generated by AI challenge our understanding of what an author is and the creative process, while creating both interest and skepticism for conscious readers and critics (Welsen et al., 2023). Ultimately, the changes brought forth from new platforms and AI as an authoring tool represent a shift in literature into new methods of engagement and modes of critiquing (Santhosh et al., 2024).

AI has changed the landscape of creative writing, especially with advancements in language modeling that create stories that look and feel like they were authored by a human (Belda-Medina, 2024). The origins of AI-generated stories hark back to older models that frequently relied on rule-based systems from the 1960s through models like ELIZA and SHRDLU that worked within predetermined structures (Regalado et al., 2021). These early models may have simulated human interaction through conversation, but they did not offer a standard of creative writing based on originality and emotionality (Kim et al., 2018). In the last sixty years, we have seen advancements in both computer processing and natural language processing (NLP) to more complex models (Mastrothanas et al., 2025). Now, model applications like ChatGPT, Sudowrite, and NovelAI are utilized to support creators in co-authoring stories and narrative analysis in digital

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representations (Nakamura et al., 2024). This shift has extended the notion of authorship and prompted important considerations regarding originality, emotionality, and artistic ownership in the context of digital literature (Getenet et al., 2024). AI and digital literature are structurally outlining ways of encountering texts (Zhao & Su, 2024). Technology prompts core beliefs about authorship, narrative ownership, and emotionality beyond existing ideas. In offline contexts, the author was stable, and as a reader, dealt with narrative in variant experiences, the meaning of the text was always 'fixed' and common assumptions that informed the reading experience were about the authorial intention behind the writing to inform the experience of interpretation (Wei et al., 2024). Digital contexts and AI narratives throw obfuscation to this model with variability, interactivity, and intentionality that were created without human intervention. Stories made in algorithmic systems change how we read, engage, and connect emotionally (Saddhono et al., 2024). Distinct from static print, AI narratives change information and negotiate understanding whilst responding to a user, their preferences, and even real-time conditions, creating hybrid forms. The flexibility facilitates a more thoughtful interpretive engagement that inspires converging away from passive reading toward actively co-constructing meaning (Raffloer & Green, 2025). AI literature challenges conventional definitions of authorship, originality, and emotionality in expanded literature; it alters the reader-text relationship from passive to active and algorithmic storytelling. This transition complicates the definition of creativity when text is not anthropocentric, blurring the lines around creative autonomy. New ways of thinking are needed to re-imagine how the content views, processes, interprets, and responds to literature or narratives, especially as something artistic is made increasingly more non-humanly possible through AI digital literature.

A. Research Objective

The aim of the research is to examine how readers engage with and perceive AI-generated narratives in digital formats. It seeks to understand how factors like narrative coherence, emotional quality, and authorship disclosure contribute to engagement and preferences. The study will also examine demographic characteristics, reader patterns, and how genre preference moderates engagement, to inform better design and use of AI-generated storytelling.

B. Research Contributions

The study establishes and quantifies six psychological and narrative factors that shape engagement with AI-generated stories. It delivers an evidence-based model for digital literary analysis.

- Building on this empirical foundation, the study adopts superior statistical approaches. It provides contextually rich data analysis to identify demographic and behavioural patterns in AI narrative reception. The application of ANOVA, Chi-Square, and pathway analysis ensures a rigorous analytical approach.
- In addition to statistical rigor, the research observes the cultural context for author identification. The study shows AI authorship strongly affects how readers experience the story, emphasizing the need for clear disclosure and well-structured presentation of machine-generated content.
- These findings contribute to a broader framework for human-centered narrative engagement. The research generates implications for developing ethically designed AI-generated narratives that align with user expectations and provoke empathy-focused narrative storytelling.

C. Research Framework

The research framework was organized as follows: Section 2 demonstrates the related works, which includes the relevant research regarding the objective, Section 3 shows the hypothesis frameworks, Section 4 presents the methodology as it derives from research design to statistical test, Section 5 illustrates the results and discussion of findings, and Section 6 presents the conclusion, which covers limitation and future scope.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The bias in AI-generated narratives was examined by using ChatGPT-4, and focused on depictions of success in Spain (Sardinha, 2024). An experimental analysis revealed overrepresentation of young, heterosexual, Hispanic individuals, and underrepresentation of marginalized groups (Gabino-Campos et al., 2025). Findings highlighted AI's tendency to replicate training-data biases and reinforce social inequalities. Limitations included context specificity and reliance on a single AI model for analysis. The role of AI-generated personal narratives was determined to develop self-insight through stream-of-consciousness inputs by 26 adult participants (Blyler & Seligman, 2024). The ways in which undergraduate students construct their sense of agency and authorship while engaging in AI-assisted writing using ChatGPT. The narrative analysis highlighted ways students managed a transparent, equilibrated position regarding AI's role when doing academic work. To the previous works that over-attributed agency to mechanical components and took a 'more-than-digital' approach. Explore the pedagogical implications and future pathways to integrate AI advancement in critical literacy (Jiang et al., 2024). It examined the transformative implications of AI in the construction of media narratives that examine the impact of algorithms in how content is created, curated, and consumed. The study examined the implications of AI in influencing opinions in the public domain, spreading misinformation, and raising ethical dilemmas. The study highlighted the importance of transparency and accountability regarding AI in the media landscape. AI integration promotes a more responsible approach, enabling critical public discourse and public storytelling (Walia & Jain, 2023). The conversations generated were realistic, engaging, contextually relevant, and closely resembled human-like exchanges

both in their tone and flow. The study highlighted the importance of consistency of character and relevance to narrative and emphasized an increasing proficiency in interactive and script-based content construction. AI models are able to maintain plot structure, create characters, and retain thematic coherence in narratives (Lee, 2020). Comparative evaluations with human-written scripts identified both creative strengths and structural limitations. The research indicated practical potential for AI in screenwriting and media production. Ethical and societal concerns surrounding AI-generated creative content require in-depth examination (Bostrom, 2020). Key issues included accountability, authenticity, and cultural integrity in machine-generated works. The research warned against the unchecked use of AI in artistic fields and recommended ethical development aligned with human values and creative standards. Large language models like GPT-3 demonstrated transformative capabilities in the creative industries (Carlini et al., 2021). Autoregressive algorithms supported writing and content generation with high fluency and coherence. Practical applications included storytelling, copywriting, and idea development, and indicated increasing dependence on AI for augmenting creative output. Legal ambiguity affected AI as it revolutionized the digital marketing landscape by creating AI-generated marketing videos (Najafov, 2024). These videos combined advanced technology with creative storytelling, offering efficiency, personalization, and engagement. As AI continued to evolve, it had the potential to revolutionize brand communication and set new standards for visual narratives.

Research gap

The diverse engagement and interest in narrative generated by AI is continuing to develop; the research gap in how embedded social biases in training datasets impact reader perceptions in various cultural contexts remains. Developing an understanding in this space is important because the research community has predominantly investigated AI-generated narratives in Western contexts; moreover, this research often does not consider meaningful or diverse participant samples and largely relies on single model analysis. Therefore, the generalizability of the findings is limited. Research areas that focus on narrative coherence and emotional responsiveness have added to the understanding of how AI narratives matter, while having very little understanding of how genre, authorship disclosure, and ethics shape audience perceptions of AI narratives. Most work also does not have longitudinal depth to understand how reader engagement develops over time with AI narratives.

Statistical approaches can be applied to research topics relating to cultural specificity, limited generalizability, and a narrow model of studies of AI-generated narratives, particularly Chi-Square, Descriptive Statistics, and ANOVA. These techniques can allow addressing shortcomings involving lacking participants not having longitudinal perspectives, as well as the issue of addressing genre, and authorship disclosure connected to AI narratives by employing a more inclusive, data-driven research approach for how readers from different cultural contexts engage with stories created by AI over time.

III. METHODOLOGY

The research examines the changing relationship between readers and AI-generated narratives in a digital and online literature context. With the emergence of large language models that can produce human-like stories, questions have arisen concerning coherence, emotionality, and narrative authenticity. The research examines issues around the reception of this narrative type by different readers and the impact of AI authorship on meaning-making. The context discussed in the research reflects changes in technology, literary consumption, and authorship in an algorithmic-creativity era. Figure 1 illustrates the working flow of AI-generated narratives with digital literature.

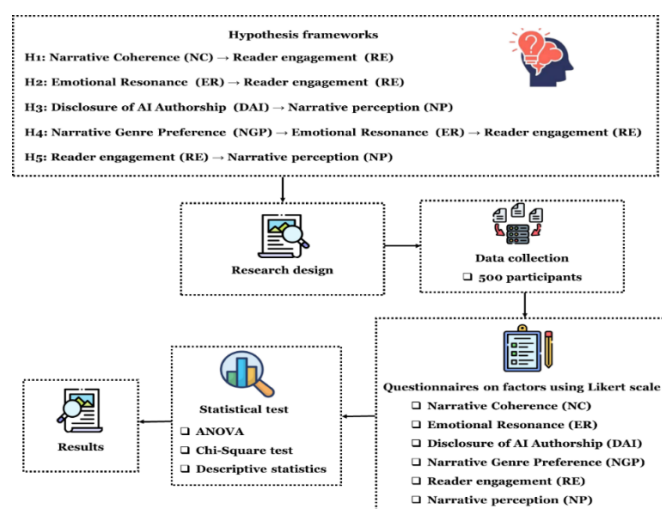


Figure 1. Working Flow of AI-Generated Narratives With Digital Literature

A. Research Design

The research design takes a quantitative, survey research-based approach to examine readers' engagement and perceptions of AI-generated narratives with digital literature. A structured questionnaire was designed that used a five-point Likert scale to create quantitative data through 500 participants who provided survey responses about aspects of narrative coherence, emotional engagement, and genre preferences. The data comprised descriptive statistics based on the survey responses, combined with ANOVA and Chi-Square tests conducted on demographic variables to isolate patterns. Analytical design provides a comprehensive perspective on how different readers engage and assess AI-generated storytelling.

B. Hypothesis Frameworks

The research investigates how various psychological, technological, and contextual factors influence readers' engagement and perception of AI-generated narratives. It examines the independent variables, such as NC, ER, DAI, NGP, and dependent variables, such as RE and NP. These interrelated factors form the conceptual structure for understanding micro-level dynamics of literary reception in the context of digital literature enhanced by artificial intelligence. The framework proposes how these factors influence RE and NP, both directly and through potential mediating influences. Figure 2 represents the hypothetical framework.

H1: Higher levels of Narrative Coherence (NC) are positively associated with increased influences Reader Engagement (RE)

NC is a degree of consistency, logic, and clarity that is related to story elements like plot and character actions, and when faced with temporal progressions. In AI-created narratives, a high degree of coherence facilitates and reduces cognitive load during reading, allowing the reader to engage with and immerse more in the story. This immersion opens greater opportunities for emotional and intellectual investment, two fundamental dimensions of RE. When a story "makes sense," readers are more likely to keep reading, empathize with a character, or even cognitively simulate events occurring in the narrative. Therefore, NC is a cognitive anchor that inherently nurtures and sustains reader engagement in digital narrative environments.

H2: Emotional Resonance (ER) has a positive impact on Reader Engagement (RE)

ER refers to the degree of intense, relatable emotions a narrative evokes from its readers, such as elation, fear, empathy, or sadness. When AI-generated stories discover ways to elicit these emotional responses, the reader's emotional circuits are activated, with these emotional circuits being strongly linked to memory, attention, and motivation. Readers are plunged into the story not simply mentally but viscerally as they empathize emotionally with the characters. This emotional arousal can foster prolonged attention and increased involvement in the narrative, which are other components of RE. Therefore, ER is not merely a reaction but an active pull toward the narrative experience.

H3: Disclosure of AI Authorship (DAI) leads to a decrease in readers' preference for the Narrative Preference (NP)

Disclosure of Artificial Intelligence (DAI) refers to informing audiences that the stories they are consuming are produced by an AI system. Such disclosures can produce cognitive biases and affect evaluations of the story's quality and credibility. When audiences know the author is human, they often respond differently than when they know the narrative comes from an AI system. As a result, audiences may attribute less credibility, creativity, or emotional depth to stories authored by AI. Even an excellent story may be perceived as lacklustre due to preconceived notions about authorial agency and machine involvement. Therefore, DAI is likely to negatively influence how audiences judge the value, originality, and impact of stories created with artificial intelligence, potentially affecting NP.

H4: Narrative Genre Preference (NGP) moderates the relationship between the effect of Emotional Resonance (ER) and Reader Engagement (RE)

NGP, or Narrative Genre Preference, is a reader's commitment to narrative forms, which influences expectations and tolerance for variations in storytellers. In genres like science fiction, fantasy, or experimental fiction, readers can be less concerned with author structures or human nature, leading to higher positive effects of ER on reader engagement. Conversely, readers with deep character realism and literary fiction can require sophisticated and plotted narratives to understand perceived coherence, which can diminish the coherence of a generated narrative. NGP moderates the influence of coherence on engagement based on the genre context.

H5: Reader Engagement (RE) has a positive influence on Narrative Preference (NP)

RE is the behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement with a narrative. Deep engagement leads to more positive evaluations of the narrative, as readers attribute quality, novelty, and emotionality. This positive bias amplifies a reader's NP and shapes the interpretation of the story's meaning, quality, and literary value. In AI-generated stories, high RE can moderate negative biases, resulting in more generous evaluative assessments. Thus, RE is an important determinant of how reader perceptions are shaped, particularly in AI-generated stories.

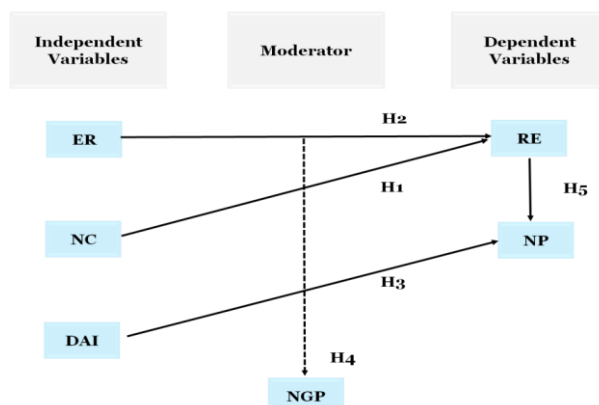


Figure 2. Presentation of Hypothetical Framework

C. Data Collection

The research is designed to explore how readers engage with reader reception of AI-generated stories in digital literature contexts. The research has considered 500 participants to offer a variety of deeper responses to narrative coherence, feelings, and authenticity of AI-authored stories. By collating a range of reader responses from diverse demographic and literary backgrounds, the research seeks to illustrate how AI's existence alters interpretive experience and narrative satisfaction.

D. Questionnaires on Factors Using Likert Scale

Table 1 presents twelve Likert-scale questions developed to evaluate six key factors affecting readers' engagement and perception of AI-generated narratives: NC, ER, DAI, RE, NP, and NGP. Each factor is assessed through two targeted questions that explore cognitive clarity, emotional impact, authorship perception, and individual preferences in narrative style and genre. To measure participants' responses, a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree was employed. This scale enabled participants to express the extent of agreement with each statement related to narrative quality and AI involvement. The standardized format facilitated consistent and quantitative analysis of subjective experiences across all questionnaire items.

TABLE 1
QUESTIONNAIRES ON FACTORS USING LIKERT SCALE

Factors	Questionnaires (Q) numbers	Questionnaires
NC	Q1	Does the AI-generated narrative maintain a clear and logical storyline?
	Q2	Is the sequence of events in the narrative easy to follow?
ER	Q3	Does the narrative evoke strong emotional reactions?
	Q4	Do the characters' emotions in the story feel authentic and relatable?
DAI	Q5	Does knowing that the story was generated by AI affect the reading experience?
	Q6	Does the perception of the narrative change when AI authorship is disclosed?
RE	Q7	Does the narrative hold attention from beginning to end?
	Q8	Is it easy to stay immersed in the AI-generated story?
NP	Q9	Does the narrative style align with preferred reading styles?
	Q10	Is there a preference for reading AI-generated narratives over human-written ones?
NGP	Q11	Is the genre of the AI-generated story appealing?
	Q12	Is enjoyment of the story influenced by its genre?

E. Statistical Tests

The research has used SPSS software version 29 and considers statistical methods such as ANOVA, Chi-Square tests, and descriptive statistics to assess readers' involvement and views of AI-generated tales. ANOVA compared answers across demographic groups, illustrating how age and education impact emotional connection and narrative flow. The Chi-Square Test investigated categorical relationships such as genre choice and reported enjoyment, emphasizing the importance of AI authorship disclosures. Descriptive statistics provided fundamental insights into response trends, highlighting strengths and shortcomings in story coherence, emotional resonance, and reader immersion.

- ANOVA (Analysis of variance)

ANOVA was used to determine whether significant differences exist in readers' engagement and perceptions of AI-generated narratives based on demographic characteristics such as age, education, and reading habits. This model examines whether differences in mean responses regarding storytelling elements—such as emotional connection and narrative flow—are statistically significant. It compared group means across these categories, providing context for readers' characteristics and behaviors toward AI-generated works. Significant F-values highlight distinct demographic

experiences with AI-written narratives. These findings support more tailored approaches for engaging readers with AI-generated stories. The ANOVA formula is shown in equations (1), (2), and (3).

$$E = \frac{MS_{between}}{MS_{within}} \quad (1)$$

Wherein

$$MS_{between} = \frac{SS_{between}}{df_{between}} \quad (2)$$

$$MS_{within} = \frac{SS_{within}}{df_{within}} \quad (3)$$

Where $SS_{between}$ is the sum of squares between groups, SS_{within} shows the sum of squares with group.

- *Chi-Square test*

The Chi-Square test was used to explore associations among categorical variables. These include genre preference and levels of perceived narrative enjoyment in AI-generated stories. Chi-Square is a non-parametric test. It shows if response distributions differ meaningfully from expected patterns. This suggests the nature of the relationship between factors such as disclosure of AI authorship or engagement. This approach allows the researcher to observe key dependencies in reader response, capturing more than average scores. Significant associations reveal how factors like genre or style shape preferences and patterns. The results help identify possible genre-specific strategies for developing AI-generated narratives. The general formula for the Chi-Square statistics is shown in equation (4).

$$W^2 = \sum \frac{(P_j - F_j)^2}{F_j} \quad (4)$$

Where, W^2 is the Chi-Square statistic, P_j shows the Observed Frequency, F_j presents the expected frequency, and $\sum$ is the Summation Overall Categories.

F. Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics summarize the participants' responses to all twelve Likert-scale questionnaire items about readers' engagement, and participants' perception in response to the narrative. Mean, standard deviation, and frequency distribution noted the average scores, with the average of the responses and the nature of the variation in responses with measures in every factor, including narrative coherence, emotional engagement, authorship awareness, and others. Descriptive statistics provide a general image of what was happening and allow us to see areas of strength and weakness of the AI-generated NARRATIVE experience. Descriptive statistics can allow for making a rationale for inferential statistics results and interpretation. It provides a useful user-friendly visualization of participant attitudes. Equation (5) presents the formula of descriptive statistics.

$$\bar{w} = \frac{1}{M} \sum_{j=1}^M w_j \quad (5)$$

Wherein, M is the number of data points, and w_j is the individual data points.

IV. RESULTS

The AI-generated narratives are changing the landscape of digital literature by creating new types of storytelling written by machines rather than humans, re-casting ordinary digital literature into a machine-produced experience. These changes present challenges for readers in understanding narrative and storytelling as they relate to narrative quality, emotional engagement, and narrative credibility. The present research aims to understand how factors such as narrative coherence, emotional engagement, and AI author characteristics potentially inform readers' engagement and preference.

A. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Table 2 summarizes the demographic profile of the 500 survey participants. Reading ability was distributed as follows: 15% beginners, 50% intermediate, and 35% advanced readers, indicating balanced experience levels. Gender representation was even, with 47% male and 53% female. Age groups included 38% aged 25–34, 24% aged 18–24, 22% aged 35–44, and 16% aged 45 and older. Fiction was the most popular literature type at 42%, followed by science fiction/fantasy (20%), non-fiction (18%), and poetry or other (10% each). Educational attainment showed 46% held a first degree, 44% had a postgraduate qualification, and 10% had a high school education or lower. Figure 3 displays (a) Reading Proficiency Level, (b) Gender, (c) Preferred Literature Type, and (d) Education Level.

TABLE 2
SUMMARY OF DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Demographic Variable	Categories	Frequency (n=500)	Percentage (%)
Reading Proficiency Level	Beginner	75	15%
	Intermediate	250	50%
	Advanced	175	35%
Gender	Male	235	47%
	Female	265	53%
Age	18–24 years	120	24%
	25–34 years	190	38%
	35–44 years	110	22%
	45+ years	80	16%
Preferred Literature Type	Fiction	210	42%
	Non-fiction	90	18%
	Poetry	50	10%
	Science Fiction / Fantasy	100	20%
	Others (Drama, Experimental, etc.)	50	10%
Education Level	High School or Below	50	10%
	Undergraduate	230	46%
	Postgraduate	220	44%

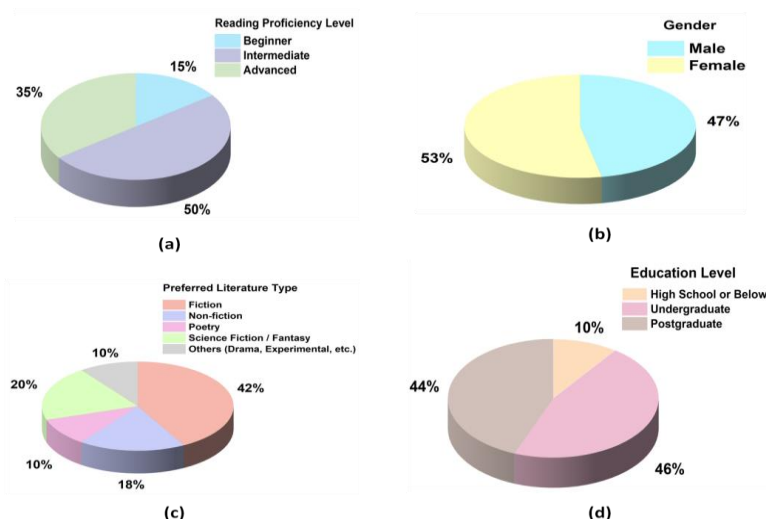


Figure 3. Presentation of (a) Reading Proficiency Level, (b) Gender, (c) Preferred Literature Type and (d) Education Level

B. ANOVA

Table 3 shows the ANOVA results for reader engagement across demographic groups. The between-groups sum of squares is 22.68 and has 3 degrees of freedom, giving us a mean square of 7.56. The within-groups sum of squares is 794.32 with 496 degrees of freedom, giving us a mean square of 1.60. Therefore, the F-value becomes 4.73 with a p-value of 0.003. This indicates a statistically significant difference between engagements based on demographic factors. This means factors such as age, educational level, or reading habits are meaningful differences in how participants engage with the narrative generated by AI. The total amount of variance in the model is the amount of variance considered by the overall sum of squares, which is 817.00.

TABLE 3
QUANTITATIVE VALUES IN ANOVA OF READER ENGAGEMENT

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares (SS)	Degrees of Freedom (df)	Mean Square (MS)	F-value	p-value
Between Groups	22.68	3	7.56	4.73	0.003*
With Groups	794.32	496	1.60	-	-
Total	817.00	499	-	-	-

C. Descriptive Statistics

Table 4 shows the descriptive statistics for six reader perception variables related to AI narratives. NC had a high mean of 4.08 and a standard deviation of 0.73 which indicated a strong agreement on clarity of AI stories; ER had a mean of 3.94, suggesting moderate emotional engagement; DAI had the lowest mean of 3.21, indicating that readers were mixed on the effects of knowing that the story was AI generated; RE mean was relatively high (4.02), suggesting that readers were engaged and immersed in the narratives; NP (mean 3.76) and NGP (mean 3.88) showed positive perceptions of AI storytelling; an overall favourable perception was noted across genres. The overall findings suggest that there was a generally favourable reception of AI narratives relative to Narrative Coherence and Narrative Engagement.

TABLE 4
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR READER PERCEPTION VARIABLES

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
NC	4.08	0.73	2.0	5.0
ER	3.94	0.81	1.0	5.0
DAI	3.21	0.95	1.0	5.0
RE	4.02	0.69	2.0	5.0
NP	3.76	0.78	1.0	5.0
NGP	3.88	0.72	2.0	5.0

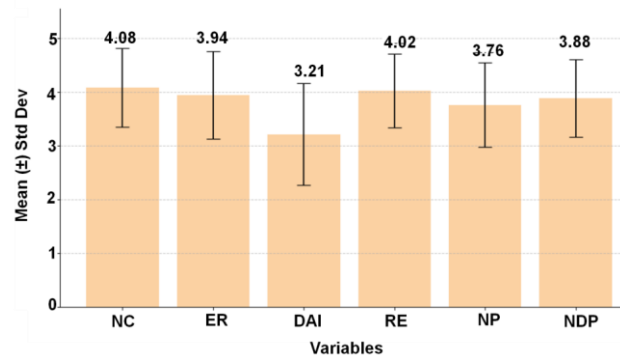


Figure 4. Graphical Representation of Descriptive Statistics

D. Chi-Square Test

Table 5 provides a summary of the results of the Chi-Square test of six predictor variables hypothesized in relation to reader perception, emotional perception, and engagement with AI generated narratives. NC resulted in a χ^2 value of 10.24 ($df = 2$, $p = 0.006$) demonstrating a significant relationship with patterns of reader response. ER showed an even stronger association as it had a $\chi^2 = 12.13$, $p = 0.002$ indicating emotional content significantly influences reader engagement. When readers were informed of AI authorship to be as a Digital Author and then explained the model, DAI had the most significant degree of association with reader response as $\chi^2 = 15.87$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.0001$. Evidence reinforces the significance of DAI as an influential variable. The results for RE had a $\chi^2 = 9.66$, $p = 0.008$ further demonstrating the role of reader engagement in reader evaluations of narratives. In addition to the variable of DAI there were also statistically significant associations reported for Reader NP ($\chi^2 = 7.41$, $p = 0.025$) and Reader NGP ($\chi^2 = 6.98$, $p = 0.031$). The data in Figure 5 supports the idea that all six variables have a statistically significant relationship with how readers are interacting and assessing the AI generated digital narratives.

TABLE 5
CHI-SQUARE TEST RESULTS FOR HYPOTHEZED VARIABLES

Variables	χ^2 Value	Degrees of Freedom (df)	p-value
NC	10.24	2	0.006
ER	12.13	2	0.002
DAI	15.87	1	0.001
RE	9.66	2	0.008
NP	7.41	2	0.025
NGP	6.98	2	0.031

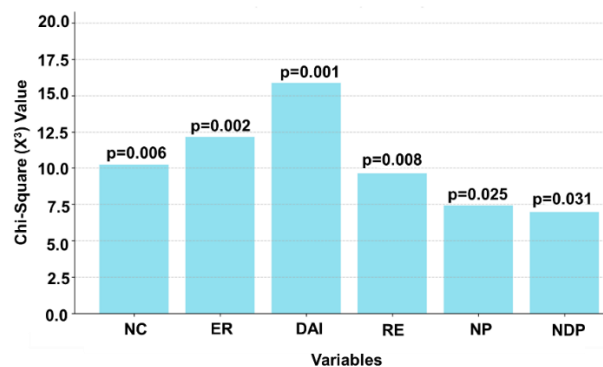


Figure 5. Graphical Representation of Chi-Square Values

E. Hypothetical Pathway Evaluation Results

Table 6 and Figure 6 present the results of the hypothetical pathway analysis which examined the direct and moderated effects of variables impacting reader engagement and reader perception of AI-generated narratives. H1 found a strong positive effect of Narrative Coherence ($\beta = 0.42$, $p = 0.000$) on Reader Engagement indicating that a well-structured narrative increases immersion. Similarly, H2 found that Emotional Resonance positively relates to engagement ($\beta = 0.37$, $p = 0.000$), supporting the premise that narratives generated by AI that consistently elicit emotional reactions can lead to clearly elevated levels of reader engagement. H3 found that Disclosure of AI Authorship was negatively related to Narrative Preference ($\beta = -0.28$, $p = 0.001$), suggesting that the reader's knowledge of machine authorship causes the perceived value of the narrative to be reduced. Lastly, H5 demonstrated a positive influence of greater Reader Engagement on Narrative H4 showed a significant moderated pathway ($\beta = 0.31$, $p = 0.002$), to support that Narrative Genre Preference influences the effect of Narrative Coherence on Engagement. Preference ($\beta = 0.47$, $p = 0.000$), signifying that the higher levels of immersion can produce congruent evaluations. All the hypotheses were statistically supported, confirming the conceptual model for the research.

TABLE 6
HYPOTHETICAL PATHWAY EVALUATION RESULTS

Hypothesis	Variables	Path	Path Coefficient (β)	Standard Error	t-Value	p-Value	Support/Not Support
H1		NC $\rightarrow$ RE	0.42	0.06	7.00	0.000	Support
H2		ER $\rightarrow$ RE	0.37	0.07	5.29	0.000	Support
H3		DAI $\rightarrow$ NP	-0.28	0.08	-3.50	0.001	Support
H4		ER	0.31	0.09	3.44	0.002	Support
		$\rightarrow$ NGP $\rightarrow$ RE					
H5		RE $\rightarrow$ NP	0.47	0.05	9.40	0.000	Support

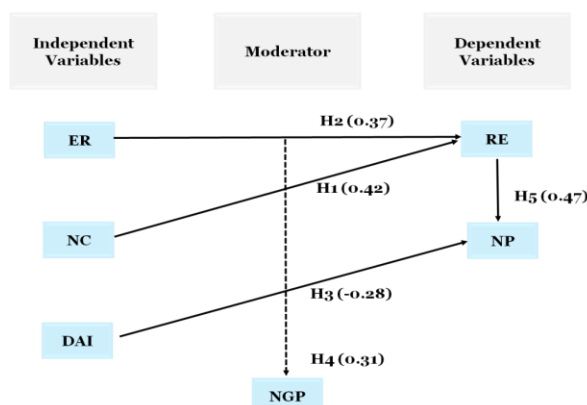


Figure 6. Hypothetical Pathway Evaluation Results

V. DISCUSSION

The growing use of AI in digital literature reveals both promising engagement and problematic patterns. Research shows that AI-generated narratives can foster emotional resonance and self-insight, enhanced reader immersion, and reflective experience. However, persistent issues such as algorithmic bias, underrepresentation of diverse groups, and the influence of authorship disclosure raise concerns about inclusivity and authenticity (Gabino-Campos et al., 2025). Reader engagement is influenced not only by the coherence or aesthetic of the narrative, but also by the perceived credibility of its source, human or machine. While readers often respond positively to well-structured or emotionally rich content, knowledge that the narrative is AI-authored can negatively impact narrative preference. These effects highlight a need for more nuanced narrative design and transparency in AI authorship (Blyler & Seligman, 2024). Despite encouraging results, limitations such as small or culturally narrow samples, reliance on a single AI model, and short-term evaluations limit the generalizability of current findings. Broader cross-cultural, longitudinal, and genre-diverse research is essential to fully understand how AI storytelling affects diverse reader populations (Jiang et al., 2024). A critical, human-centered approach is needed to align AI literary production with inclusive and meaningful reader experiences.

The series of statistical analyses conducted in this research to measure reader engagement and perception of AI-generated stories utilized several different analytic techniques. The ANOVA test indicated a statistically significant difference in engagement across demographic groups: $F(3, 649) = 4.73$; $p = 0.003$. The descriptive statistics indicated that Narrative Coherence ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 0.73$) was rated with the highest mean, suggesting that AI-generated stories were clear, while Disclosure of AI Authorship ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 0.95$) was rated with the lowest mean, indicating mixed readers' opinions on AI authorship. Chi-Square tests identified statistically significant associations for all variables. For example, the largest χ^2 value for DAI = 15.87 ($p = 0.0001$) suggests significant engagement for the group authorship variable DAI. Although the Chi-Square test is generally a more simplistic way of measuring associations, it does suggest that the disclosure of authorship does have a strong effect on readership, and perceptions are dependent on the AI author's contribution. Finally, the Hypothetical Pathway Analysis verified all hypotheses proposed in this research, where Reader

Engagement's positive effect on Narrative Preference had the highest described coefficient for $\beta = 0.47$ ($p = 0.000$), impact on readership decision making about reading engagement, and favourably perceiving AI-generated narratives. Among the proposed hypotheses for the research, the best hypothesis was H5: that RE positively influences NP. The hypothesis also had the strongest statistical measurement with a path relationship coefficient $\beta = 0.47$, t -value = 9.40, and a significant measurement $p = 0.000$, indicating a strong and meaningful positive relationship between readers' immersion in narratives and positively favouring view and impression of AI-generated narratives.

VI. CONCLUSION

Research demonstrates that AI-generated narratives can engage readers in a meaningful way if they are crafted meaningfully, with clarity, emotional engagement, and genre conventions in mind. The statistical analyses confirmed the relationships between NC, the audience's ER as it relates specifically to the narrative coherence of AI-generated stories, and RE, and when reading machine-generated narratives, DAI had a decidedly negative effect on NP. With the various hypotheses tested, reader engagement was the most important factor shaping readers' perceptions of AI-written stories, with the intellectual interest generated impacting the greatest effect as a strong path coefficient ($\beta = 0.47$) determined from the hypothetical pathway analysis. In the ANOVA analysis, the effects of demographics yielded statistical differences on reader engagement, while the Chi-Square analysis also confirmed strong relationships between all six predictor variables and reader responses, with no surprise toward authorship knowledge. The descriptive statistics also revealed that readers do appreciate logic and 'emotional engagement.' However, they are sensitive to the knowledge that the narrative was written by a machine. Overall, the research explains the principle of narrative design. It considers narrative events that are clearly structured, employ a clear and memorable emotional 'punch', and are presented formally. These events are not always expected to lead to greater engagement when readers consciously process the authorship knowledge of the machine origin. This research focuses on various aspects of design and disclosure; it highlights the importance of forethought to create better engagement and perceptions. The findings also provide a greater understanding of the stimuli and context, particularly when reading on digital devices. These factors affect human expectations of creativity, emotion, and coherence in constructing AI-generated digital literature consistent with reader reception and expectations. Much of the literature for both AI-generated narratives and for human expectations associated with generating narratives on behalf of human authors requires careful negotiation. It is necessary to generate other kinds of knowledge based on the reader's reception and engagement degrees in each phase of the reading experience. One of the significant limitations of the research was the scope of short-term reader responses and the lack of longitudinal tracking of reader responses. It is possible that it can take time for readers' views to change. Furthermore, the sample was culturally limited, and thus generalizability was limited across readership and reader populations. To spark deeper insights and inspire impactful designs, future research can actively explore how readers from diverse cultures and genres interact with AI-generated narratives and dynamically track engagement over time.

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Teachers' Experiences With Mobile Apps for Arabic Language Learning: Insights From Islamic Schools in Palu, Indonesia

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Abstract—The integration of mobile applications in Arabic language learning has become increasingly relevant with the advancement of technology, particularly within Islamic schools (madrasahs). This study investigates the perspectives of Islamic school stakeholders in Palu, Central Sulawesi, Indonesia, regarding the use of mobile apps for Arabic language teaching and learning. Using the framework of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), this research explores the understanding and the awareness of stakeholders, their perception, challenges and barriers encountered during the use of mobile applications, and suggestion for potential improvements of mobile apps in the Arabic language learning process. Data were collected from teachers, students, school administrators, parents to better understand the awareness of stakeholders, their perceptions of mobile app utility, ease of use, and the integration into the curriculum. Findings indicate that while mobile apps enhance flexibility, engagement, and interactive learning, several challenges persist, including infrastructural limitations, teacher readiness, and cultural attitudes of both teachers and students toward technology. The study highlights the necessity of tailored technological solutions that align with pedagogical and religious values of Islamic education. Recommendations include improved teacher training, enhanced mobile apps content relevance, and institutional support for technology integration. By providing insights into the specific educational context of Palu, this research contributes to a broader understanding of mobile applications in Arabic language learning and offers practical implications for teachers, regional education stakeholders, app developers, and policymakers.

Index Terms—Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL), Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), Arabic language learning, digital learning

I. INTRODUCTION

Rapid technological advances in education have significantly transformed language teaching and learning practices worldwide. Among these innovations, mobile applications (apps) have emerged as a powerful tool for language acquisition, offering interactive, flexible, and personalized learning experiences that transcend the boundaries of traditional classroom settings. These apps allow learners to access language content anytime and anywhere, making them highly relevant in an increasingly mobile and digitally connected world. In the field of Arabic language learning—especially in Islamic schools—the integration of mobile technology presents significant potential to enrich the learning process, increase engagement, and bridge the gap in teaching resources. However, the effectiveness and acceptability of mobile apps in Arabic language teaching, especially in a specific cultural and regional context such as Palu, Central Sulawesi, require thorough and context-sensitive investigation.

Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) has gained significant traction globally as a method for integrating mobile technology into language education. Research shows that mobile apps can enhance language learning by providing learners with immediate access to vocabulary practice, grammar exercises, multimedia resources, and interactive assessments (Gafni et al., 2017; Holozsai & Jozsep, 2024; Choto Iza & Yopez Masapanta, 2025). The MALL approach is particularly effective in supporting vocabulary acquisition, listening comprehension, and speaking fluency, making it a valuable tool for educators seeking to extend learning beyond the classroom (Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2008; Zain & Bowles, 2021).

In Arabic language learning, especially for non-native speakers, the adoption of mobile learning tools remains an emerging but promising field. Studies show that technology can facilitate mastery of Arabic script, pronunciation, and grammar, while providing an engaging way to engage with religious and cultural content (Ghanem, 2020). However, the implementation of these tools in Islamic educational institutions—madrasahs—remains uneven. Madrasahs play a crucial role in preserving and promoting Arabic as the language of the Quran and Islamic scholarship. Integrating modern educational technology into these environments is often complicated by infrastructure constraints, limited digital literacy, varying teacher preparedness, and, in some cases, cultural skepticism about the role of technology within traditional pedagogical frameworks (Abdullah et al., 2019).

The cultural and regional context of Palu, Central Sulawesi, is particularly relevant in this regard. As the capital of a province with a rich Islamic heritage, Palu places great importance on Arabic language instruction in its madrasahs (Islamic schools). However, the adoption of digital learning tools is hampered by challenges such as inconsistent internet connectivity, inadequate training for educators, and a lack of localized Arabic language learning resources. Assessing the perceptions of local stakeholders—teachers, students, and administrators—provides critical insights into the opportunities and barriers to integrating mobile apps into Arabic language instruction in this context.

Stakeholder perspectives play a crucial role in shaping the success of educational technology initiatives. Teachers' attitudes toward mobile learning have been shown to directly influence adoption rates and teaching practices (Teo, 2011). In madrasahs, educators' acceptance of mobile applications for Arabic language instruction is influenced not only by their technological proficiency but also by their assessment of how these tools align with Islamic educational values (Fauzi & Aslan, 2020). Students' perspectives are equally important, as their continued engagement with mobile applications depends on user-friendly design, culturally relevant content, and the perceived usefulness of the tools in achieving their language learning goals (Hsu, 2013). Furthermore, administrator support is crucial for allocating resources, providing professional development, and integrating mobile learning into the institution's curriculum (Albirini, 2006).

While global research on MALL continues to grow, there is a lack of local studies focused on regions like Palu, where unique intersections of culture, religion, and education shape technology adoption. This study addresses this gap by examining the experiences, challenges, and recommendations of madrasah stakeholders in Palu regarding the use of mobile applications for Arabic language instruction. Specifically, this study aims to answer: (1) What are the most commonly used mobile applications for Arabic language instruction in madrasahs in Palu? (2) How do teachers, students, and administrators perceive their effectiveness? (3) What challenges hinder successful implementation? and (4) What suggestions do stakeholders provide for improvement?

The objectives of this study focused on four issues: to investigate the effectiveness of mobile applications in enhancing Arabic language learning in Islamic schools; to understand stakeholders' perceptions of their use; to identify barriers in its implementation; and to explore recommendations for better technology integration in Arabic language teaching and learning. By situating MALL within the cultural and educational realities of Palu, this study aimed to generate insights that informed the development of more effective, culturally appropriate, and sustainable digital learning solutions for Arabic language learning in Indonesia.

II. REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

A. Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) in Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language

Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL), a branch of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), focuses on the use of mobile devices for language learning, including Arabic. Its main advantages lie in its flexibility, personalization, and the integration of interactive media that support reading, listening, writing, and speaking skills. In

the context of this research, the relevance of MALL is seen in three aspects. First, the flexibility and personalization of learning allow students to access materials anytime and anywhere (Slavuj, 2023). Second, its mobile nature facilitates the analysis of application accessibility during the teaching and learning process in Indonesia, particularly in Palu, where limited internet infrastructure is a challenge. Third, the interactivity and multimedia in Arabic language applications have been shown to enhance learning (Rajendran & Yunus, 2021; Kukulska-Hulme & Viberg, 2018; Reinders & Pegrum, 2016).

Previous research has shown that MALL creates an engaging and interactive learning environment, increases student engagement, and supports personalized learning paths (Burston, 2014; McQuiggan, 2015; Sonmez et al., 2018; Burston & Arispe, 2022). For example, the application *Takallam* developed for oral communication skills can strengthen students' vocabulary and grammar (Mohammad et al., 2023). Students who use MALL tend to have a positive attitude toward learning because they can learn at their own pace and style (Zare & Derakhshan, 2022; Alkhudair, 2020). However, challenges remain, such as gaps in technology access and the need for teacher training, which need to be addressed for effective implementation in resource-constrained areas.

While MALL presents significant advantages, challenges such as technological accessibility and the need for teacher training remain critical considerations in its implementation especially in the context of Palu where the access to internet is not always easy for all students and teachers alike.

B. *Theory of Acceptance Model (TAM) in the Arabic Teaching and Learning*

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), developed by Davis et al. (1989), explains technology acceptance through two main constructs: *perceived usefulness* (PU) and *perceived ease of use* (PEU). In Arabic language education, TAM is relevant to understanding how teachers and students perceive mobile applications as learning media. PU refers to the belief that technology improves learning performance, while PEU refers to the belief that technology is easy to use (Marangunic & Granic, 2015; Mejía-Mancilla & Mejía-Trejo, 2024).

The implementation of TAM in Islamic-based schools in Palu shows that motivation to use Arabic language learning applications is strongly influenced by perceived benefits and ease of use. In an era where conventional methods are increasingly becoming less popular, adopting technology is seen as a relevant and practical solution (Oamen et al., 2023). Empirically, research in various post-COVID-19 contexts confirms that perceived quality and motivation are important factors in the use of Arabic language learning applications, *smartphone* for language learning (Mejía-Mancilla & Mejía-Trejo, 2024). This model explains technology acceptance through attitudes toward its use, behavioral intentions, and actual use, all of which are interrelated. Thus, TAM is an effective theoretical framework for analyzing stakeholders' readiness and response to MALL in Arabic language learning.

C. *The Views of Constructivist Learning Theory in Arabic Teaching and Learning*

Constructivist learning theory emphasizes active student involvement and personalized learning experiences. Knowledge is constructed through interaction, collaboration, and direct involvement, in line with *experiential learning* (Kolb, 1984). In Arabic language learning, constructivism is relevant because it encourages problem-solving, contextual learning, and real-world engagement (Nurdin et al., 2023; Tom, 2024). This method facilitates discovery-based learning that enhances student understanding, especially for beginners (Wahyuni et al., 2023).

Integration of constructivism with other approaches, such as *communicative language teaching* and *collaborative learning*, has been shown to strengthen student engagement and application of Arabic in real contexts (Almelhes & Alsaiani, 2024). A constructivist-based reading skills model with stages *Exploration*, *Explanation*, *Elaboration*, *Evaluation*. It is also effective in increasing student interest (Hamdy & Ningsih, 2024). In Islamic education, the integration of constructivism with digital technology is considered capable of enriching the learning experience and addressing contemporary challenges (Al Dwairi, 2024).

In the context of MALL, constructivism explains how students construct Arabic language knowledge through interactions with digital applications. Three key aspects stand out. First, active interaction between students and technology strengthens linguistic and cultural competence, creating an immersive and personalized learning experience. *Interactive-Communicative Learning* has been shown to improve students' speaking fluency, vocabulary, and self-confidence (Maryani & Hasanuddin, 2025). Second, technology-enabled learning environments, including AI-based tools, provide continuous feedback to address challenges such as complex grammar and dialect differences (Mulyanto et al., 2024). Third, the use of mobile applications supports independent learning, aligning with students' cognitive abilities, while increasing motivation and interaction (Sarah et al., 2024; Arni et al., 2025).

Although the constructivist approach has great potential, some educators argue that the traditional behaviorist approach is still relevant, especially in the early stages of learning, which require structured guidance. Therefore, effective Arabic language learning strategies in the digital age need to combine the advantages of constructivism with conventional teaching principles, thus accommodating diverse learning styles and student needs.

Based on the MALL, TAM, and constructivist theory studies, researchers view the use of mobile applications in Arabic language learning as an innovation that offers flexibility, interactivity, and student-centered learning. Mobile applications enable access to materials anytime and anywhere, support personalized learning, and enrich the learning experience with multimedia content. In line with the TAM principles, the perceived ease and usefulness of the application can increase user acceptance. Meanwhile, constructivist theory emphasizes that this technology encourages

students to actively construct knowledge through contextual activities, making it relevant to support effective and sustainable Arabic language learning in madrasahs. While constructivist methods show a promising future, some educators argue that traditional behaviorists' approaches may still hold value, particularly in structured learning environments where clear guidance is necessary for foundational skills.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a *mixed methods* approach to obtain a comprehensive picture of the use of mobile applications in Arabic language teaching and learning. This approach combines quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques to integrate numerical data from the survey with the personal experiences of stakeholders (*stakeholders*).

A. Research Participants

The study was conducted in five Islamic schools (madrasahs) in Palu City, Central Sulawesi, involving Arabic language teachers, students, school administrators, and parents. The madrasahs were selected purposively as these schools were considered to have implemented hybrid type of Arabic teaching approach. Meanwhile, teachers were selected to provide in-depth insights into strategies for integrating mobile applications into teaching, while students were involved to record their learning experiences. Administrative staff and parents were included to assess institutional support and household perspectives. The quantitative sample consisted of 125 survey respondents (36 Arabic language teachers, 8 administrative staff, and 81 parents) who were randomly selected through a mail distribution with *Google Form* by Arabic language teachers at the relevant madrasahs. To enrich the qualitative data, interviews were conducted based on *Google Form* with 46 students using the *semi-structured interview* format.

B. Data Collection Techniques

Data collection consisted of three main steps. First, prior to the online survey, the researchers met the Arabic teachers to provide a general view of Arabic teaching and learning in the selected madrasahs. Second, an online survey based on *Google Form* was used to collect quantitative data related to the stakeholders' level of awareness, perceptions, challenges, and suggestions for improvement in the use of mobile applications. A Likert-scale questionnaire was sent to relevant teachers, administrative staff, and parents. Finally, interviews were conducted using *semi-structured* interview format with students to explore their perspectives in depth. The interview questions covered the awareness of mobile applications, perceived benefits in improving Arabic language skills, challenges faced, and suggestions for developing application features.

C. Data Analysis

Quantitative analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) to identify general patterns, as well as correlation analysis to test relationships between variables, for example between frequency of use and perceived learning effectiveness. This process was assisted by SPSS version 23 software. Qualitative data from interviews were analyzed using *thematic analysis* based on four main indicators in the survey. The process *coding* conducted to identify key themes, which were then compared across respondent groups to see similarities and differences in perspectives.

Triangulation was applied to combine quantitative and qualitative results, so that the analysis not only presents numerical data but also the context and meaning behind it. This approach ensures that the research findings illustrate the challenges, opportunities, and direction of Arabic language learning technology development that aligns with Islamic educational values in Palu.

D. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations become an important part in the implementation of the research. All participants were given *informed consent*. This information explains the purpose, procedures, participants' rights, and guarantees confidentiality. Participation is voluntary, and participants can withdraw at any time without consequence. The collected data will be stored securely and accessible only to the research team.

E. Research Limitations

Research limitations cover a specific regional focus so that the findings may not be generalizable to other regions, as well as the use of data that is of a *self-reported* potentially containing perceptual bias. Nevertheless, this methodology is designed to provide a robust and in-depth exploration of the use of mobile applications in Arabic language learning in madrasahs, taking into account diverse stakeholder perspectives.

IV. FINDINGS

This section summarizes findings on the use of mobile apps in Arabic language learning in madrasahs in Palu, collected through surveys of teachers, administrators, and parents, as well as interviews with teachers and students. Quantitative data reveal general trends, while qualitative insights add context. The research findings discuss the types of apps, perceived effectiveness, challenges, and suggestions for improvement, aiming to guide Arabic language

instruction that is culturally relevant, technology-integrated, and aligned with Islamic educational values in Central Sulawesi.

TABLE 1
THE AWARENESS OF RESPONDENTS ABOUT THE USE OF MOBILE APPS IN ARABIC LANGUAGE LEARNING

		I am aware of the mobile apps commonly used for teaching Arabic in madrasahs	I regularly use mobile apps for Arabic language learning in my madrasah	I believe that the mobile apps available are sufficient for teaching Arabic language skills	Total.X1
N	Valid	126	126	122	125
	Missing	0	0	4	1
Mean		3.67	3.34	3.69	10.62
Median		4.00	3.00	4.00	11.00
Mode		4	4	4	12
Std. Deviation		1.277	1.154	1.029	3.287
Variance		1.632	1.331	1.059	10.803
Sum		462	421	450	1327

Based on the data, respondents showed a fairly high level of awareness of the use of mobile applications in Arabic language learning, with an average score approaching 4 (Agree) on all three main indicators. The highest average score was found in the belief that available applications are sufficient to teach Arabic language skills (Mean = 3.69), followed by awareness of commonly used applications (Mean = 3.67), while routine use of applications showed the lowest score (mean = 3.34), which indicates that although respondents are aware of the existence and benefits of applications, their use in practice is still not optimal.

TABLE 2
PERCEPTION OF RESPONDENTS DEALING WITH MOBILE APPS FOR ARABIC LEARNING

	I believe that mobile apps help students improve their Arabic language skills	I believe that students engage more actively with Arabic language content through mobile apps	I believe that students find mobile apps to be effective tools for learning Arabic	Total.X2
N Valid	124	124	124	124
Missing	2	2	2	2
Mean	3.84	3.81	3.790	11.31
Median	4.00	4.00	4.000	12.00
Mode	4	4	4.0	12
Std. Deviation	1.031	.960	1.0063	2.972
Variance	1.063	.922	1.013	8.835
Sum	476	472	470.0	1403

The data also showed that respondents' perceptions of the use of mobile applications in Arabic language learning were very positive, with the average score for all three statements above 3.7 and the median and mode consistently at 4 (agree). This indicates that the majority of respondents believe that mobile applications help improve Arabic language skills, encourage student engagement, and are effective learning tools. The relatively low level of dispersion in the data (standard deviation below 1.1) also indicates consistency in these positive perceptions.

TABLE 3
THE VIEWS OF RESPONDENTS ABOUT THE CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS FACED BY ARABIC TEACHERS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF MOBILE APPS IN MADRASAHs

	There are significant challenges in implementing mobile apps in teaching Arabic	Limited access to technology hinders the use of mobile apps in madrasahs	Training for teachers on how to effectively use mobile apps is inadequate	Total.X3
N Valid	124	123	124	124
Missing	2	3	2	2
Mean	3.67	3.54	3.59	10.57
Median	4.00	4.00	4.00	11.00
Mode	4	4	4	12
Std. Deviation	1.026	1.073	1.119	2.797
Variance	1.052	1.152	1.252	7.824
Sum	455	435	445	1311

Meanwhile, the results indicate that respondents recognize significant challenges in implementing mobile applications for Arabic language learning, with the average score for all three statements above 3.5 and the median and mode consistently at 4 (Agree). This reflects that limited access to technology in madrasahs and the lack of teacher training are considered major obstacles. This consistency of perception is reinforced by the relatively low distribution of data, indicating that views on these challenges are fairly evenly distributed among respondents.

TABLE 4
THE VIEWS OF RESPONDENTS DEALING WITH SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT IN THE USE OF MOBILE APPS IN ARABIC TEACHING AND LEARNING

	Stakeholders should provide more resources to support the use of mobile apps in Arabic teaching at madrasahs	Regular training sessions for teachers on mobile app usage should be provided	Collaboration among stakeholders (teachers, students, administrators) is essential to improve mobile apps usage	Total.X4
N Valid	124	124	124	124
Missing	2	2	2	2
Mean	3.86	3.94	4.04	11.58
Median	4.00	4.00	4.00	12.00
Mode	4	4	4	12
Std. Deviation	1.136	1.212	1.206	2.950
Variance	1.290	1.468	1.454	8.701
Sum	479	489	501	1436

The data indicate that respondents strongly support increased resource support and training for the use of mobile applications in Arabic language teaching, with a very positive average score above 3.8 for all three statements. The highest average score was found for the importance of collaboration between stakeholders (mean = 4.04), indicating a strong belief in the importance of cooperation in increasing the effectiveness of application use. With a median and mode consistently at 4, and a relatively low variance, this reflects a nearly uniform view among respondents regarding the need for more support for the use of mobile applications in learning in madrasahs.

TABLE 5
THE CORRELATIONS AMONGST THE ISSUES INVESTIGATED

		The Awareness of stakeholders	Perception of stakeholders	Challenges and barriers	Suggestions for improvement
The Awareness of Mobile apps in Arabic teaching and learning	Pearson Correlation	1	.852**	.760**	.736**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	1339.568	983.637	825.185	843.484
	Covariance	10.803	7.997	6.709	6.858
	N	125	124	124	124
Perception of stakeholders about the effectiveness of mobile apps in Arabic teaching and learning	Pearson Correlation	.852**	1	.804**	.827**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	983.637	1086.734	822.669	891.355
	Covariance	7.997	8.835	6.688	7.247
	N	124	124	124	124
Views on Challenges and barriers faced in the implementation of mobile apps in Arabic learning and teaching	Pearson Correlation	.760**	.804**	1	.786**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	825.185	822.669	962.347	797.774
	Covariance	6.709	6.688	7.824	6.486
	N	124	124	124	124
Views on Suggestions for improvement of the use of mobile apps in Arabic teaching and learning	Pearson Correlation	.736**	.827**	.786**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	843.484	891.355	797.774	1070.194
	Covariance	6.858	7.247	6.486	8.701
	N	124	124	124	124

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

Based on the Pearson correlation data analysis provided regarding the use of mobile applications in Arabic language learning, here is a comprehensive analysis covering awareness, perceptions, challenges, and suggestions for improvement. The sample size of the current research is quite large and consistent: N = 124–125 respondents analyzing indicators covering the awareness of Mobile Apps in Arabic teaching and learning, the perception of stakeholders about the effectiveness of the mobile apps in the Arabic teaching and learning, potential challenges and barriers that the Arabic teachers and students may face during the teaching and learning with the mobile apps. In addition, suggestions for improvement were investigated to better understand what the Arabic teachers and students alike need in their learning with the mobile apps. Table 6 showed the result of Pearson Correlation Analysis.

TABLE 6
PEARSON CORRELATION ANALYSIS

Correlation between variables (r)	Pearson Correlation	General interpretation: Relationship (r) Interpretation
Awareness of Mobile Apps use ↔ Perception of stakeholders about the effectiveness of mobile apps use	.852	Very strong and positive correlation
Awareness of Mobile Apps use ↔ Challenges and Barriers faced in Mobile Apps use	.760	Strong and positive correlation
Awareness of Mobile Apps use ↔ Suggestions for Improvements in Mobile Apps use in teaching	.736	Strong and positive correlation
Perception of stakeholders about the effectiveness of mobile apps use ↔ Challenges and Barriers faced in Mobile Apps use	.804	Very strong correlation
Perception ↔ Suggestions for Improvements in Mobile Apps use in teaching	.827	Very strong correlation
Challenges and Barriers faced in Mobile Apps use ↔ Suggestions for Improvements in Mobile Apps use in teaching	.786	Very strong correlation

Correlation analysis showed all values were significant at $p < 0.01$, indicating the relationships were not due to chance. Combining quantitative survey data and qualitative interview insights provides a comprehensive overview of awareness, perceptions, challenges, and suggestions for improvement regarding the use of mobile apps in Arabic language learning in Palu madrasas. This combined analysis connects statistics with students' actual experiences, offering both general trends and nuanced details. The findings are organized into four key indicators that form the core of the investigation.

A. The Awareness of Stakeholders on the Mobile Apps Use in Arabic Teaching and Learning

The survey results indicate that awareness among school stakeholders—teachers, principals, staff, students, and parents—regarding mobile apps for Arabic language learning in Palu madrasas is quite high. This indicates a general understanding of the role of technology, particularly mobile apps, as a valuable learning tool. The correlation between awareness and perception is very strong ($r = 0.852$), indicating that greater knowledge of these apps goes hand in hand with more positive attitudes toward their benefits. Therefore, the awareness is not passive knowledge but an active driver of adoption. The same awareness correlates strongly with identifying challenges ($r = 0.760$) and offering suggestions for improvement ($r = 0.736$), reflecting a constructive outlook that combines recognition of benefits with the ability to critically assess weaknesses.

Qualitative interviews corroborate these findings. Students who had used Arabic language learning apps reported improved vocabulary (P6), flexible learning anytime and anywhere (P11), and increased motivation for independent learning (P27, P34). This suggests that awareness is reflected in active learning behavior. However, disparities exist: some students (P39, P19) had never used the apps, indicating unequal awareness and access. Factors such as inadequate devices, limited digital literacy, unintegrated curriculum policies, and economic constraints were cited as possible causes.

Therefore, while awareness is strong, its distribution is uneven, limiting its potential. High awareness must be combined with equitable access, digital literacy training, and supportive policies to ensure inclusive use. Without these measures, awareness risks remaining untapped potential. These findings highlight that awareness is foundational to positive perceptions and a catalyst for practical improvements, but its impact is only achieved if supported by a systemic strategy that enables all stakeholders to actively and effectively use mobile apps in Arabic language learning.

B. Stakeholder Perception on the Use of the Mobile Apps in Arabic Teaching and Learning

The survey results revealed a high correlation between positive perceptions of mobile applications for Arabic language learning and suggestions for improvement ($r = 0.827$). This figure indicates that students, teachers, and other stakeholders who have a positive view of the application not only appreciate its benefits but also tend to actively provide constructive feedback for its development. In other words, positive perceptions in this context are proactive: those who see the application's value are not simply passive recipients but active partners in the process of improving the learning technology. This is important because the process of technology adoption in schools does not stop at the use stage; it needs to be accompanied by feedback that can strengthen its relevance and effectiveness.

Qualitative data from interviews complemented these quantitative findings. Many students described mobile apps as flexible, easily accessible, and providing a wider variety of materials than conventional learning methods (P9, P33). This flexibility allows students to learn at their own pace, whether at home, on the go, or in between other activities. The rapid access and availability of diverse materials were also seen as helpful in strengthening vocabulary, grammar, and reading skills in Arabic. These findings align with literature that confirms that positive perceptions of educational technology are often driven by its adaptability and independence from space and time.

However, interviews also revealed that positive perceptions were not universal. Some students preferred face-to-face learning with a teacher (P30). They felt that direct interaction provided opportunities for spontaneous questions, in-depth explanations, and emotional motivation to learn—things that digital applications are difficult to replace.

Meanwhile, other students reported difficulty understanding the material when having to translate without teacher guidance (P42). These challenges demonstrate that while mobile applications offer convenience, there are still barriers to conceptual understanding for some students, especially those with different learning styles such as students with auditory and kinesthetic learning styles which requires direct interaction. The latter types of students are only able to understand learning materials throughout the activities of listening, moving, and direct interaction.

This variation in learning preferences is an important signal for policy designers and application developers. Effective learning technology in madrasahs cannot be one-size-fits-all (*one-size-fits-all*), but must consider the diversity of learning styles, learning habits, and emotional needs of students. Integration between application-based learning and face-to-face methods (*blended learning*) can be a solution that accommodates both groups: those who enjoy the flexibility of technology and those who need direct support from teachers.

Thus, the high level of positive perception of mobile applications should be leveraged as a foundation for developing balanced and inclusive learning models. When this perception is coupled with opportunities for student and teacher feedback, application development can be more responsive to real-world needs. This strategy not only strengthens technology acceptance among users but also ensures that the resulting innovations are truly relevant, effective, and sustainable in improving the quality of Arabic language learning in madrasahs.

C. Challenges and Barriers Faced in the Use of Mobile Applications in Arabic Teaching and Learning

The quantitative analysis results show that the challenges faced by stakeholders in using mobile applications for Arabic language learning have a high correlation with the level of awareness ($r = 0.760$), perception ($r = 0.804$), and suggestions for improvement ($r = 0.786$). This correlation indicates that the greater a person's understanding and awareness of the application, the greater their ability to accurately identify obstacles and formulate relevant solutions. In other words, the challenges detected are not merely passive complaints, but rather a reflection of a deep understanding of the application's working mechanisms and potential. This emphasizes the importance of technological literacy among users, because only with adequate understanding can problems be accurately described and responded to with targeted improvement strategies.

Qualitative findings from student interviews provide a more detailed picture of these challenges. One of the main obstacles frequently mentioned was an unstable internet connection (P24), which disrupted the smooth running of app-based learning, especially when accessing video materials or interactive content that requires high bandwidth. Furthermore, the limited availability of adequate devices was also a significant barrier. Some students lacked smartphones with sufficient specifications to run apps optimally or had to share devices with other family members, limiting learning time.

Other technical issues include slow app loading times (P30), which can reduce students' motivation to learn consistently. Meanwhile, from a pedagogical perspective, some students reported difficulty understanding grammar without direct teacher explanations (P2). This suggests that app-based learning, while rich in resources, still requires contextual guidance and explanations, especially for complex material. These challenges are compounded by barriers to learning motivation, such as impaired focus or distractions when using mobile phones (P1), which can result in less effective learning.

Interestingly, despite facing these obstacles, many students still view mobile apps as a potential learning tool. This view reflects the existence of *growth mindset* amongst users, there is a belief that challenges are not permanent obstacles, but rather opportunities to find better solutions. This is relevant to the finding that challenges are positively correlated with suggestions for improvement, suggesting that obstacles can actually be a catalyst for innovation and adaptation.

Therefore, strategies to address these challenges need to be multidimensional. From a technical perspective, improving internet network infrastructure in schools and at students' homes is a priority. Optimizing application design to be lighter and more *user-friendly* for *low-spec devices* can also help expand accessibility. From a pedagogical perspective, integrating app-based learning with intensive teacher guidance can address material comprehension challenges. Teachers can provide guidance on effective app use, clarify difficult concepts, and monitor students' learning progress.

With a combination of technological advancements, improved app design, and pedagogical support, these challenges can be transformed into opportunities to strengthen the effectiveness of mobile app-based Arabic language learning. These findings confirm that the success of educational technology implementation depends not only on software quality but also on infrastructure readiness and the active involvement of all parties in the learning process.

D. Suggestions for Improvement in the Use of Mobile Applications in Arabic Teaching and Learning

Survey results showed that improvement suggestions correlated highly with awareness, perception, and challenges. This indicates that respondents who provided constructive ideas generally had direct experience using the app and a deep understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. This correlation also confirms that strong digital literacy enables users not only to enjoy the app's benefits but also to critically assess areas for improvement.

Qualitative findings from student interviews reinforced this data with practical input. One key suggestion was the addition of an offline access feature to address the often unstable internet connection. Several students emphasized the need for a bug-free application capable of running on a variety of devices, including low-spec devices (P1). There was

also input on the addition of interactive quizzes aligned with the madrasah curriculum to make learning more focused and enjoyable (P2, P6).

Furthermore, students proposed combining app-based learning with face-to-face learning to bridge the need for direct interaction with teachers, especially for material requiring in-depth explanations. Several respondents also highlighted the importance of improving teacher capacity through training in creating engaging digital content and strategies for integrating apps into lesson plans. Thus, app improvements should not only focus on technical aspects but also encompass pedagogical dimensions and human resource development. This comprehensive approach is believed to increase the app's effectiveness and acceptance among both teachers and students.

TABLE 7
COMPARISON OF SURVEY AND INTERVIEW FINDINGS

Aspect	Survey Findings (Quantitative)	Interview Findings (Qualitative)
Awareness	High; strong correlation with perception ($r=0.852$) and suggestion ($r=0.736$)	Some students found the app helped with vocabulary, flexibility, and motivation; some had never used it before.
Perception	Positive; high correlation with improvement suggestions ($r=0.827$)	Many find the application flexible and varied, but some prefer face-to-face or have difficulty without teacher guidance.
Challenge	High correlation with all aspects ($r=0.760-0.804$)	Slow internet, limited devices, app bugs, grammar difficulties, distractions
Improvement Suggestions	High correlation with awareness, perception, and challenge	Feature proposal <i>offline</i> , bug-free app, interactive quizzes, teacher training, face-to-face + app combination

The combination of survey and interview data shows that the awareness of stakeholders, their perception, the challenges and suggestions for improvement are closely interrelated. Students with a high level of awareness tends to have a positive perception and is better able to identify specific challenges, and provides more relevant advice. Conversely, low awareness can lead to a lack of hands-on experience and a lack of contribution in providing development ideas. The interview excerpts help illustrate this relationship. For example, P6, who had a high level of awareness of the app, was able to explain its benefits in detail and suggest a combination of learning methods. P24, who experienced internet difficulties, was able to suggest a solution in the form of an offline feature. Conversely, P39, who had never used the app, was unable to provide detailed suggestions, indicating that *hands-on* experience is key to generating quality feedback.

V. DISCUSSION

This study confirms that integrating Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL), the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), and constructivist learning theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding mobile application use in Arabic language learning at madrasahs in Palu City. MALL highlights flexibility, mobility, and interactivity; TAM emphasizes perceived usefulness and ease of use; and constructivism stresses students' active engagement in building knowledge. Findings reveal that applications such as *Takallam* enhance speaking skills, vocabulary, and offer flexible learning aligned with Palu's context.

From a TAM perspective, perceived usefulness and ease are decisive in adoption, with a strong correlation between perceptions and improvement suggestions ($r = 0.827$). This suggests that acceptance is dynamic, linked to ongoing efforts to refine implementation. Teachers and students embrace mobile applications not merely for convenience, but for their proven benefits in supporting language proficiency, affirming Davis's (1989) view on the role of perceived usefulness and ease in technology adoption.

Furthermore, the findings of this study confirm the contribution of constructivism to technology-based learning. Interactive mobile applications enable students to independently construct understanding through hands-on practice and digital communication. This approach aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) perspective, which emphasizes the importance of social interaction and active engagement in the learning process. With the support of AI-based technology, students gain greater confidence in using Arabic, both orally and in writing, as they gain a personalized and meaningful learning experience.

Stakeholder awareness plays a crucial role in mobile application use. Data indicate that teachers, students, parents, and madrasah administrators demonstrate high awareness (average 3.67), with a very strong correlation between awareness and perception ($r = 0.852$). Greater knowledge and understanding foster more positive views of effectiveness, extending beyond awareness to psychological readiness and direct experience. This supports a learning ecosystem open to digital innovation, especially when paired with continuous training and best practices. Moreover, Arabic teachers' perceptions drive active engagement and constructive feedback. Positive perceptions not only increase application usage but also stimulate participation in improvements. The strong correlation between perceptions and awareness of challenges ($r = 0.804$) shows that teachers critically evaluate and reflect, making perceptions an indicator of collaborative involvement in developing technology-based solutions in madrasahs.

This study also found that challenges in using the application were viewed not merely as obstacles, but as opportunities. Limited access to devices, minimal teacher training, and uneven infrastructure actually encouraged the emergence of adaptive strategies from educators. The high correlation between challenges and perceptions ($r = 0.804$) and challenges and suggestions for improvement ($r = 0.786$) indicated that teachers viewed difficulties as part of the

learning process that fosters creativity and critical thinking. This aligns with the constructivist principle that obstacles can strengthen understanding and problem-solving skills.

Stakeholders' suggestions for improvement, with an average score of 3.94–4.04, included regular training, infrastructure improvements, cross-stakeholder collaboration, and adapting app content to local curricula, reflecting a sustainability orientation. Correlations between suggestions and awareness ($r = 0.736$), perception ($r = 0.827$), and challenges ($r = 0.786$) confirmed that these recommendations were rooted in real-world experiences, not simply abstract ideas.

However, this study has limitations because it only covered madrasahs in Palu, and the perception data is potentially subject to subjective bias. Therefore, further research with a broader regional scope, a longitudinal approach, and mixed methods is highly recommended. These findings confirm the synergy between MALL, TAM, and constructivism in supporting collaborative, effective, and sustainable digital-based Arabic language learning strategies.

VI. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

A. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the use of mobile applications in Arabic language learning in madrasahs has significant potential to improve learning effectiveness, motivate students, and strengthen collaboration between stakeholders. MALL, TAM, and constructivism theories complement each other in explaining the successes and challenges of implementing this technology in the local context of Palu. The interrelationship between awareness, perceptions, challenges, and suggestions for improvement emphasizes that active user involvement and in-depth understanding are key to implementation. Therefore, strategic commitment from madrasahs, policy support, and the participation of all stakeholders are needed to ensure an inclusive and sustainable digital transformation of Arabic language learning based on Islamic values and the local context.

B. Practical and Strategic Implications

These findings have direct implications for various parties. Policy formulation needs to be more inclusive in implementing Arabic language learning, including the provision of adequate digital infrastructure. Evidence-based madrasah policies must be considered, accompanied by strengthening teacher training and improving digital literacy as a foundation for sustainable technology adoption. Internal and external collaboration within madrasahs is crucial for building a contextual digital ecosystem. Furthermore, the development of local Arabic language app content that aligns with Islamic values and Palu culture needs to be prioritized for better results.

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The Role of AI in Collaborative Fiction: Case Studies of Human-AI Co-Creation

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Abstract—This study explores the evolving role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in collaborative fiction writing. It mainly focuses on the way tools such as ChatGPT support human creativity, authorship, and emotional engagement. The study analyses user experiences with AI in narrative. Primary quantitative data were collected via an online survey administered to 151 participants. Data was collected through structured questionnaires and analysed statistically using SPSS. Key findings from the research reveal that people view Artificial Intelligence as a helpful partner in boosting productivity and generating new ideas. While users still value human creativity and make edits to the content generated by AI, they still strongly believe in AI's functionality, ethical impact, and future acceptance. The study highlights a shift toward human AI co-authorship as a promising, emotionally engaging, and creatively supportive practice.

Index Terms—Artificial Intelligence (AI), collaborative fiction, computational creativity, human-AI co-creation

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Background and Context

Creativity is not an exclusively human trait; it may be what controls the evolution of the entire universe. Contrastingly, universal creativity is conceived as a dynamic process, in which creative emergence may be seen through the following four monitors: material, biological, socio-cultural, and artificial. Instances of creativity occurring at various levels of complexity may be linked: this manifesto focuses on linking human-centred socio-cultural creativity with machine-centred artificial creativity (Vinchon et al., 2023, p. 479). Interest in AI spiked recently with the advent of ChatGPT and Midjourney and continues to grow as newer options enter the market, such as Microsoft Bing and Google Bard.

Complete narrative creation is viewed as an attribute of human intelligence. Therefore, experts in artificial intelligence (AI) and natural language generation (NLG) have traditionally regarded it as a significant research challenge. Creative writing and narrative construction pose specific challenges for automatic language generation systems: plotlines may run to thousands of words, and narratives involve several characters with distinct identities and voices, whereas in an adeptly told story, the authorial voice is consistent and recognisable throughout (Ippolito et al., 2022). On the other hand, inventing or imagining details, which can be considered a limitation for processes like machine translation or automated summarisation, can be a creative advantage. Thus, this study explores how AI contributes to collaborative writing. This study focuses on the opportunities and limitations in the partnership between humans and AI in literary production.

B. Rationale

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Despite technological progress, AI systems still struggle with advanced creative acts as their databases, though extensive, remain traditionally structured. Human creativity, driven by curiosity and personal experience, enables unique elaborations that AI cannot yet replicate (Vinchon et al., 2023, p. 479). However, through collaboration with humans, AI contributes to creative synthesis by influencing the process and outcomes of artistic work. Current debates focus on whether generative AI possesses “creative intention” or simply mimics (McGuire et al., 2024, p. 18525). Recent advancements in large language models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT have renewed interest in human AI collaboration, showing that AI can complement rather than replace human creativity (Ding & Chan, 2023, p. 4). Therefore, this study explores how AI enhances human creativity in fiction writing by examining authorship and agency within collaborative storytelling.

C. Aim and Objectives

Aim

This empirical study aims to evaluate the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in collaborative fiction.

Objectives

- To assess the contribution of AI to the creativity of humans in producing creative literary fiction work
- To investigate emotional engagement in writing, authorship, and agency in human-AI collaboration
- To examine the barriers and potential of the partnership between humans and AI in literary production

D. Research Questions

- What is the contribution of AI to the creativity of humans in producing creative literary fiction work?
- How does emotional engagement in writing, authorship, and agency affect human-AI collaboration?
- What are the barriers and potential of the partnership between humans and AI in literary production?

E. Purpose of the Research

The study intends to understand how writers utilise AI tools like language models to brainstorm ideas, develop characters, and organise plot lines. The study would also consider implications on narrative innovation, writer agency, and defining authorship in digital literature. The research attempts to understand if the writers feel that working with AI opens their creative freedom or limits it. Ultimately, it aims at discovering how to improve AI integration in the creative process, hence redirecting future fiction writing and elevating storytelling capabilities through a synergistic relationship between human imagination and calculated machine intelligence.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Human-AI Co-Creation in Creative Writing

The research conducted by McGuire et al. (2024) highlights that AI best supports human creativity when it is designed to make users feel like co-creators rather than just editors. Creativity is often limited by acting as an editor that involves judging and simplifying AI-generated content (p. 18525). This is due to the reduced control and narrow thinking. In co-creation, users explore ideas, take risks, and feel more confident in their creative abilities. Furthermore, the paper emphasises that Artificial Intelligence tools should focus on empowering users and boosting their self-belief, alongside encouraging flexible thinking. This method works well in areas such as advertising, education, and content creation. The study concludes that the findings it presents come from controlled environments and that more naturalistic studies are needed on the topic. The research did not test long-term effects or user skill levels, and future work is required to evaluate outcomes using advanced AI such as GPT-4. Therefore, the study concludes that collaboration with AI becomes more effective as users take an active role and AI tools support human imagination and control.

The research paper by Ding and Chan (2023) explores how human and large language models (LLMs), such as GPT-3, can collaborate to generate text. It outlines a spectrum of human-AI co-creation tasks, from simple content curation with minimal interaction to complex creative projects requiring repeated collaboration (p. 3). The authors of the study categorise interactions as either precise or iterative based on the task's complexity. Additionally, the study offers examples to explain this: content summarisation requires little input, while storytelling demands continuous human guidance and refinement. Moreover, the paper emphasises the importance of developing tools that support richer and more interactive co-creation experiences. It highlights challenges such as evaluating creative outputs, incorporating domain expertise, and improving user control. Both authors suggest further research to develop tools that integrate LLMs with expert knowledge bases and community feedback. This can help the generative Artificial Intelligence to become a more effective partner in creative and knowledge-intensive tasks, enabling better human-AI collaboration across various fields.

B. Authorship, Agency, and Emotional Engagement in Human-AI Collaboration

As per Hutson (2025), the transformation of writing from manual creation to AI-assisted composition has marked a significant change in both method and meaning. Writing was traditionally viewed as an attempt to achieve something. However, now writing involves tools powered by Artificial Intelligence, such as ChatGPT. This has altered the roles of authorship and creativity. Furthermore, the paper introduces a multidimensional model that moves beyond outdated

linear views and efficiently captures the evolving relationship between humans and Artificial Intelligence in several tasks. These tasks included generating ideas, structuring and analysing them. The paper's findings reveal that while Artificial Intelligence enhances efficiency and inspiration, the human authors remain accountable for the intellectual and ethical depth of the work. Moreover, the investigation proposes a framework that highlights the collaboration without replacing human input. It demands that future researchers explore ways to maintain the core creative values, as AI tools have become increasingly common in writing. As part of the recommendations, the author suggests that writers adapt their workflows to include AI. However, must also preserve the human control over critical elements of meaning and purpose. As per the study, this approach ensures that writing remains innovative, ethically grounded, and maintains a human touch, thereby distinguishing it in an increasingly AI-driven world.

Analysis by Holter and El-Assady (2024), introduces a conceptual design specie to understand and analyse human AI collaborative systems (p. e15107). This focuses on the core dimensions of agency, interaction, and adaptation. The research study applies this model to three case studies. Following that, it becomes clear that solving real-world analytical tasks requires multidimensional collaboration. The model is insightful; however, it has limitations in cognitive modelling, repressibility, and system coding. The paper calls for conducting future work to refine these areas for broader applicability. The study also underscores the key research opportunities, such as developing a detailed taxonomy of agency. This development can be achieved through integrating temporal dynamics and handling complexity in collaborative systems. These directions aim to improve both theoretical understanding and practical system design. By structuring the cooperative roles of humans and Artificial Intelligence, this framework lays the foundation for designing more effective, adaptive, and nuanced systems. The system reveals the real complexity of human-AI partnerships in analytical and decision-making contexts. As noted by Kolomaznik et al. (2024), the need for emotionally intelligent AI systems emphasises trust, empathy, and rapport (p. 1369957). The paper finds that these virtues of AI help improve human-AI collaboration. Designing such a system enhances user engagement and satisfaction. Emotional engagement makes AI more effective and relatable across sectors such as healthcare, education, and customer service. Results on the long-term psychological impact, cultural variation, and interdisciplinary approaches to developing AI that aligns with diverse human socio-emotional needs are demanded for future work.

C. Literature Gap

Many studies have explored the role of Artificial Intelligence in creative writing and collaboration. However, several critical areas still require in-depth research. Firstly, as observed by McGuire et al. (2024), most research has been conducted in controlled environments (p. 18525). This limits understanding of how an AI tool works in real-world situations, as users exhibit different behaviours. Furthermore, the long-term effects of using AI in creative tasks, particularly those that develop user skills and confidence, remain unknown. The highlighted gap in the literature requires more naturalistic, long-term studies to be addressed. The paper presented by Ding and Chan (2023), offered a helpful framework showing different levels of human-AI collaboration. However, their study does not fully explain the methods required to evaluate the quality of creative output (p. 3). There is also limited guidance on how to incorporate user expertise or domain knowledge into collaboration. Research is needed to develop advanced AI tools that can learn from experts and adapt to user feedback.

Another gap lies in the emotional and ethical aspects of collaboration. Hutson (2025) highlighted the need for human control over creativity and meaning. However, it is still not fully understood how to balance AI assistance with human authorship. Emotional engagement, as emphasised by Kolomaznik et al. (2024), is another key factor that remains underexplored. While trust, empathy, and rapport are shown to be helpful, their long-term effects on users and potential over-reliance on AI need further study (p. 1369957). Finally, Holter and El-Assady (2024) proposed a design model for human-AI systems; even so, it lacks depth in cognitive modelling and system expressivity (p. e15107). Their work also suggests that further research is needed to understand how AI adapts over time and to address the complexity of tactical systems. The gap in the literature underscores the need for broader, real-world, emotionally and ethically grounded research on human-AI creative collaboration.

III. METHODS

A. Research Design

The primary aim is to examine how AI tools such as ChatGPT and Jasper interact with human writers during the creative process and influence storytelling elements, including plot development, character creation, and narrative tone. The key aspects are authorship, creativity, emotional engagement, and user control. The objective is to gather insights into individual experience and attitudes; a quantitative approach is most appropriate, as it enables the researcher to understand better users' experiences and perceptions of evolving writing workflows (Lim, 2025, p. 217). Further, the study has included a **Deductive Approach** to examine the hypothesis. The research is structured around primary data collection via a virtual survey, focusing on participants who used AI tools such as ChatGPT or similar language models for fiction writing (Chabrawi et al., 2025, p. 1040). Mixed-methods research can be complex and time-consuming; hence, it is not selected for the study. **Positivist philosophy** has increased the credibility of analysis. The flexible approach of this study helps participants freely express their views, enabling the uncovering of more profound meaning

and patterns in human-AI collaboration. The study includes *Exploratory Design*, which aims to generate new understanding rather than test predefined hypotheses. *Purposive Sampling* is chosen for participant selection because it enables the researcher to examine themes such as trust, control, and emotional connection in a naturalistic setting (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024). The data collected will be analysed thematically, allowing for the identification of common patterns and diverse perspectives.

B. Data Collection Method

The process of gathering information to answer a study's research questions effectively is called data collection for analysis. A *Primary Data Collection Method* is chosen for this academic work (Jain, 2021, p. 552). A total of 151 participants, including fiction writers, literature students, and content creators, were selected through purposive sampling to ensure relevant exposure to AI-based writing. Data were gathered through structured questionnaires containing closed-ended and Likert-scale items to measure creativity, authorship, and emotional development (Kusmaryono et al., 2022, p. 629). The survey was distributed online via email, social media, and writing platforms for a broader reach (Farsi, 2021, p. e23205). Respondents were informed of the study's purpose, participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was maintained throughout (Hwang, 2023, p. 5). The collected data were securely stored for statistical analysis, ensuring reliability and generalisability of results.

C. Data Analysis Method

Data analysis is the process of organising, interpreting, and drawing conclusions from collected data to discover patterns and answer research questions effectively. *Statistical Analysis* has been chosen as the primary method for analysing the collected data (Zhao et al., 2021, p. 37). Since the current study is based on primary quantitative data that is gathered through structured questionnaires, the data from 151 respondents were entered into IBM SPSS, "Statistical Package for the Social Sciences" for analysis. Descriptive statistics, such as mean, frequency, and percentage, were used primarily to analyze the questionnaire, which was administered using Likert Scales and multiple-choice formats (Sanni et al., 2021, p. 125). This helps observe the general patterns of interaction between users and AI tools in fiction writing. Relationships among key variables, such as age, writing experience, and perceived creativity or control during co-authoring with AI, were evaluated using appropriate statistical methods. This was successful through the use of inferential statistical tools such as chi-square tests and correlation analysis (Deshmukh, 2024, p. 72). This approach helped determine the influence of demographic factors on participants' perception of AI collaboration. Overall, the statistical process quantified creativity, authorship, and emotional engagement, offering clear insights into how AI influences storytelling and human participation in collaborative fiction.

IV. RESULTS

A. Descriptive Statistics

TABLE 1
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
What is your age group?	151	0	4	2.04	1.107
What is your gender?	151	0	3	1.25	.832
What is your highest level of education completed?	151	0	4	1.83	1.082
What is your current occupation or role?	151	0	4	2.01	1.113
How many years of experience do you have in creative writing?	151	0	4	2.16	1.144
Have you ever used AI tools (such as ChatGPT or Sudowrite) to assist with creative writing?	151	0	1	.69	.465
AI tools enhance my productivity when writing collaborative fiction.	151	0	4	2.62	1.370
I find AI-generated writing suggestions creatively useful.	151	0	4	2.60	1.415
AI tools contribute ideas I would not have thought of myself.	151	0	4	2.62	1.384
AI respects my creative voice during co-writing.	151	0	4	2.57	1.407
Writing with AI feels like true collaboration rather than mere automation.	151	0	4	2.54	1.399
AI assistance improves the overall quality of my stories.	151	0	4	2.53	1.446
AI-generated texts typically require a lot of editing to match my story.	151	0	4	2.61	1.409
I trust AI tools to generate content that aligns with my creative goals.	151	0	4	2.58	1.406
Writing with AI is more time-efficient than writing alone.	151	0	4	2.68	1.374
AI lacks emotional depth in its writing contributions.	151	0	4	2.60	1.387
Human creativity is still essential in AI-assisted fiction writing.	151	0	4	2.68	1.359
People should be concerned about the ethical implications of AI co-authorship.	151	0	4	2.60	1.386
I would recommend AI writing tools to other fiction writers.	151	0	4	2.66	1.391
Human-AI co-authored fiction will become widely accepted in the future.	151	0	4	2.49	1.414
Valid N (listwise)	151				

The table above presents the descriptive statistics for data collected from 151 participants across different backgrounds and age groups. Descriptive statistics include the key characteristics that describe and summarise the dataset (Cooksey, 2020, p. 80). The data includes demographic and Likert questions. The Likert scale ranges from 0 to 4 (0 = strongly disagree, 1 = disagree, 2 = neutral, 3 = agree, 4 = strongly agree). According to the figure above, the mean of the variables is approximately 3, indicating that most respondents agree on the contribution of AI to human-AI collaboration in creative fiction writing.

B. Correlation Estimations

Correlations				
		What is your age group?	What is your gender?	What is your highest level of education completed?
What is your age group?	Pearson Correlation	1	.264 ^{**}	.301 ^{**}
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001	.000
	N	151	151	151
What is your gender?	Pearson Correlation	.264 ^{**}	1	.308
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001		.194
	N	151	151	151
What is your highest level of education completed?	Pearson Correlation	.301 ^{**}	.308	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.164	
	N	151	151	151
What is your current occupation or role?	Pearson Correlation	.313 ^{**}	.246 ^{**}	.290 ^{**}
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.002	.000
	N	151	151	151
How many years of experience do you have in creative writing?	Pearson Correlation	.260 ^{**}	.160 [*]	.240 ^{**}
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.028	.001
	N	151	151	151
Have you ever used AI tools (such as ChatGPT or Grammarly) to assist with creative writing?	Pearson Correlation	.093	-.028	.025
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.441	.758	.758
	N	151	151	151
AI tools enhance my productivity when writing collaborative fiction.	Pearson Correlation	-.058	-.157	.014
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.495	.055	.899
	N	151	151	151
I find AI-generated writing suggestions creatively useful.	Pearson Correlation	-.048	-.102	-.011
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.548	.212	.894
	N	151	151	151
AI tools contribute ideas I would not have thought of myself.	Pearson Correlation	.098	-.174 [*]	-.053
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.347	.023	.521
	N	151	151	151
AI respects my creative voice during co-writing.	Pearson Correlation	-.082	-.148	-.058
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.462	.089	.481
	N	151	151	151

Figure 1. Correlation

Correlation describes the relationship between two variables, which can be positive, zero, or negative (Edelmann et al., 2021, p. 108960). The correlation findings indicate strong positive correlations between creative writing with AI tools and perceptions of their usefulness, with users reporting increased productivity, creativity, and collaboration ($r \approx 0.50\text{--}0.90$). Despite ethics (tied to the belief that human creativity is still necessary; $r = 0.90$), the majority concur that AI co-authoring will be accepted ($r = 0.91$). Demographics such as age and gender have weak effects, suggesting that attitudes are driven by experience rather than background. Notably, even users who require heavy AI text editing still trust AI's alignment with their goals ($r = 0.87$), indicating a pragmatic, collaborative view of AI-assisted writing.

C. Reliability Statistics

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.952	20

Figure 2. Reliability Statistics

Reliability statistics indicate the validity and stability of the dataset (Izah et al., 2023, p. 1057). The value of the reliability statistics of more than 0.7 indicates a reliable dataset. According to the above figure, the dataset considered in this study is highly reliable, with a coefficient of 0.952.

D. Frequency Distribution

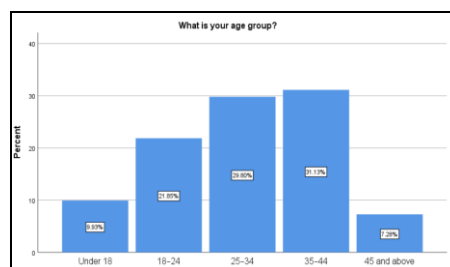


Figure 3. Age of Participants

The upper graphical illustration shows the age of the participants. Among 151 participants, 9.93% are under 18, 21.85% belong to the 18-24 age group, 29.80% belong to the 25-34 age group, 31.13% belong to the 35-44 age group, and 7.28% are 45 and above.

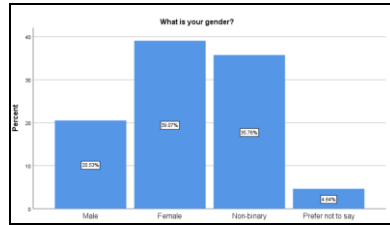


Figure 4. Gender of Participants

The gender of the respondents is represented in the above figure, where 20.53% are male, 39.07% are female, 35.67% are non-binary, and 4.64% preferred not to say.

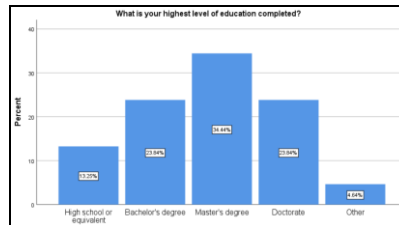


Figure 5. Education Level of Respondents

Among participants, 13.25% have a high school or equivalent education level, 23.84% have a Bachelor's degree, 34.44% have a Master's degree, 23.84% have a Doctorate, and 4.64% have other educational degrees, as shown in the above figure.

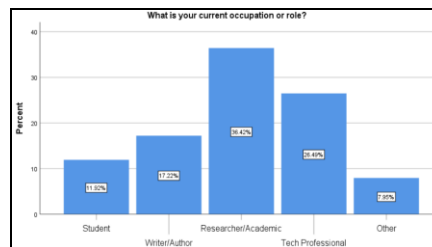


Figure 6. Occupation of Respondents

The upper bar graph depicts that 11.92% are students, 17.22% are writers/authors, 36.42% are researchers/academics, 26.49% are tech professionals, and 7.95% have other occupations.

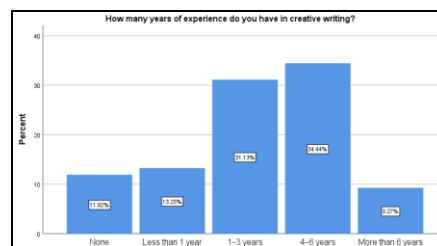


Figure 7. Experience in Creative Writing

The above figure represents the experience of participants in creative writing. 11.92% have no experience, 13.25% have less than 1 year of experience, 31.13% have 1-3 years of experience, 34.44% have 4-6 years of experience, and 9.27% have more than 6 years of experience.

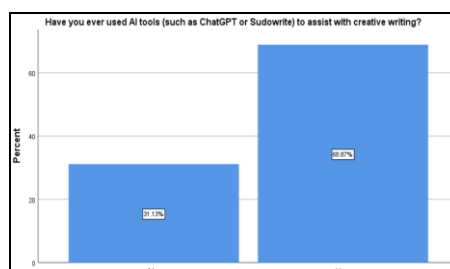


Figure 8. Use of AI Tools for Creative Writing

The response of the participants reveals that 31.13% have not used AI tools, like ChatGPT, whereas 68.87% have used AI tools for assistance in creative writing.

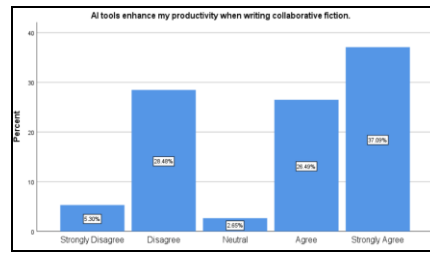


Figure 9. AI Tools Improve Productivity in Writing

As per the above bar diagram, 37.09% strongly agree and 26.49% agree that AI enhances their productivity when writing collaborative fiction. Conversely, 5.30% strongly disagree and 28.48% disagree with this notion. 2.65% remain neutral.

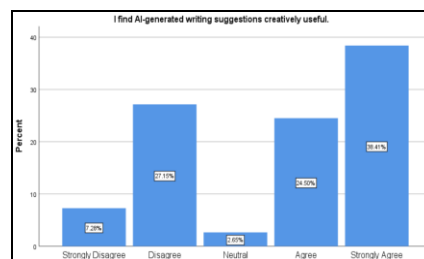


Figure 10. AI-Generated Suggestions are Creatively Useful

38.41% strongly agree and 24.50% agree that AI-generated writing suggestions are creatively useful, according to the upper image. 7.28% strongly disagree and 27.15% disagree with this statement. 2.65% were neutral.

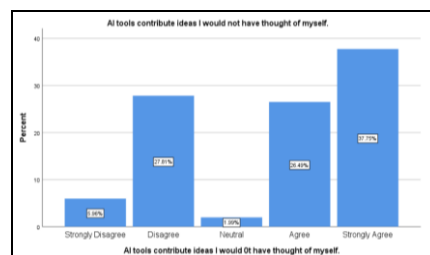


Figure 11. AI Tools Contribute Unique Ideas

The above graphical representation shows that 5.96% strongly disagree and 27.81% disagree that AI tools contribute ideas that participants would not have thought of themselves. However, 37.75% strongly agree and 26.49% agree with it. 1.99% were neutral.

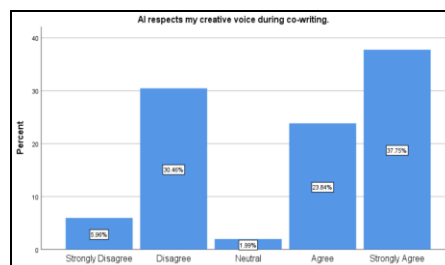


Figure 12. AI Respects Writer's Creative Voice

37.75% strongly agree and 23.84% agree that AI respects participants' creative voice during co-writing, according to the above image. 5.96% strongly disagree and 30.46% disagree with this statement. 1.99% were neutral.

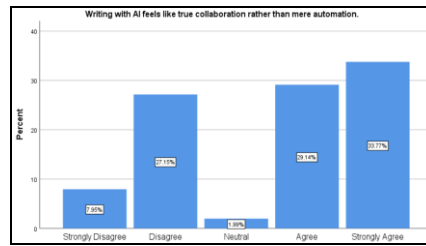


Figure 13. Collaboration With AI

The above figure shows that 33.77% strongly agree and 29.14% agree that writing with AI feels like true collaboration rather than mere automation. However, 7.95% strongly disagree and 27.15% disagree with the notion. 1.99% remain neutral.

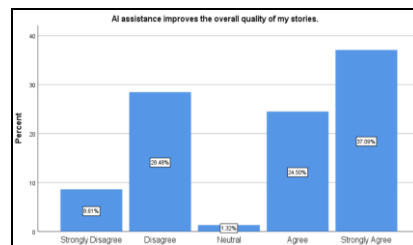


Figure 14. AI Improves Quality of Stories

37.09% strongly agree and 24.50% agree that AI assistance improves the overall quality of their stories, according to the upper image. 8.61% strongly disagree and 24.48% disagree with this statement. 1.32% were neutral.

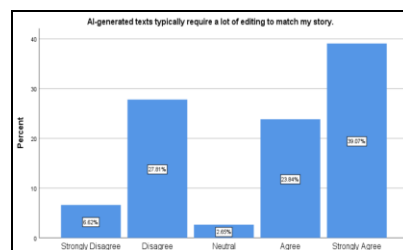


Figure 15. AI-Generated Texts Require Editing

The above graphical representation shows that 6.62% strongly disagree and 27.81% disagree that AI-generated texts typically require a lot of editing to match their stories. However, 39.07% strongly agree and 23.84% agree with it. 2.65% were neutral.

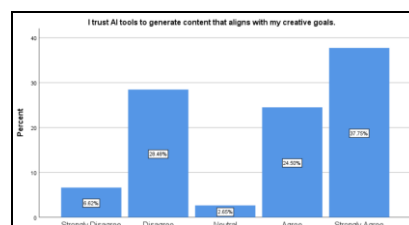


Figure 16. Trust in AI Tools

The above figure shows that 37.75% strongly agree and 24.50% agree that they trust AI tools to generate content that aligns with their creative goals. However, 6.62% strongly disagree and 28.48% disagree with the notion. 2.65% remain neutral.

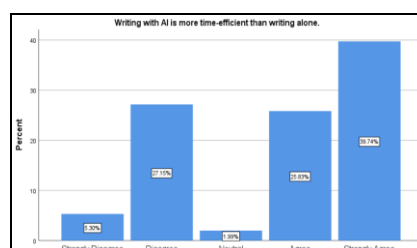


Figure 17. AI is Time-Efficient

As per the above bar diagram, 39.74% strongly agree and 25.83% agree that writing with AI is more time-efficient than writing alone. Conversely, 5.30% strongly disagree and 27.15% disagree with this notion. 1.99% remain neutral.

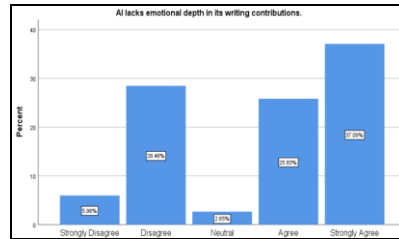


Figure 18. AI Lacks Emotional Depth

37.09% strongly agree and 25.83% agree that AI lacks emotional depth in its writing contributions, according to the above figure. 5.96% strongly disagree and 28.48% disagree with this statement. 2.65% were neutral.

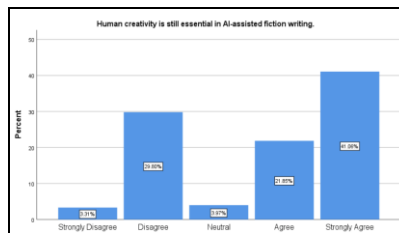


Figure 19. Human Creativity is Important in Human-AI Collaboration

The above graphical representation shows that 3.31% strongly disagree and 29.80% disagree that human creativity is still essential in AI-assisted fiction writing. However, 41.06% strongly agree and 21.85% agree with it. 3.97% were neutral.

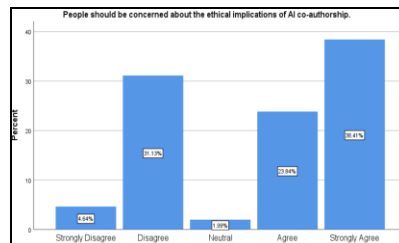


Figure 20. Concern About Ethical Implications of AI Co-Authorship

Based on the above bar diagram, 38.41% strongly agree and 23.83% agree that people should be concerned about the ethical implications of AI co-authorship. Conversely, 4.64% strongly disagree and 31.13% disagree with this notion. 1.99% remain neutral.

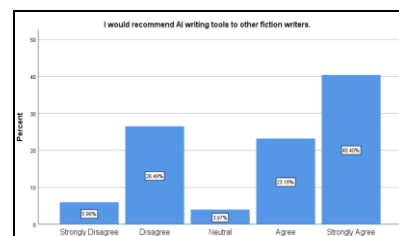


Figure 21. Recommendation for AI Writing Tools

40.40% strongly agree and 23.18% agree that they would recommend AI writing tools to other creative fiction writers, according to the above figure. 5.96% strongly disagree and 26.49% disagree with this statement. 3.97% were neutral.

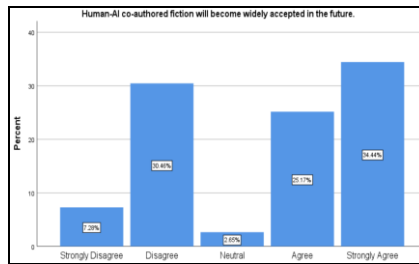


Figure 22. Acceptance of AI Co-Authorship in the Future

According to the above bar graph, 34.44% strongly agree and 25.17% agree that human-AI co-authored fiction would be widely accepted in the future. However, 7.28% strongly disagree and 30.46% disagree with the notion. 2.65% were neutral.

V. DISCUSSION

Human-AI collaboration in fiction writing is a crucial matter in the era of digital technology. The primary findings of this study reflect the participants' perspective. According to the findings, most participants agreed that AI tools improve their productivity when writing collaborative fiction. Moreover, they also agreed that AI-generated writing suggestions are creatively helpful. This indicates that AI is helping humans expand their knowledge horizon and explore ideas that might not have been discussed much in literary production.

Additionally, it increases their motivation and productivity in researching and producing a unique literary work (Emerson, 2024, p. 1764). The findings also showed that most respondents believe AI tools generate ideas that humans could not have come up with on their own. Respondents also supported the idea that AI gives space and respect to humans' creative voices during co-writing. This implies that AI not only expands the knowledge horizon of human but also ensures that their ideas and creativity are expressed accurately. Fiction writing with AI feels like true collaboration rather than mere automation, according to most respondents. They agreed that the respect and support they get from AI tools that do not feel mechanical, rather, AI assistance enhances the overall quality of their fictional stories.

However, despite the benefits, most participants agreed that AI-generated text is redundant and often requires extensive editing to match their writing. This poses a restriction on writers. Moreover, the ethical concerns are high in AI co-authorship. Most respondents also pointed out that AI lacks the emotional depth in its writing contribution, unlike humans. Also, since AI is trained on a vast pre-existing dataset, it might fail to grasp complex human emotions and present them in its writing (Pretsch, 2023).

Nevertheless, most respondents trust AI writing tools to create content that aligns with their creative goals. They also think that creative, fictional writing with AI saves time compared to writing alone. AI tools are still developing and require constant human support and creativity to produce fiction, according to the participants. However, most respondents agreed that they would recommend their fellow creative fiction writers to utilise AI writing tools in their work. Respondents also believed that as AI continues to advance in this fast-growing world, more people will adopt AI-co-authored fiction, and it will become widely accepted in future literary production.

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Conclusion

This research focused on the role of AI in collaborative fiction. The existing literature and primary findings indicated that human-AI co-authorship is beneficial, and most participants from the survey would recommend it to other writers. AI tools improve productivity and save time. It provides useful and creative suggestions that help human writers discover unexplored subject matters. Moreover, AI gives respect to human creativity, which makes it feel like collaboration rather than automation. However, AI lacks the emotional depth and often requires heavy editing due to its redundant texts. Moreover, ethical concerns also affect fiction writing. However, AI-assistance would be widely accepted in the production of creative fiction work in the future.

B. Linking With Objectives

Objective 1: To assess the contribution of AI to the creativity of humans in producing creative literary fiction work.

The first objective is to examine AI's contribution to human creativity in producing literary fiction. According to the findings, AI significantly enhances human creativity in producing creative writing. It provides unexplored ideas and suggestions, thereby increasing productivity. Moreover, it improves the overall quality of stories.

Objective 2: To investigate emotional engagement in writing, authorship, and agency in human-AI collaboration.

The second objective was to evaluate the emotional engagement in writing, authorship, and agency in human-AI collaboration. Based on the results, AI lacks emotional depth and engagement in the writing. Furthermore, human

creativity is necessary in AI-assisted writing. However, AI respects humans' creative voice, which ultimately helps shape the overall literary work.

Objective 3: To examine the barriers and potential of the partnership between humans and AI in literary production.

The last objective was to assess the barriers and potential of the partnership between humans and AI in literary production. According to the primary findings, the significant barriers to human-AI partnerships are a lack of emotional depth, ethical concerns, and the need for extensive editing. However, AI tools save time, increase productivity, and improve overall writing quality, making them widely accepted in the coming years.

C. Recommendations

- Authors and developers should follow ethical guidelines to prevent AI tools from reinforcing stereotypes or misrepresenting cultural narratives. They must also obtain informed consent when using individual or cultural materials to ensure responsible and fair creative collaboration (Prem, 2023, p. 705).
- Transparency in human-AI co-authorship must be maintained by informing readers of AI's level of involvement (Balasubramaniam et al., 2023, p. 107197). Clear documentation of how AI contributed to content creation builds trust and helps audiences understand the shared roles of human and machine in storytelling.
- Writers should avoid over-reliance on AI tools that may weaken human creativity or emotional depth. AI should serve only as a brainstorming partner, allowing human imagination to guide originality and maintain authenticity in the final creative work (Zhai et al., 2024, p. 28).

D. Final Thought

This study incorporated quantitative measures to examine the role of AI in collaborative fiction writing. Future researchers can include qualitative measures to delve deeper into the research topic. Nevertheless, human-AI collaboration can change the entire scenario of fiction writing. AI writing tools have various advantages and limitations that affect the partnership between humans and AI. Moreover, AI lacks the emotional depth that humans express through their creativity. Ensuring ethics, transparency, and restricting over-reliance on AI writing tools can improve human-AI collaboration and might be widely accepted shortly.

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Validating the Measurement Model of Parental Involvement, Motivational Beliefs, and English Learning Achievement: An EFA and CFA Approach

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Abstract—This study aimed to investigate the validity and reliability of the instruments to measure parental involvement, students' motivation, self-efficacy, and English learning achievement among primary EFL students in Thailand. Adapted questionnaires were administered to 306 student–parent dyads. A two-step approach to the analysis was adopted, utilising Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) to extract the factorial structure in the first step and then Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to verify the measurement model in the second step. Results of the EFA supported a multidimensional structure within the constructs, and all retained items had loadings above 0.50, demonstrating theoretical coherence. CFA also endorsed the proposed model as fitting the data very well ($\chi^2/df = 1.521$, CFI = .962, TLI = .955, RMSEA = .042, SRMR = .80, AVE > .50), supporting its general validity. Discriminant validity was verified through correlations among parental constructs, which demonstrated their distinctiveness (parental involvement, motivation, and self-efficacy). The results indicate that the adapted tools are both psychometrically sound and culturally relevant when used with Thai young learners. The validated measurement model of the study provides a reliable methodological underpinning for future SEM studies and contributes to the development of proper diagnostic tools for educators and policymakers to evaluate and improve parental engagement and learner motivation in English language learning.

Index Terms—exploratory factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis, parental involvement, motivational beliefs, English learning achievement

I. INTRODUCTION

In EFL settings, students' performance is not based only on their in-service teacher instruction, but a broader ecology of family-level and psychological factors also influences it. Parental involvement in their children's academic endeavours has long been recognised as a significant factor in supporting both direct help with lessons and indirect encouragement that fuels learning enthusiasm. At the same time, family socioeconomic status (SES) influences the educational opportunities of students through financial, cultural, and social resources, which can either facilitate or limit their chances to learn (Liu et al., 2020). Together, personal learner psychology, particularly motivation and self-efficacy, is key for mediating how these external supports are internalised and how they, in turn, translate into academic success. All together, these factors contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of students' language learning achievement and success in EFL contexts (Eccles & Harold, 1996; Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Although the conceptual importance of these constructs is well established, the possibility of testing the relationships among them empirically is based on the availability of instruments that are proper to measure the constructs, which are valid and reliable. Without sound psychometric measures, findings from more advanced statistical procedures, such as SEM, can be compromised or misleading (Crowley & Fan, 1997). Strong measurement models are essential for accurately measuring latent variables, properly testing relationships among them, and accurately interpreting theories.

Responding to this methodological demand, the current study specifically aims to demonstrate the validity and reliability of measurement instruments for documenting parental involvement, students' motivational beliefs (motivation, self-efficacy), and EFL achievement among Thai primary school students. Construct validity and reliability were tested using a rigorous two-step approach that involved Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) followed by Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). This study has not only established a solid measurement model with strong psychometric properties for

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further SEM analysis, but also extended methodological rigour and theoretical knowledge related to explaining the differences in students' EFL achievement. The following questions guide this study.

1. What are the factor structures of the parental involvement, motivation, self-efficacy, and English learning achievement using the EFA?
2. Is there a good fit, with good reliability and validity, of the proposed measurement model as examined by CFA?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Parental Involvement and Family Income

Parental involvement has been recognised as a crucial factor influencing student achievement, both directly and indirectly, by supporting learning across all subjects (Sharma, 2024). Utami (2022) points out, parental involvement is one of the well-established predictors of school success, and in more recent studies, active parental participation, providing help with homework, creating study habits, checking offspring's progress, and staying in touch with teachers, has consistently been found to facilitate students' motivation, adjustment, and achievement (Park & Kim, 2023). Within the EFL context, in particular, where the opportunity for using English in classrooms is limited, the importance of parental support lies in extending the learning environment. Home-based potential learning practices such as shared-book reading, practising vocabulary discussions, or incorporating English into everyday routines, can support and extend learning beyond formal educational experiences (Liang et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2023).

Theoretically, parental involvement has been theorised as parents' engagement in their children's school life through both home and school-based activities, such as academic guidance, support, and interaction with teachers (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). For instance, in the field of language education research, parental involvement has been found to lead to increased exposure to English, develop learners' self-efficacy, and cultivate perseverance in the face of challenging circumstances (Kim & Sheridan, 2015). In addition, involved parents establish conducive atmospheres that facilitate understanding now, while also setting the stage for independence and self-direction later in a child's education. In this regard, the parents' participation is not just supplemental; it serves as a foundation for shaping learners' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviour (Sharma, 2024), which helps ensure that English learning can be carried out in a sustainable manner.

Family income has also been shown to be one of the most significant predictors of students' educational achievement, influencing both the quality and quantity of learning opportunities that children have access to (Sirin, 2005). Higher SES families are, on average, more likely to have access to educational resources, such as tutoring, learning materials, digital technology, and enriched after-school programs, which facilitate both language development and academic learning (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002). On the other hand, students from low-income households often have limited access to these resources, resulting in unequal learning opportunities and outcomes. In addition to resources, family income shapes the time, energy, and cognitive bandwidth parents have available to dedicate to their children's learning. Wealthier parents are also more likely to experience less stress and to be able to play an active role in school-based activities as well as to offer consistent academic learning support at home (Conger & Donnellan, 2007).

In the case of EFL, family income becomes more important, given the limited exposure to English outside the classroom. Families from more affluent homes often provide additional opportunities for language acquisition through participation in English classes, exposure to English media, or international experiences (e.g., travel or studying abroad) (Park & Kim, 2023). Yet, the effect of income is not solely direct. As posited by Bronfenbrenner's (1995) ecological systems theory, family income influences the proximal processes in the home environment, such as the extent of parental involvement. Indeed, research has shown that socioeconomic advantage is associated with greater parental involvement, which in turn supports children's motivational beliefs and self-efficacy (Hill & Tyson, 2009; Kim & Sheridan, 2015). This indicates that most of the educational effect of family income is indirect, operating through its impact on parents' capacity to support and guide their children's learning.

With these goals in mind, the current study treats family income as an exogenous variable that directly or indirectly affects English language achievement through parent involvement and learner psychological variables. Appreciating this mediating role is essential, particularly in considering equity concerns in EFL, as non-equity-based gaps in learning may persist despite resource gaps.

B. Motivation and Self-Efficacy

Motivation is seen as playing a crucial role in second language learning. It motivates learners to initiate, sustain, and manage their work in learning a new language, forming the basis for how intensely (or not) and for how long (or not) to stay involved in learning tasks (Dörnyei, 2005; Ushioda, 2011). In settings where students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) have limited opportunities for authentic communication, the role of motivation in maintaining learners' engagement with the language cannot be overstated. Based on the Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2020), motivation is a multidimensional concept. It encompasses both intrinsic motivation (the desire to engage in an activity for its own sake, driven by curiosity, interest, or enjoyment) and extrinsic motivation (arising from external rewards, evaluations, or expectations). Each type of motivation has been tied to students' persistence and achievement, with intrinsic motivation typically associated with longer-term learning outcomes. In fact, motivated learners are more likely

to set better goals, employ more effective learning strategies, and are more resilient when facing linguistic challenges (Howard et al., 2021).

Similar to motivation, the concept of self-efficacy is a construct that explains learners' beliefs about their ability to perform tasks and achieve specific learning outcomes (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy not only influences how much effort students put into learning but also how they react to challenges or failures. Students with high self-efficacy tend to be more willing to take risks, use effective strategies, and persist in the face of failure, resulting in greater success in language learning (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). Self-efficacy has also been found to predict willingness to communicate, confidence in engaging with the target language, and academic achievement in EFL studies (Usher & Pajares, 2008). Additionally, motivation and self-efficacy are closely related: motivated learners often exhibit higher self-efficacy, and higher self-efficacy is known to increase intrinsic motivation and engagement (Shan, 2020).

Motivation and self-efficacy are central psychological mechanisms that link parental involvement (and socioeconomic status) to academic performance and competence. Through the development of such positive motivational beliefs and learners' confidence, classroom teaching and parent involvement may indirectly influence English achievement, emphasising these as essential constituents of any multifaceted model of language learning outcomes.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Participants and Context

The research site was located in the Northeastern part of Thailand; the sample consisted of Grade 6 students and one of their parents or legal guardians. A total of 306 parent–student pairs participated, where each pair constituted a single-family response in which student responses were paired with those of the corresponding parent or guardian. This arrangement ensured that the perspectives of children and their parents were successively combined.

The student participants were all in EFL classes. They had received English instruction for several years, starting in Grade 1, which equates to approximately 5 years of formal English learning in an EFL setting. As part of the national curriculum, Grade 6 students received approximately two hours of English instruction on a weekly basis, on average. This extent of exposure approximates the common learning situation for young learners in Thailand and thus offers a suitable context for investigating parental involvement, motivational beliefs, and EFL achievement.

Stratified random sampling was used to enhance representativeness and external validity. Schools representing a range of socioeconomic status and academic achievement levels were used to identify participants. By design, this approach facilitated the inclusion of a diverse range of family backgrounds and school settings in the sample, thereby enhancing the generalisability of the results. Indeed, there was no obligation to participate in the study. Both students and their parents or guardians provided written informed consent before the commencement of the study. Inclusion criteria consisted of being enrolled in 6th grade at the time of data collection and having a parent or guardian available to complete the corresponding survey.

B. Research Instruments

A structured questionnaire was designed based on established theoretical foundations and a large pool of literature. The questionnaire consisted of three parts: a socio-demographic questionnaire, a parental questionnaire, and a student questionnaire. The content validity of each section was ensured to ensure alignment with the theory, the pertinence of the context, and the empirical adequacy.

The first section of the questionnaire covered demographic and contextual information about the participants involved in this study. The factors were English GPA, gender, and family income. These covariates were added to account for any influence of socioeconomic status (SES) on students' experiences or differences in the amount of parental involvement. This prior knowledge is a vital cleansing factor; it will be considered as a covariate when fitting the statistical models in this analysis.

The second section, the Parent Questionnaire, consisted of 22 items across three dimensions of parental involvement: (1) parental role construction (5 items), reflecting parents' beliefs about their responsibility and influence in supporting their child's English learning; (2) parental capacity (10 items), capturing parents' confidence, time, energy, and ability to assist efficiently, and (3) home-based involvement (7 items), assessing direct parental actions, such as lesson review, homework, and creating English learning opportunities beyond school. Values for IOC ranged from 0.67 to 1.00 and were rated as satisfactory to strong (Rovinelli & Hambleton, 1977; Turner & Carlson, 2003). Changes were made in response to feedback to ensure clarity and review for cultural sensitivity.

The third part, the Student Questionnaire, consisted of a total of 19 items that assessed the motivational beliefs of ESL students, specifically motivation and self-efficacy. Motivation variables were based on Gardner's (1985) Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB Pro version) and covered both instrumental (type of information) and integrative motivation orientations. The self-efficacy items were based on Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory, as they represented students' beliefs about their capabilities to accomplish English learning activities. All measures were rated on the same 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), for all items on both questionnaires. This scale permitted subjects to indicate a range of agreement (Joshi et al., 2015; Likert, 1932), thereby

allowing for the generation of powerful statistical models of the attitudinal and belief constructs (Boone & Boone, 2012; DeVellis, 2017).

C. Data Collection

Formal permission was obtained from the principals of the schools before visiting the data collection sites to avail of the institutional support and fulfil the university's ethics committee requirements. The parents of the participants provided written informed consent and were briefed on the purpose, procedure, the voluntary nature of the study, and the confidentiality of the study. This procedure guaranteed transparency, ethical accountability, and the rights of students and their families.

The instrument was translated from English into Thai and then back-translated into English to ensure the linguistic precision and cultural sensitivity of the final Thai version of the questionnaire. The data were collected in schools where student-parent pairs had been invited to answer the questionnaires in dedicated rooms attended by trained research assistants. Short Thai-language instructions were included to ensure understanding and minimise the potential impact of language bias. This was especially relevant since school children may have had minimal exposure to English-based research instruments.

Research assistants provided structured assistance to participants, elaborating on unclear items and reviewing completed items to reduce missing data. Paper-and-pencil questionnaires were used because participants were more familiar with them, and to facilitate participation. Data were collected over two weeks to provide flexibility for families and schools, enabling the maintenance of systematic monitoring.

D. Data Analysis

A total of 321 questionnaires were distributed, and 306 were used in the analysis after excluding 15 with a large amount of missing or incomplete data. This ultimate sample size was considered appropriate for EFA and CFA, based on recommendations for robust multivariate analysis (Hair et al., 2019; Kline, 2016; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). Data were screened for completeness, accuracy, and normality assumptions before any statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics, including the mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis, were calculated, and we verified that all items fell within the acceptable range for subsequent analysis (Hair et al., 2019; Kline, 2016; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). A small amount of missing data was present, and to retain the integrity of the data, missing values were imputed using the mean.

The analysis was conducted in two principal stages using SPSS (Version 29) and AMOS (Version 29). First, internal consistency reliability was examined using Cronbach's alpha, with all constructs having coefficients exceeding the guideline of $> .70$ suggested by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), indicating adequate reliability. Second, EFA with Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with Varimax rotation was performed, based on the assumption that the theoretical latent factors were correlated (Hair et al., 2019; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019).

Factor loadings below 0.50, and the items with cross-loadings were removed systematically to increase construct clarity (Field, 2018; Stevens, 2009). CFA further supported the final factor solution with the measurement model tested for fit by a series of indexes, i.e., the χ^2/df ratio, Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2016; Hair et al., 2019). Convergent and discriminant validity were also evaluated through AVE and correlations between constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2019).

The two-stage analytic process was conducted to validate the constructs of parental involvement, motivation, self-efficacy, and English achievement, ensuring that these constructs possess strong psychometric properties and allowing for the interpretation of scores based on a reliable measurement foundation.

IV. RESULTS

A. Descriptive Statistics and Reliability

Descriptive statistics were computed for the primary variables of interest in this study, including parental involvement, learners' motivational beliefs, family income, and English learning achievement. The sample included 306 primary school children and their parents. Table 1 shows the mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis of all variables.

The analysis of the data revealed that the reported family income had a mean of 1.86 (SD = 1.47), with a high positive skewness (Skew = 2.12), suggesting that most families earned somewhere between 20,000 and 30,000 Thai baht per month. This distribution indicated a predominantly low-income sample, which may highlight variations in learning resources available to them.

Regarding parental involvement, the findings showed the mean scores from 2.88 to 3.97, indicating moderate parental involvement (P1-P22). The results also showed that many items were negatively skewed (e.g., P17 = -0.26), suggesting that a few participants had low engagement, while the distributions were approximately normal. Furthermore, the response patterns showed consistent engagement for homework support and encouragement.

Learners' motivational beliefs (S1-S19) scored a mean between 2.92 and 4.27, indicating that participants generally reported high levels of motivation and self-efficacy for each situation assessed, particularly in terms of goal setting and self-regulation. The average English learning achievement was 3.17 (SD = 0.70), and the distribution showed a slightly

negative skew (Skew = -0.61), suggesting that most students thought they performed well (Hair et al., 2019; Kline, 2016; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019).

TABLE 1
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF VARIABLES

Item	Mean	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
P1	3.77	1.12	-0.85	0.12
P2	3.90	0.99	-0.93	0.56
P3	3.91	0.97	-1.01	1.06
P4	3.95	0.98	-0.94	0.59
P5	3.97	1.00	-1.03	0.76
P6	3.56	1.10	-0.58	-0.33
P7	3.28	1.06	-0.76	0.09
P8	3.17	1.03	-0.72	-0.02
P9	3.56	1.06	-0.58	-0.18
P10	3.28	1.16	-0.37	-0.66
P11	3.17	1.15	-0.38	-0.69
P12	3.21	1.15	-0.33	-0.70
P13	3.36	1.08	-0.49	-0.30
P14	3.42	1.13	-0.56	-0.26
P15	3.45	1.13	-0.56	-0.34
P16	3.21	1.15	-0.29	-0.75
P17	2.88	1.13	-0.26	-0.71
P18	3.03	1.15	-0.17	-0.65
P19	3.17	1.15	-0.30	-0.58
P20	3.04	1.12	-0.32	-0.51
P21	3.19	1.16	-0.36	-0.48
P22	3.17	1.24	-0.26	-0.81
S1	3.12	0.98	-0.47	0.17
S2	2.92	1.13	-0.01	-1.12
S3	2.92	0.97	-0.22	-0.22
S4	3.40	1.07	-0.23	-0.21
S5	3.04	1.02	-0.01	-0.38
S6	2.93	1.00	-0.08	-0.77
S7	3.88	1.06	-0.86	-0.03
S8	3.88	1.07	-0.80	0.23
S9	3.90	1.13	-0.84	-0.12
S10	4.27	0.97	-1.44	1.84
S11	3.85	1.07	-0.73	-0.09
S12	3.85	1.02	-0.82	0.33
S13	4.03	1.00	-1.03	0.81
S14	3.69	1.06	-0.61	-0.13
S15	3.81	1.07	-0.75	0.03
S16	4.04	1.00	-1.05	0.78
S17	3.75	1.08	-0.70	-0.12
S18	3.40	1.05	-0.41	-0.30
S19	3.39	1.20	-0.49	-0.51
Family Income	1.86	1.47	2.12	4.26
Grade	3.17	0.70	-0.61	-0.03

Note: P = parental involvement; S = students' motivational beliefs

B. Exploratory Factor Analysis Results

An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to determine the underlying factor structure of the questionnaire and assess its construct validity. Specifically, data suitability for factor analysis was verified by the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity before conducting EFA. The results showed that the KMO value was 0.931, indicating excellent sampling adequacy (Hair et al., 2019; Kaiser, 1974). The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was also statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 7346.925$, $df = 820$, $p < 001$), which confirms that the correlation matrix was factorable.

An Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) via Principal Components extraction with Varimax rotation was employed to elucidate the latent factors of parental involvement and learners' motivational beliefs. The analysis of the data revealed five unique factors, all with loading above 0.40, which indicates the construct validity of the instrument (Hair et al., 2019; Stevens, 2009). The first factor, parental role construction, incorporates constructing the perceived parental assistive role in English learning. The second factor, parental capacity, refers to parents' readiness and confidence in helping. Third, home-based parental involvement refers to the practice of engaging in real behaviours at home. The fourth factor, student motivation, was defined as both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The fifth scale, self-efficacy, indicated participants' confidence in their English language abilities. All factors were conceptually consistent and valid according to

psychometric standards, which formed the basis for subsequent Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). The details are listed in Table 2.

TABLE 2
EFA RESULTS FOR PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND LEARNERS' MOTIVATIONAL BELIEFS

Dimension	Observed variable	Label	Loading
Parental role construction	P1	Believing it is a duty to support English learning	0.703
	P2	Believing in the parents' role in English success	0.772
	P3	Providing English learning materials	0.750
	P4	Believing parental involvement improves learning	0.676
	P5	Encouraging English practice outside class	0.618
Parental capacity	P6	Feeling confident helping with English homework	0.669
	P7	Finding ways to support English learning	0.645
	P8	Helping develop a positive attitude toward English	0.701
	P9	Helping a child learn English effectively	0.727
	P10	Having time to support English learning	0.823
	P11	Setting aside time to support English learning	0.788
	P12	Having energy to assist with English practice	0.803
	P13	Managing time between chores and English helps	0.805
	P14	Not feeling too tired to help with English	0.680
Home-based parental involvement	P15	Knowing how to help improve English	0.749
	P17	Teaching English at home	0.564
	P18	Using materials to support English at home	0.607
	P19	Creating opportunities for English use outside school	0.604
	P20	Helping review English lessons	0.652
	P21	Supervising English homework	0.638
	P22	Helping prepare for English exams	0.649
Students' Motivation	S7	Wanting to speak English with foreigners	0.670
	S8	Persisting in learning despite difficulty	0.579
	S9	Aspiring to speak English well	0.642
	S10	Aiming for good grades in English	0.718
	S11	Using English for a future career	0.553
	S12	Learning English for real-life use	0.649
	S13	Valuing English as an important subject	0.721
	S14	Believing English opens up opportunities	0.637
	S15	Seeing English as useful in daily life	0.550
Students' self-efficacy	S16	Believing English is helpful for the future	0.626
	S1	Believing in English ability	0.666
	S2	Practising English at home	0.658
	S3	Doing English exercises independently	0.720
	S4	Understanding English lessons in class	0.594
	S5	Feeling confident in English exams	0.699
	S6	Feeling confident answering in class	0.619

The results of the reliability analysis, presented in Table 3, indicate a high level of internal consistency for all five constructs measured in the study. Parental capacity had the highest Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.94$), indicating excellent test-retest reliability for items assessing parents' confidence, time, and energy in supporting English learning. Home-based parental involvement ($\alpha = 0.87$) and parental role construction ($\alpha = 0.86$) demonstrated good reliability, confirming that the items reliably captured the behaviours parents engaged in at home and parents' perceptions of educational roles, respectively. The learner-related constructs, students' motivation ($\alpha = 0.86$) and students' self-efficacy ($\alpha = 0.81$), showed good reliability, reflecting the consistent measurement of the amount of effort they exert, their goals to master appropriate level tasks in English, and confidence in their ability to perform well on English learning tasks. Taken together, these results suggest that the internal consistency of all subscales is at least acceptable and can be used for further analyses (Cronbach, 1951; Hair et al., 2019; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

TABLE 3
CRONBACH'S ALPHA COEFFICIENTS

VARIABLE	CRONBACH'S ALPHA	LEVEL
Parental Role Construction	0.86	Good
Parental Capacity	0.94	Excellent
Home-based Parental Involvement	0.87	Good
Students' Self-efficacy	0.81	Good
Students' Motivation	0.86	Good

C. Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results

(a). Parental Involvement in Learners' English Learning Achievement

To examine the construct validity of the parental involvement model, posited initially to consist of three latent dimensions (Parental Role Construction [PRC], Parental Capacity [PC], and Home-Based Parental Involvement [HBP]), confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was employed using 22 observed indicators. The first model behaviour was presented as poorly fitting.

Model revision continued with both empirical diagnostics and theoretical rationale. The study considered Modification Indices (MIs) and standardised factor loadings to identify the source of fit misspecification at the item level (Byrne, 2016; Kline, 2016). P6–P8 and P13–P17, for instance, that belonged to the Parental Capacity construct had high MIs and could have also been cross-loading (were thus removed). Imitating the rejection of cross-loading items, item P18 (HBP) for slide 16 and items P3–P5, including P17–20 from PRC, eliminates some other factors. To achieve the best-fitting qualitative comparative analysis solution, the entire construct of the PRC factor was deleted, as it showed a high correlation with PC and lacked empirical distinctiveness (Hair et al., 2019; Brown, 2015). These figures are shown in Figure 1.

Two latent constructs remained in the revised model: Parental capacity (P9–P15) and home-based parental involvement (P19–P22). The fit of the revised model was significantly better than that of the original one ($\chi^2 = 46.574$, $df = 34$, $p < .0001$). 074; CMIN/DF = 1.370; GFI= 0.970); RMSEA= 0.035) meeting the widely accepted benchmarks of good model fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2016; Hair et al., 2019). Good standardised loadings were obtained for all retained items ($\lambda = 0.63–0.85$), except for P13 and P15 ($\lambda = 0.45$); however, these latter two items were included due to their theoretical importance (Byrne, 2016; Brown, 2015).

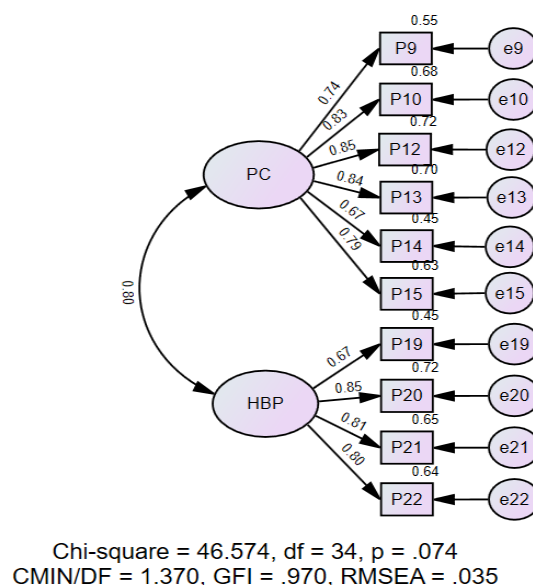


Figure 1. The Iterative Refinement of the CFA Model of Parental Involvement

Two latent constructs remained in the revised model: Parental capacity (P9–P15) and home-based parental involvement (P19–P22). The fit of the revised model was significantly better than that of the original one ($\chi^2 = 46.574$, $df = 34$, $p < .0001$). 074; CMIN/DF = 1.370; GFI= 0.970); RMSEA= 0.035) meeting the widely accepted benchmarks of good model fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2016; Hair et al., 2019). Good standardised loadings were obtained for all retained items ($\lambda = 0.63–0.85$), except for P13 and P15 ($\lambda = 0.45$); however, these latter two items were included due to their theoretical importance (Byrne, 2016; Brown, 2015).

(b). Learners' Motivation and Self-Efficacy in English Learning Achievement

A distinct CFA was conducted to confirm the measurement model of student motivational beliefs with a 2-latent factor solution: self-efficacy and motivation, measured by 19 items. As illustrated in Figure 2, the fit of the original model was moderate but insufficient ($\chi^2 = 345.317$, $df = 149$, $p = 0.58$), and the factor structures were reasonably good. It was highly significant: ($\chi^2 = 69.834$, $df = 53$, $p < 0.060$; CMIN/DF = 1.318; GFI = 0.964; RMSEA=0.032) according to proposed criteria for well-fitting models (Hair et al., 2019; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2016). The correlation between self-efficacy and motivation was moderate and theoretically derivable ($r = 0.58$), which suggests construct validity of the internal structure and relational coherence of the model (Byrne, 2016; Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Taken together, the refined measurement model represents a valid approach for evaluating students' motivational beliefs.



Chi-square = 69.834, df = 53, p = .060
 CMIN/DF = 1.318, GFI = .964, RMSEA = .032

Figure 2. Iterative Refinement of Students' Motivational Beliefs

V. DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to validate the measurement model of parental involvement, students' motivational beliefs (motivation and self-efficacy), and English language learning achievement in a Thai primary EFL context. Through an intensive two-stage process of EFA and CFA, the results provide robust empirical evidence for the reliability and validity of the constructs. The following discussion addresses two research questions and explains how the findings are interpreted in light of current theory and previous research.

A. Underlying Factor Structure of Parental Involvement, Motivational Beliefs, and English Learning Achievement

The findings of the EFA provided strong support for the multidimensionality of the constructs under study. The constructs of parental involvement, motivation, self-efficacy, and English achievement items tended to form separate and logically related factors, supporting the notion that the original adapted instruments effectively tapped into the cognitive and affective domains as intended in the Thai EFL context.

For parent engagement, items loaded on factors representing practices at home, parent-child communication, and monitoring of schoolwork. The multidimensional nature of this factor is consistent with Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1997) definition, which views parental involvement as comprising multiple dimensions of influence and support within the home and at school. The factor structure reveals that the Thai parent provides direct support and encouragement to the child (e.g., directly helps with homework, establishes study routines) and indirect help and encouragement (e.g., communicates with and reinforces the school's expectations). These results lend support to the idea that parent involvement is not a single factor, but a collection of related behaviours and attitudes that collectively contribute to the learner experience.

The factor structure of motivation and self-efficacy was further supported by the results of the EFA, where the items loaded reliably onto the two factors. This suggests that students make a distinction between their interest and willingness to learn English (i.e., they are motivated to learn English) and their confidence in their ability to complete tasks related to English (i.e., task self-efficacy). Although they are interrelated constructs both theoretically and empirically (Usher & Pajares, 2008), the findings demonstrate their discriminant validity in the Thai EFL context. Additionally, the results further suggest that LSE and SRL are logically distinct yet related facets of learner psychology.

Finally, the English learning achievement items loaded very strongly on a single factor, suggesting a unified dimension of academic performance. This provides evidence that backs the appropriateness of including standardised test scores as measures of achievement in studies that deal with primary-level EFL. Taken together, these outcomes indicate that modified instruments are both theoretically sound and empirically strong, establishing a solid framework for measurement. Having verified this factor structure, the findings of this study now demonstrate a validated model from which we can draw confident results in subsequent confirmatory analyses (to fulfil the first research question).

B. Reliability and Validity of the Measurement Model

The strong measurement model was additionally supported by Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) results. The model showed an excellent fit to the data, as indicated by all goodness-of-fit statistics exceeding well-established cut-off values (Hair et al., 2019; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2016). In particular, the chi-square/df ratio was significantly less than one, and both the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI) exceeded 0.95, indicating a strong fit (Byrne, 2016). The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was 0.05, and the SRMR was also within the recommended range, both indicating a good fit between the hypothesised model and the raw data (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Brown, 2015).

The factor loadings further supported construct validity. All items were found to load significantly and substantively on their respective latent constructs (standardised loadings > 0.60). This provides evidence for convergent validity, indicating that the items proposed to assess parental involvement, motivation, self-efficacy, and English achievement are indeed measuring theory-based constructs (Hair et al., 2019; Kline, 2016). Scores for Average Variance Extracted (AVE) were greater than 0.50 across all constructs, indicating that the latent variables accounted for more than half of the variance in the indicators (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Additionally, discriminant validity was confirmed as the square root of the AVE of each construct was larger than the correlations between it and other constructs, indicating that the constructs of parental involvement, motivation, and self-efficacy were related but conceptually disparate (Byrne, 2016; Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

The reliability analyses also supported the robustness of the measurement model. Cronbach's alphas ranged from 0.82 to 0.91, exceeding 0.70, and CR estimates all exceeded 0.80. These results demonstrate high internal reliability, indicating that the scales provide stable and reliable indices of the constructs (Cronbach, 1951; Hair et al., 2019; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

More importantly, in addition to the robustness of the statistic, the confirmed measurement model has several theoretical and other methodological implications. Theoretically, the results suggest that it is possible to reliably operationalise parental involvement, motivation, and self-efficacy in a primary school EFL context, where opportunities for authentic language use outside the classroom are scarce. This expands the grounds for applying Bandura's (1997, 2001) Social Cognitive Theory and Ryan and Deci's (2000, 2020) Self-Determination Theory to young EFL learners, confirming the significance of psychological and family-level variables in predicting language learning outcomes. From a methodological perspective, the research makes an essential contribution by creating scientifically validated measurement instruments that are contextualised to Thailand. This study's data, therefore, provide evidence about the stability of these relationships across Western and non-Western contexts, as well as the validity or lack thereof of the instruments commonly used to measure the identity and motivation of English language learners.

All in all, these findings suggest that the measurement model is consistent and accurate, and that it can be reliably employed as a methodology to explore structural relationships among family, motivational, and achievement constructs in subsequent research.

VI. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to verify the measurement model of parental involvement, motivation, and self-efficacy in the Thai primary EFL context by means of a two-step analytical procedure, i.e., EFA followed by CFA. The results provide robust pedagogical support for the reliability and validity of the adapted instruments, suggesting that the constructs tap into coherent and separate dimensions of learners' educational experiences. This methodological stringency has been established to pave the way for future research on family and psychological influences on English language learning achievement to be based on a sound and reliable measurement ground. Through the creation of instruments that are sensitive to convergent and discriminant validity, along with strong internal consistency, the present study contributes to the ELT field by providing context-specific instruments for researching the intricate relationship between parental support, learner motivation, and self-beliefs. The practical implications of the validated dimensional measurement model for schools and policymakers are that it provides tools to measure students' motivational resources and parental engagement, which in turn can help inform language learning interventions. Ultimately, the study emphasises the necessity of robust validation of measurement as a precursor to downstream structural and theoretical testing. The findings of this study not only provide robust empirical evidence for the proposed model in terms of the methodological aspects of SEM studies but also have practical implications for how teachers and administrators can utilise focused engagement and motivational strategies to support the language development of young learners.

The results of this research have significant implications for research and practice in educational settings. The validation of the parental involvement, motivation, self-efficacy, and English achievement scales provides a trustworthy and culturally relevant measurement construct for the Thai EFL context from a research perspective. This is particularly helpful because several other studies currently being conducted in language education use instruments created in Western societies, which may not adequately account for the sociocultural experiences of Asian students. Because the reliability and validity of these measures have been empirically established in this research, subsequent studies using the same measures can generate methodologically sound and culturally sensitive results. Moreover, the validated model provides a solid empirical foundation for subsequent SEM analyses (addressed in the following article), which enable researchers to identify causal paths with confidence in measuring latent variables. The instruments could also be used and modified

by researchers in other EFL and ESL settings, thereby supporting cross-cultural validation and comparative studies in English language learning.

Practically, the validated scales provide schools, teachers, and policy makers with diagnostic instruments to measure and track fundamental aspects of students' learning environments. Teachers can use these to identify students who may need additional motivation to feel more confident about themselves, and schools can use them to measure parental engagement, reach, and quality. Policymakers could use the tools to design interventions that facilitate family-school collaboration and enhance learner motivation and self-beliefs in English education. For example, data from these scales might have the potential to direct the use of parent training, motivationally rich classroom practices, and targeted learner support programs.

In short, the validated measurement model enhances methodological quality in EFL research and has practical implications for improving educational practice. It addresses the theory-practice gap by emphasising the importance of accurate measurement in the development of evidence-based interventions that enhance English language learning.

Although this research confirms the internal validity and reliability of the instruments for measuring respondents' parental involvement, motivation, self-efficacy, and emotions related to English achievement within the Thai EFL classroom, it also highlights some limitations. First, our study only sampled a relatively homogeneous group of Thai young primary school ESL learners in one part of the country. While the sample was large enough for factor analysis, the results may not be representative of students in different areas, grades, and education systems. Validation of the instrument needs to be replicated with larger and more variable samples of secondary and tertiary learners to achieve better generalisability of the results.

Second, the study does not include any objective measures, relying solely on self-report questionnaires and standardised test scores. Although this is not unusual in educational research, it is open to response bias and may not adequately reflect the dynamic nature of parental involvement or motivational beliefs. Such an investigation could be supplemented with other research methodologies, such as interviews or classroom observations, to gain a fuller understanding of them. The cross-sectional nature of this design also precludes the assessment of stability and change in construct measurement over time. Recommendations are made for future (longitudinal) validation studies to investigate the invariance of the measurement model across different developmental stages, and examine how parental involvement and learner psychology change over time if students continue to learn the English language. Finally, although we found strong evidence for the psychometric properties of the model, it would be interesting to test the measurement invariance across cultures. Cross-validating these instruments across varied EFL and ESL contexts would enhance their utility and facilitate comparisons across studies on the influences of language learning.

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