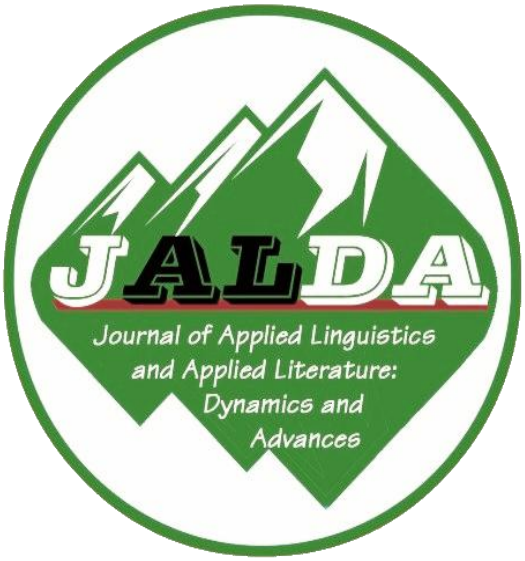
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JALDA's Aims and Scope

The Journal of Applied Linguistics and Applied Literature: Dynamics and Advances (***JAL****DA*) is an ambitious academic publication which aims to encourage and disseminate cross-disciplinary research targeting real-world problems and real-life concerns where language and/or literature are at the center. Bringing together the now-well-established discipline of *Applied Linguistics* and the thriving subject of *Applied Literature*, ***JAL****DA* stimulates and promotes innovative work within applied studies on language and literature. In the first place, it publishes articles on the two inter-related subjects of *Applied Linguistics* and *Applied Literature*. However, as an essential component of ***JAL****DA*'s long-term goals, a new focus has been added, namely the dynamic relationship between language teaching and literature, a fast-growing and dynamic field that requires special attention. In fact, the long-term prospective ambition is to bring this inter-subject dynamic from background to the foreground in the journal. ***JAL****DA*'s precise outlook on each of the three intended areas is outlined below in the hope of further illumination on its publication policies and planned purview.

1. *Applied Linguistics*

The most prevailing definition of *Applied Linguistics* so far, with a consensus on, conceives the field as "the theoretical and empirical investigation of real-world problems in which language is a central issue" (Brumfit, 1997, p. 93). Although real-world problems concerning language may involve each of the three questions regarding the nature of language, its use and its learning, historically, the question of efficient learning and teaching of languages has been a predominant concern among real word problems attended to in *Applied Linguistics*. Accordingly, the following subjects are well-seated areas of investigation within mainstream *Applied Linguistics* which are included in ***JAL****DA*'s scope of focus. ***JAL****DA* considers English as a foreign language as the subject of learning:

- Second language vocabulary acquisition
- Grammatical development in L2
- Teaching and learning L2 skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening)
- Technology in language learning and teaching
- Second language curriculum and materials
- Individual differences in second language learning
- Social issues in language learning
- Language teaching methodology
- English for specific purposes
- English as a Lingua Franca
- Language assessment and testing
- English as an international language
- Research methods in applied linguistics
- Language teacher education
- Bilingual education

Although the subject of *Language Learning and Teaching* seems to have already established itself as the mainstream concern in *Applied Linguistics*, the sheer fact that language learning and teaching take place in various ecological conditions, brings forth the warning that ignoring the questions concerning the nature of language and language use might carry with it the risk of blocking our views of the true nature of language learning and teaching as well. *Applied Linguistics* studies need to preserve the flexibility to be inspired by and note the insights from the studies concerning the nature of language and language use, an area which has been labeled as the "*Linguistics Applied*" or "*Applications of Linguistics*" by Davis and Elder (2007). In other words, language pedagogy needs to be examined in its social background in order to be able to reap benefits from the *blessings of the unknown*.

It must be reminded as a word of caution that linguistics is not alone in inspiring *Applied Linguistics Studies*. In fact, attention to the contextual aspects of language learning and teaching highlights the cross-disciplinary nature of *Applied Linguistics*. In this perspective, any research that associates a language-related problem to the core knowledge in psychology, sociology, anthropology, education, neuroscience, economic and political sciences, law, business, etc. counts as *Applied Linguistics*. In this view, *Applied Linguistics* can equally be based in psychology, education, sociology, computer sciences and any other relevant area as it is in linguistics. The intention in these interdisciplinary inquires is to offer reformative, corrective and ameliorative views and suggestions for a language-related real-world problem. In this sense, the discipline of *Applied Linguistics* will be open to the attempts to account for the issues of language learning and teaching alongside its various dimensions as outlined above by giving way to the studies inspired by other language-related studies including the following:

- Corpus Studies
- Discourse Studies
- Economy and language
- Forensic linguistics
- Language and culture
- Language and environment
- Multilingualism
- Neurolinguistics
- Other related areas
- Politics and language
- Translation

According to *JALDA*'s policy formulated here, a few canonical considerations make *Applied Linguistics* distinctive from *Linguistics Studies*. Also, these key features define the nature of work on *Applied Linguistics* that is expected to be submitted for publication in *JALDA*.

1) Problem-orientedness
2) Language in its ecology
3) Cross-disciplinary nature
4) Reformative goals
5) Real-life data

2. *Applied Literature*

Applied Literature has emerged recently as an effort to draw literary studies more akin to human beings' everyday needs. A problem-oriented view of literature might be alien to most of the scholars in English Literature, one way or another, since the established tradition in literary studies does not concern itself primarily with real-life problems. However, there is an urgent call upon the experts and academicians of English Literature to further concern themselves with the real word, an appeal that needs to be responded effectively. Literary studies seem to be in an urgency to be taken out from the academic world into the real world. Literature needs to be treated as a real-world art concerning itself with people's lives and not simply an academic art that is analyzed and criticized within academic forums.

Inspired by this urgency, *Applied Literature* is defined here as any systematic research where literature can solve or ameliorate a real-world problem. In this sense, literature acts as a stimulus to reform. *Applied Literature* examines the effect of literature on human beings whereby the literary text is in service of dealing with real-life problems. To be able to account for the various aspects of human life in all its contexts, *Applied Literature* must be interdisciplinary in its nature. Furthermore, to meet the essential requirements of scientific research, it has to give allegiance to a satisfactory level of methodological rigor. By definition, *Applied Literature* is thus:

1) Problem-oriented in terms of objectives
2) Effect-driven in its rationale
3) Multi- disciplinary in its scope
4) Method-conscious in its procedure
5) Data-based in terms of its subject
6) Reform-oriented in its applications

What Is Not *Applied Literature*?

Articles in *Applied Literature* that are based on the following research orientations, generally classified under *Pure Literature*, do not comply with the policies of *JALDA*:

1. The starting point of the research is based on a piece of literary work rather than a problem in the outside world.
2. The rationale and justification of the study is theory-driven rather than effect-driven.
3. The study commits itself exclusively to the tradition of literary studies without any attempt to invoke insights from other disciplines.
4. The study acts upon literary texts as the only data available for analysis and does not attend to the data from the real-world human life.
5. The study does not imply any reform, amelioration or solution to a real-world problem in its conclusion.

Areas of Research in Applied Literature

Following are some subjects that can be included in *Applied Literature.* The list is not exhaustive; ***JAL****DA* encourages initiatives and innovations in this regard:

- Therapeutic value of literature
- Trauma studies in literature
- Literature and ethical development
- Literature and science
- Literature and environment
- Literature for professional training
- Literary literacy education
- Other innovative areas

3. *Dynamics* between *Applied Linguistics* and *Applied Literature*

The most ambitious and prospective goal of ***JAL****DA* is to propagate research on real-life problems where both language and literature are at the core. Here, the intention is to deal with language-related problems where literature acts as a source of solution or amelioration to the problem. ***JAL****DA* considers this interdisciplinary preoccupation as a highly promising area of research concern for the specialist in both *Applied Linguistics* and *Literary Studies*. As part of its long-term policy, ***JAL****DA* team fervently encourages researchers to step in this innovative forum of inquiry. *Novel* as it is, the concept of the research on the *Dynamics* between *AppliedLinguistics* and *Literature* can be illustrated with the few following areas of inquiry. The list is inevitably tentative and open for further promotion. ***JAL****DA* is opening a special forum for discussing the options and potentials available regarding the feasibility of this new research area. We ardently invite scholars and experts of the related fields to share their initiatives with us by submitting their prospects in the form of Review Articles or reporting their interdisciplinary research findings.

- The role of literature in language teaching
- The role of Literature in language teacher education
- The role of Literature in language assessment
- The role of Literature in Language teaching curriculum
- Other innovative areas

Basic Criteria for Publishing with *JALDA*

A research article published in ***JAL****DA*:

1) starts and deals with a real-life problem, where language and/or literature is at the center.
2) introduces clear suggestions for tackling problems.
3) upholds an iterative relationship between theory and practice.
4) involves symptomatic and documented evidence in the form of real-world data.
5) may rely on the research data of quantitative, qualitative or combined nature.
6) involves a wide spectrum of research designs ranging from highly qualitative ethnographies or case studies to statistics-based experiments

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General Guidelines

The articles submitted to *JALDA* should follow the APA 7th style with some adaptations specific to *JALDA*. Contributing authors are advised to download and read *JALDA's Concise Guide for APA's 7th Edition Manual*. Please consult the *Paper Submission Template to JALDA* for submission instructions, guidelines, and contact information of the journal's editors.

Online submission

Manuscripts should be written in English and must be submitted online through our online submission website. **Submit Manuscript** is an online submission and review system where authors can submit manuscripts and track their progress. Registration and login are required to submit items online and to check the status of current submissions.

PUBLICATION ETHICS

As a member of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), JALDA is committed to maintaining the highest standards of publication ethics and supporting ethical research practices.

Ethics Statement

1.1.1.1 Authorship

The authors' central obligation is to present a concise, accurate account of the research performed as well as an objective discussion of its significance. A paper should contain sufficient detail and references to public sources of information. The results of research should be recorded and maintained in a form that allows analysis and review, both by collaborators before publication and by other scholars for a reasonable period after publication.

Fabrication of data is an egregious departure from the expected norms of scholarly conduct, as is the selective reporting of data with the intent to mislead or deceive, as well as the theft of data or research results from others.

Proper acknowledgment of the work of others used in a research project must always be given. Authors should cite publications that have been influential in determining the nature of the reported work. Information obtained privately, as in conversation, correspondence, or discussion with third parties, should not be used or reported without explicit permission from the investigator with whom the information originated. Information obtained in the course of confidential services, such as refereeing manuscripts or grant applications, cannot be used without permission of the author of the work being used.

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It is unethical for an author to publish manuscripts describing essentially the same research in more than one journal of primary publication. Submitting the same manuscript to more than one journal concurrently is unethical and unacceptable. When an error is discovered in a published work, it is the obligation of all authors to promptly retract the paper or correct the results.

J*AL*DA*'s Commitment Form*

JALDA's Commitment Form for Publication Ethics Observance, Assignment of the Financial Rights, Disclosure of Potential Conflicts of Interest and Introduction of Authors can be downloaded in *MS Word Format* or *PDF Format* on *JALDA*'s website. The form includes the following 4 sections:

1. Commitment to scholarly publication ethics and introduction of the corresponding author
2. Assignment of the financial rights to publish an article
3. Disclosure of potential conflicts of interest
4. Introducing the authors, their order of appearance, and their contribution

Please read the terms of this agreement, use the Word file or PDF file of the Commitment Form, fill in and sign it, and send the document as one of the required files upon submission.

Author Guidelines

Articles submitted to the *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Applied Literature: Dynamics and Advances* (***AL****DA*) should represent outstanding scholarship and make original contributions to the field. The Editors will assume that an article submitted for their consideration has not previously been published and is not being considered for publication elsewhere, either in the submitted form or in a modified version. The articles must be written in English and not include libelous or defamatory materials. The articles should be between 4,000 and 8,000 words (including the abstract and references). ***JAL****DA* operates a double-blind peer-review process. To facilitate this process, authors are requested to ensure that all submissions, whether first or revised versions, are anonymous. Authors' names and institutional affiliations should appear only on the web-fillable sheet. All authors are asked to submit five files including the Main File of the article (anonymous), Title Page (containing authors' names, affilliations, email and ORCID), Authorship Form (containing all authors' short biographies and Photo), Authorship and Conflict of Interest Form and Supplementary Persian Abstract.

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Journal of Applied Linguistics and Applied Literature: Dynamics and Advances

Sociopragmatic Competence in Medical Higher Education: Structure, Criteria, and Measurement Methods

Gulnoza Salimova*

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Abstract

Sociopragmatic competence—the ability to use language appropriately in accordance with social, institutional, and cultural context—represents a critical yet comparatively underexplored dimension of medical professional communication. In Uzbek-medium higher education, validated structural models and assessment frameworks for this construct appear to remain limited, particularly within the Central Asian context. This study aimed to develop a theoretically grounded structural model of sociopragmatic competence for medical higher education, articulate component-specific assessment criteria, and identify appropriate measurement methods through a systematic integrative literature review conducted across Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, PubMed Central, and Google Scholar, yielding 54 sources retained for thematic synthesis following PRISMA-ScR screening procedures and employing abductive reasoning evaluated against criteria of internal coherence, theoretical grounding, and practical applicability. The study proposes the five-component MedSPC Model, organized across two hierarchical planes. The foundational plane encompasses Sociopragmatic Knowledge and Discourse Organizational Competence, while the performative plane comprises Interactional Role Competence, Face Management Competence, and Pragmatic Adaptability. The model is accompanied by a component-specific four-level assessment rubric and a Multi-Method Assessment Battery (MMAB) consisting of four complementary instruments. All components are theoretically grounded and presented as a structured research agenda subject to empirical validation. The MedSPC Model is presented not as a set of validated claims but as an empirically generative framework that produces testable hypotheses about the structure, development, and assessment of medical sociopragmatic competence, with empirical validation constituting the essential and immediate next step in this research agenda.

Keywords: MedSPC Model, professional discourse, pragmatic assessment, Central Asian higher education, integrative literature review

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Introduction

The growing complexity of multilingual clinical environments has renewed attention to the communicative preparation of medical professionals. In Uzbekistan, language instruction has traditionally prioritized grammatical accuracy and lexical acquisition while neglecting the sociopragmatic dimensions of professional medical discourse. This gap is not unique to the Uzbek context: competency-based approaches integrating communication, critical thinking, and professional skills within ESP frameworks yield measurable benefits, while revealing persistent deficits in soft skills that content-focused instruction fails to address (Dashtestani & Forutanian, 2025). The gap is consequential: a physician commanding grammatical correctness but lacking sociopragmatic competence—the ability to deploy linguistic resources appropriately in accordance with social context, interactional roles, institutional power relations, and culturally embedded norms (Leech, 1983; Brown & Levinson, 1987)—may still fail to communicate effectively with patients, colleagues, and caregivers (Thomas, 1983; Kasper & Rose, 2002). This competence underpins sensitive history-taking, delivery of difficult diagnoses, informed consent negotiation, and interprofessional coordination (Heritage & Maynard, 2006). Yet no validated assessment framework currently exists for Uzbek-medium medical education, limiting both curriculum design and learner evaluation.

Three terminological distinctions are operative throughout. *Communicative competence* denotes the overarching construct encompassing all dimensions of effective and appropriate language use (Hymes, 1972; Canale & Swain, 1980). *Pragmatic competence* refers to the broader capacity to interpret and produce language for communicative intent, comprising pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic competence (Thomas, 1983). *Sociopragmatic competence*—the central construct—denotes contextually and socially appropriate linguistic deployment; where cited authors use 'pragmatic competence,' their original terminology is preserved.

This study aims to develop a theoretically grounded structural model of sociopragmatic competence applicable to Uzbek-medium medical higher education and to identify criteria and methods for its assessment, pursuing four objectives: (1) analyzing theoretical foundations within communicative competence research; (2) identifying structural components as they manifest in medical professional discourse; (3) establishing assessment criteria for medical students; and (4) critically reviewing measurement methods suited to the Uzbek-medium context. These correspond to three central questions: what constitutes the structural architecture of sociopragmatic competence in medical communication, what criteria best serve its assessment, and which measurement methods suit the Uzbek-medium educational context.

Literature Review

Thomas (1983) laid the conceptual foundations of sociopragmatics by distinguishing pragmalinguistic failure—inability to encode communicative intentions through appropriate linguistic forms—from sociopragmatic failure—inability to select contextually appropriate speech acts regardless of linguistic accuracy, demonstrating that grammatical competence alone does not guarantee

communicative success. Leech's (1983) Politeness Principle established that effective communication requires orientation toward social harmony—a culturally variable dimension requiring explicit instruction. Brown and Levinson's (1987) face theory systematized the relationship between social variables—power, distance, and ranking of imposition—and politeness strategy selection; in medical interaction, face-threatening acts are pervasive, from delivering terminal diagnoses to refusing treatment preferences (Rees et al., 2007).

Communicative competence, introduced by Hymes (1972) and operationalized by Canale and Swain (1980), provided the disciplinary infrastructure within which sociopragmatic competence found its place. Bachman and Palmer (1996) advanced the field by positioning pragmatic knowledge as a testable, teachable dimension of language ability—particularly relevant to medical education, where consultations, ward rounds, and multidisciplinary meetings require sustained pragmatic attunement.

Mishler (1984) characterized the physician-patient encounter as a site of tension between the voice of medicine—objective, biomedical—and the voice of the lifeworld—experiential, patient-centered. Heritage and Maynard (2006) demonstrated that tacit sociopragmatic conventions carry significant consequences for patient outcomes, with conversation-analytic research consistently confirming this across multiple health systems and languages (Barnes & Woods, 2024). In the Central Asian context, however, research remains critically sparse: no empirically grounded, Scopus-indexed studies examining physician-patient interactional discourse in Uzbek-medium clinical settings could be identified, and discourse-analytic methods have yet to be systematically applied to Uzbek medical education contexts (Imafuku et al., 2022)—gaps constituting the primary scholarly justification for the present study.

Sociopragmatic Norms in Uzbek Medical Communication: Cultural and Institutional Specificities

Applying Western sociopragmatic frameworks to Uzbek-medium medical education requires structural reconceptualization, not merely contextual sensitivity. Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory provides a robust account of face management, but its cross-cultural universality has been contested (Kasper & Rose, 2002), and the Uzbek clinical context presents four constitutive departures from Western interactional models.

First, in hierarchical and collectivist healthcare cultures such as Uzbekistan, illness is understood as a family matter, with treatment decisions routinely negotiated with family representatives rather than the patient alone (Claramita & Susilo, 2024), extending the dyadic Brown-Levinson model to multi-party face negotiation as a normal institutional feature. Second, bad news delivery follows graduated indirect disclosure grounded in *andisha*—considerate restraint in service of relational harmony—with religious formulations such as *Xudo xohlasa* ("God willing") functioning as institutionally sanctioned mitigation devices rather than mere politeness markers (Mishler, 1984). Third, the *ustoz-shogird* (master-apprentice) hierarchy governs trainee communication: disagreement with senior physicians is

expressed through indirect, face-preserving reformulations—typically questions rather than counter-assertions—diverging substantially from assertiveness-oriented models in English-language clinical literature (Rees et al., 2007). Fourth, language choice carries sociopragmatic meaning absent in monolingual Western contexts: encounters may unfold in Uzbek, Russian, or code-mixed *shargish*, while rural patients frequently present dialectal features requiring real-time register adaptation.

These four features are constitutive of the MedSPC Model's architecture: Cultural Norm Sensitivity (Criterion 1.3) encodes culturally variable FTA ranking; Interactional Role Competence incorporates the *ustoz-shogird* hierarchy; and Pragmatic Adaptability includes register and language-variety flexibility as a specifically Uzbek competence dimension. The model is thus a culturally situated reconceptualization, not a contextual adaptation of Western frameworks.

Measurement of Sociopragmatic Competence: Methods and Challenges

The operationalization of sociopragmatic competence for assessment presents considerable methodological challenges. The Discourse Completion Test (DCT), widely adopted for its administrative feasibility, elicits responses that frequently diverge from naturally occurring interaction, reflecting explicit rather than real-time pragmatic processing (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Bardovi-Harlig, 2010). Role-play methodologies elicit interactive spoken data approximating natural discourse (Kasper, 2008), while the Standardized Patient (SP) methodology offers the highest ecological validity through trained actor-patients evaluated against structured criteria (Yudkowsky, 2002). As Roever (2011) argues, robust frameworks combine multiple methods to capture both the knowledge and performance dimensions of sociopragmatic competence. The successful operationalization of such multi-method frameworks, however, extends beyond instrument design to encompass practitioners' assessment literacy; research has demonstrated that targeted educator preparation can substantially shape implementation attitudes, with practical constraints such as time and institutional readiness emerging as significant barriers (Zohrabi & Khalili, 2025). This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What theoretical and empirical foundations inform the conceptualization of sociopragmatic competence in Uzbek-medium medical higher education contexts?

2. What components constitute a coherent structural model of sociopragmatic competence for medical professionals in Central Asian higher education, and how are these components hierarchically organized?

3. What assessment framework and instruments are most appropriate for operationalizing and measuring the proposed components of the MedSPC Model?

Method

Research Design

This study adopts a systematic integrative literature review combined with conceptual framework development—appropriate when the aim is to synthesize existing theoretical and empirical knowledge to construct a novel conceptual model

rather than generate new primary data (Torraco, 2005; Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). The integrative review was preferred over a conventional narrative review for its explicit, replicable procedures for source identification, inclusion, and synthesis, enhancing transparency and rigor. Methodological rigour was further ensured through systematic attention to validity and reliability considerations across all stages of the review and conceptual development process (Zohrabi, 2013). PRISMA-ScR (Tricco et al., 2018) was referenced for procedural guidance and adapted to align with the integrative review design (see PRISMA-ScR Adaptation section below). The methodological logic follows three stages: (1) systematic identification and screening of relevant literature; (2) thematic synthesis and critical analysis; and (3) conceptual modeling, translating synthesized insights into a coherent structural framework with defined components, criteria, and assessment implications.

Literature Search Procedure

A systematic search was conducted across Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, PubMed Central, and Google Scholar—selected to ensure comprehensive coverage across applied linguistics, language education, medical education, and health communication—using Boolean combinations of the keyword clusters summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Systematic Review Search Terms and Construct Categorization

Cluster	Search Terms
Core construct	*sociopragmatic competence, pragmatic competence, communicative competence*
Domain	*medical education, health communication, clinical communication, medical discourse*
Language context	*Uzbek, Central Asian, post-Soviet, second language, professional language teaching*
Assessment	*pragmatic assessment, language testing, discourse completion test, standardized patient*

The search was limited to English and Russian publications covering 1983–2024, with 1983 selected as the lower boundary to coincide with Thomas's foundational articulation of the sociopragmatic/pragmalinguistic distinction. This language restriction was considered methodologically appropriate for two reasons. First, English constitutes the primary medium of international scholarly communication in applied linguistics, pragmatics, and medical education research. Second, Russian remains a significant language of academic publication across Central Asian higher education contexts, including Uzbekistan, owing to the enduring influence of the Soviet-era scholarly tradition; Russian-medium literature therefore provides regionally relevant theoretical and empirical grounding directly pertinent to the Uzbek-medium institutional context under investigation. Uzbek-language academic literature on sociopragmatic competence was not included due to

the near-absence of peer-reviewed empirical work on this construct in that language at the time of the search.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria encompassed peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, or scholarly monographs addressing sociopragmatic, pragmatic, or communicative competence in educational or professional contexts; studies focusing on medical or health communication or professional language use; theoretical and empirical works proposing or validating competence models or assessment frameworks; and publications indexed in Scopus or Web of Science, or cited in foundational works in the field. *Exclusion* criteria covered non-peer-reviewed sources, conference abstracts, or grey literature; studies confined to non-professional language learning contexts with no transferable theoretical implications; works addressing medical communication in culturally or linguistically irrelevant contexts; and duplicate publications or studies superseded by subsequent work by the same authors.

Of 142 identified records —defined as individual search results returned across all queried databases and sources prior to deduplication— 24 duplicates were removed, leaving 118 for title and abstract screening; 31 were excluded as outside thematic scope. Of the remaining 87 retrieved for full-text assessment, 33 were excluded (12 non-peer-reviewed; 21 outside relevant linguistic or cultural scope), yielding a final corpus of 54 sources—40 cited in the main text and 14 appearing in Appendices A–D as supporting references for rubric and instrument development. Selection followed PRISMA-ScR adapted procedures (Tricco et al., 2018).

PRISMA-ScR Adaptation and Procedural Transparency

Although PRISMA-ScR (Tricco et al., 2018) served as the procedural reference, three adaptations were made to align the framework with the integrative review design (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005) rather than a strict scoping review, as detailed item-by-item in Table 2.

Table 2

PRISMA-ScR Adaptation Record for the Present Integrative Review

PRISMA-ScR Item	Standard Requirement	Present Study	Adaptation Rationale
Title	Identify as scoping review	Identified as integrative review	Design is integrative (Torraco, 2005), not scoping; PRISMA-ScR adapted for procedural transparency only
Structured summary	Report PCC framework (Population, Concept, Context)	Research questions used in place of PCC	PCC framework is scoping-review-specific; research questions provide equivalent conceptual scope
Protocol registration	Pre-registration on OSF or PROSPERO	Not pre-registered	Conceptual framework development studies are not

PRISMA-ScR Item	Standard Requirement	Present Study	Adaptation Rationale
			conventionally pre-registered; acknowledged as limitation
Sources	Report all databases searched	Five databases reported (Scopus, WoS, ERIC, PMC, Google Scholar)	Fully compliant
Search strategy	Report full Boolean strings	Keyword clusters reported in Table 1	Full Boolean strings available on request from corresponding author
Selection process	Duplicate screening by ≥2 reviewers	Single primary reviewer; independent verification of 30% random sample	Resource constraints; verification subsample reported below
Data extraction	Structured extraction form	Thematic coding protocol (Thomas & Harden, 2008)	Integrative review uses synthesis coding rather than discrete data extraction
Synthesis	Report evidence mapping	Thematic synthesis across three stages	Evidence mapping not applicable to conceptual framework development
Critical appraisal	Appraise sources for risk of bias	Theoretical adequacy and empirical grounding assessed	Formal risk-of-bias tools (e.g., CASP) designed for primary empirical studies; theoretical adequacy criteria applied instead

Note. Items not listed above were followed as specified in PRISMA-ScR (Tricco et al., 2018). PCC = Population, Concept, Context; OSF = Open Science Framework; WoS = Web of Science; CASP = Critical Appraisal Skills Programme.

Analytical Procedure: Thematic Synthesis

The corpus was analyzed using thematic synthesis (Thomas & Harden, 2008) across three stages: inductive line-by-line coding against the research questions (Stage 1); grouping of related codes into descriptive themes with convergences and divergences mapped explicitly (Stage 2); and abstraction of descriptive themes into higher-order categories constituting the model's structural components, guided by Bachman and Palmer (1996), with competing positions documented rather than artificially resolved where definitional ambiguity was encountered (Stage 3; Booth et al., 2016). A randomly selected 30% subsample (n = 16 sources) was independently reviewed by a second coder; no formal κ statistic was computed—a methodological limitation acknowledged here—with discrepancies, concentrated primarily at the Interactional Role/Face Management boundary, resolved through structured discussion until consensus.

The structural model was derived through abductive reasoning (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012) and evaluated against criteria of internal coherence, theoretical grounding, and practical applicability, with each component's primary and secondary theoretical sources and medical communication justification presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Derivation of MedSPC Model Components: Theoretical Sources and Medical Justification

Component	Primary Theoretical Source	Secondary Sources	Medical Justification
Sociopragmatic Knowledge	Thomas (1983)	Leech (1983); Brown & Levinson (1987)	Declarative norm knowledge is prerequisite to performative deployment; explicitly teachable in preclinical years
Discourse Organizational Competence	Heritage & Maynard (2006)	Swales (1990); Sacks et al. (1974)	Medical consultations follow institutionally recognized phase structures; violations are immediately consequential for patient care
Interactional Role Competence	Goffman (1967); Mishler (1984)	Hyland (1998); Brown & Levinson (1987)	Physicians enact multiple shifting roles within single encounters; role miscalibration is among the most-cited communication failures in medical education
Face Management Competence	Brown & Levinson (1987)	Claramita & Susilo (2024); Heritage & Maynard (2006)	Medical interaction is exceptionally rich in face-threatening acts; face management quality is the strongest predictor of patient satisfaction outcomes
Pragmatic Adaptability	Kasper (2008); Anderson (1983)	Sacks et al. (1974)	Distinguishes expert from novice performance; coordinates all other components under real-time pressure

Note. A three-component model (Knowledge, Discourse, Interaction) was rejected for insufficient granularity in face management and adaptability—both empirically distinct constructs in the medical communication literature (Roever, 2011)—while a six-component model incorporating a separate Empathic Communication component was rejected on grounds of construct overlap with Face Management Competence and in the interest of parsimony and assessment feasibility.

Rationale for Five-Component Architecture

The five-component structure was retained over simpler and more elaborate alternatives on three grounds. First, empirical parsimony: Roever (2011) identifies face management and metacognitive adaptability as empirically distinguishable constructs in second language pragmatic assessment, supporting their separation from a general interactional category. Second, pedagogical operationalizability: each component maps onto a discrete instructional phase within the five-year medical curriculum (Table 3), making five components the minimum granularity required for curriculum alignment without excessive complexity. Third, assessment feasibility: each component is assessable through at least two instruments in the MMAB, ensuring no component relies on a single measurement method—a requirement a six-component model would compromise given available assessment resources. A three-component model fails the first criterion; a six-component model fails the third.

Ethical Considerations

As this study is based entirely on published scholarly literature and involves no human participants, data collection, or experimental intervention, no institutional ethical approval was required. All sources are properly attributed in accordance with academic integrity standards. No conflicts of interest are declared.

Results

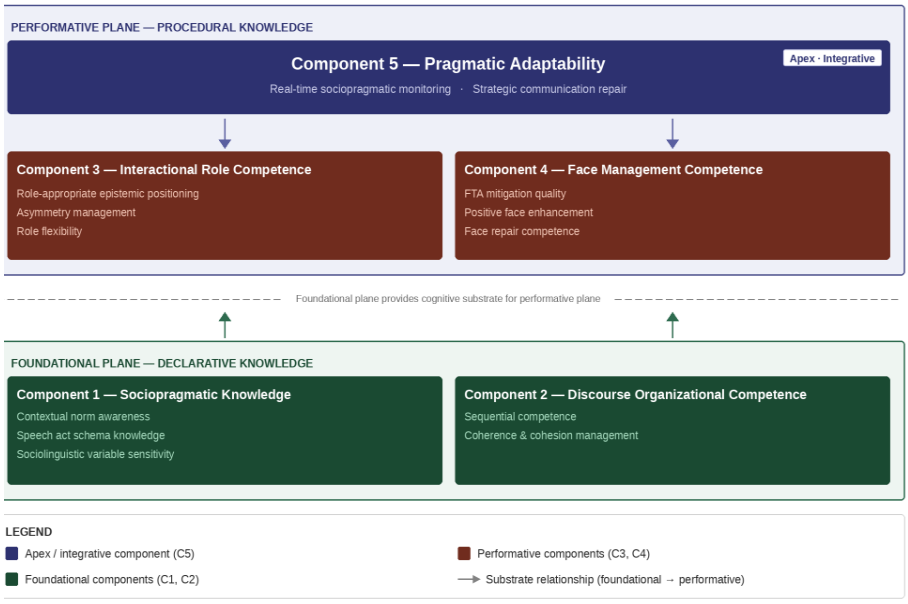
Research Question 1: What theoretical and empirical foundations inform the conceptualization of sociopragmatic competence in Uzbek-medium medical higher education contexts?

Overview of the Proposed Model

The thematic synthesis yielded the MedSPC Model (Medical Sociopragmatic Competence Model)—a five-component structural model organized across two hierarchical planes: a foundational plane comprising knowledge-based components, and a performative plane comprising skill-based and strategic components—reflecting the theoretical consensus that sociopragmatic competence is not a unitary construct but a complex, multi-layered ability that develops unevenly across its constituent dimensions (Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Roever, 2011).

Figure 1

The MedSPC Model: Structural Architecture of Medical Sociopragmatic Competence



Note. Arrows indicate the substrate relationship between hierarchical planes, not temporal developmental sequence. The foundational plane (C1, C2) provides the declarative cognitive basis upon which performative competence (C3, C4, C5) is built. Pragmatic Adaptability (C5) functions as the integrative executive mechanism coordinating all components under real-time interactional pressure. Hierarchical architecture derived from Anderson (1983) and Bachman & Palmer (1996).

Research Question 2: What components constitute a coherent structural model of sociopragmatic competence for medical professionals in Central Asian higher education, and how are these components hierarchically organized?

Component 1: Sociopragmatic Knowledge

Sociopragmatic Knowledge constitutes the foundational cognitive layer of the MedSPC Model—defined as declarative understanding of social norms, contextual variables, and cultural conventions governing communicative conduct in a given institutional setting (Thomas, 1983): knowledge of when it is appropriate to perform a given speech act and what social consequences follow from particular communicative choices. Three sub-components are distinguished: (a) contextual norm awareness—knowledge of institutionally and culturally sanctioned norms regulating physician-patient, physician-colleague, and physician-administrator interaction, including power asymmetries, consultation sequencing, and culturally specific expectations regarding directness and emotional expression (Mishler, 1984; Heritage & Maynard, 2006); (b) speech act schema knowledge—declarative knowledge of conventional forms through which recurrent medical speech acts are realized in Uzbek-medium professional discourse, organized around prototypical schemas internalized through exposure to professional discourse communities (Kasper & Rose, 2002); and (c) sociolinguistic variable sensitivity—awareness of how Brown and Levinson's (1987) social variables—power (P), distance (D), and ranking of imposition (R)—systematically shape speech act selection and formulation. As the component most amenable to explicit instruction and declarative assessment, it constitutes the necessary cognitive substrate upon which performative competence is built (Bachman & Palmer, 1996), hence its foundational positioning.

Component 2: Discourse Organizational Competence

Discourse Organizational Competence refers to the ability to structure extended medical communicative events—consultations, case presentations, patient education sessions, multidisciplinary discussions—in accordance with their institutionally recognized sequential organization, drawing on conversation-analytic (Heritage & Maynard, 2006; Sacks et al., 1974) and genre-theoretic (Swales, 1990) traditions. Two sub-components are distinguished: (a) sequential competence—the ability to manage the phase structure of medical encounters across opening, middle, and closing sequences, deploying phase-appropriate communicative resources at each transition; and (b) coherence and cohesion management—the ability to maintain thematic continuity, manage topic transitions, and organize complex biomedical information into sequentially accessible discourse, particularly consequential during patient education (Roter & Hall, 2006). Deficiencies in this component—disorganized consultations, omitted case presentation phases, incoherent patient instructions—are sociopragmatic rather than purely linguistic failures, reflecting inability to map linguistic resources onto institutional discourse structure rather than insufficient vocabulary or grammar.

Component 3: Interactional Role Competence

Interactional role competence is defined as the ability to enact, negotiate, and maintain the communicative rights and obligations associated with specific institutional roles within medical encounters, grounded in Goffman's (1967) concept of interactional footing and Mishler's (1984) analysis of competing voices in medical interaction. Three sub-components are identified: (a) *role-appropriate epistemic positioning*—calibrating claims to knowledge and authority through hedges, boosters, and evidential markers in accordance with one's institutional role (Hyland, 1998); (b) *asymmetry management*—navigating power asymmetries both downward (toward institutionally vulnerable patients) and upward (toward senior physicians and administrators) through differential politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987); and (c) *role flexibility*—shifting communicative register and relational positioning as encounter demands evolve, from authoritative diagnostician to empathic counselor to collaborative partner in shared decision-making (Roter & Hall, 2006). Failures in this component—overly authoritative communication with patients, inappropriate informality with senior colleagues, inability to shift from biomedical to patient-centered discourse—are among the most frequently cited communication deficiencies in medical education literature (Rees et al., 2007) and are directly associated with adverse patient outcomes.

Component 4: Face Management Competence

Face management competence refers to the ability to protect, repair, and where appropriate strategically threaten the face wants of all interactional participants, grounded in Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory and its systematic account of face-threatening acts (FTAs) and available mitigation strategies—positive politeness, negative politeness, off-record strategies, and bald-on-record performance. Three sub-components are distinguished: (a) *mitigation competence*—softening, hedging, or reframing face-threatening acts, particularly critical in Uzbek clinical culture where direct contradiction of a patient's expressed beliefs may be severely face-threatening (Claramita & Susilo, 2024); (b) *positive face enhancement*—affirming patients' and colleagues' positive face wants through recognition, validation, and solidarity-building, strongly associated with patient adherence and treatment engagement (Heritage & Maynard, 2006); and (c) *face repair competence*—recognizing and remediating face threats through apology, explanation, humor, or topic redirection, requiring real-time interactional monitoring and rapid sociopragmatic adjustment (Goffman, 1967). Research consistently demonstrates that patients' evaluations of physician communication quality are more strongly predicted by perceived face-sensitivity than by informational content (Roter & Hall, 2006), making this component the most directly implicated in patient satisfaction, therapeutic alliance, and informed consent outcomes.

Component 5: Pragmatic Adaptability

Pragmatic adaptability occupies the apex of the MedSPC Model's performative plane. It is the metacognitive and strategic capacity to monitor ongoing

interactions, identify sociopragmatic challenges, and flexibly reconfigure communicative behavior in response to interlocutor feedback and situational shifts. This component draws on Kasper's (2008) concept of pragmatic interactional competence and Anderson's (1983) declarative-procedural distinction, which establishes that genuine communicative expertise requires not merely sociopragmatic knowledge but its fluent proceduralization under interactional pressure. Two sub-components are identified: (a) *real-time sociopragmatic monitoring*—tracking interlocutor responses, detecting signs of misunderstanding, discomfort, or face threat, and adjusting strategy without disrupting interactional coherence (Sacks et al., 1974); and (b) *strategic communication repair*—initiating and executing repair sequences when breakdowns occur, a critical competence in high-stakes encounters involving emotionally distressed patients or complex ethical decisions (Yudkowsky, 2002). Pragmatic adaptability most clearly distinguishes advanced communicative competence from rule-following. A student who performs well in scripted role-play but fails with an uncooperative or distressed patient has not yet achieved it. For this reason, it is both the most challenging component to develop pedagogically and the most demanding to assess reliably**.**

Structural Architecture of the MedSPC Model

The five components form an integrated, hierarchically organized system. Foundational components—Sociopragmatic Knowledge and Discourse Organizational Competence—provide the cognitive substrate for performative ones. Pragmatic Adaptability functions as the dynamic coordinating mechanism governing competence deployment under real-time interactional pressure.

Research Question 3: What assessment framework and instruments are most appropriate for operationalizing and measuring the proposed components of the MedSPC Model?

Assessment Criteria and Measurement Methods for Sociopragmatic Competence in Medical Higher Education

Integrating the MedSPC Model into medical education practice requires explicit, operationalizable assessment criteria aligned with each component and measurement methods that are both theoretically valid and practically feasible within Uzbekistan's medical higher education system. The framework is guided by three principles: *construct validity*—criteria must capture sociopragmatic competence as defined in the model, not surrogate constructs such as grammatical accuracy (Bachman & Palmer, 1996); *consequential validity*—the framework must generate productive washback effects that incentivize genuine competence development rather than surface-level performance (Messick, 1989); and *contextual authenticity*—assessment tasks must approximate the sociopragmatic demands of actual medical communication closely enough to support ecologically valid inferences about real-world communicative ability (Yudkowsky, 2002).

Part I: Assessment Criteria

Criterion System Design

Each of the five MedSPC Model components is evaluated against component-specific behavioral descriptors rated on a four-level proficiency scale: Inadequate (1), Developing (2), Proficient (3), and Advanced (4), with domain-specific behavioral anchors grounded in the medical discourse literature, following the precedent of the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001). A four-level scale was preferred over binary pass/fail because medical communicative competence develops progressively and unevenly across components, and a scalar system captures this developmental heterogeneity while providing actionable diagnostic information for instructional planning (Roever, 2011); the effective deployment of such rubrics is contingent on assessors' assessment literacy, and targeted instrument development grounded in systematic validation procedures substantially enhances rubric reliability and practical utility (Rastegar et al., 2022). Full component-specific criteria and behavioral descriptors are presented in Appendix A. *(submitted as supplementary material)*

Part II: Measurement Methods

Methodological Framework

The selection of measurement methods was guided by Kane's (2013) argument-based approach to validity, requiring that each interpretive claim based on an assessment score be supported by an explicit validity argument connecting task, observed performance, and construct. A fundamental implication follows: no single instrument can generate valid inferences across all five MedSPC Model components, as they differ in whether they are best captured through declarative, performance-based, or observational evidence—making a multi-method assessment battery theoretically required, not merely preferable.

Method 1: Sociopragmatic Judgment Task (SJT). Students evaluate the sociopragmatic appropriateness of scripted medical exchanges in vignette format, rating each on a Likert scale, identifying features rendering behavior appropriate or inappropriate, and proposing alternative formulations where applicable (Roever, 2005; Rees et al., 2007). The SJT targets Component 1 primarily and Component 2 secondarily, offering administrative feasibility for large cohorts and systematic manipulation of contextual variables (P, D, R). Its principal limitation is assessment of declarative rather than procedural knowledge (Bardovi-Harlig, 2010); SJT scores must never serve as sole indicators of overall sociopragmatic competence. *Recommended administration: semesterly, as pre- and post-instruction diagnostic.*

Method 2: Written Discourse Completion Task (DCT). Students provide the missing physician turn in partially scripted sequences designed to elicit face-threatening or sequentially complex speech acts—delivering a difficult diagnosis,

refusing a patient's request, negotiating consent, correcting a colleague's error (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Yudkowsky, 2002; Roever, 2011). Targeting Components 1, 3, and 4, responses are scored against a Speech Act Appropriateness Rubric with inter-rater reliability established through Cohen's κ prior to large-scale administration. Its principal limitation is that written responses elicit reflective rather than spontaneous behavior, precluding valid assessment of Component 5 (Bardovi-Harlig, 2010; Kasper, 2008). *Recommended administration: formatively at the conclusion of each instructional unit.*

Method 3: Oral Role-Play Assessment (ORP). Students engage in structured interactive scenarios with trained interlocutors enacting standardized patient, colleague, or supervisor roles, generating the full range of sociopragmatic challenges: phase management, face-threatening act performance, role transitions, and real-time repair demands (Kasper, 2008; Rees et al., 2007). Targeting all five components—with particular strength for Components 3, 4, and 5—performances are video-recorded and scored by two trained assessors using the MedSPC Analytical Rating Scale, with discrepancies exceeding one scale point resolved through third-rater adjudication. Limitations include resource intensity and scheduling constraints for large cohorts. *Recommended administration: as a summative assessment at the end of each academic year, supplemented by formative role-play throughout the instructional cycle.*

Method 4: Standardized Patient Assessment (SPA). Trained actor-patients present standardized clinical scenarios approximating genuine clinical encounters (Barrows, 1993), generating validity evidence superior to written or role-play instruments for constructs involving real-time interpersonal communication (Yudkowsky, 2002). Targeting Components 3, 4, and 5 with highest ecological validity, scoring employs a dual system: trained assessors complete the MedSPC Analytical Rating Scale, while standardized patients complete a structured Patient Communication Experience Questionnaire (PCEQ) evaluating perceived respect, clarity, emotional sensitivity, and overall interaction satisfaction—capturing face management dimensions not fully visible to external assessors. SPA carries the highest resource demands of all proposed methods. Recommended administration: as high-stakes summative assessment at clinical transition points—entry to clinical rotations and pre-graduation competency certification.

Proposed Multi-Method Assessment Battery (MMAB)

The four methods are most appropriately deployed as an integrated Multi-Method Assessment Battery (MMAB) in which each contributes targeted validity evidence for specific components while compensating for the limitations of others, as represented in Table 4.

Table 4

Multi-Method Assessment Battery: Component Coverage by Method

MedSPC Component	SJT	DCT	ORP	SPA
1. Sociopragmatic Knowledge	●●	●●	●	●
2. Discourse Organizational Competence	●	●●	●●	●●
3. Interactional Role Competence	○	●●	●●	●●
4. Face Management Competence	●	●●	●●	●●
5. Pragmatic Adaptability	○	○	●●	●●

Note. ●● = Primary assessment method; ● = Secondary assessment method; ○ = Not applicable.

The MMAB is designed for progressive implementation: SJT and DCT are introduced in early years as formative tools; ORP in middle years as clinical training begins; and SPA is reserved for high-stakes summative assessment at clinical transition points—ensuring assessment demands are calibrated to students' evolving competence and generating longitudinally coherent evidence of development.

Inter-Rater Reliability and Assessor Training

ORP and SPA validity depends critically on rater reliability. Evidence from institutional assessment contexts confirms that rubric design quality directly influences inter-rater reliability outcomes, and that assessor-informed rubric refinement—where practitioner feedback is systematically incorporated into descriptor revision—yields significant improvements in scoring consistency and pedagogical relevance (Zargaran & Ghorbanpoor, 2026). All assessors must complete a standardized training program comprising: orientation to the MedSPC Model; anchor performance calibration; live rating practice; and periodic recalibration to prevent assessor drift. Inter-rater reliability is calculated using intraclass correlation coefficients (ICC) for continuous ratings and Cohen's κ for categorical judgments, with acceptable thresholds set at ICC ≥ 0.75 and $\kappa \geq 0.70$ (Streiner et al., 2015). Assessor pairs failing to meet these thresholds undergo additional calibration before rating student performances.

Pilot Administration

A preliminary SJT pilot was conducted with $N = 35$ medical students across eight Uzbek medical higher education institutions. Given the limited sample, data are hypothesis-generating only. Three findings warrant attention. First, S1 and S3—involving collective versus individual clinical decision-making frameworks—produced near-identical negative judgment distributions (combined negative: 85.7%), suggesting that collective orientation in Uzbek clinical culture extends face management obligations to family interlocutors, consistent with Criterion 1.3. Second, S6 (gift acceptance) revealed that 88.6% of respondents endorsed culturally

framed responses deviating from formal ethics standards, illustrating the inadequacy of ethics instruction alone as a substitute for explicit sociopragmatic competence development. Third, S5 was the only scenario yielding a noteworthy year-of-study association (r_s = −.420, p = .012, uncorrected; adjusted α = .010 across five comparisons), suggesting face management sensitivity develops through clinical exposure rather than declarative instruction alone. Full statistics are reported in Appendix B.

Discussion

This study addresses a critical gap at the intersection of applied linguistics, medical education, and language assessment by proposing the MedSPC Model—a theoretically grounded, contextually situated framework for conceptualizing, teaching, and evaluating sociopragmatic competence in Uzbek-medium medical higher education. The need for such a framework is underscored by emerging evidence that medical professionals frequently demonstrate strong domain-specific expertise while remaining insufficiently equipped in the communicative and linguistic dimensions of professional practice; this tension between professional knowledge and linguistic competence represents a defining challenge in medical education contexts where English or other non-native languages serve as media of instruction or professional communication (Khalili et al., 2025).

Theoretical Contributions

The MedSPC Model disaggregates sociopragmatic competence into five hierarchically organized components, each with a distinct theoretical lineage and observable behavioral manifestations—advancing prior frameworks, including Bachman and Palmer (1996), whose treatment of pragmatic competence at a level of generality limits applicability to domain-specific professional education. The foundational–performative distinction operationalizes Anderson's (1983) declarative–procedural knowledge divide, providing a principled account of why students with strong declarative knowledge frequently fail in real-time clinical interaction (Kasper & Rose, 2002). Positioning Pragmatic Adaptability at the apex establishes metacognitive self-monitoring as a teachable, assessable competence dimension rather than an innate trait.

Most existing sociopragmatic research has been conducted in English-language contexts using Western clinical communication models—emphasizing patient autonomy, shared decision-making, and explicit verbal consent—frameworks that cannot be uncritically imported into Uzbek medical education, where distinct configurations of physician authority, family involvement, and norms of indirection obtain (Claramita & Susilo, 2024). The MedSPC Model accommodates this cultural specificity through Criterion 1.3 and the face management component's emphasis on culturally variable FTA mitigation, embedding cultural contextualization into the model's structural architecture rather than treating it as supplementary (Kasper, 2008; Roever, 2011).

This cultural contextualization raises three theoretical tensions requiring direct engagement. First, the risk of essentialism: characterizing Uzbek medical communication through shared norms risks treating a diverse society as homogeneous. Following Kádár and Haugh (2013), politeness norms are dynamic, generationally variable, and institutionally contested; the model responds by encoding awareness of normative variability as itself a competence dimension within Criterion 1.3. Second, the postcolonial critique: the model's theoretical foundations—Hymes (1972), Canale and Swain (1980), Bachman and Palmer (1996)—carry epistemological assumptions subject to postcolonial scrutiny (Pennycook, 1994); the model responds structurally by embedding Uzbek communicative norms as the constitutive standard rather than a deviation from Western baselines. Third, individual variation: following Terkourafi (2005), politeness norms operate as probabilistic expectations rather than categorical rules; the proficiency scale accordingly captures developmental proximity to communicatively effective performance, while Pragmatic Adaptability at the apex is defined precisely as the capacity to deviate from normative expectations when contextual demands require it, embedding communicative agency at the highest level.

Collectively, these engagements are constitutive of the model's theoretical architecture—converting essentialism risk into a competence criterion, repositioning Western theory as one input rather than the authoritative baseline, and building individual agency into its apex component.

Pedagogical Implications

Curriculum Design

The MedSPC Model argues for reconceptualizing language instruction objectives—from the dominant focus on grammatical accuracy and lexical acquisition toward the explicit development of sociopragmatic competence across all five components—embedding linguistic instruction within communicatively authentic, sociopragmatically rich contexts rather than treating it as an end in itself. The model's hierarchical architecture suggests a developmental curriculum sequence: early years prioritize foundational components (sociopragmatic norms, discourse genre conventions, and the P/D/R social variable framework), while later years shift toward performative components through role-play, case simulation, and standardized patient encounters—mirroring the preclinical–clinical structure of medical education. Estimated additional instructional time is approximately 20–30 contact hours per academic year in Years 1–3, declining as clinical placement hours increase in Years 4–5. This reorientation does not displace existing linguistic content but recontextualizes it within sociopragmatically complex tasks that generate pragmatic development alongside linguistic consolidation (Willis & Willis, 2007), as detailed in Table 5.

Table 5

Illustrative Scope-and-Sequence Framework for a Five-Year Uzbek Medical Program

Academic Year	Primary MedSPC Focus	Instructional Modality	Assessment Method
Year 1	Sociopragmatic Knowledge (C1)	Explicit instruction; case vignette analysis; SJT practice	Sociopragmatic Judgment Task (SJT)
Year 2	Discourse Organizational Competence (C2)	Genre analysis; transcript study; structured role-play	Written DCT; discourse analysis tasks
Year 3	Interactional Role Competence (C3)	Simulated consultations; peer role-play; video-based reflection	ORP — formative
Year 4	Face Management Competence (C4)	Standardized patient encounters; emotionally complex scenarios	ORP — summative; SP feedback instrument
Year 5	Pragmatic Adaptability (C5)	Clinical rotation communication; unscripted SP assessment; reflective portfolio	SPA — high-stakes

Instructional Methodology

The pedagogical approach most consistent with the MedSPC Model is task-based language teaching (TBLT) with a sociopragmatic orientation—Willis and Willis (2007) demonstrate that TBLT generates more durable pragmatic development than form-focused instruction—requiring tasks that engage students in the full sociopragmatic complexity of clinical encounters rather than scripted phrases. For Pragmatic Adaptability specifically, the principle of deliberate interactional challenge is particularly important: systematically introducing unexpected, face-threatening, or interactionally complex events into practice scenarios requires students to deploy real-time monitoring and strategic repair under genuinely challenging conditions, consistent with the desirable difficulties literature demonstrating that manageable challenges produce more robust skill acquisition than error-free performance environments.

The MMAB's consequential validity (Messick, 1989) creates washback effects aligning students' priorities with genuine professional communication demands, while formative deployment of SJT and DCT instruments provides specific, actionable developmental feedback that generic communicative competence

assessments cannot deliver. However, the fully specified MMAB represents an aspirational system whose complete deployment presupposes institutional resources—trained standardized patients, video infrastructure, assessor training programs, and dedicated contact hours—not uniformly available across Uzbekistan's medical higher education institutions. Three implementation tiers are therefore specified: Tier 1 (Full MMAB: SJT + DCT + ORP + SPA) for high-resource institutions; Tier 2 (Core MMAB: SJT + DCT + ORP) for medium-resource institutions; and Tier 3 (Essential MMAB: SJT + DCT) for constrained settings—with component coverage, validity claims, and recommended cautions for each tier detailed in Appendix D and summarized in Table 6.

Table 6

Tiered Implementation Framework for the MedSPC Multi-Method Assessment Battery

	Tier 1 Full MMAB	Tier 2 Core MMAB	Tier 3 Essential MMAB
Instruments	SJT + DCT + ORP + SPA	SJT + DCT + ORP	SJT + DCT
Components with primary evidence	C1–C5	C1–C4	C1–C2
Components with secondary evidence	—	C5	C3–C4
Components unassessed	—	—	C5
Minimum assessors	2 trained + SP pool	2 trained faculty	1 trained rater
Additional contact hours/year	20–30 (Yrs 1–3)	15–20 (Yrs 1–3)	10–15 (Yrs 1–3)
High-stakes decisions	✓✓ Supported	⚠ With caution	✗ Not recommended
Formative use	✓✓ Full	✓✓ Full	✓✓ Limited

Institutions are encouraged to adopt the highest feasible tier and plan iterative capacity development toward full MMAB deployment, with a practical decision support guide—including minimum equipment specifications, assessor training outlines, and guidance for adapting tasks to local constraints—provided in Appendix C.

The MedSPC Model's contributions emerge most clearly in direct comparison with established frameworks: relative to Bachman and Palmer (1996), it offers greater domain specificity and developmental explicitness through its hierarchical rather than flat taxonomic architecture; relative to the Calgary-Cambridge Guide (Silverman et al., 2005), it provides stronger sociopragmatic theoretical grounding, complementing clinical communication frameworks by supplying the linguistic infrastructure they presuppose but do not explicitly develop; and relative to Roever's (2011) pragmatic assessment framework, it offers a more comprehensive structural account addressing the institutional, sequential, and role-

based dimensions that general second language pragmatic assessment frameworks do not capture.

Limitations

Five limitations are consequential for interpretation. First, the MedSPC Model has not yet been empirically validated; the proposed components, criteria, and methods represent theoretically grounded hypotheses requiring instrument development, pilot assessment, factor analytic validation, and longitudinal tracking before underpinning high-stakes decisions. Second, the literature base is heavily weighted toward English-language research, and transferability to the Uzbek clinical context cannot be assumed without empirical verification. Third, ORP and SPA carry substantial resource implications that may limit feasibility in under-resourced settings—tiered implementation guidance is provided in Section 2.3. Fourth, the study does not address how sociopragmatic competence interacts with clinical reasoning, biomedical knowledge, and procedural skills in determining overall physician performance. Fifth, pilot SJT analyses are exploratory and hypothesis-generating only; all reported correlations, including the significant result for S5, await replication with larger samples and appropriate correction procedures (see Appendix B).

Directions for Future Research

Four hypotheses follow directly from the model's structural architecture: H1: MedSPC Component scores will display a hierarchical acquisition sequence, with C1 and C2 attaining proficiency earlier than C3, C4, and C5. H2: SJT scores will not predict ORP or SPA performance at a magnitude sufficient to substitute for performance-based assessment, consistent with Anderson's (1983) declarative–procedural distinction. H3: Students scoring at the Advanced level on C5 will demonstrate significantly greater communicative recovery from interactionally disruptive SP events than Proficient-level students, controlling for C1–C4 scores. H4: Cultural Norm Sensitivity (Criterion 1.3) scores will moderate the relationship between Face Management Competence and patient satisfaction ratings, with higher sensitivity associated with stronger face management outcomes in Uzbek-specific scenarios than in culturally neutral ones.

Four priorities constitute the immediate research agenda: (1) psychometric validation of the SJT, DCT, and MedSPC Analytical Rating Scale, including factor analytic examination of the five-component structure; (2) corpus collection of authentic Uzbek-medium medical interactions to establish empirically grounded behavioral descriptors; (3) prospective longitudinal tracking of MedSPC component development from preclinical years through clinical rotations; and (4) cross-institutional comparative research across Uzbek medical universities to identify best practices and inform national-level education policy.

Conclusion

This study has proposed and theoretically grounded the MedSPC Model—a five-component structural model of sociopragmatic competence for Uzbek-medium

medical higher education—through a systematic integrative review of the applied linguistics, medical communication, and language assessment literature. The central argument is that sociopragmatic competence is not an incidental byproduct of general communicative ability but a complex, domain-specific construct that must be explicitly modeled, deliberately taught, and systematically assessed.

The model makes three principal contributions. Theoretically, it distinguishes foundational and performative competence planes and positions Pragmatic Adaptability as the integrative mechanism coordinating competence under real-time interactional pressure. Methodologically, it proposes a validity-argument-based Multi-Method Assessment Battery addressing the full construct range while remaining sensitive to institutional resource constraints. Practically, it provides a principled basis for curriculum design and assessment policy in a context that has lacked the theoretical grounding needed to move beyond ad hoc communicative instruction. Empirical validation remains the essential next step: the MedSPC Model is offered not as a set of confirmed claims but as a theoretically rigorous, empirically open contribution to an emerging research agenda.

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Appendix A
MedSPC Model Assessment Criteria: Component-Specific Behavioral Descriptors

Component	Criterion	Behavioral Descriptors (Advanced → Inadequate)
C1—Sociopragmatic Knowledge	1.1 Norm recognition accuracy	*Advanced:* accurately discriminates appropriate/inappropriate behavior across culturally ambiguous contexts. *Inadequate:* misses basic institutional norm violations.
	1.2 Contextual variable analysis	*Advanced:* nuanced multi-variable weighting of power (P), distance (D), imposition (R). *Inadequate:* attends to ≤1 variable.
	1.3 Cultural norm sensitivity	*Advanced:* demonstrates awareness of Uzbek-specific norms (indirection, respect marking, family involvement) as distinct from generic/Western-derived models (Claramita & Susilo, 2024). *Inadequate:* applies Western-default norms uncritically.
C2—Discourse Organizational Competence	2.1 Phase structure management	*Advanced:* smooth, appropriately signaled transitions across all consultation phases (opening, history, diagnosis, treatment, closing). *Inadequate:* omitted or disordered phases.
	2.2 Sequential coherence	*Advanced:* cohesively organized discourse with explicit connectives across case presentations, patient education, handovers. *Inadequate:* fragmented or thematically inconsistent.
	2.3 Genre appropriateness	*Advanced:* conforms to institutional generic conventions (consultation, case presentation, discharge instruction, referral) with context-sensitive recognition. *Inadequate:* genre conventions unrecognized or ignored (Swales, 1990).
C3—Interactional Role Competence	3.1 Epistemic calibration	*Advanced:* sophisticated deployment of hedges, evidentials, boosters accurately representing certainty while maintaining credibility. *Inadequate:* overclaims certainty or excessively hedges.
	3.2 Asymmetry sensitivity	*Advanced:* fluent register and mitigation modulation across patients, peers, senior physicians, allied health professionals. *Inadequate:* uniform communicative style regardless of relational context.
	3.3 Role transition fluency	*Advanced:* manages interactional footing shifts (diagnostician ↔ counselor ↔ listener) without sociopragmatic discontinuity. *Inadequate:* rigid role maintenance disrupts interactional coherence.
C4—Face Management Competence	4.1 FTA mitigation quality	*Advanced:* contextually appropriate mitigation seamlessly integrated (strategy × FTA severity × relational context) without informational loss. *Inadequate:* strategy mismatch or awkward deployment.

Component	Criterion	Behavioral Descriptors (Advanced → Inadequate)
	4.2 Positive face engagement	*Advanced:* actively sustains rapport through solidarity-affirming, validation, and acknowledgment behaviors, especially in distress and chronic-disease contexts (Heritage & Maynard, 2006). *Inadequate:* absent or formulaic engagement.
	4.3 Face repair responsiveness	*Advanced:* detects and repairs inadvertent FTAs (misunderstanding, abrupt shift, insensitive formulation) restoring relational equilibrium (Goffman, 1967). Assessed by performance-based methods only. *Inadequate:* face threats unnoticed or unaddressed.
C5—Pragmatic Adaptability	5.1 Real-time monitoring accuracy	*Advanced:* proactive detection of patient confusion, emotional escalation, communicative breakdown; preemptive adjustment before breakdown occurs. *Inadequate:* reactive or absent monitoring.
	5.2 Repair strategy effectiveness	*Advanced:* repair resolves identified difficulties without secondary interactional problems, confirmed by interlocutor response. *Inadequate:* repair attempts ineffective or counterproductive.
	5.3 Strategic flexibility range	*Advanced:* broad repertoire of sociopragmatic strategies selected by contextual demand. *Inadequate:* single rigid strategy applied regardless of interactional effectiveness.

Note. Four-level proficiency scale: 1 = Inadequate, 2 = Developing, 3 = Proficient, 4 = Advanced.

Appendix B

Preliminary Empirical Illustration: Pilot Sociopragmatic Judgment Task Data

Overview and Rationale

A pilot SJT was administered to $N = 35$ medical students across eight Uzbek medical higher education institutions (Tashkent Medical Academy, $n = 11$; Bukhara State Medical Institute, $n = 10$; Samarkand State Medical University, $n = 6$; Fergana Public Health Medical Institute, $n = 3$; Sechenov–Tashkent branch, $n = 2$; three further institutions, $n = 1$ each), spanning all six curriculum years (Year 1: $n = 2$; Year 2: $n = 3$; Year 3: $n = 6$; Year 4: $n = 11$; Year 5: $n = 6$; Year 6: $n = 7$). The instrument comprised five contextualized vignettes rated on a three-point scale (1 = Completely inappropriate; 2 = Mostly inappropriate; 3 = Neutral/context-dependent) plus one forced-choice gift-acceptance item (S6). Scenarios were mapped to MedSPC components as follows: S1—terminal prognosis disclosure against family objection (C4, C1); S2—open correction of a senior physician's error before a patient (C3); S3—proceeding with surgery on patient's consent against spousal objection (C1, C4); S4—failure to verify comprehension with a dialectal-register rural patient (C2, C5); S5—continued information delivery to an emotionally distressed patient (C4, C5).

Table B1

Pilot SJT Results: Response Distributions, Descriptive Statistics, and Year-of-Study Correlations *(N = 35)*

Scenario	Completely inappropriate % (*n*)	Mostly inappropriate % (*n*)	Neutral % (*n*)	Combined negative %	*M* (SD)	*rs* (year)	*p*
S1—Prognosis disclosure	54.3 (19)	31.4 (11)	14.3 (5)	85.7	1.60 (0.74)	.158	.366
S2—Hierarchical error correction	25.7 (9)	65.7 (23)	8.6 (3)	91.4	1.83 (0.57)	−.160	.358
S3—Spousal consent override	51.4 (18)	34.3 (12)	14.3 (5)	85.7	1.63 (0.73)	−.147	.398
S4—Dialectal comprehension	31.4 (11)	60.0 (21)	8.6 (3)	91.4	1.77 (0.60)	−.247	.153
S5—Emotional state management	57.1 (20)	37.1 (13)	5.7 (2)	94.3	1.49 (0.61)	−.420	.012
Overall				85.7–94.3	1.66 (0.66)		

Note. Three-point scale: 1 = Completely inappropriate, 2 = Mostly inappropriate, 3 = Neutral/context-dependent. * $p < .05$ (uncorrected; Bonferroni-adjusted $\alpha = .010$). *rs* = Spearman rank-order correlation with year of study.

Key Findings. Combined negative judgment rates ranged from 85.7% to 94.3% across all scenarios (overall $M = 1.66$, SD = 0.66). S1 and S3—both involving collective versus individual clinical decision-making—produced near-identical distributions (combined negative: 85.7%), supporting the model's claim that collective orientation extends face management obligations to family interlocutors (C4, Criterion 1.3). S2 and S4 produced distributions concentrated at *mostly inappropriate*, reflecting ustoz-shogird norms of indirect hierarchical disagreement (C3) and physician communicative accountability (C5). S5 produced the strongest negative pattern (94.3%; $M = 1.49$) and the only significant year-of-study correlation ($rs = −.420$, $p = .012$), suggesting face management sensitivity develops through clinical exposure. S6 (gift acceptance): 88.6% endorsed culturally framed responses deviating from formal ethics standards (Option B: 48.6%; Option C: 40.0%), directly

illustrating Criterion 1.3 and the inadequacy of ethics instruction as a substitute for explicit sociopragmatic competence development.

Limitations. $N = 35$ precludes inferential generalization; the three-point response scale constrains score sensitivity; the cross-sectional design prevents causal inference about developmental trajectories; five correlations were computed without alpha correction. All results are hypothesis-generating only and require replication with larger samples and appropriate correction procedures.

Appendix C

Institutional Decision Guide for MedSPC Assessment Implementation

Step 1—Resource Audit. Before selecting an implementation tier, institutions should conduct a brief resource audit addressing: (a) number of trained language assessors available; (b) availability of video or audio recording equipment; (c) feasibility of standardized patient recruitment and training; (d) additional contact hours available for sociopragmatic competence instruction per academic year.

Step 2—Tier Selection. Based on the resource audit, institutions select the highest feasible tier using Table 5 as a guide. Institutions uncertain about tier placement are encouraged to begin at Tier 3 and build capacity incrementally.

Step 3—Assessor Training Minimum Standards. Regardless of tier, all assessors must complete: (a) orientation to MedSPC Model component definitions; (b) calibration on at least three anchor performances per proficiency level; (c) live rating practice with feedback prior to student assessment. For ORP and SPA, acceptable reliability thresholds are ICC ≥ 0.75 and Cohen's $\kappa \geq 0.70$ (Streiner et al., 2015); assessor pairs failing these thresholds must undergo additional calibration before rating student performances.

Step 4—Formative-Summative Balance. At all tiers, assessment instruments should be deployed formatively before summative use. SJT and DCT should be administered at least once formatively before contributing to summative records. ORP should be used formatively in at least two practice sessions before summative deployment.

Step 5—Capacity Development Planning. Institutions should establish a three-to-five-year capacity development plan specifying: target tier for Year 3 and Year 5 of implementation; resource investments required for tier advancement; and external support needs (assessor training, standardized patient recruitment, equipment acquisition). Institutions are encouraged to adopt the highest feasible tier and plan iterative progression toward full MMAB deployment.

Appendix D

Tiered Implementation Specifications for the MedSPC Multi-Method Assessment Battery

Note. SJT = Sociopragmatic Judgment Task; DCT = Written Discourse Completion Task; ORP = Oral Role-Play Assessment; SPA = Standardized Patient Assessment. C1 = Sociopragmatic Knowledge; C2 = Discourse Organizational Competence; C3 = Interactional Role Competence; C4 = Face Management Competence; C5 = Pragmatic Adaptability.

	Tier 1—Full MMAB	Tier 2—Core MMAB	Tier 3—Essential MMAB
Instruments	SJT + DCT + ORP + SPA	SJT + DCT + ORP	SJT + DCT
Primary evidence	C1–C5 (all components)	C1–C4	C1–C2
Secondary evidence	—	C5 (via ORP unscripted segments)	C3–C4 (written level only)
Unassessed	—	—	C5 (Pragmatic Adaptability)
Minimum assessors	2 trained + SP pool (≥4 SPs/cohort)	2 trained faculty; audio/video recording required	1 trained rater; written format only
Contact hrs/year (Yrs 1–3)	20–30	15–20	10–15
High-stakes decisions	✓ Supported	⚠ With caution; supplement with faculty observation	✗ Not recommended; formative/diagnostic use only
Key caution	Highest resource demand; SP recruitment and training required	Face management dimensions visible only to the interlocutor (patient-perceived rapport) not captured without SPA	No valid performative claims for any component; insufficient for clinical readiness certification
Recommended deployment	High-stakes summative at clinical transition points (rotation entry; pre-graduation certification)	Summative ORP from Year 3; formative SJT/DCT in Years 1–2	Formative diagnostic only; introduce SJT/DCT from Year 1; plan tier advancement

Note. Institutions should select the highest feasible tier and plan capacity development iteratively. Tier 1 provides the fullest construct coverage and ecological validity; Tier 2 preserves coverage for C1–C4 with strong primary evidence; Tier 3 is restricted to formative diagnostic use only and is insufficient for high-stakes clinical readiness decisions.

Author Biography



Gulnoza Salimova is an independent researcher and Methodist at the Department of Youth Affairs, Spirituality, and Enlightenment, Abu Ali ibn Sino Bukhara State Medical Institute, Bukhara, Uzbekistan. Her research focuses on sociopragmatic competence development in Uzbek-medium medical education, with emphasis on integrative instructional frameworks combining Language for Specific Purposes, Content and Language Integrated Learning, Intercultural Communicative Competence, and Genre Pedagogy. Her broader interests lie at the intersection of instructed pragmatics, medical communication, and professional language education in post-Soviet Central Asian contexts. She aims to develop empirically validated sociopragmatic training programmes for Uzbek-medium medical education upon completing her PhD.

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The Relationship Between Job Demands-Resources and Iranian EFL Teachers' Burnout: A Mixed-Methods Investigation

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Abstract

In the demanding context of Iranian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching, teacher burnout threatens instructional quality and retention, yet its association with job demands and resources remains underexplored. This study leverages the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model to investigate how workplace factors, specifically job demands like administrative overload, emotional labor, and resources including autonomy and colleague support shape burnout among Iranian EFL teachers, while probing cultural and contextual influences such as societal expectations and educational policies. A convergent complementary mixed-methods design was used in which the quantitative phase included 146 teachers across Iran using the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory and the JD-R questionnaire, using Kruskal-Wallis tests and pairwise comparisons. The qualitative phase involved semi-structured interviews with 39 teachers, analyzed through transcendental phenomenology using MAXQDA. Quantitative findings revealed that high job demands significantly amplify burnout, with teachers in high-demand groups reporting greater emotional exhaustion and cynicism, while abundant resources markedly reduce burnout. Qualitative insights illuminated key themes: structural demands like inadequate salaries, imposed curricula, and societal pressures such as unrealistic parental expectations exacerbate burnout, whereas resources like professional development and peer support serve as protective buffers. Teachers' coping strategies, including exercise and adaptive teaching, alongside critiques of commercialized education and policy inefficiencies, further contextualize these dynamics. This study validates the JD-R model's predictive power in Iran's EFL context, highlighting the critical need for targeted interventions such as workload restructuring, enhanced training, and cultural awareness campaigns to mitigate burnout, bolster teacher resilience, and elevate educational outcomes. These findings offer actionable insights for policymakers and educators, with implications for global EFL settings facing similar challenges.

Keywords: job demands, job resources, teacher burnout

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Introduction

Organizational and environmental factors critically impact teaching, where job resources, job demands, and burnout affect teachers' job performance (Rezai et al., 2022) and well-being (Bakker & Demerouti, 2024). The JD-R model categorizes workplace conditions into job demands, which require sustained psychological or physical effort, and job resources, which facilitate goal achievement and mitigate stress. While job demands directly correlate with teacher burnout (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), balancing resources and demands is essential for educator well-being (Demerouti et al., 2001).

In Iranian EFL education, high job demands like heavy workloads and emotional labor lead to burnout, characterized by reduced professional efficacy and emotional exhaustion (Karanfil & Khatami, 2021). Generally, Iranian EFL teachers face distinct challenges, including overcrowded classrooms in public high schools, administrative workloads, and salary disparities, necessitating the understanding of JD-R framework to boost teacher well-being and educational outcomes (Safari, 2020). Teachers globally report high occupational stress leading to anxiety and depression (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2016), with similar patterns in Iran.

According to Bakker and Demerouti (2017), the JD-R model explains how workplace conditions influence well-being through job demands, physical, organizational, or social aspects requiring mental, psychological, or emotional effort, and job resources, including social support, autonomy and professional development opportunities. Research demonstrates that high job demands are related to cynicism and emotional exhaustion and low resilience (Ghafouri et al., 2025), which is believed to indirectly influence burnout (Divsar, 2026). Recent education research shows that administrative pressures and lack of training predict teacher burnout (Hakanen et al., 2024), yet gaps remain regarding specific job resources' comparative significance (Hakanen et al., 2024) and the loss and gain spiral (Bakker & Demerouti, 2024).

Recent JD-R studies reveal critical research gaps. Some studies (e.g., Karanfil & Khatami, 2021; Zhou et al., 2024) have examined the influence of job demands and personal resources on professional identity in professional settings. However, higher education contexts seem to remain underexplored. Meanwhile, specific demands and resources, including work-family conflicts, classroom disturbances, and autonomy, are underexplored concerning work ability (Hlado & Harvankova, 2024). Hence, as Hlado and Harvankova (2024) highlighted, there is a need for comprehensive frameworks addressing how teachers cope with high workloads, bureaucracy, and time pressure within JD-R context. Additionally, broader organizational and macro-social factors require examination to prevent burnout (Castro Silva et al., 2026).

Teacher burnout, which is a psychological state characterized by cynicism, emotional exhaustion, and reduced professional efficacy from chronic workplace stress (Maslach & Leiter, 2016), significantly influences teaching quality and student outcomes. Burnout impacts retention, and according to the formal consensus, 15 to 20 percent of teachers give up their jobs annually in global settings

(Sutcher et al., 2016). High job demands predict burnout (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011), while imbalance between demands and resources drives burnout (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Here, the role of self-efficacy is central as it has mitigating effects on the relationship between demands and resources and burnout. Teacher burnout also reduces teacher enthusiasm, which has been shown to correlate with learner engagement (Safdari, 2022).

The literature on JD-R and Iranian EFL teachers' burnout reveals underexplored areas warranting mixed-methods investigation. Barjesteh et al. (2025) reported that high job demands, like financial problems, large class sizes, administrative pressures, and limited facilities, significantly contribute to burnout, with student challenges and parental pressures intensifying exhaustion. However, exploration of how cultural and contextual factors unique to Iran moderate these relationships is lacking. Prior research relies predominantly on quantitative surveys, with limited qualitative integration to capture lived experiences, as Esmaeilee et al. (2025) highlighted in their investigation of job crafting and reflective teaching. Understanding how teachers cope with demands is necessary (Hlado & Harvankova, 2024). Debates persist regarding specific demands' relative weight, emotional labor versus workload, in predicting burnout, yet few studies have disaggregated these factors within the Iranian context (Esmaeilee et al., 2025). The absence of mixed-methods studies restricts understanding of how JD-R levels influence burnout in Iran, because addressing this could inform targeted interventions for teacher well-being and retention where turnover intentions are significant (Zeinolabedini et al., 2022).

This study employs a sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach to investigate how job demands, including student expectations, administrative tasks, curriculum requirements, and resources like professional autonomy, professional development, colleague support, and teaching materials, shape Iranian EFL teachers' burnout. It assesses how specific demands and resource levels predict burnout quantitatively and qualitatively explores teachers' lived experiences within Iran's unique educational context. Specifically, the study addresses these questions:

1. Does the level of job demand lead to any significant difference in EFL teachers' burnout?

2. Does the level of job resources lead to any significant difference in EFL teachers' burnout?

3. What are the primary job demands (including societal and familial expectations) faced by EFL teachers in Iran?

4. How do the job demands influence Iranian EFL teachers' experiences of burnout, and what coping strategies do they employ to manage these pressures?

5. What additional factors (e.g., societal perceptions of English language teaching, working conditions, or educational policies in Iran) affect the quality of English language teaching?

6. How do the additional factors (mentioned in the previous research question) relate to job demands or job resources?

This comprehensive approach bridges quantitative patterns with qualitative depth to address critical gaps. The next section critically examines existing studies to frame the study's focus on Iranian EFL teachers.

Literature Review

Previously, the JD-R theory and its applications were mostly applied across professions other than teaching. For example, Bakker and Demerouti (2024) carried out a study on JD-R with non-teaching employees, concluding that job demands predicted burnout. These outcomes were corroborated by Khan et al. (2014), who reported that job demands are critical factors contributing to burnout in various professions. Hakanen et al. (2024) expanded this model to the field of teaching, demonstrating that demands like student misbehavior predict burnout among Finnish teachers.

Burnout elucidates individuals' responses to prolonged periods of chronic physical, emotional, and mental stresses associated with work (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Teachers are more susceptible to withdrawal and are uncommitted within their organization, constantly accompanied by a sense of dissatisfaction and suffering from physical, emotional, and mental symptoms (Field & Buitendach, 2011). Burnout is negatively influential on teacher agency, which refers to teachers' beliefs in their own ability as active experts who are capable of making significant decisions and serving as agents of change (Arabahmadi et al., 2023).

Salmela-Aro and Upadyaya (2018) found that perceived job control moderates the association between perceived job demands and the emotional exhaustion and depersonalization dimensions of burnout. Pishghadam et al. (2014) reported that teachers' assessment-related beliefs were significantly related to the dimensions of burnout, including depersonalization, reduced personal accomplishment, and emotional exhaustion. Aimi Roslan et al. (2015) showed a positive correlation between burnout and job demands among Malaysian teachers. Similarly, Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2016) found that emotional intelligence and personality are related to burnout. Likewise, Baleghizadeh and Jula (2024) reported a positive relationship between teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction, which is the opposite of teacher burnout. Later, De Carlo et al. (2019) found that job resources mitigated the relationship between workload aspects and job demands among teachers.

Samadi et al. (2020) studied the potential links between EFL teachers' job satisfaction, burnout and intention to leave. They found that, regardless of the level of job satisfaction, teachers' level of burnout was affected by their intention to leave. Safari (2020) showed an inverse relationship between teachers' job satisfaction and burnout and recommended that resources be provided to help teachers gain the optimal level of well-being. Bakker and Demerouti (2024) observed that teacher burnout was correlated with higher demand, demonstrating higher burnout and exhaustion due to the shift to online platforms. Xing (2022) found a significant

relationship between professional identity and teacher burnout. Moreover, job resources, like obligation and job satisfaction, were found to mediate this association.

More studies have further developed the theoretical basis by integrating multi-level structures, external family conflicts, and psychological needs into the JD-R paradigm. At a broader organizational level, hierarchical linear modeling reveals that school-level emotional job demands of teaching and individual-level suppression have positive relationships with teachers' depression and anxiety, while school-level trust in colleagues and individual-level reappraisal relate positively to contentment and enthusiasm (Yin et al., 2018). Furthermore, the model extends to the home environment, where workload has a positive relationship with work-family conflict (WFC), and job resources successfully buffer this association (De Carlo et al., 2019).

To understand the complex, multifold relationship between teachers' JD-R and its link to burnout, empirical literature has focused heavily on locating and controlling contributing factors in an organized way (Khan et al., 2014). Synthesizing these foundational dynamics, early research established that workplace factors directly shape these outcomes; specifically, a positive relationship exists between burnout and job demands, whereas job resources and burnout are negatively correlated (Szabó & Jagodics, 2014). This foundational framework highlights a direct relationship between teachers' job demand and burnout, making it essential to consider these factors in one study to see the link between JD-R of teachers in the form of burnout (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017, 2024; Khan et al., 2014). Beyond basic correlations, the social environment of the workplace significantly affects burnout, which is negatively related to the professional and emotional support of co-workers—implying that certain factors of the workplace contribute to the development of burnout, whereas others appear to lessen the impact of job demands (Szabó & Jagodics, 2014).

Applying and adapting this framework globally, subsequent research shifted toward specific cultural contexts and life-span demands. In Malaysia, investigations adapting the JD-R model confirmed that job demands and job resources were negatively correlated, while reinforcing the positive relationship between burnout and job demands (Aimi Roslan et al., 2015). Expanding the model to include personal resources and life stages, research has shown that demands fluctuate across a teacher's career; for instance, economic problems and ICT demands are positively related to burnout symptoms particularly during the early stages of a career, while caregiving demands have a positive relationship with work burnout but a negative association with work engagement in the later stages (Salmela-Aro & Upadyaya, 2018). Crucially, while life satisfaction is related to work engagement, depressive symptoms remain linked to work burnout across all career stages (Salmela-Aro & Upadyaya, 2018).

According to Yu and Yu (2023), heavy workload and social expectations increase EFL teachers' job demands, leading to emotional exhaustion and depersonalization in China. Rastegar and Zarei (2023) reported that some aspects of

assessment workload were significant predictors of burnout among EFL teachers in Iran.

Pawlak et al. (2024) provided a systematic review of language teacher burnout and demotivation, explicitly associating high job demands, such as intercultural requirements and assessment responsibilities, with burnout because language teachers and assessors face various demands, including designing authentic assessments and meeting high intercultural expectations, which result in emotional exhaustion, burnout, and consequently, reduced motivation.

Hlado and Harvanková (2024) found that job demands indirectly influence work ability. High job demands lead to teacher fatigue, which contributes to a reduced perceived work ability. Li (2025) concluded that higher job resources, such as a positive perceived school climate and access to professional development, were negatively related to burnout, whereas high challenging job demands had positive correlations with burnout.

Most recently, empirical focus has turned to the internal mechanics of motivation, needs, and administrative perceptions. Research mapping the school hierarchy shows that out of multiple potential resources and demands identified by school principals, only four are significantly related to emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction, and motivation to quit, with emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction mediating the relationships between motivation to quit and JD-Rs (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2016). Finally, looking at how these dynamics affect teachers' learning commitment, findings demonstrate positive relationships between the satisfaction of basic psychological needs, teachers' job resources experience, commitment to professional learning, and autonomous motivation (Pawlak et al., 2024). However, mirroring the distinct pathways of the JD-R model, there remains no relationship between basic need satisfaction and job demands (Pawlak et al., 2024), showing the separate but intersecting roles that demands and resources play in teacher burnout.

Two notable limitations emerge from the research conducted thus far. First, few studies have investigated job demands and resource levels among Iranian EFL teachers, specifically focused on burnout. Second, there remains a scarcity of mixed-methods studies examining these interconnections through integrated quantitative and qualitative lenses. These gaps motivated the present mixed-methods investigation into the associations among burnout, job demands, and resources within Iran's EFL context.

Method

Participants and Setting

Quantitative Phase

The quantitative strand involved 146 Iranian EFL teachers (67 males, 79 females), selected through convenience sampling. Participants were drawn from various cities across Iran, including Tehran, Shiraz, Qazvin, Rasht, Arak, Urumieh, Ahvaz, and Ilam. Their age range was from 21 to 65 years (M = 31.5 years). Their experience of teaching ranged from 4 to 40 years. Educational qualifications

included 22 participants with a B.A. in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), 75 with an M.A., and 49 who were PhD candidates or PhD holders.

Qualitative Phase

The qualitative strand comprised 39 EFL teachers (22 females, 17 males), recruited via an online questionnaire administered through Porsline. Informed consent was obtained, and anonymity was ensured to protect participant confidentiality. Their ages ranged from 24 to 56 years (M = 40.1 years). They had experiences of teaching ranging from 1 to over 18 years, distributed as follows: 1–3 years (n=2), 3–6 years (n=7), 6–12 years (n=7), 12–18 years (n=7), and more than 18 years (n=16). Educational qualifications included 4 participants with a B.A., 18 with an M.A., and 17 who were PhD candidates or holders. The participants were affiliated with diverse educational settings: 16 taught at language institutes, 18 at private or public schools, and 15 were university professors. They were located in Shiraz, Qazvin, Mashhad, Tehran, Rasht, Arak, and Hamedan.

Materials and Instruments

The following four data collection instruments were used to collect data:

Burnout Questionnaire

The Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (CBI) was used to measure academic burnout (Kristensen et al., 2005). We used the Personal Burnout Scale, which assesses the level of psychological and physical fatigue and exhaustion an individual experiences (Kristensen et al., 2005). It includes six questions that are answered on a five-point Likert type scale, ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). The scale was evaluated by Kristensen et al. (2005) and demonstrated excellent internal consistency, achieving a high Cronbach's alpha of .90. The validity of the scale was entrusted to expert judgment, and Cronbach's alpha was used to re-estimate its reliability to be .83.

Job Demand and Resources Questionnaire

The questionnaire originally developed by (Demerouti et al, 2001) is made up of two parts; the first part (job demand) contains seven sections, each of which includes four items: mental load, pace and amount of work, physical effort, emotional load, changes in tasks, uncertainty about the future, and ambiguities about work. Part two (job resource) also has seven sections, each including four items: communication, information, participation, remuneration, relationship with superior, relationship with colleagues, and work independence. Items are scored on a 5-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). The construct validity of the instrument is anchored in the dual-process framework of JD-R theory, and its contextual and content validity were verified through a panel of expert judges to ensure relevance to the educational climate. Expert judgment and widespread previous use confirmed its validity, and its reliability in the context of this study was estimated to be 0.83.

Job Demands-Resources Semi-Structured Interview

After completing the quantitative part, a semi-structured interview protocol, adapted from Bakker and Demerouti (2007), served as the primary instrument to explore the job demands and resources of English language teachers in Iran. The adaptation incorporated probes specific to Iran's EFL teaching environment, such as societal attitudes toward English and local curriculum constraints, to reflect cultural and educational nuances. The questionnaire comprised 11 questions: the first five gathered demographic data, including gender (male or female), teaching experience (1–3, 3–6, 6–12, or over 12 years), educational attainment (B.A., M.A., or Ph.D.), teaching city, and age. The remaining six open-ended questions explored major job demands including societal and familial expectations (e.g., workload, student issues, administrative tasks, curriculum, parental pressures, and societal views on English teaching), coping strategies for managing these pressures, supportive resources (e.g., colleagues, training, autonomy, educational materials, and professional development in Iran), and insights on how additional contextual factors like working conditions and educational policies affect teaching quality.

Procedure

The JD-R questionnaire was utilized along with the burnout questionnaire to determine the possible consequence of job demands or job resources in academic settings. After getting the participants' consent, in the quantitative phase, the JD-R and burnout questionnaires were given to teachers via e-mail and social media, including Google Forms, Telegram, and WhatsApp. The researchers explained to the respondents that they had to answer the questionnaires at time intervals; this was to prevent fatigue and to ensure effective cooperation. Moreover, the participants could ask questions if they had any misunderstanding any time. Of the 220 initial sample of participants, 146 responded to the questionnaires satisfactorily.

In the qualitative phase, the semi-structured interview was hosted on the Porsline.ir platform, supporting both voice and written responses to accommodate varying technological access and participant preferences, ensuring inclusivity. To ensure that the Interview and the respective questionnaire measured the same construct, the interview guide was submitted to a panel of psychometric and linguistic experts to verify its content alignment and face validity, and they confirmed that the qualitative prompts effectively targeted the same conceptual dimensions as the quantitative items. The interview was presented in Farsi to minimize time demands and encourage authentic responses. Then, answers were translated into academic English for analysis. Data were collected over a month in 2025. Based on Guest et al. (2006), who suggest 12–60 interviews for thematic saturation in qualitative research, the study initially targeted 70 teachers to ensure a diverse sample across Iran's regions and teaching contexts. However, data collection concluded with 39 participants, as thematic saturation was confirmed through iterative coding by the research team, ensuring no new themes emerged, and participant availability constraints were encountered.

To address the quantitative research questions examining whether the levels of job resources and job demands lead to significant differences in EFL teachers'

burnout, the collected data were systematically cleaned, summarized, and prepared for statistical analysis. Data cleaning involved handling missing values and identifying outliers to ensure data quality. The Kruskal-Wallis test was selected for its suitability in analyzing non-parametric data or non-normal distributions. Following significant Kruskal-Wallis test results, pairwise comparisons were conducted to identify specific group differences.

To investigate the qualitative research questions concerning the primary job resources, job demands, societal and familial expectations, and additional factors influencing EFL teachers' burnout and teaching quality in Iran, a transcendental phenomenology was conducted to describe the essence of the lived experiences of 39 EFL teachers across various regions in Iran (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). This approach was chosen to bracket researchers' preconceptions and capture the invariant structures of teachers' experiences with job demands, resources, and burnout. Qualitative data collected from semi-structured interviews and open-ended surveys, were imported into MAXQDA software, and analyzed using thematic analysis within a phenomenological framework, employing an inductive coding approach to identify emergent themes (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2021). The analysis adhered to the core stages of transcendental phenomenology: (1) epoché, bracketing researchers' biases through reflective memos; (2) phenomenological reduction, identifying significant statements and coding meaning units from narratives; (3) imaginative variation, exploring structural variations to uncover essential patterns; and (4) synthesis of meanings, integrating textures and structures into cohesive themes that capture the phenomenon's essence (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 2007). MAXQDA facilitated data organization through code hierarchies and visualization of theme relationships, supporting iterative coding and theme refinement in line with the questions of the study (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2021).

Design of the Study

This study utilized a convergent complementary mixed-methods design to examine the relationships between resources, job demands, and burnout among EFL teachers in the Iranian educational context, aiming to provide robust insights. In this design, the quantitative and qualitative strands are deliberately separated to address distinct, specialized research questions, allowing for a comprehensive mapping of the target phenomenon (Greene et al., 1989). Quantitative data were first collected through structured surveys to test statistical relationships for research questions 1and 2, establishing a generalizable foundation for understanding these variables. Subsequently, qualitative data were gathered via semi-structured interviews to address research questions 3 and 4, exploring contextual nuances specific to the Iranian setting. Integration occured during interpretation, where joint displays link survey results with interview themes to explain quantitative findings, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the EFL teaching environment. The design of this study enhances reliability and credibility by combining the breadth of statistical analysis with the depth of qualitative insights, making it ideal for addressing complex research objectives in a high-impact study (Creswell & Clark, 2018).

Results

Results of the Quantitative Phase

Research Question 1

The goal of the first question was to see whether the level of job demand can make any difference in the level of teachers' burnout. To this end, the researchers divided the participants' job demand scores into three categories using the Visual Binning facility in SPSS, and based on these, compared the burnout scores of the resultant groups. For this purpose, a Kruskal-Wallis test was used, with the results displayed in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics on Burnout Scores Based on Job Demand

	Job Demand (Binned)	N	Mean Rank
Burnout	Low	52	33.03
	Mid	47	70.87
	High	47	120.90
	Total	146	

Table 1 shows Kruskal-Wallis mean ranks for Burnout across three binned categories of Job Demand, illustrating a clear, progressive increase in burnout scores as job demands elevate.

As shown in Table 2, (H (2) = 108.036, P = 0.000), the p-value ($p < 0.05$) suggested significant differences among the burnout scores of the participants with different levels of job demand scores.

Table 2

Kruskal-Wallis H Test Statistics on Burnout Scores Based on Job Demand

	Burnout
Chi-Square	108.036
Df	2
Asymp. Sig.	.000

a. Kruskal-Wallis Test
b. Grouping Variable: Job Demand (Binned)

To determine which pairs of categories were different, the researchers used pairwise comparisons of the burnout scores. The results are shown in Table 3. The p-values in Table 3 indicate that the burnout scores of each job demand level were significantly different from other levels ($p < 0.05$). It was observed that the level of burnout of the participants of the high job demand group was notably higher in comparison to the other two job demand levels. Meanwhile, the level of burnout of the participants of the mid job demand level was significantly higher than that of the low job demand group.

Table 3

Pairwise Comparison of Burnout Scores Based on Job Demand Categories

Sample 1-Sample 2	Test Statistic	Sig.	Adj. Sig.
Low-Mid	-37.843	.000	.000
Low-High	-87.875	.000	.000
Mid-High	-50.032	.000	.000

Based on this piece of data, it can be concluded that the level of job demand led to a significant difference in EFL teachers' burnout.

Research Question 2

To investigate whether the level of job resource leads to any significant difference in EFL teachers' burnout, the researchers divided the participants' job resources scores into three categories and, based on them, compared the burnout scores of the resultant groups. For this purpose, a Kruskal-Wallis H test was run; the results are shown in Table .

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics for Burnout Scores Based on Job Resources Categories

	Job Resource (Binned)	N	Mean Rank
Burnout	Low	54	59.85
	Mid	37	70.85
	High	55	88.68
	Total	146	

Table 4 displays Kruskal-Wallis mean ranks for Burnout across three binned categories of Job Resources, demonstrating a progressive increase in burnout rank scores across resource groups. The p-value in Table 5 ($p= 0.002 < 0.05$) is indicative of significant differences among the burnout scores of the participants with different levels of job resource scores.

Table 5

Kruskal-Wallis H Test Statistics on Burnout Scores Based on Job Resources

	Burnout
Chi-Square	12.999
Df	2
Asymp. Sig.	.002

a. Kruskal Wallis Test
b. Grouping Variable: Job Resource (Binned)

To determine which pairs of categories were different, the researchers used the pairwise comparisons of the burnout scores. The results are shown in Table 6.

Table 6

Pairwise Comparison of Burnout Scores Based on the Three Categories of Job Resource

Sample 1-Sample 2	Test Statistic	Sig.	Adj. Sig.
Low-Mid	-10.999	.220	.661
Low-High	-28.830	.000	.001
Mid-High	-17.830	.046	.139

The adjusted p-values in Table 6 indicate that only the difference in the burnout scores of the teachers with low and high levels of job resources was significantly different (adj. $p < 0.05$), and that the teachers with intermediate levels of job resources showed no significant difference with those teachers who had low or high job resource levels in terms of their burnout.

Results of the Qualitative Phase

In the qualitative phase, a transcendental phenomenological approach was used to explore the research questions, complementing quantitative findings by elucidating the essence of Iranian EFL teachers' lived experiences of job demands, resources, and burnout (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). Thematic analysis was conducted inductively within this phenomenological framework to identify meaningful themes and patterns from textual data, capturing the psychological, social, and professional complexities of teachers' experiences (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2021). Data from semi-structured interviews were transcribed for rigorous analysis to reflect participants' lived realities. The analysis followed transcendental phenomenology's stages: (1) epoché, bracketing researchers' assumptions via reflective memos; (2) phenomenological reduction, coding significant statements to form meaning units; (3) imaginative variation, varying perspectives to identify invariant structures; and (4) synthesis, integrating findings into essential themes (Creswell, 2007). MAXQDA supported this process through systematic coding, code hierarchies, and visualization tools, enabling iterative theme development (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2021).

To ensure rigor, trustworthiness was established by observing Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria, as described in Creswell and Clark (2018). Credibility was achieved through the design of the semi-structured interview guide, which utilized detailed prompt development grounded in the operational definitions of the JD-R framework, and was further refined through peer debriefing with two EFL pedagogy experts to refine interpretations. Transferability was improved by detailed contextual descriptions of settings and diverse sampling across regions and institutions. Dependability was maintained via a MAXQDA audit trail, logging coding decisions and theme revisions, with intercoder reliability checks confirming consistency. Confirmability was ensured through reflexivity, documenting biases in memos, and verifying themes against raw data. These measures ensured robust findings that accurately reflected participants' experiences.

Thematic Analysis and Findings

To analyze the qualitative data, the initial coding phase aimed to extract foundational concepts and organize data into meaningful units. This phase followed an inductive thematic analysis approach within the phenomenological framework to avoid imposing preconceived theoretical frameworks on the data. Transcripts were read multiple times, with meaning units coded line-by-line and paragraph-by-paragraph, yielding 43 initial codes. Efforts were made to define codes with precision and semantic consistency, avoiding conceptual overlap.

Table 7 presents an example of the preliminary coding procedure applied to the qualitative data, including a representative matrix of the initial coding phase and how specific excerpted narratives were translated into foundational open codes for subsequent axial categorization.

Table 7

Initial Coding of Qualitative Data Based on Interviewee Narratives

Narrative of Participant	Initial Coding
"I have to stay at school until late every day, even after working hours, because we also have administrative tasks."	High workload
"Our contracts are renewed every year; I'm never sure if I'll be here next year or not."	Lack of job security
"The school principal doesn't pay attention to our suggestions at all; I feel like I have no value."	Feeling undervalued
"To avoid burnout, I go hiking on weekends or spend time with friends."	Coping strategies for burnout
"We have no discretion in choosing resources or teaching methods; everything is dictated from above."	Limitations in educational autonomy
"The books we have to teach don't match the kids' levels at all; they're too hard or too easy."	Syllabus mismatch with learner levels

Each code was documented with raw data examples to enhance analysis credibility. These initial codes formed the basis for extracting final themes in subsequent stages of thematic analysis and paved the way for identifying deeper conceptual patterns. Table 8 displays the initial codes derived from the data.

Table 8

Initial Codes Extracted from Data

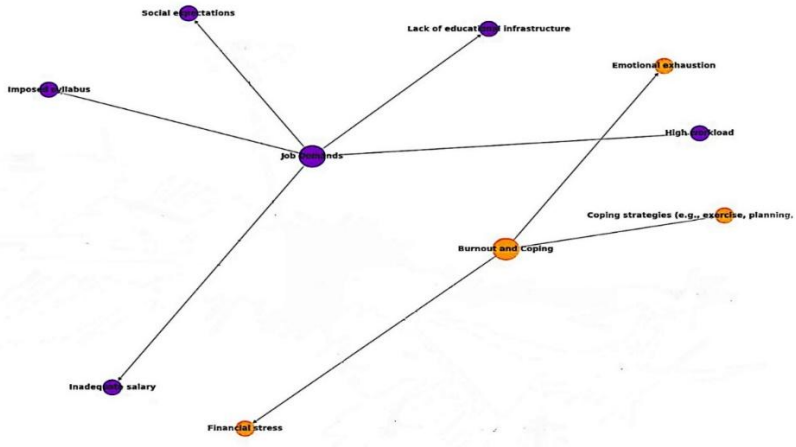
Category	Initial Code	Description
Job Demands	High workload	References to large numbers of classes, administrative duties, and online assignments
Job Demands	Inadequate salary	Dissatisfaction with pay relative to effort and working hours
Job Demands	Imposed syllabus	Lack of alignment between the curriculum and students' levels or the teacher's expertise
Psychological Pressure	Family expectations	Pressure from unrealistic expectations of parents and society
Psychological Pressure	Commercial view of institutes	Transformation of education into business, neglect of teaching quality

The table maps five distinct initial codes to their higher-order thematic, accompanied by explicit operational descriptions for each code.

Initial inductive coding of qualitative data revealed that the lived experiences of English language teachers in Iran encompass multilayered and diverse components identifiable as conceptual codes (See Figure 1).

Figure 1

Codes Extracted From MAXQDA



The extracted codes reflected challenges and coping strategies in facing job pressures. Examination of participants' narratives indicated that concepts such as high workload, lack of job security, feeling undervalued, and limitations in educational autonomy were among the most significant factors contributing to burnout. Narratives also showed that teachers employ diverse coping strategies, including recreational activities and revisions to teaching methods. These findings suggest that teachers' professional experiences combine structural pressures and individual strategies, interacting to shape their occupational well-being. The final themes from qualitative analysis are presented in Table 9.

Table 9

Final Themes in Qualitative Analysis

Row	Main Theme	Subthemes	General Description of Theme
1	Structural and Organizational Demands	High workload, inadequate salary, imposed syllabus, and lack of facilities	Pressures arising from the educational structure and lack of institutional support
2	Job Burnout and Psychological Pressure	Mental fatigue, financial pressure, social neglect, and unrealistic expectations	Experiences of exhaustion and disappointment due to work and social conditions
3	Coping Strategies for Job Pressure	Time management, relaxing activities, social support, and changing teaching methods	Methods teachers use to maintain mental health and motivation
4	Critique of Educational Structure and Policy	Commercial outlook, lack of effective evaluation, scientific gap, and distrust in formal education	Critical views on macro policies and inefficiencies in the language education system

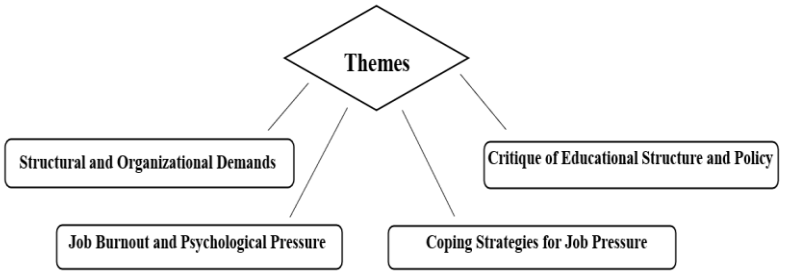
The thematic analysis indicates that the lived experiences of English language teachers in Iran form at the intersection of structural pressures and coping strategies. The extracted themes can be categorized into a main axis: Tension Axis, including themes of ‘structural demands’, ‘job burnout’, and ‘critique of educational structure’, which highlight systemic, psychological, and social challenges. These themes indicate that teachers face burnout when confronting inefficient structures, unrealistic expectations, and a lack of institutional support. This axis forms a

complex pattern of professional experiences, which can be used as a foundation for designing educational interventions and supportive policies.

Figure 2 presents the extracted themes and the final conceptual model of the qualitative section of the study.

Figure 2.

Extracted Themes and the Final Conceptual Model



Here, the key themes of the qualitative findings are summarized with participant quotes for credibility:

a. Theme: Workload Pressure and Imposed Duties: "We are not just teachers; we have to do administrative work, report writing, and even cultural planning. There's no time left for actual teaching."

b. Theme: Feeling Undervalued and Lack of Organizational Support: "No one supports us. When a problem arises, everyone blames the teacher."

Research Question 3: Job Demands

Challenging job demands and the way they influence job burnout were explored, and the result showed that Job demands in teaching English in Iran often extend beyond mere instruction. Teachers face a high volume of administrative tasks, report writing, cultural planning, and even executive duties, as illustrated in Theme (a) regarding workload pressure and imposed duties. This excessive workload, coupled with job insecurity and imposed curricula misaligned with students' proficiency levels, contributes to feelings of burnout and demotivation. Some teachers reported feelings of 'worthlessness' and 'organizational neglect',' which align with Maslach and Leiter's (2016) burnout theory. Structural and organizational demands, such as high workload, inadequate compensation, imposed curricula, insufficient teaching resources, and inefficient educational structures, are among the primary challenges for English teachers in Iran. These pressures lead to mental exhaustion, decreased motivation, and feelings of devaluation.

Research Question 4: Burnout Experiences, and Coping Strategies

The impact of societal and parental expectations on job stress and motivation management revealed that these expectations often exceed English

teachers' realistic capabilities and roles in Iran. Parents anticipate rapid language proficiency from their children while disregarding educational constraints, creating significant psychological pressure. Teachers are expected to ensure students' success in international exams without adequate institutional support, often leading to feelings of worthlessness and frustration, consistent with the experiences of organizational neglect described in Theme (b). However, teachers navigate these pressures through various coping strategies, including engaging in constructive dialogue with parents, establishing realistic expectations, and participating in stress-relieving activities such as exercise and social interaction. As one teacher shared: "To avoid burnout, I try to exercise or spend time with friends on weekends. It helps a lot." Additionally, teachers employ adaptive teaching methods to manage workload demands. These coping mechanisms are in line with the stress-coping model of Lazarus and Folkman's (1984), demonstrating how teachers actively employ emotion-focused and problem-focused strategies to maintain their professional well-being.

Research Question 5: Contextual Factors Affecting Teaching Quality

The analysis of the data pertaining to the contextual factors affecting teaching quality related to job resources and demands showed that contextual factors, such as societal views on English, working conditions, and educational policies, significantly influence teaching quality. The commercial orientation of some educational institutes, the lack of effective evaluation, and distrust in formal education systems pose structural challenges. One teacher remarked, *"Institutes are more commercial than educational. Teaching quality doesn't matter; only enrollment numbers do."*

Research Question 6: The Impact of the intervening factors on job demands/resources

According to the open-ended results, these factors are intertwined with job demands, like workload and job insecurity, and also affect the availability of motivational resources. For instance, in environments with more flexible educational policies, teachers have greater opportunities to utilize technology and innovative methods. Contextual factors, including the commercialization of language education, ineffective evaluation systems, a scientific gap between policymakers and teachers, and distrust in formal education, negatively impact the quality of teaching. These factors are linked to structural demands and undermine motivational resources. However, some teachers maintain motivation through the use of educational technology and engaging teaching experiences. These experiences align with Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning theory, suggesting that meaning-making in teaching serves as a source of sustained motivation.

Discussion

The results of this mixed-methods study revealed a nuanced interplay between JD-R and Iranian EFL teachers' burnout. Quantitatively, Kruskal-Wallis tests demonstrated that higher job demands were significantly associated with elevated burnout, with teachers in high-demand groups exhibiting greater emotional

exhaustion and reduced efficacy compared to their low-demand counterparts. Conversely, higher job resources significantly lowered burnout, with pairwise comparisons revealing progressive improvements across resource levels. Qualitatively, themes such as structural demands, including administrative overload and inadequate salaries, alongside societal pressures, exacerbated burnout, as richly illustrated through teachers' narratives. These findings underscore the JD-R model's applicability in Iran's EFL context, demonstrating that balancing demands and resources is pivotal for teacher well-being, which ultimately influences instructional quality and student outcomes in this culturally unique educational system.

These findings align with and extend the extensive JD-R literature, offering a robust contribution to educational and EFL-specific research within the Iranian context. Consistent with Bakker and Demerouti (2017), high job demands, including administrative tasks, emotional labor, and curriculum constraints, predicted burnout, corroborating Hakanen et al. (2024) and Safari (2020) regarding workload pressures and organizational challenges. Assessment-related demands linked to emotional exhaustion align with findings from Ghafouri et al. (2025), Pishghadam et al. (2014) and Rastegar and Zarei (2023) among Iranian EFL teachers. The study's emphasis on 'professional autonomy' and 'colleague support' as protective job resources corroborate Hakanen et al. (2024) regarding psychological capital in EFL settings. Qualitative findings on cultural factors, particularly parental expectations and the commercialization of education, extend Barjesteh et al. (2025) while aligning with Pawlak et al. (2024) on intercultural demands. The mixed-methods approach uniquely addresses the scarcity of such designs in Iranian EFL research, noted by Zeinolabedini et al. (2022), with qualitative insights on coping strategies aligning with Lazarus and Folkman (1984) and Esmaeilee et al. (2025) regarding job crafting practices. The integration of macro-social factors, including policy inefficiencies and commercial outlooks, responds to calls by Hlado and Harvankova (2024) and Castro Silva et al. (2026) for more holistic examinations of structural and cultural influences on the well-being of teachers.

Overall, the results of this mixed-methods study indicate that the JD-R model benefits from predictive validity in Iranian EFL contexts, in alignment with global trends in educational psychology. This is evidenced by the quantitative data, which connotated high job demands with increased burnout, as well as the qualitative data, which supported the role of structural and societal demands, as put forward by Pawlak et al. (2024), which was shown to serve as a mediator as well as a moderator in this relationship. These findings align with our qualitative data, where peer support emerged as a key resource.

Finally, from a teacher-centered perspective, we can refer to the findings drawn from Lillelien and Jensen's (2025) systematic review of digital interventions on burnout. The study indicated that personal resources (e.g., mindfulness) play an undeniable role in enhancing professional well-being and reducing emotional exhaustion. Moreover, Bahramy Hidaji et al. (2024) drew upon Demerouti et al.'s (2001) model to validate the JD-R framework's applicability across diverse educational settings, including EFL instruction, which can ultimately improve teacher retention and instructional quality through structural reforms and resource

allocation. Therefore, teacher training centers' targeted interventions can build on teachers' personal and social resources, which can, in turn, improve students' well-being and engagement (Safdari, 2022) and foster a culture of support.

Conclusion and Implications

The quantitative findings revealed that high job demands significantly increased burnout among Iranian EFL teachers, while abundant resources substantially reduced it, demonstrating that teachers' well-being is intrinsically linked to balancing workplace demands and the resources available. Qualitatively, the study highlighted how structural demands, such as administrative overload and inadequate compensation, alongside external societal pressures, drive exhaustion, whereas resources like colleague support, professional development opportunities, and institutional autonomy serve as protective buffers. These results validate the applicability of the JD-R model to Iranian EFL settings and suggest that targeted interventions, including workload restructuring, enhanced professional development programs, and strengthened peer support systems, can effectively mitigate burnout while improving teaching quality and retention rates.

In conclusion, this mixed-methods research utilized a complementary framework, and the qualitative insights elaborated and contextualized the broader macro-structural patterns revealed by the quantitative instruments. The investigation validated the JD-R model's applicability within the Iranian EFL context through compelling quantitative and qualitative evidence. Quantitatively, Kruskal-Wallis tests confirmed that elevated job demands significantly increased burnout levels, with high-demand groups reporting greater emotional exhaustion and cynicism, while abundant job resources substantially reduced burnout across progressive resource levels. Qualitatively, thematic analysis illuminated how structural demands, including administrative overload, inadequate salaries, and imposed curricula, alongside societal and familial expectations, amplified occupational pressures and burnout experiences. Conversely, resources like professional autonomy, colleague support, and access to educational technology mitigated burnout and enhanced teaching quality. Teachers employed various coping strategies, including exercise and constructive dialogue, to navigate these challenges. Additionally, contextual factors such as the commercialization of education and policy inefficiencies further exacerbated demands while limiting available resources. The combination of quantitative patterns with qualitative meanings provides a more comprehensive picture of how demand-resource imbalances fundamentally undermine teacher well-being in Iran's culturally unique educational landscape.

Nevertheless, the study has a number of limitations that warrant caution in interpretation. The reliance on convenience sampling for both quantitative (n=146) and qualitative (n=39) phases may limit generalizability beyond urban Iranian EFL teachers, potentially overlooking rural or less accessible populations. Self-reported measures, such as the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory, introduce risks of socially desirable responses, while cross-sectional designs preclude causal inferences about JD-R dynamics over time. Additionally, the qualitative saturation at 39 participants, though aligned with Guest et al. (2006), could be expanded for greater diversity in

teaching contexts. Future research should adopt longitudinal designs to track how JD-R factors evolve, perhaps incorporating objective measures like physiological stress indicators. Interventions testing resource-enhancing programs, such as targeted professional development in digital tools, could be evaluated in randomized trials.

The broader implications of the results can go beyond Iranian EFL education, offering valuable lessons for global educational systems grappling with teacher retention amid high-stakes demands. By highlighting how resources mitigate burnout, this study underscores the need for targeted interventions, such as enhanced professional development programs and digital tool access, which could be applied in policy reforms to foster resilient teaching environments, particularly in resource-scarce contexts like Iran. Educational administrators and policymakers can leverage these insights to redesign workloads, promote autonomy, and address cultural expectations through awareness campaigns, ultimately improving instructional quality and student outcomes. Moreover, the identification of societal perceptions as burnout influencers suggests applications in cross-cultural educational psychology, informing strategies to align public expectations with realistic teaching roles. However, limitations such as convenience sampling and self-reported data call for cautious generalization, prompting future research to employ longitudinal designs that track JD-R dynamics over time and incorporate objective measures like physiological stress indicators. Additionally, exploring the role of personal resources in moderating JD-R effects could refine the model for diverse EFL settings.

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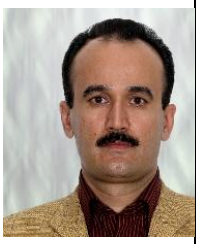
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Enhancing Vocabulary, Grammar, and Discourse Competence through AI-Supported Microlearning among EFL Learners: A Quasi-Experimental Study

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Abstract

Recent research has examined artificial intelligence (AI) and microlearning as separate instructional approaches. However, their combined effect on the development of core language systems remains underexplored. This quasi-experimental study examined the impact of AI-supported microlearning on Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary, grammatical, and discourse competence. Accordingly, a total of 60 intermediate learners recruited from Tanin Language Institute in Kerman, Iran, participated in the study and were assigned to an experimental (n = 30) and a control group (n = 30). Over an eight-week instructional period, the experimental group engaged in AI-supported microlearning activities, while the control group received conventional instruction. Data were collected using vocabulary and grammar achievement tests, as well as a discourse production task administered at both pre-test and post-test stages. Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was employed in order to control for initial differences between the groups. The results indicated that learners in the experimental group significantly outperformed those in the control group across all three variables, with large effect sizes. These results suggest that integrating adaptive AI-based feedback with microlearning may support the development of multiple language systems in EFL contexts. Pedagogical implications for integrating AI-supported microlearning into EFL instruction, as well as directions for future research, are presented.

Keywords: AI-supported microlearning, artificial intelligence in language learning, vocabulary development, grammatical competence, discourse competence

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Introduction

The development of digital technologies has increasingly transformed classroom practices across educational contexts. In recent years, artificial intelligence (AI) has attracted increasing attention across educational contexts, particularly in the field of language education. AI-based tools are now able to support adaptive learning environments in which instructional content can be adjusted based on learners' needs and their ongoing performance (Ouyang & Jiao, 2021; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). In English as a foreign language (EFL), AI has been used for modifying instructional input and extending learning beyond the physical classroom (George, 2023; Yadav & Singh, 2025). These affordances male enable learners to experience more flexible exposure to language input and immediate responses to their performance.

Along with these developments, microlearning has emerged as a prominent trend in technology-enhanced learning environments. Microlearning refers to the delivery of instructional content in small and focused units, designed to address a specific learning objective (Alias & Razak, 2025; Ghafar et al., 2023; Taylor & Hung, 2022). This approach is often linked to cognitive load theory (CLT), which emphasizes the importance of presenting information in manageable segments. (Lopez, 2024; Plass & Kalyuga, 2019). Microlearning in language learning contexts may provide opportunities for repeated exposure and gradual consolidation of knowledge. A number of studies have suggested that microlearning can support learner motivation and accessibility, particularly in digital environments (Fidan, 2023; Holubnycha et al., 2025; Monib et al., 2024, 2025a). From a cognitive perspective, this study is informed by CLT, which suggests that learning is more effective when instructional materials are structured in a way that reduces unnecessary cognitive demands (Sweller, 1988; Plass & Kalyuga, 2019).

Recent investigations have started to consider the potential of combining AI with microlearning more recently. AI-supported microlearning environments can integrate some language learning features such as adapting content and tracking learner progress in a more individualized manner. Moreover, AI-driven microlearning environments can enhance self-regulated learning and higher-order thinking through adaptive feedback and personalized pathways (Hariyanti, 2026; Mrabet et al., 2024). Empirical studies (e.g., Almuqhim & Berri, 2025; Fadli, 2025; Monib et al., 2024, 2025a) showed that such environments may contribute to increased learner autonomy, motivation, and interaction with learning materials. In addition, microlearning-based interventions have been applied to different language skills such as reading, speaking, and writing often with positive outcomes (Amakhina et al., 2023; Boumalek et al., 2025; Prasittichok & Smithsarakarn, 2024). Therefore, technology-supported microlearning may offer useful possibilities for language development.

Despite these developments, existing research has largely focused on isolated language skills or learners' perceptions, with limited attention to the integrated development of core language systems. From the perspective of second language acquisition (SLA), language development involves more than the improvement of skills alone. It requires the development of underlying language systems, including phonology, vocabulary, grammar, and discourse. These systems form the structural

basis of communicative competence and impact meaningful language use (Scrivener, 2011).

Among these systems, Vocabulary knowledge forms the lexical foundation necessary for comprehension and expression (Nation, 2019). Grammar enables learners to organize the lexical items into meaningful structures and express relationships between ideas (Larsen-Freeman, 2015). Beyond sentence-level structures, discourse competence refers to the ability to produce coherent and contextually appropriate language across longer stretches of communication (Vásquez Fernández, 2025). These components contribute to the development of communicative competence in second language learning.

Despite the importance of language systems, very few studies have examined the development of these systems simultaneously within AI-supported microlearning environments. Some studies have either focused on isolated linguistic features or addressed general learning outcomes such as motivation. Moreover, research in the Iranian EFL context remains scarce, even though the use of digital tools in language classes has been gradually increasing.

Considering these gaps, this study aims to investigate the effect of AI-supported microlearning on vocabulary knowledge, grammatical competence, and discourse competence among Iranian EFL learners through a quasi-experimental design. This study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how AI-supported microlearning may influence the development of core language systems. Based on these considerations, the following research questions are formulated:

RQ1. Does AI-supported microlearning significantly improve Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge compared with conventional instruction?

RQ2. Does AI-supported microlearning significantly improve Iranian EFL learners' grammatical competence compared with conventional instruction?

RQ3. Does AI-supported microlearning significantly improve Iranian EFL learners' discourse competence compared with conventional instruction?

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

From a cognitive perspective, this study is grounded in CLT, which explains how the limitations of working memory influence learning processes (Sweller, 1988; Plass & Kalyuga, 2019). According to CLT, learning becomes more effective when instructional materials are designed to reduce unnecessary cognitive demands and to support meaningful processing. When information is presented in smaller, manageable segments, learners are more likely to process and retain new knowledge. Microlearning aligns closely with the principles of CLT, as it structures learning content into brief, focused units that can reduce cognitive overload and facilitate gradual knowledge construction. This alignment has been empirically supported, with studies showing that microlearning designs grounded in CLT can enhance learning efficiency and reduce cognitive overload (Lopez, 2024). In language learning contexts, this approach may be particularly useful, as learners must simultaneously process vocabulary, grammatical

structures, and discourse-level information. Segmenting these elements into shorter learning episodes may support more efficient processing and retention. In addition, the integration of AI into microlearning environments introduces adaptive and feedback-driven features that can further optimize cognitive processing. AI-supported systems can adjust task difficulty, provide immediate feedback, and personalize learning pathways based on learners' performance (Monib et al., 2025b). These features may help regulate cognitive load by preventing excessive difficulty while maintaining sufficient challenge for learning. In this sense, CLT provides a useful lens for examining how AI-supported microlearning may influence the development of vocabulary, grammar, and discourse in EFL contexts.

Artificial Intelligence in Language Learning

AI has become part of technology-enhanced language learning (TELL) environments, influencing how teaching and learning processes are organized. AI-based systems are significant due to their ability to provide adaptive and personalized learning experiences (Ouyang & Jiao, 2021; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). Unlike traditional digital tools, AI systems can analyse learners' responses and adjust instructional content based on their performance and learning needs. AI technologies in EFL contexts have been integrated through a variety of tools, such as intelligent tutoring systems, automated writing evaluation systems, speech recognition tools, and chatbots (Kuddus, 2022; Schmidt & Strasser, 2022). The tools offer various opportunities for learners such as providing immediate feedback and helping learners to interact with language input more flexibly. In addition, these developments are consistent with broader trends in AI-supported educational innovation, where tutoring systems and microlearning approaches are increasingly combined to enhance learning flexibility and responsiveness (Mrabet et al., 2024). As a result, learners may experience greater autonomy and more opportunities for individualized learning (George, 2023; Yadav & Singh, 2025).

In addition, AI contributes to the development of adaptive learning environments in which instructional content is continuously adjusted. Since AI systems track learner performance, they can identify areas of difficulty and provide targeted support (Kaswan et al., 2024). From the learners' perspective, several studies have reported positive effects of AI integration on motivation, self-regulation, and language development. For example, Peña-Acuña and Durão (2024) reported increased motivation among learners. Qiao and Zhao (2023) found improvements in speaking performance and self-regulated learning. These findings show that AI can lead to more responsive and learner-centered language learning environments.

Microlearning in Language Education

Microlearning has become an important approach in digital learning environments. It refers to the delivery of content in small, focused units that target specific learning objectives and can be completed within short periods of time. These learning units are often delivered through digital platforms which make them accessible anytime and anywhere. Systematic reviews have emphasized that microlearning is not only a delivery format but also an instructional strategy that supports flexible, learner-centered environments (Alias & Razak, 2025). The theoretical basis of microlearning can be linked to CLT and the segmentation principle of multimedia learning (Mayer,

2005; Plass & Kalyuga, 2019). These perspectives suggest that learners process information more effectively when it is presented in smaller and manageable segments. In addition, instructional design models have demonstrated that structured microlearning sequences can improve learning outcomes by guiding learners through staged cognitive processing (Cahyanto et al., 2024). In this way, microlearning may help reduce cognitive overload and support more efficient processing of instructional material.

Microlearning in language learning may provide repeated exposure to linguistic input, which is essential for acquisition. Since language learning is gradual and cumulative, frequent interaction with small units of content can support retention and understanding over time (Monib et al., 2025a). This repeated exposure is particularly relevant in language learning, where microlearning has been shown to facilitate gradual acquisition and retention of linguistic knowledge (Ghafar et al., 2023). A growing body of research (e.g., Fidan, 2023; Monib et al., 2024, 2025a) has highlighted the role of microlearning in increasing learner motivation and accessibility in technology-enhanced environments.

Empirical studies have provided further support for the effectiveness of microlearning. Chen and Sitthiworachart (2023) found that mobile-based microlearning improved learners' vocabulary development and motivation. Shafiee Rad (2021) reported significant improvements in grammar achievement through microlearning-based instruction. Other studies (e.g., Amakhina et al., 2023; Fauziah et al., 2023; Prasittichok & Smithsarakarn, 2024) have shown positive effects on reading, writing, speaking, and overall communicative performance. However, many of these studies have focused on isolated language skills rather than underlying language systems. In addition to these findings, recent implementations in authentic educational contexts have reported that microlearning supports engagement and knowledge consolidation across different disciplines (Holubnycha et al., 2025).

AI-Supported Microlearning

The integration of AI and microlearning has led to the emergence of AI-supported microlearning, which combines adaptive technology with short, focused learning activities. In such environments, AI can adjust the level of difficulty, provide immediate feedback, and personalize learning pathways as learners engage with microlearning tasks (Boumalek et al., 2024; Chen et al., 2024; Monib et al., 2025b). This combination may enhance the pedagogical value of microlearning by making it more responsive to individual learner differences. AI-based analytics can monitor learner progress and provide targeted practice opportunities (Sajja et al., 2025). Thus, AI-supported microlearning may support self-regulated learning by creating continuous cycles of practice and adjustment. Such environments may also enhnace higher levels of self-regulation and critical thinking by continuously adapting content to learner performance (Hariyanti, 2026). From a design perspective, microlearning frameworks supported by AI and mobile technologies have been shown to enable scalable and personalized learning experiences (Robles et al., 2023).

Related research has started to explore this combination in educational settings. For example, Arimbawa et al. (2025) and Silitonga et al. (2024) examined the use of AI chatbots within microlearning environments and reported improvements in motivation

and cognitive performance. Similarly, Kohnke et al. (2025) found that AI-supported microlearning enhanced confidence and self-regulated learning among pre-service teachers. Moreover, AI-driven microlearning has been associated with broader educational innovation trends, particularly in integrating adaptive tutoring systems with short-form learning content (Mrabet et al., 2024).

Despite these promising findings, research on AI-supported microlearning in language learning contexts is still limited. In many cases, AI and microlearning have been studied separately, and fewer studies have examined their combined effects using experimental designs. Moreover, systematic reviews indicate that integrated models of AI-supported microlearning remain underexplored, particularly in relation to comprehensive learning outcomes (Alias & Razak, 2025; Monib et al., 2025a).

Language Systems in Second Language Acquisition

From the perspective of SLA, communicative competence develops not only through language skills but also through underlying language systems, including phonology, vocabulary knowledge, grammatical competence, and discourse competence (Ellis, 2015; Larsen-Freeman, 2015; Scrivener, 2011). These systems provide the structural foundation for meaningful communication.

Vocabulary knowledge plays an important role because it provides the lexical resources needed for both comprehension and production (Nation, 2019; Schmitt, 2019). Grammar enables learners to organize these lexical items into meaningful structures and express relationships between ideas (Larsen-Freeman, 2015). At a broader level, discourse competence involves the ability to organize ideas coherently and use cohesive devices to produce contextually appropriate communication (Celce-Murcia, 2008; Vásquez Fernández, 2025).

Although digital technologies are increasingly integrated into language learning, few studies have examined the simultaneous development of these language systems in AI-mediated environments (Ouyang & Jiao, 2021; Wang et al., 2024; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). This indicates a need for more comprehensive investigations that consider multiple dimensions of language development.

Empirical Gap and Rationale for the Study

Previous research highlighted the effectiveness of microlearning and AI in language education. Microlearning has been associated with improved learning outcomes and reduced cognitive load. AI has been linked to personalization, adaptability, and enhanced feedback mechanisms. However, several limitations can be identified in the literature. First, many studies have examined microlearning and AI separately rather than as an integrated instructional approach. In addition, most research has focused on individual language skills or general learner outcomes such as motivation and satisfaction. Furthermore, there is limited empirical evidence on the development of core language systems such as vocabulary, grammar, and discourse, particularly when these are examined together.

This gap is evident in the Iranian EFL context, where the use of digital technologies is increasing but empirical research is limited. Therefore, there is a need

for studies that investigate how AI-supported microlearning influences multiple aspects of language development in a more comprehensive manner. To address this gap, the present study examines the effects of AI-supported microlearning on vocabulary knowledge, grammatical competence, and discourse competence using a quasi-experimental design. Focusing on these three interrelated language systems can provide a more complete understanding of the role of AI-supported microlearning in EFL learning.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a quasi-experimental design to examine the effect of AI-supported microlearning on the development of language systems among Iranian EFL learners. Quasi-experimental designs are commonly used in educational research when intact classes are involved and full randomization is not feasible (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The study followed a pretest–posttest control group design. Two intact classes of intermediate EFL learners participated in the study. One class was assigned to the experimental group, which received AI-supported microlearning and the other class served as the control group and received conventional instruction. The intervention lasted eight weeks, and both groups followed the same core curriculum for instructional comparability. The independent variable in this study was AI-supported microlearning, while the dependent variables included vocabulary knowledge, grammatical competence, and discourse competence. As intact classes were used, the findings should be interpreted with caution in terms of causal inference.

Participants

A total of 60 Iranian EFL learners enrolled in Tanin Language Institute in Kerman, Iran, participated in this study. A combination of convenience and purposive sampling was used. Initially, learners who were available in the institute were selected through convenience sampling. Then, purposive sampling was applied to ensure that participants met the required criteria, particularly in terms of proficiency level and course enrolment. The learners were young adults aged between 20 and 26 years and were classified as intermediate-level (B1) based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Prior to the study, all participants had completed Touchstone Level 2 and were studying Touchstone Level 3. This level was considered appropriate for the study, as learners at the intermediate stage are expected to demonstrate developing control over vocabulary, grammar, and discourse. To ensure group equivalence, the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) and pre-test measures were administered prior to the intervention, and the results confirmed that the two groups were comparable at the outset of the study. In addition, both groups were taught by experienced teachers and followed the same instructional materials, so that any observed differences could be attributed mainly to the instructional treatment. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and their participation was voluntary. Informed consent was obtained prior to data collection, and participants' anonymity and confidentiality were ensured.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Variable	Experimental (n = 30)	Control (n = 30)	Total (N = 60)
Age (M ± SD)	23.1 ± 1.8	22.9 ± 1.9	23.0 ± 1.9
Age Range	20–26	20–26	20–26
Gender (M/F)	12 (40%) / 18 (60%)	14 (46.7%) / 16 (53.3%)	26 (43.3%) / 34 (56.7%)
CEFR Level	B1	B1	B1
Previous Instructional Level	Touchstone 2	Touchstone 2	Touchstone 2
Current Instructional Level	Touchstone 3	Touchstone 3	Touchstone 3

Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation; M/F = male/female.

Instruments

Three instruments were used to collect the data, including a vocabulary achievement test, a grammar achievement test, and a discourse production task. These instruments were designed to measure learners' development in lexical knowledge, grammatical competence, and discourse organization.

Oxford Placement Test

To determine participants' language proficiency at the outset of the study, OPT was administered. The test consists of three sections: vocabulary, grammatical structures, and reading comprehension, including 40 vocabulary items, 40 grammar items, and 20 reading comprehension items. This test has been widely used in language research, with its reliability supported through large-scale piloting and its validity established through alignment with CEFR. The internal consistency of the test was estimated using Cronbach's alpha, yielding a coefficient of $\alpha = .84$, indicating acceptable reliability. To further support content validity, the test was reviewed by two experienced EFL instructors familiar with standardized language assessment.

Vocabulary Test

Vocabulary knowledge was measured using a researcher-developed test based on the lexical items presented in the Touchstone 3 textbook. The test included 20 items consisting of multiple-choice and contextualized questions. Each item was scored as one point, resulting in a total score range of 0 to 20. To ensure content validity, the test items were aligned with the instructional materials and reviewed by two experienced EFL experts. Based on their feedback, several items were revised for clarity. A pilot study was also conducted and minor modifications were made. Cronbach's alpha was used to

estimate the reliability of the test, and the results indicated an acceptable level of internal consistency (α = .84).

Grammar Test

Grammatical competence was assessed using a grammar achievement test developed based on the grammar structures presented in the Touchstone 3 book. The test included 20 items, including sentence completion and multiple-choice questions. Each correct answer received one point, with a total score of 20. The test was reviewed by two experienced EFL instructors for content validity and alignment with instructional objectives. A pilot test was conducted, and the reliability of the instrument was confirmed through Cronbach's alpha (α = .82), indicating acceptable internal consistency.

Discourse Task

A short written task was used to measure the discourse competence. In detail, learners were asked to produce a coherent paragraph on a familiar topic related to the course content. The responses were evaluated using an analytic rubric focusing on coherence, cohesion, and organization. Each component was scored on a scale, and the total score was calculated by summing the component scores. Scores ranged from 0 to 20, with higher scores indicating better discourse performance. To enhance scoring reliability, two experienced EFL instructors independently rated the written responses. Inter-rater reliability was estimated using the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC), which indicated acceptable agreement between the raters (ICC = .82). Any discrepancies were discussed until consensus was reached.

Table 2

Reliability indices for study instruments

Instrument	Reliability Type	Coefficient
Vocabulary Test	Cronbach's Alpha	.84
Grammar Test	Cronbach's Alpha	.82
Discourse Measure	Inter-rater Reliability (ICC)	.82

Procedure

The study was conducted over eight weeks and was integrated into the regular instructional schedule of the institute. Both groups followed the same Touchstone 3 book to ensure consistency in instructional content. The data collection process consisted of three main stages of pre-testing, instructional intervention, and post-testing. At the beginning of the study, both groups completed pre-tests measuring vocabulary knowledge, grammatical competence, and discourse competence. These pre-tests were used to establish baseline equivalence between the groups.

Then, the experimental group participated in AI-supported microlearning activities in addition to regular classroom instruction. These activities were delivered through a digital platform accessible via mobile devices and computers. The

microlearning sessions were short (approximately 10–15 minutes) and included vocabulary tasks with spaced repetition, grammar-focused exercises, and short discourse-related activities. The system provided immediate feedback and adjusted the level of difficulty based on learners' performance. The AI-supported microlearning activities were designed to align with the vocabulary, grammar, and discourse objectives of the Touchstone 3 syllabus. Vocabulary tasks included matching, multiple-choice, and contextualized usage items with spaced repetition. Grammar activities focused on sentence-level practice, error correction, and form-focused exercises. Discourse tasks involved short paragraph construction, cohesion identification, and idea organization. The platform provided immediate feedback by indicating incorrect responses, offering brief explanations, and supplying additional practice when needed. Learners completed these activities outside class, and their participation was monitored by the instructor to ensure engagement.

In contrast, the control group received only conventional instruction, including teacher explanation, textbook exercises, and regular homework activities, without adaptive feedback or structured microlearning activities. At the end of the eight-week period, both classes completed the post-tests using the same instruments administered at the beginning of the study. Both groups received comparable instructional time to ensure that any observed differences were attributable to the treatment rather than differences in exposure.

Data Analysis

All data were analyzed using SPSS version 26. Before conducting the main analyses, assumptions of normality, homogeneity of variance, and homogeneity of regression slopes were examined and found to be satisfied. Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was used to examine the effect of the instructional intervention while controlling for pre-test differences. In each analysis, the post-test score was treated as the dependent variable, the instructional group as the independent variable, and the corresponding pre-test score as the covariate. Before conducting the main analyses, the assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes was tested by examining the interaction between group and pre-test scores. This interaction was not statistically significant which showed that the assumption was satisfied. Effect sizes were estimated using partial eta squared (η^2), with values of .01, .06, and .14 interpreted as small, medium, and large effects, respectively. The level of significance was set at .05 for all statistical tests.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Before conducting the main analyses, preliminary checks were performed to examine whether the assumptions underlying ANCOVA were satisfied. Descriptive statistics indicated that the control and experimental groups were comparable at the pre-test stage across vocabulary, grammar, and discourse. Normality, homogeneity of variance, and homogeneity of regression slopes were assessed. The results are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3

Summary of Assumption Checks for ANCOVA

Variable	Shapiro–Wilk p	Levene's p	Group × Pre-test p
Vocabulary	.198	.092	.924
Grammar	.405	.842	.997
Discourse	.276	.072	.185

As shown in Table 3, the Shapiro–Wilk tests indicated that post-test scores were normally distributed ($p > .05$). Levene's tests were non-significant, supporting the assumption of homogeneity of variances. In addition, the interaction between group and pre-test scores was not statistically significant for any of the variables, indicating that the assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes was met. Taken together, these results confirmed that ANCOVA was appropriate for the main analyses.

RQ1: Effect of AI-Supported Microlearning on Vocabulary Knowledge

Descriptive statistics for vocabulary scores are presented in Table 4. The two groups showed comparable performance at the pre-test stage. However, at the post-test stage, the experimental group obtained higher scores than the control group.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics for Vocabulary Scores by Group

Group	Pre-test M	Pre-test SD	Post-test M	Post-test SD
Control	11.67	1.81	13.63	2.06
Experimental	11.73	1.93	17.80	2.30

To determine whether this difference was statistically significant while controlling for pre-test scores, an ANCOVA was conducted.

Table 5

ANCOVA Results for Vocabulary Post-test Scores

Source	F	p	Partial η^2
Vocab_Pre	211.34	< .001	.788
Group	244.99	< .001	.811

As can be seen in Table 5, the results indicated that vocabulary pre-test scores significantly predicted post-test performance. More importantly, the effect of instructional group was statistically significant, suggesting that learners who received

AI-supported microlearning achieved higher vocabulary scores than those in the control group after controlling for initial differences. The effect size was large (partial η^2 = .811), indicating that the instructional intervention accounted for a substantial proportion of variance in vocabulary outcomes.

RQ2: Effect of AI-Supported Microlearning on Grammatical Competence

Descriptive statistics for grammar scores are presented in Table 6. While both groups were comparable at the pre-test stage, the experimental group demonstrated higher post-test scores than the control group.

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics for Grammar Scores by Group

Group	Pre-test M	Pre-test SD	Post-test M	Post-test SD
Control	13.13	2.00	15.03	2.24
Experimental	13.03	1.90	19.43	2.14

An ANCOVA was conducted to examine whether this difference remained significant after controlling for pre-test scores.

Table 7

ANCOVA Results for Grammar Post-test Scores

Source	F	p	Partial η^2
Grammar_Pre	191.44	< .001	.771
Group	270.78	< .001	.826

The ANCOVA results (Table 7) revealed that grammar pre-test scores significantly predicted post-test performance. In addition, the effect of instructional group was statistically significant which indicates that AI-supported microlearning led to improved grammatical competence compared with conventional instruction. The effect size was large (partial η^2 = .826). This shows a strong impact of AI-supported microlearning on grammatical competence.

RQ3: Effect of AI-Supported Microlearning on Discourse Competence

Descriptive statistics for discourse scores are shown in Table 8. As with the other variables, the two groups were comparable at the pre-test stage, while the experimental group achieved higher post-test scores.

Table 8

Descriptive Statistics for Discourse Scores by Group

Group	Pre-test M	Pre-test SD	Post-test M	Post-test SD
Control	10.83	2.09	13.13	2.18
Experimental	11.63	1.94	17.50	1.74

To evaluate the statistical significance of this difference, an ANCOVA was conducted.

Table 9

ANCOVA Results for Discourse Post-test Scores

Source	F	p	Partial η^2
Discourse_Pre	325.51	< .001	.851
Group	325.53	< .001	.851

The results in Table 9 indicated that discourse pre-test scores significantly predicted post-test performance. More importantly, the effect of instructional group was statistically significant, suggesting that AI-supported microlearning was associated with a substantial effect on learners' discourse competence. The effect size was particularly large (partial η^2 = .851), indicating that the intervention had a strong influence on learners' discourse performance.

Across all three research questions, the results consistently showed that AI-supported microlearning significantly improved learners' vocabulary knowledge, grammatical competence, and discourse competence compared with conventional instruction. In all three variables, the effect sizes were consistently large (partial η^2 ranging from .811 to .851), highlighting the substantial impact of the intervention.

Discussion

This study aimed to examine the effects of AI-supported microlearning on Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge, grammatical competence, and discourse competence. The findings showed that, after controlling for pre-test differences, learners in the experimental group outperformed those in the control group in all three language systems. This pattern suggests that AI-supported microlearning may provide a supportive learning environment within the context of this study. More specifically, the results indicate that combining microlearning with AI-based feedback may help learners engage more actively with language content. The presence of short learning units, together with immediate and adaptive feedback, seems to create conditions in which learners can process language more gradually but also more effectively. From a cognitive perspective, this pattern can be interpreted through the lens of CLT, which suggests that structuring information into manageable segments can reduce cognitive

overload and facilitate more efficient processing (Lopez, 2024; Plass & Kalyuga, 2019). In this sense, the findings of the study are generally consistent with previous research on technology-supported learning environments, which emphasizes the role of adaptive feedback and structured input in supporting language development (Mrabet et al., 2024; Monib et al., 2025a; Ouyang & Jiao, 2021).

AI-Supported Microlearning and Vocabulary Knowledge

The first research question examined whether AI-supported microlearning leads to improvement in vocabulary knowledge. The results demonstrated a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups, with higher performance observed among learners who received AI-supported microlearning. This finding aligns with previous studies suggesting that microlearning can support vocabulary development by presenting lexical items in small and manageable units. Such an approach helps learners to encounter new words repeatedly over time, which is important for retention and use (Ghafar et al., 2023; Nation, 2019). This repeated exposure is particularly important in vocabulary learning, as it supports both form–meaning connections and long-term retention. For example, Chen and Sitthiworachart (2023) reported that mobile-based microlearning improved vocabulary learning as well as learner motivation and satisfaction. The present study extends these findings by showing that the addition of AI-based adaptivity may further strengthen these effects (Hariyanti, 2026; Sajja et al., 2025).

In addition, the role of AI in providing immediate and personalized feedback should also be considered. Some studies (e.g., Ouyang & Jiao, 2021; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019) in AI-supported language learning have emphasized that timely feedback and adaptive support can facilitate more efficient learning processes. In this study, such features may have helped learners notice gaps in their knowledge and revisit difficult items more frequently. A possible explanation for the observed improvement is that vocabulary learning benefits from repeated exposure, focused attention and feedback. The microlearning format, by dividing content into smaller units, may reduce cognitive overload and aid learners to concentrate on specific lexical items (Lopez, 2024). At the same time, AI-based systems can adapt to learners' performance and provide additional practice when needed. This combination likely created more opportunities for noticing and consolidation, which are essential processes in vocabulary development. These factors may explain the significant gains observed in vocabulary knowledge. This interpretation is also consistent with CLT, as reduced cognitive demands may enable learners to allocate more attention to lexical processing and consolidation.

AI-Supported Microlearning and Grammatical Competence

The second research question addressed grammatical competence. It was found that learners in the experimental group performed significantly better than those in the control group after controlling for pre-test scores. This finding may indicate that AI-supported microlearning can also be effective in supporting grammar learning. This result is consistent with previous research indicating that microlearning can be beneficial for grammar instruction, especially when grammatical structures are presented in smaller and more focused units (Alias & Razak, 2025; Cahyanto et al., 2024). For instance, Shafiee Rad (2021) found that microlearning-based instruction

improved both grammar achievement and learner motivation. The present study contributes to this line of research by examining grammar as part of a broader language system rather than as an isolated outcome. One possible reason for this finding is that grammar learning often requires careful attention and timely correction. This immediacy may help learners process grammatical forms while the input is still active in working memory, which can facilitate more effective form–function mapping. In traditional classrooms, such conditions may not always be fully available. However, in an AI-supported microlearning class, learners may receive more immediate feedback on their responses, which can help them identify and correct errors more effectively (Ouyang & Jiao, 2021; Sajja et al., 2025). In addition, the segmented nature of microlearning may enable learners to focus on specific grammatical forms without being overwhelmed by large amounts of information.

It also seems that the adaptive nature of AI plays an important role here (Hariyanti, 2026; Kaswan et al., 2024). By adjusting the level of difficulty and revisiting problematic areas, the system may support a more individualized learning process. In this way, learners may engage more actively with grammatical structures and develop a clearer understanding of how these structures function in context. This could explain the relatively strong improvement observed in grammatical competence.

AI-Supported Microlearning and Discourse Competence

The last research question addressed the effect of AI-supported microlearning on discourse competence. The results showed that the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group, even after controlling for pre-test differences. This finding is significant, as discourse competence is generally considered more complex to develop compared to vocabulary and grammar. Discourse competence involves organizing ideas, maintaining coherence, and using appropriate cohesive devices in extended stretches of language (Celce-Murcia, 2008; Vásquez Fernández, 2025). Therefore, improvement in this area usually requires first exposure to language forms and then opportunities to practice organizing and connecting ideas. Such processes require linguistic knowledge as well as the ability to integrate multiple elements of language in a coherent manner.

Although relatively fewer studies have directly examined discourse competence in AI-supported microlearning environments, the present findings are broadly consistent with research showing positive effects of such environments on communicative skills, including speaking and writing (Amakhina et al., 2023; Fauziah et al., 2023; Prasittichok & Smithsarakarn, 2024). Since these skills rely on discourse-level organization, it may be argued that that improvements in these areas may reflect underlying gains in discourse competence.

An explanation for this finding is that microlearning may enable learners to focus on specific aspects of discourse, such as sequencing ideas or maintaining coherence, in a step-by-step manner (Cahyanto et al., 2024). At the same time, AI-based feedback may help learners monitor how effectively they organize their ideas and make necessary adjustments (Sajja et al., 2025). In this sense, AI-supported microlearning may act as a bridge between sentence-level learning and more extended language production. From a cognitive perspective, this may suggest that AI-supported

microlearning can support discrete language elements and higher-level integration processes by managing cognitive load and providing structured feedback (Lopez, 2024; Plass & Kalyuga, 2019).

Another important point is that these findings provide an alternative perspective on the assumption that microlearning is mainly suitable for discrete-point learning. While it is sometimes argued that breaking content into smaller units may limit the development of more complex skills, the present results suggest that, when supported by appropriate instructional design and adaptive feedback, microlearning may contribute to higher-level language abilities, such as discourse competence, when supported by appropriate instructional design and adaptive feedback.

In sum, the findings of this study suggest that AI-supported microlearning may influence language development through multiple mechanisms, including reduced cognitive load, increased opportunities for repeated exposure, and the provision of adaptive feedback (Ghafar et al., 2023; Lopez, 2024; Sajja et al., 2025). These mechanisms appear to operate across different language systems, from vocabulary and grammar to discourse-level organization. While the relative contribution of each factor cannot be determined in the present study, the overall pattern indicates that the integration of AI and microlearning may offer a more responsive and cognitively supportive learning environment for EFL learners.

Conclusion

The present study examined the effects of AI-supported microlearning on vocabulary knowledge, grammatical competence, and discourse competence among Iranian EFL learners. The findings showed that learners who engaged in AI-supported microlearning outperformed those who received conventional instruction in all three language systems. Therefore, AI-supported microlearning may play a meaningful role in supporting language development beyond what may be achieved through traditional classroom practices alone. The results also indicate that this instructional approach appears encourage more active engagement with language content. Through short, focused learning activities combined with adaptive feedback, learners appear to have more opportunities to process, revisit, and consolidate language knowledge over time. In this sense, AI-supported microlearning may be considered as a supportive extension to classroom instruction rather than a replacement for it.

The findings of this study offer some implications for language teaching practice. One implication of these findings is that AI-supported microlearning can be meaningfully integrated into existing instructional programs as a complementary approach. Rather than replacing traditional teaching methods, it may function as an additional layer of support that enhances learners' interaction with language systems. A related implication concerns the importance of instructional design. The effectiveness of AI-supported microlearning does not appear to depend only on the presence of technology, but also on how learning activities are structured. Short, clearly focused tasks combined with timely and adaptive feedback may create conditions that support gradual and sustained learning. Therefore, teachers and instructional designers need to carefully align microlearning activities with learning objectives and learner needs. In addition, the findings suggest that AI-supported microlearning may help address

individual differences among learners. Since the system can adjust content and feedback based on performance, it can provide more personalized learning experiences. This could be useful in EFL contexts where learners often have different levels of proficiency and learning pace.

Despite these contributions, several limitations should be acknowledged. One limitation relates to the sample, which consisted of only 60 intermediate-level learners from a single private language institute in Kerman, Iran. Because of this, the findings may not be easily generalized to learners with different proficiency levels or learning contexts. Future studies could address this issue by including larger and more diverse samples in order to examine whether similar patterns can be observed in different populations. A second limitation concerns the duration of the intervention. The study was conducted over a period of eight weeks, which, although sufficient to observe short-term improvement, does not allow strong conclusions about the long-term sustainability of the results. In this regard, longitudinal research designs would be useful to investigate whether the effects of AI-supported microlearning are maintained over time in terms of retention and continued development.

A further limitation is related to the research design. While the quasi-experimental design was appropriate for the classroom context, it does not provide the same level of control as fully randomized experimental designs. As a result, some uncontrolled variables may have influenced the findings. Future research may therefore benefit from employing fully randomized designs in order to strengthen causal interpretations. In addition, discourse competence was assessed only through a written paragraph task. This type of assessment may not fully capture learners' ability to use discourse in different communicative situations, especially in spoken interaction. Future studies could adopt a more comprehensive approach by including both written and spoken measures of discourse competence to gain a more complete understanding of learners' abilities. Finally, the present study relied mainly on quantitative data. Although this is useful for identifying general patterns, it may not fully capture learners' experiences during the learning process. For this reason, future research could incorporate qualitative methods, such as interviews or reflective reports, to explore learners' perceptions and engagement with AI-supported microlearning in more depth.

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Authentic Media Production in Project-Based EFL Learning: Exploring Student Perceptions of Language Development, Engagement, and Professional Skills in a Jordanian University

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Abstract

Idioms are typically considered as elements of informal, vivid, and entertaining language, and are generally thought to be unsuitable for formal contexts. However, recent studies show that idioms are increasingly used in formal communication and academic writing. In this context, this corpus-based study aims to offer new insights into English idioms by examining them within a corpus consisting of 5,675,554 tokens from 640 randomly selected applied linguistics research articles (RAs). To achieve this, the researchers developed a working definition and framework for identifying academic idioms within written genres like RAs. Using this framework, they compiled a list of the most common academic idioms found in the genre. Additionally, the study explored whether the frequency of these idioms changed over the period from 1980 to 2020. The findings revealed that idioms are indeed present in applied linguistics RAs and merit appropriate attention. No significant correlation was found between time and idiom usage frequency, while the writing style of authors appeared to significantly influence how often idioms are used. By identifying and analyzing the most frequent academic idioms in applied linguistics RAs, this study's results may be valuable for EFL writing instructors, graduate and postgraduate students in applied linguistics, and developers of teaching materials.

Keywords: idioms, research articles, corpus, applied linguistics

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Introduction

The fast-paced evolution in the global media landscape has placed substantial changes on the skills required by English language graduates. These changes generated a set of new challenges in the tertiary higher education institutions in the Arab world. Al-Masshaqbah and Abuhasirah (2023) stated that although there are many classes to take, many Jordanian university students still encounter obstacles when attempting to apply their linguistic knowledge and abilities to authentic media production environments. This tension has raised concerns in academia and business, as English has become the dominant language of journalism, international communication, and higher education. This divide is evident in the enduring educational paradox that students learn to think critically about news stories but get little chance to write them. Although students have theoretical knowledge of journalistic writing styles, they often lack chances to use that knowledge in actual communicative situations. This is a symptom of a more profound pedagogical problem where language analysis is valued over language production, and this is translated into teaching that promotes interpreting to the detriment of engaging in authentic and meaningful use of the language.

Consequently, authentic media production as a university course is attracting considerable international attention as a promising teaching practice. Supporters of authentic journalistic production as a learning tool at the tertiary level argue that there is no better way to hone both linguistic ability and professional know-how. For instance, Tseng (2018) stated that media-based teaching of English has been largely built on the passive side of learning such as close reading of news and media texts analysis and grammar work which considered as unrelated to real communicative situations. Although these methodologies are still essential for establishing a foundation, they lack the context in which learners can practice the communicative expertise they will really need as journalists.

The absence of this type of pedagogy has also fueled interest in preservice language teachers adopting authentic media production projects (Yang, 2014). Promoters of this approach stress that involving students in the production of real media content as opposed to confining them to text analysis, leads to a stronger and more significant learning ecosystem that nurtures both language and professional capabilities. Project-based language learning (PBLL) has been identified as a theoretical and pedagogical approach that helps to articulate the relationships among task-based language teaching, learner needs, and project work within the broad context of Communicative language teaching (Beckett, 2023; Beckett & Slater, 2018; Beckett & Slater, 2019). According to Gilmore (2007) and Widdowson (1998), the traditional classroom activities simplify the language use, but the content of professional journalism brings the learners to the complexity and communicative challenge of real-world professional discourse.

As students research, interview, write, edit, and produce work for real audiences, they engage in a multidimensional learning process that takes place in authentic communicative situations and that calls for disciplined command of professional terminology and genre conventions as well as language skills on the level of the content of communication (Stoller, 2002). Indeed, such productive

involvement with language is expected to produce learning outcomes qualitatively distinct from and potentially more enduring than that observable following passive exposure to language in more traditional educational contexts (Beckett & Slater, 2005; Stoller, 2002).

Nevertheless, the Jordanian higher education context is clearly underrepresented in the empirical literature, despite this theoretical underpinning and the emerging body of international findings that portray media production as a language-learning medium. As far as the researcher is aware, no published research has investigated the language development, engagement, and professional-skills outcomes of real-world media production projects for students of EFL in Jordan. The present research fills this gap by providing an in-depth qualitative study on the impact of a scripted, realistic media production project in an English for Media and Journalism course at a private university in Jordan.

In the Jordanian higher education context, EFL learners specifically those pursuing degrees in Applied English (Applied Linguistics) are required to attend a course in English for Media and Journalism, but they do not produce journalism for a real audience. Even when institutions have state-of-the-art media suites on campus, such as digital newsrooms and radio or television studios, these facilities often have little to do with formal language teaching. Employing the perceptions of media faculty at Jordanian universities, Abuhasirah and Ismael (2023) revealed that there is a disparity between students' academic qualifications and the practice-based requirements of the media labor market. They recommended that increasing the number of hands-on training hours available to students would provide them not only with exposure to the latest media tools, methods, and practices, but also with the practical and technical know-how needed to successfully enter the media labor market. Similarly, Al-Masshaqbah and Abuhasirah (2023) revealed that this gap builds a paradox: while students develop an analytical awareness of media language, they lack the productive skill that employers frequently prioritize when recruiting graduates. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to investigate whether students perceive that the inclusion of a structured, authentic media production task in their English for Media and journalism curriculum enhances language learning, motivation, and readiness to work in the media.

This study pursues three interrelated objectives; each paired with a corresponding research question. The first objective is to explore EFL learners' language learning awareness as it emerged through their participation in an authentic media production experience, addressed through RQ1: In what ways do authentic media production projects influence EFL learners' language skills development in an English for the Media and Journalism course at a private university in Jordan? The second objective is to investigate learners' perceptions of the importance of motivation and engagement in undertaking an authentic media production project, addressed through RQ2: How do EFL learners view their motivation and engagement in media production tasks (TV shows, videos, and news reports)? The third objective is to examine students' perceptions of the professional and media skills they acquired through the project, along with their preparedness to engage in media work, addressed through RQ3: In what ways can authentic media production

projects contribute to the development of EFL learners' professional and media skills? Together, these objectives and research questions frame the study's inquiry into how authentic, real-world media production tasks shape language awareness, motivation, and professional readiness among EFL learners.

Review of Literature

Authentic Materials and Task-Based Language Teaching

The use of authentic materials and tasks, rather than materials specifically designed for language teaching, has been shown to enhance both the motivation and communicative usefulness of EFL teaching instruction (Nghi, 2023; Peacock, 1997; Sample, 2015). For example, a study conducted by Peacock (1997) in the Korean EFL context found that authentic materials promoted greater on-task behavior and increased higher levels of motivation compared to synthetic materials although self-reported motivation gains emerged only gradually and some learners rated authentic materials as less immediately engaging. This pattern has persisted in more recent research. Likewise, Latifah et al. (2025) study reported that authentic materials integrated into project-based speaking tasks increased Indonesian EFL learners' motivation, though such materials are also capable of introducing cognitive challenges leading to sustained anxiety in the learners highlighting that the motivational effects of authenticity are real not unconditional.

This focus on authenticity is linked to the more general Task-Based Language Teaching framework, which places meaningful real-world tasks over isolated grammar or lexical tasks as the medium for developing language (East, 2021; Ellis, 2021; Nunan, 2004). Within the TBLT model, reading and writing are generally integrated with spoken interaction in a collaborative manner, mirroring the communicative and social organization of authentic language use. Rather than conceiving them as isolated skills, these literacies are situated within tasks that are meaningful and that simulate real-world communication (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004, Willis, 2021). Systematic reviews on the implementation of TBLT in EFL environments report a positive impact of authentic, communicative tasks on learners' ability to utilize language in a more natural and integrated manner compared to traditional language teaching methods that focus on isolated and decontextualized language form instruction. In addition, this literature suggests that TBLT enhances learners' motivation, engagement, and willingness to participate in language learning activities (Anbarshahi & Yeganeh, 2026; Bryfonski & McKay, 2019; Guo et al., 2026; Namkung & Kim, 2024). This is echoed by experimental evidence: Anbarshahi and Yeganeh (2026) found that Iranian EFL learners exposed to form-focused TBLT significantly outperformed a control group on both speaking fluency and motivation measures, reinforcing that meaningful, real-world tasks can drive gains in fluency and engagement simultaneously rather than as separate outcomes.

Project-based learning (PBL), a closely related pedagogical approach, similarly emphasizes the application of language skills within authentic, real-world contexts. Beyond linguistic gains, PBL has been argued to support the development

of broader life skills including communication, critical thinking, mutual respect, and self-regulation through collaborative work toward a shared, meaningful outcome (Hicham, 2024; Song et al., 2024). Studies combining PBL with video-based or multimodal production tasks in EFL settings report gains in student confidence, autonomy, and critical-skills development, while also noting that some students experience difficulty with the increased complexity of producing both spoken and written output simultaneously underscoring the importance of structured scaffolding within authentic, multimodal project work (Pamuji et al., 2025).Project-based approaches have also been shown to significantly improve EFL undergraduates' writing performance specifically, through enhanced idea generation, organization, and collaboration on real-world tasks (Andargie et al., 2025).

News and Media-Based EFL Instruction

A closely related study is that conducted by Tseng (2018), who investigated the integration of a News English course at a Taiwanese private university. The research involved 33 intermediate EFL learners who completed individual weekly mini-news projects and the final project was a collaborative news video production. Results found that the use of online news media in an EFL course in a task-based environment, where students were required to use the four skills, developed student positive attitudes towards the course and contributed to an integrated rather than compartmentalized skills learning.

Similarly, in the Asian context, Gong (2023) carried out a semester-long, quasi-experimental study comparing an experimental class receiving weekly peer-assisted sharing of online English news with a control class receiving traditional instruction among Chinese university ESL learners. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach that consisted of standardized proficiency tests and semi-structured interviews, the study demonstrated statistically significant advancement in reading, and writing performance of those involved, with comparatively modest enhancement in the listening skill.

More broadly, it was argued that incorporating newspapers and broadcast news into ESL/EFL classrooms exposes learners to a rich and authentic input of vocabulary and sentence structures not found in textbook materials, and it also enhances learners' cross-cultural communicative competence and motivation by involving them in current, socially oriented issues (Manasrah & Al-Khawaldeh, 2014; Jain, 2024). This synergy is further confirmed by the latest studies located in the news-EFL context: Luo and Xie (2025), using a systemic functional linguistics (SFL) approach to examine Chinese EFL learners' news critical literacy. The findings revealed that discursive technology, contextual orientation, and critical awareness were interacting factors for learners' negotiation of news texts. Although they were concerned with critical evaluation (rather than production), this finding provides indirect, genre-specific support for the claim of the present study that authentic, news-based tasks, production among them, tap into integrated linguistic-cognitive resources rather than isolated, fragmented skills.

Taken together, this body of research suggests that news- and media-based instruction can facilitate productive integrated EFL skill development, although much of the extant empirical foundation, for example, Tseng (2018) and Gong

(2023) is established within East Asian university contexts; the present study contributes to this stream of research by exploring a Jordanian tertiary context and an interview rather than purely written or retold news format.

Foreign Language Anxiety, Confidence, and Self-Efficacy

Foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) has been a focal point of L2 research since Horwitz et al., 1986 seminal work, which framed FLCA as a discrete, context-specific anxiety resulting from the particular challenges of classroom language learning and included elements of communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety. The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed in the study still remains the most widely applied instrument within the domain and has significantly influenced subsequent studies on the association between learner anxiety and speaking and engagement in the L2 classroom.

A considerable number of recent qualitative studies have focused on how EFL learners manage and cope with speaking anxiety. Strategies that were most frequently reported in these studies are (over)practice and preparation; design of classroom activities and environment to be warm, supportive, non-threatening; exposure (to speaking-related tasks) in small, manageable steps; cognitive and emotional coping strategies, such as positive self-talk and reframing anxious thoughts, and emotion regulation (Theriana, 2023). Preparation and rehearsing are common discourses of coping strategies within this literature, a pattern which is mirrored in this study, especially within the sub-theme confidence-through-practice. Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory is a complementary theoretical lens indicating that a person's perceived ability to perform a specific behavior can be influenced by enactive mastery experiences successfully performing the behavior, especially when the behavior is difficult and is perceived to be due to one's own effort. In the L2 context, this would mean that carrying out challenging authentic tasks (e.g., interviewing) successfully can be more than an end as a task performance, but a means of fostering learners' overall confidence and willingness to try their hands on target-language tasks in the future.

Learner Identity and Investment in Language Learning

Norton's (2000, 2013) poststructuralist theory of language learner identity has been influential in the field of second language motivation research, as it reconceptualizes motivation through the notion of investment. Learners' commitment to the language is thus not simply a function of individual ability or a unitary, fixed notion of motivation, but is shaped by the social and personal value attached to language use and by learners' access to desired or imagined identities and communities (Norton, 2000, 2013). When a teaching task provides access to a socially or personally valued identity that of a journalist, broadcaster, or professional interviewer, for example, students may become more deeply invested in the linguistic practices that constitute that identity, with implications for their language development.

This framework is particularly relevant to project-based and role-based language tasks, in which learners are asked to take on a professional or social role beyond that of language learners as such. The present study's identity-shift theme, in which participants described having "thought like a journalist" or performed the role of a television presenter, situates the authentic media project within this broader literature on identity and investment as a motivational mechanism in L2 learning.

Together, this body of literature gives three sources of evidence supporting the design of the current study and its research questions. First, authentic, task- and project-based approaches to teaching are now recognized as being effective for integrated development of EFL skills and fostering learner motivation (Peacock, 1997), which supplies theoretical support for RQ1 and RQ3. Second, instruction based on news and media has been associated with integrated language learning and positive affective changes from anxiety to confidence through practice (Tseng, 2018; Gong, 2023), paralleling results in the current study, but this line of research is still focused largely on East Asian contexts and has rarely specifically addressed interview-based formats. Third, although not explained in this article, theoretical studies in foreign language anxiety, self-efficacy and learner identity (Horwitz et al., 1986; Bandura, 1977; Norton, 2000, 2013) provide complementary explanations for how and why authentic media tasks may facilitate both language and motivational development.

Despite this convergence of supporting evidence, a definite void remains. None has investigated an authentic, interview-driven media production project where EFL learners themselves carry out, tape, and report on interviews with interviewees they select within a Jordanian or wider Arab context of higher education. This study bridges that void, by qualitatively exploring how such a project influences students' perceptions of language growth (RQ1), engagement and motivation (RQ2), and mastery of professional- and media-based abilities (RQ3), further developing the news-based EFL instruction literature into a novel task type, an institutional environment, and a geographic locale.

Beyond addressing this empirical gap, this study contributes to the literature in four further ways. First, it is one of very few investigations focusing on EFL students' perspectives on engagement in an authentic media production project. Second, it fills a critical geographical and contextual gap in the literature by being the first empirical study of authentic media production as a language teaching tool in the context of higher education in Jordan. Third, to extend Project-Based Language Learning (PBLL) theory, it explores the use of this pedagogic approach in the domain of English for Media and Journalism, a speciality that has so far attracted scarce research attention. Fourth, the research may have practical implications for curriculum planners, department chairs, and instructors of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) at Jordanian universities, as it proposes evidence-based recommendations for pedagogical innovation and program enhancement.

Methodology

Research Design

This study was conducted in a Media and Journalism English course offered as part of the Applied English program at Philadelphia University in Amman, Jordan, during the second semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. The course convened for three hours each week over a full semester. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select the research site: the course was chosen because its mandatory, semester-long authentic media production component directly aligned with the study's research questions. Data was collected in two phases: reflective reports were obtained from all participants, while a purposively selected subsample additionally took part in semi-structured interviews to explore further qualitative insight.

Participants

Within the selected research site, all enrolled students were invited to participate, yielding a total sample of N = 60 students, whose English proficiency ranged from intermediate to advanced, as determined by instructor assessment and self-report. Of these, a purposively selected subsample of 20 students chosen as information-rich cases whose reflective reports offered particularly detailed or contrasting perspectives additionally took part in semi-structured interviews.

The Media Production Project

Media production assignment was used to accommodate students' group-based needs in ways similar to the present study. The media production assignment accounted for 20% of students' final course marks. Evaluation criteria addressed both content (relevance, accuracy, and informativeness of the journalistic topic) and language (clarity, fluency, and appropriateness of register for journalistic writing), applied consistently to both the video and the written report.

Materials/Instruments

Two primary instruments were used to generate the study's qualitative data. The first was the written reflective report submitted as part of the media production project, in which students described the production process and the language and professional skills they perceived themselves to have developed. The second was a semi-structured interview protocol, administered to a purposively selected subsample of participants, designed to allow their written reflections to be further explored and clarified.

Data Collection Procedure

The course in which data collection took place was designed around two integrated sets of objectives: content learning objectives and language learning objectives, following Coyle et al.'s (2010) CLIL framework for curriculum design. Content objectives centered on building students' knowledge of news English across a range of current issues, while language objectives targeted the development of specific English language skills through purpose-built tasks and projects. The full

syllabus, which reflects this integration and situates the media production project within the semester's broader instructional design, is provided in Appendix B.

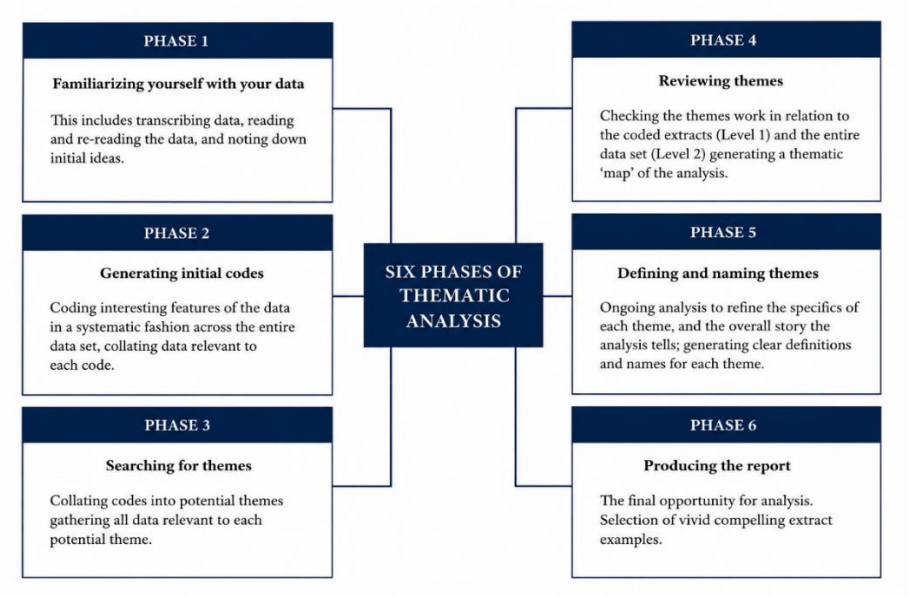
Data was collected in two sequential phases over the course of the semester. In the first phase, all 60 enrolled students completed the media production project, comprising the video piece and the accompanying written reflective report, as a required course assignment; these reflective reports were collected from the full sample at the point of submission. In the second phase, a purposively selected subsample of 20 students, chosen as information-rich cases whose reflective reports offered particularly detailed or contrasting perspectives, was invited to take part in individual semi-structured interviews. These interviews were conducted in person, lasting approximately 50 minutes, and took place after the reflective reports had been reviewed, allowing the interview questions to probe and clarify points raised in each participant's report. Prior to students' participation, all interviewees were provided with an information sheet outlining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty.

Data Analysis Procedures

Qualitative data from both the written reflective reports and the interview transcripts were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2019) six-phase reflexive thematic analysis procedure. Consistent with this reflexive TA approach, coding was treated as an interpretive, researcher-informed process rather than a search for pre-existing themes, with theme development proceeding iteratively rather than through a fixed coding frame, as elaborated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1

Thematic Analysis Phases (Braun and Clarke, 2006)



Results

Regarding students' perceived effectiveness of the integrated, project-based English for Media and Journalism course, results from the semi-structured interviews are reported under three major headings: (a) the perceived effectiveness for students' language development, (b) the perceived engagement and motivation among students while participating in media production tasks (e.g., videos, news reports and TV programs), and (c) the perceived development of EFL learners' professional and media-related skills. Participant quotations are identified using the abbreviation US (University Student) followed by a numerical identifier (e.g., US1, US11).

RQ2: Students' Perceived Effectiveness for Language Development

In response to the first research question, *in what ways do authentic media production projects influence EFL learners' language skills development in an English for the Media and Journalism course at a private university in Jordan*? the analysis of the semi-structured interviews generated two themes that illustrate students' perceived impact of task-based English for Media and Journalism projects on their language development. Each theme is presented below, supported by representative excerpts from the interviews.

Impact 1: Confidence Development Through Practice

The majority of university students felt that they had gone through a process of what might be described as stages of initial discomfort or reluctance toward greater confidence. They explained this transformation as a result of practice preparations rather than inspiration at a particular point in time. As one of the participants noted,

"Since I had practiced many times, I was more comfortable and confident while I was speaking and asking questions during the interview" (US 1).

It was a much more sudden change for US12, who shared that:

"The Media project really pushed us out of our comfort zones and made us more confident in interviewing and journalistic skills" (US 12).

Other participants had similar experiences. Such as US14 who reported that:

"By practicing and performing the script before the camera, I gained considerable confidence in public speaking" (US 14).

Also, US 15 mentioned that:

"I thought one of the difficulties for me was trying to keep the conversation going naturally, but I felt more at ease as the interview went on" (US 15).

These stories highlight once more the importance of sustained involvement in and recursive practice of a particular performance in building confidence and communicative competence.

Impact 2: Development across receptive and productive language skills

Participants also agreed that the project enhanced a variety of language skills, such as reading, writing, speaking, and vocabulary all at once, as opposed to the advancement of one single skill.

The authentic nature of the Media assignment meant that students were required to speak, listen, read and write from the beginning to the end of the project. This resulted in general language development. As an example, US,1, US2 and US 13 detailed that,

"This was a good experience that helped me to study and practice English by talking, listening, reading, and writing and enhanced our oral communication and pronunciation."

US12 claimed the following:

"This task also helped me to improve my English pronunciation, speed of speaking and communication skills and made me easier to listen more effectively in real world too!" US 12

In conclusion, these responses reveal that EFL students at Philadelphia University-Jordan anticipated several language gains through involvement in the authentic media production project. The most prominent finding to emerge across the participants was the enhancing of multiple language skills at once (i.e., speaking, listening, and writing), rather than the improvement in one single skill. This implies that the task-based, integrated-skills approach of the project may have contributed to promoting cross-skill development in media English, which contrasts markedly with the typical, reception-based media English teaching. Increased confidence in oral communication also emerged as a frequently reported and closely related outcome. Participants attributed this improvement not only to the final recorded performance itself but also to the process of preparation, repeated practice, and practice leading up to the recording.

RQ2: Students' Perceived Effectiveness for Engagement and Motivation

In response to the second research question, how do EFL learners view their motivation and engagement in media production tasks (TV shows, videos, and news reports)? the analysis of the semi-structured interviews generated four themes, which illustrate students' perceptions on the influence of the task-based English for Media and Journalism project on their engagement, motivation and emotional experiences. Below are each of these themes in detail.

Impact 1: Affective Barriers and Emotional Engagement

It is also the case that although university students presented a very positive image of the experience, all participants reported feeling anxious. These emotional

trials were particularly pronounced in rehearsal and live interviews, which students were required to perform publicly and on-the-spot to speak. For example, US1 stated that:

"One of the things I struggled with was being nervous while we were recording," US1

US8 reported that the task made her nervous, especially at the prospect of conducting the interview, and organizing it, *"I was so nervous! while asking questions and organizing the interview."*

Similarly, US3 considered the emotional nature of the experience to be architectural:

"I went through personal anxiety during the process, and it made me realize how vital natural chemistry is to a good flow of conversation."

Although these emotional challenges initially had a negative impact on students' performance, the respondents generally perceived them as temporary impediments that they were able to overcome through active participating. The tension between anxiety and growing confidence indicates that engagement in the real media task proved deep emotional involvement, and that such participation evoked is a profound emotional engagement, eventually driving personal growth and enhanced self-confidence

Impact 2: Professional Identity Formation

Another prevalent theme among the respondents was representing professional media identities. Respondents commented frequently that they felt like journalists, presenters or interviewers as they worked on the project. This sense of role immersion seemed to increase students' engagement in the tasks and the authenticity of the learning process. For instance, US1 insisted that: "*This project has made me think more like a journalist and made me more confident when I speak English in real-life situations.".* Similarly, US 14 noted that one had to *"learn to have comfortable body language as a real television presenter* ". Several participants related these experiences to coming professional situations. For example, US19 stated that *"this project has definitely helped build my confidence in interviewing, reporting, and using language for professional media production",* and US 20 reported that *"this assignment made me think more like a journalist."*

These results suggest that the assigned authentic media production task enabled learners to imagine themselves as professionals in communicative roles and in so doing enhanced both engagement and motivation.

Impact 3: Content-Based Engagement and Interpersonal Learning

The most common method was "*learning from interviewees*" and deep listening or reading the interviews. Consistently, the majority of the participants discussed acquiring new information, views, or cultural knowledge from their interviewee. For example, US13 explained that:

"After conducting the interview, I started to know more about Chinese culture and the contrast between living in China and living in Jordan."

US15 reported that "I *got more information about the differences and similarities between Jordanian and British culture."* To be sure, there were profounder intellectual and personal learning experiences described by some participants. For instance, US 16 reflected that:

"Came away with a strong understanding of the role media and journalism play as a mirror for cultural identity."

At the same time, US17 emphasized that: *"Dr. Mohammad's insights enabled me to understand the significance of balancing theory with practical application and adapting educational methods to modern realities."."*

These answers suggest that the participants were not simply learning a language, but were also interacting with ideas, cultures and professional experiences in ways that made the project more personally meaningful.

Impact 4: Aspirational and Motivational Impact

For a smaller number of participants, the Media and Journalism project had a stronger impact on their personal dreams and future plans. After hearing the experiences and views of interviewees, students stated that they were prompted to think about their own academic and career paths. For instance, one participant commented on their interviewee, "*his words made me consider more seriously my academic and future career goals"* (US8). This shows a straightforward incentive effect. Similarly, US17, *"this experience improved my academic understanding of language learning and strengthened my perspective on innovation in education*. Despite being less frequently reported, these comments indicate that genuine media creation tasks can affect students' aspirations for the future and foster enduring motivation development.

RQ3: Professional and Media-Related Skills

In response to the third research question, in what ways can authentic media production projects contribute to the development of EFL learners' professional and media skills? the analysis of the semi-structured interviews generated six themes that described student perceptions of the impact of the

authentic media production project on their professional and media-related capabilities. Below are these thematic findings in detail.

Impact 1: Professional Communication and Flow Management

One of the most significant results of the media production activities was the acquisition of professional communicative competence in interview and reporting situations. Learning how to ask the right questions, keeping the conversation flowing and having a trained but natural conversation were some of the things they picked up. This encompassed both language for interaction and a greater awareness of what is linguistically required by professional interviewing. For example, US1 came to realize that: *I learned how to ask professional questions and confidently talk to people.".* Just as US19 commented on how to formulate "*professional interview questions"* and the way to "*structure a formal dialogue.".* They also stressed the need to stay natural not become staged. As an illustration, US15 confessed to having a hard time *"keeping the conversation flowing naturally,*" and US18 had a similar aspiration: to get the report to "*sound natural and professional*." These narratives reveal that students gained fundamental media communication strategies related to interviewing, reporting and keeping an on-going interaction in professional situations.

Impact 2: Organizational and Production Management Skills

University students expressed similar concerns and insights about the organizational and procedural aspects of media production. These were how to schedule interviews, how to work within time limit, how to organize reports, and how to deal with the editing. US3 characterized these challenges as *"rushing the early planning phase*," but for US20 these problems related to "*organizing the interview and… preparing the podcast."* Technical Production was also noted. She also mentioned that she had to "*cut down on the time during recording and editing."* These results indicate that the project supported the acquisition of fundamental media production management skills such as planning, sequencing, and post-production arrangement.

Impact 3: Identity Shift and Professional Role Adoption

One theme that emerged among the participants was the development of journalistic and media producer identities. Students often talked about how it changed their sense of self to that of a journalist, a presenter, or a media producer. US1 noted that "*This project made me think more like a journalist",* while US14 spoke of learning to employ "*body language that is comfortable as a real television presenter*." Likewise, US19 commented that the experience gave him increased confidence in *"interviewing, reporting and using language for professional media production"* and US20 reported that she "*thought as a real journalist."* These

results suggest that engagement in authentic media activities encouraged students to adopt professional roles that fostered higher engagement and language use congruent with real-world media identities.

Impact 4: Interpersonal and Content-Based Learning as Journalistic Practice

Participants often felt that they were able to learn from those interviewed and so they had a high level of engagement with the topic. Learning went far beyond language learning; it was cultural, social and professional. For example, US13 was exposed to "*Chinese culture and contrasts between life in China and Jordan,"* and US15 contemplated *"the differences and likenesses between Jordanian and British culture*." More sophisticated reflections were also evident. US16 discussed learning to *"see media and journalism as a reflection of cultural identity,"* and US17 spoke of the importance of *"integrating theory and practical application."* These results imply that the interview format encouraged productive intellectual engagement, thereby establishing information acquisition and interpretation as core journalistic practices.

Impact 5: Emerging Specialist Media Skills

Apart from general communication and management, some of the participants also showed initial recognition towards more specialized media-making techniques. These ranged from how to build rapport to awareness of register, non-verbal features and journalistic writing strategies. For instance, US3 stressed the significance of establishing rapport to *break the ice* and "*reduce anxiety*", and US14 drew attention to the application of "*easy, simple, clean and professional English words for journalism*." In the same vein, US16 spoke of "*structuring a cohesive news report under journalist guidelines*" *and* US7 and US 14 mentioned eye contact and body language to convey meaning in televised presentation. Even though some of these competences were mentioned by only a handful of the participants, they still suggest the formation of media literacy skills relevant to the working environments of media professionals.

Impact 6: Obtaining Technical and Reflective Production Skills

Finally, participants reported that they were led to develop potential technical production skills and reflective practice. These were such things as video editing, audio management, and an awareness of production quality. For instance, US13 noted difficulties in "*editing the interview video*," whereas US 16 stressed the need to distinguishing between *"background ambient sounds from concrete sound effects during recording*". Further, a number of participants evidenced strategic moments of self-correction and future-oriented coping. US18 reflected on how to work on *"eye contact and body language"* and on the use of "*supplementary visual materials,"* and US3 on the need to prepare the interview schedules in a more rigid

fashion. These results indicate that participation in media production activities facilitated development of technical skills as well as reflective professional practice.

Discussion

This study contributes to a limited body of research examining the impact of a whole-task, authentic English for Media and Journalism production project on EFL students' perceived language improvement, engagement and motivation, and professional and media skills development, as captured through reflective reports and interviews. Thematic analysis of the 20 semi-structured interviews resulted in 12 codes, structured around the study's three research theme, while the 60 reflective reports served as supplementary data source for triangulation process (Creswell, 2013), providing additional context that supported and corroborated the interview-based findings. This discussion is organized by research questions, with findings compared against the literature where relevant.

In response to the first research question — In what ways do authentic media production projects influence EFL learners' language skills development in an English for Media and Journalism course at a private university in Jordan? the findings showed that the strongest general pattern in the data was a concurrent increase in language skills, identified in 13 of 20 participants' accounts. Participants rarely described individual language skills as developing independently; rather, they conceptualized speaking, writing, and listening as an integrated set of competencies that progressed simultaneously through their engagement with the media project. This pattern suggests that the integrated nature of the project — which required participants to conduct research, carry out interviews, record content, and write up a news story — promoted multiple language skills (reading, writing, speaking, and pronunciation) concurrently, rather than producing gains confined to a single skill. This finding is consistent with the theoretical basis for project-based language learning put forward by Stoller (2002), who argues that project work brings the four skills together within a single purposeful outcome and therefore requires learners to develop them concurrently rather than separately. Read alongside whole-language treatments of integrated skill development (Goodman, 1986; Freeman & Freeman, 1992), the present results offer empirical evidence, from a real-world media-production setting, in support of the theoretical argument that skills co-evolve when practiced within a meaningful communicative task rather than when pursued through isolated, decontextualized drills. This synergy is also consistent with the broader news-EFL literature reviewed above. For instance, Luo and Xie (2025) found that discursive technology, contextual orientation, and critical awareness functioned as interacting factors in EFL learners' negotiation of news texts, though their study addressed critical reception of news rather than its production. The present findings extend this pattern from reception into production: where Luo and Xie (2025) observed integration in how learners read and critically evaluated news, participants in the present study demonstrated a parallel integration, consistently describing speaking, writing, and listening as developing together rather than in isolation. This convergence across reception and production suggests that engagement with the news genre, regardless of directionality, may be a distinctively integrative task type for EFL skill development a comparison that also sharpens the contribution of the

present study, since, as noted in the literature review, this line of research has rarely addressed production-based or interview-driven formats.

Confidence-building through practice was another dominant theme, identified in 9 of 20 participants' accounts. Participants consistently described confidence not as something achieved immediately upon task completion, but as something built through repeated practice: iterative rounds of recording, questioning, and presenting appeared to produce a gradual shift toward greater ease. This pattern is consistent with the FLCA literature reviewed above, which builds on Horwitz et al.'s (1986) identification of communication apprehension and fear of negative valuation as prominent, learner-specific sources of anxiety in oral tasks. It also echoes Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory, in which enactive mastery experiences successfully performing a challenging, effortful behavior — build a learner's perceived capability for future performance; the present participants' accounts of gradually increasing ease across successive rounds of recording and interviewing closely mirror this mechanism. Recent empirical evidence confirms that public speaking anxiety among EFL students operates at multiple stages, encompassing both anticipatory (process) anxiety and in-the-moment performance anxiety (Halimah & Nuraida, 2025). This distinction is consistent with the present findings: because rehearsal in this study addressed the *process* stage, the drafting, planning, and repeated low-stakes attempts leading up to the final recording rather than only the performance itself, it may have targeted the anxiety-generating stage most amenable to intervention through repeated exposure.

In response to the second research question - in what ways does the authentic media production project influence EFL learners' engagement and motivation in an English for Media and Journalism course at a private university in Jordan? the evidence was relatively scant compared to that for RQ1 and RQ3, a trend that itself calls for methodological reflection (see Limitations). Where evidence was available, however, it was substantial. Interpersonal and content learning was the most common RQ2-relevant theme, identified in 13 of 20 participants' accounts, though with considerable variation in intensity. This theme related to moments when participants felt they had learned something, gained a new perspective, or obtained insight from their interviewee — learning that participants did not frame as a language-skill gain. For a small number of participants (US 8, US 11, and US 17), this expanded into an aspirational impression: the interview experience was described as having shaped their own academic or professional outlook. This suggests that for at least a few students, motivation to participate in the project stemmed not from the language task itself but from the genuine human contact it brought about — a dynamic that parallels Norton's (2000, 2013) formulation of investment, which reframes learners' commitment to a target language not as a fixed individual trait but as something shaped by the social and personal value they attach to language use, and by their access to desired or imagined identities and communities. This is consistent with recent applications of Darvin and Norton's (2015) expanded investment model in EFL contexts: Rahaman (2025), in a narrative case study of EFL learning in Bangladesh, similarly found that

engagement with English deepened when connected to imagined future identities — such as future

In response to the third research question — in what ways does the authentic media production project develop EFL learners' professional and media-based abilities in an English for Media and Journalism course at a private university in Jordan? RQ3 proved the most richly differentiated of the three, accounting for the largest number of distinct codes (6 of 12). Professional communication and flow management, the ability to conduct a natural-sounding professional exchange, manage conversational flow, and avoid stilted delivery was the most frequently cited RQ3 theme (12 of 20 participants). This suggests that the interview format was broadly effective in developing this specific pragmatic competence, regardless of participants' chosen topic or interviewee. This finding is consistent with recent experimental evidence: Anbarshahi and Yeganeh (2026) found that Iranian EFL learners exposed to form-focused, real-world tasks significantly outperformed a control group on speaking fluency measures, alongside gains in motivation. While their design was quantitative and controlled, the convergence with the present qualitative findings suggests that structured exposure to authentic, naturally organized talk can measurably improve learners' management of turn-taking, sequencing, and conversational coherence a pattern that recurred across participants regardless of interview topic.

Beyond this core competence, several infrequently reported but conceptually discrete abilities were observed, indicating that the real-world media-based format encouraged the development of a wider set of professional skills than those traditionally acquired via standard speaking activities. This included genre and register awareness: participants recognized that broadcast English is simplified and demonstrated awareness of journalistic conventions in news delivery. Nonverbal and paralinguistic competence was also emphasized by participants, particularly the use of eye contact and body language during presentations. Moreover, the interview data demonstrated the development of translation and interlingual awareness, participants discussed the difficulty of translating culturally bound language as well as technical audio/visual production skills, such as the intentional use of ambient and scripted sound in media production.

Such a diversification of emergent competences is consistent with recent research on digital multimodal composing in EFL contexts. Zhang and Peng (2025), for instance, found that learners' video artifacts reflected a cluster of literacies including audience awareness, semiotic awareness, and genre awareness that extended beyond the task's explicit linguistic goals, suggesting that authentic production tasks may encourage learners to develop a wider range of literacies than anticipated at the outset of instructional design. Similarly, US 16's interlingual awareness and translation practice align with classroom-based research on EFL students' use of literal versus paraphrastic translation strategies to preserve the emotive and cultural connotations of source texts (Ymeri & Vula, 2025), yet it is admittedly a singular example within the dataset that would require further data

student-selected topics and modalities expand (e.g., participants using multilingual source material, or producing more extensively edited audio/video content), the project may elicit an even wider array of media-production literacies than captured in the current codebook. This suggests that the learning outcomes of such authentic projects may be, to some extent, emergent and topic-specific rather than predetermined by task design a point I return to in the Pedagogical Implications section below.

Two participants (P3, P18) also exhibited strategic self-correction: they did more than merely state a problem; they identified a specific, prospective revision to their process (e.g., checking interviewees more carefully, rehearsing more, and bringing audiovisual materials). This is a relatively sophisticated metacognitive move, consistent with self-regulated learning (SRL) models, in which Tran and Tran (2021) identified iterative planning, monitoring, and evaluation as effective components of project-based EFL tasks more generally. Its occurrence, even within this small subset of the sample, indicates that the reflective-report component of the task may itself be fostering a transferable professional habit (iterative self-evaluation), in addition to the language and media competences more immediately targeted by the task.

Conclusion

This study investigated EFL university students' perceptions of language learning, motivation, and professional development in an authentic, integrated media production project. Three main themes were identified from a thematic analysis of reflective reports by all 60 students participating in an English for Media and Journalism module, and these were supplemented by semi-structured interviews with a purposively selected subsample of 20 participants. First, participants reported improvement in the range of skills and described progress in all four skills or in subsets of the four skills (listening, reading, writing, and speaking), with confidence-building identified as a recurring practice-dependent mediator of these improvements. Second, where motivational aspects could be identified in participants' reflections, these tended to be tied to the meaningful, human interaction of the interview itself rather than treated as separate from it (e.g., language problem-solving occurring within the interaction rather than in preparation for it) suggesting that the authenticity and personal relevance of the project, not merely its communicative demands, may be central to its motivational appeal. Third, it seemed that the project engaged a broader and more nuanced set of professional and media skills than a typical classroom speaking task would ever elicit, such as interview pragmatics and genre consciousness, and, in a few instances, translation awareness and technical audio/video production know-how. Taken together, these findings point to the potential of authentic, project-based media activities to foster the development of both language and job skills in the EFL setting and suggest that there are meaningful differences between learners in terms of which aspect of the experience linguistic, affective, or professional is most salient for their own perception of learning.

These findings are useful for designing similar English for Media and Journalism modules or other content-based language modules. 1 Task authenticity and topic selection should be maintained: The participants' motivation to participate in the project was often connected to the topic of their self-chosen interview (e.g., migration, cultural identity, career advice) and much less to the language task in the abstract, so teachers planning similar projects are advised to make sure that students have a real choice as to the topic and interviewee and do not impose one topic type across all students, as relevance of content to personal experience seems to be a rather powerful motivator in sustaining depth of reflective engagement. Second, the structured rehearsal aspect should be built-in as opposed to a single, one-time performance: the reported gains in confidence were consistently ascribed to process of practicing and rehearsing and not the end recorded performance, so course designs that follow through on the rehearsal arc (e.g., by way of low-stakes rehearsal opportunities mock interviews with peers, for example, or run-throughs of an interview prior to final recording) are more likely to prove supportive of confidence building, a process this project appears to hinge on, rather than opting to contemplate the option of rehearsing as " preparation " to be taken up or not by students at their own pace. Third, the reflective report itself could be utilized as a learning tool rather than simply an assessment mechanism: the development of strategic self-correction in a portion of the reflections (participants pinpoint a particular problem and offers a focused, forward-looking resolution) indicates that reflective writing may foster metacognitive and self-evaluative tendencies that have utility beyond language acquisition per se and reflective prompts may be reformulated so that they more explicitly invite this type of error to revision narrative (e.g. , What would you do differently next time and why?) as opposed to more broad “what did you learn” framing, a revision that might not only increase the number of participants who take up this metacognitive move but also bolster the evidentiary foundation for RQ2, which was relatively under-represented in the current data.

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Use of Anuvadini AI for Soft Skills Training: A Move From Assistance to Autonomy for Young Adults

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Abstract

Despite growing interest in the field of digital andragogy as a framework to support self-paced learning of adult learners, its implications in India remain unexplored. There have been many scholarly articles published with regard to the examination of human-AI collaboration as a helpful tool to teach and learn a language. But in the context of India, similar studies cannot be applied with a unidirectional approach, given the multilinguistic population of the nation. Research shows that what dominates in the Indian classrooms of undergraduate degree programs is the soft skills training that tries to use the bilingual method of instruction wherever necessary. Therefore, with regard to the young adults pursuing professional studies in India, there has been an attempt to create an AI-infused space with adaptive technology to cater to the needs of a multivocal audience has manifested in the form of Anuvadini AI. Anuvadini AI is an initiative of the Ministry of Education (MoE) to create an artificially intelligent platform with a human in the loop. In this study, the offerings of Anuvadini AI platform will be examined to further investigate its applicability in the field of soft skills training imparted to young adults. The thrust of the study's methodology will be on design-based research that will propose a framework for developing autonomous learning styles of the target group through conceptualizing and iteratively refining the andragogical recommendations. The current research will serve to be pioneering work on studying the implications of Anuvadini AI for delivering quality digital education for all.

Keywords: Anuvadini AI, young adults, soft skills training, digital andragogy, autonomous learning

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Introduction

The term 'English' has acquired so many connotations in India that one gets baffled to admit or deny any underpinnings attached to the language - technically, a vernacular language of England, historically destined to become the global lingua franca. The question of whether global English is necessary is not the central focus of this discussion, especially when it is here to stay for at least a century more; but it also does not lie in the scope of this paper to predict the future of the English language in its entirety. What matters today is the present status of the language and its implications in the near future, predominantly for the young adults of India. Possessing an ease to use and communicate in English is an inevitable soft skill of the 21st century. Even if one does not speak English as their first language or their primary language (L1), it is indispensable to become comfortable with English as a soft skill in order to manage professional communication and other skill-oriented tasks in formal contexts. For this purpose, there has to be a system to ensure seamless training of essential soft skills to young adults. India being a multilingual nation, there always remains some amount of obscurity regarding the medium of instruction of professional courses, especially in the higher grades. In India, the conventional form of teacher-directed instruction continues to prevail even for adult learners and there is hardly any discussion around student-centered pedagogy or self-directed learning styles of multilingual adults. Therefore, the current study earnestly intends to discuss the use of technological tools in Indian HEIs (Higher Education Institutions) to impart soft skills training to the diverse learners.

Literature Review

A person is confident knowing at least one language in the world. What motivates people to learn another language can differ from person to person; though most often there are professional needs that govern one's requirement to be bilingual. However, wrestling with more than two languages can be quite overwhelming at times (Kasparian & Steinhauer, 2017). Because, "children who are exposed to two languages, even from birth, do not necessarily grow up to being bilingual adults" (Hoff, 2021). There is a plenitude of studies being undertaken to establish the proposition that all infants who are exposed to two or more than two languages from their childhood do not achieve native-like competency in all their target languages (Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams, 2013; Meisel, 2019; Yip & Matthews, 2007). On the contrary, there are ample studies that prove otherwise. The roots of easily navigating between two languages and being able to identify oneself as a bilingual come from the infancy of most young adults (Byers-Heinlein et al., 2010). Kousaie et al. (2017) explore the positive impacts of simultaneous learning of two languages from birth; they state how intrinsic functional connectivity and cognitive control get augmented because of the same. There is undoubtedly no dearth of literature on the positive effect of bilingualism as well as multilingualism on cognition (Williams et al., 2021).

There is technically no need to argue against the existence of a constructive role played by multilingual situations. Because in such situations, the individual's mother tongue or the native language functions as their L1; the use of the second language (L2) which is any language other than the L1, is most often required in formal or professional contexts. However, in a country like India, where English is

the associate official language of the nation, students grapple with learning concepts in English as they move from secondary to higher secondary school education. In the context of Indian HEIs, all professional courses are taught in English to the multilingual students who may not always be comfortable learning academic terms in a language which is not the language in which they think. Often, the blame goes on the poor teaching of English in India right from the primary school education (Dixit & Padwad, 2018; Mandal, 2017; Michael & Kennedy, 2024). It was in fact, from 2019 itself that conferences and symposiums in India started discussing as well as seriously deliberating upon the use of technology for the purpose of modernizing the Indian ESL/EFL classrooms. Scholarly articles and dissertations started shedding light on the integration of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) into Indian HEIs (Disalva & Vijaykumar, 2019). But, the need of the hour is to shift the focus from what has happened in the past to what can be constructively done in the present as well as forthcoming years to secure the future of Indian young adults seeking jobs at the national and international forums. Learners mostly have a very neutral attitude towards their L2 (Esmaeili et al., 2022), but if the same second language becomes a barricade in their career growth, then there is a higher possibility of attracting a pessimistic outlook towards the use of L2 in andragogical contexts. Where linguistic diversity majorly contributes in the identity formation of individuals and, operation of English as the only medium of instruction in the educational setups gets problematized, then the integration of AI tools in English classrooms to fix grammatical errors and develop L2 skills becomes inevitable (Salman et al., 2026).

Indian HEIs serve linguistically diverse students; for instance, about 80% of them identify themselves as non-English speakers (Rukmini, 2019). Even today, standardized content fails to reach all learners in their preferred language, posing an impediment to engagement and equity. This barrier widens when adolescents, at the cusp of their adulthood, fail to refer to technical content in their L1; because, as young learners, they are in a pedagogically dependent situation where classroom decisions are simply informed to learners. Once this group of learners enter colleges and universities, the same process transforms into group discussions and self-directed classroom learning practices whereby, the young adults have to make informed choices regarding their career. The most critical period for adult learners therefore, is the age group of 18-24 years. This age group bridges secondary and tertiary education, requiring autonomy and real-world relevance in learning. Unlike children, adult learners expect self-direction and practical application (Knowles et al., 2015). Employers emphasize soft skills (communication, collaboration, adaptability) as critical for career readiness. The National Bureau of Economic Research notes that soft skills (communication, critical thinking, teamwork) are "fundamental drivers of long-term employability" (Deming, 2018). However, traditional curricula often underemphasize these, highlighting a need for new pedagogical approaches and thereby better andragogical frameworks. Recent advances position Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools (translation software, conversation agents) as "co-pilots" in learning (Zaim et al., 2025). To harness their benefits ethically, experts stress that AI outputs require without a Human-in-the-Loop (HITL) model, "ethical and equitable AI implementation is simply impossible" (UNESCO, 2023). This underscores the dual goal of enhancing learning while maintaining human oversight.

Even before discussing the ways and means through which facilitators can try and ensure the use of AI ethically and equitably, there is another perspective that this research paper would like to highlight for the careful consideration of English instruction in HEIs. The researchers want to argue that it will not be an easy task to change the mindset of the diverse learners and make them feel valued even if they are not proficient in the use of the English language. The animosity young adults have regarding a misnomer that fluency in English language implies greater intelligence and higher level of education is alarming as well as disturbing. A young adult, in his blog post, recently voiced his discontent over the language divide English creates in a linguistically diverse country like India by considering English not as a mere language but indeed a judgment (Kachrapappu, 2026). Kachrapappu (2026) observes that perfectionism mostly becomes an enemy when it comes to speaking English in India due to the fear of mockery. Sadly, most of the learners do not realize that one's brain does not learn a language by just studying the rules of grammar; it learns by using it, embracing the initial discomfort, and thereby learning from the mistakes. Language is undoubtedly one of the most powerful tools of expression and has to be accepted as a medium of communication instead of a threat. Hence, if the central objective of higher education is to build individuals' capacity to engage with ideas effectively and improve their interpersonal skills, especially in such networks where people tend to think alike; a lot of research and further investigation is expected to center around what is actually required from education systems in general and language classrooms in particular (Brown et al., 2024).

Thus, what nations need is indeed a system of higher education where technology integration into the curriculum takes place seamlessly with an aim to deliver maximized content benefits to the young adult learners. So, to extend this understanding further, the researchers of the present study would like to highlight the efforts made by the Indian government in this regard. The India-AI Impact Summit 2026 was organized as an international conglomeration on Artificial Intelligence in New Delhi, February, 2026 - this grand meet marked a significant shift in India's AI strategy, moving from purely technical development to a "people-centric" and "impact-oriented" approach. The most talked about "Three Sutras" (Guiding Principles) and "Seven Chakras" (Thematic Areas) were the most crucial outcomes of the Summit. The three sutras formed the foundational pillars namely – people, planet and progress, which were translated into action via seven interconnected working groups as the seven chakras, namely – human capital; inclusion for social empowerment; safe & trusted AI; resilience, innovation, and efficiency; science; democratizing AI resources; AI for Economic Development and Social Good. The Summit harped on inclusivity through the dictum "AI for ALL" which indeed aligns with the scope of the current research. The researchers sought to analyze an instructional environment tailored for young adults' education which relies on a multi-tiered technological stack acting as a primary andragogical catalyst emphasizing on the transition from assistance to autonomy. This study on the use of Anuvadini AI is therefore, the first of its kind to talk about the need of educational research in Indian HEIs for the training and development of soft skills through Anuvadini AI.

Product Overview and Andragogical Transformation

Anuvadini AI in the current research is proposed to be an AI assistant that can guide learners on career pathways as it mirrors soft-skills acquisition through a total of 22 languages of the nation as well as the globe viz. Bengali, English, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Turkish, and Malay. Anuvadini AI has an effect much broader than translation, as it also deals with the systemic issues in the multilingual Indian environment. Access to quality education has been low as 80 percent of the population is a non-English speaker, which worsens the skill gap and unemployment situation. Anuvadini AI is a democratized approach to learning, where the translated textbooks, research papers, and online courses are translated into regional languages, which increase the understanding and performance of millions of students in tier-2 and tier-3 cities. In health, it can be used to help patients communicate with doctors across the dialect, which allows giving appropriate diagnoses and treatment. Global trade provides businesses with a competitive advantage; the company exporters can localize product descriptions, negotiate contracts and sell internationally by way of avoiding language barriers. Services provided by the government can be more open and the policy guidelines and announcement to the public can even extend to isolated regions. This kind of improved skilling has the potential to decrease unemployment and create diverse workforces to substantially raise GDP by eliminating urban-rural gaps. Anuvadini AI thus, combines human-like intelligence and linguistic diversity to bring about digital transformation in India.

Learner autonomy is another trait that the software encourages. It is a multimodal translation software that converts speech-to-text and text-to-speech alongside translating PDFs, PPTs, Word documents, and even live videos and meeting audios. It is here that the learner does not have to depend on any person nor feel the need to seek any professional help that mostly works only if scheduled in a timely manner. The learner can use virtual keyboards, dictation aids, and image-to-text converters that are embedded as facilities in the software itself. As the software is built on Microsoft Cognitive Services, the functions of Natural Language Processing (NLP), speech recognition, and computer vision come along with the software suite. But as the majority of the classes and masses are still unaware of this software, Anuvadini AI needs to train itself more with regard to accuracy which can be guaranteed with more and more frequency. The more users visit and use the AICTE-supported software, the better this Make-In-India platform will serve its target users. However, the researchers have noted that the software is yet to be accessible by one and all in India through a freemium model; but the trial version has already proved its working capacity and is able to successfully execute instant conversion of content and facilitation of bilingual displays.

Prasanna Kumar (2026) notes that the pace at which AI is getting integrated in the educational contexts, it is soon going to be a dire need for educationists to critically examine the way English language pedagogy will be reshaped; particularly the domains of communication and soft skills training. Most studies on AI-integration (Selwyn et al., 2020; Selwyn, 2019) emphasize how AI tools can become an inclusive scaffold if they are channelized and mediated thoroughly by the instructors. In a classroom of 60 students, not all speak the same L1 nor do they

think in a similar fashion. If this is a secondary or high-school setup, then the working styles too would be different for every individual and these students mostly tend to form their social groups based on their matches in terms of language and studying/working styles. There could be exceptional cases but they are always a few. So, the pedagogical implication here is that the instructor should be well aware of the diversity and in order to cater the distinct needs of their classroom, they must illustrate accordingly - they can use translation tools by pulling up side-by-side bilingual materials to boost comprehension and discussion quality in a multilingual class. This makes all learners feel included, especially if the displays are interesting translations (from respective L1s to English) of exit tickets, polls, or video captions on the fly instead of the routine reading materials. If the instructor is able to maintain cultural sensitivity and accuracy with such example-oriented activities, then language learning can be fun and AI drafts in such cases can spearhead the L2 learning process with a greater pace and variety.

Slightly different is the case of young adults - they are not always spoon-fed with dictations or class notes. Most of the time the students in their undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate (PG) classes have to take down running notes. But, in case the instructor's pace is too fast to comprehend, or the facilitator has an MTI (Mother Tongue Influence) which is very common in India, then it becomes complicated to follow the tone as well as the accent of the facilitator. In such cases, if the facilitator enables the 'lecture captions' option in students' native languages, then every student can practice in the language they are most comfortable with (Indian Institute of Technology Madras, 2025). In this regard, a software like Anuvadini AI with its translation feature can promote equity by breaking language barriers. This builds the context for fostering andragogical applications in the classroom; as adult learners are mostly "digital natives" (Prensky, 2001) who expect interactive, tech-integrated instruction. If the facilitator ensures to follow a cooperative model of technology-enabled classroom instruction, then the students may engage more deeply because of active learning strategies and discussion of real-life issues through role-plays and peer-teaching. This demonstrates the transformation from pedagogy to andragogy because, andragogy implies teacher multi-directed adult learning which can get channelized through Anuvadini AI. This framework echoes the works of Esfandiari and Allaf-Akbary (2025) who revealed that AI platforms serve as powerful scaffolding tools for self-directed learning, particularly for introverted individuals who thrive in low-anxiety, autonomous environments. When adult learners engage with AI platforms like Anuvadini AI, the shift from dependent pedagogy to autonomous digital andragogy is mediated by the tool's ability to act as a private cognitive mirror, allowing learners to analyze, categorize, and visually map information at their own pace without instructor intervention.

Methodology

If pedagogy harps on a controlled environment for classroom-engagement, then andragogy builds on the notion of cultivation of concepts on the basis of learner maturity which can be best facilitated with AI tools. As per the tenets of educational design research (McKenney, & Reeves, 2018), using vignettes is one of the core principles for conceptualizing pedagogical shifts before its complete implementation. Hence, the researchers of the current study decided to illustrate the

shift from pedagogy to andragogy by comparing two hypothetical scenarios with the help of figures attached in the Appendices –

Scenario 1: It is a high school context in which the English language teacher wishes to discuss a short story, its plot, characters, themes, and the central message with the students. The teacher can either discuss the whole story in a monotonous monologue and ask the students to simply answer comprehension questions; or have a task-based approach to the teaching of the literary devices and linguistic nuances through a communicative language teaching method whereby students actively participate in the dialogic mode of instruction. As a part of the pedagogical task, the teacher can either use freely downloadable illustrations (Appendix 1 – Fig. 1 and Fig. 2) to make the story more relatable to the target group; or simply provide a blanket story board (Appendix 1 – Fig. 3) to the students and ask them to work in groups and fill in the details as per the progression of the plot. This makes the whole pedagogical process very interesting.

Scenario 2a: This is the very first class of English Communication in the UG level BTech or BSc program. To check the comprehension skills of the students, the instructor gives a short descriptive essay on Hampi – a city in Karnataka, India. The students are asked to read the passage and make notes of the same in the form of a mind map. For the sake of time management as well as classroom management, the instructor divides the class into groups of four or five and, asks each group to create one mind map that can be submitted during the class time itself. Even then, the mental schematic representations that get manifested in the form of concrete mind maps are varied in nature. These artifacts are initial instances of self-directed learning. Each qualitative evidence becomes a unique submission (Appendix 2a – Figures 4-6) reinstating the fact that different learners will carry out the same task differently.

Scenario 2b: It is a Communicative English class in an Engineering College where undergraduate students are still in the first year of their formal training of skills. The facilitator wishes to introduce a digital platform that can be used as a multitasking tool to benefit students with diverse L1s and learning styles. In a dialogic mode of instruction, both the teacher and the students discuss the software named Anuvadini AI as well as its application in the Indian classrooms. As an extension of this discussion, the facilitator asks the target group to represent their ideas related to the use and practicality of the software for the young adults studying in Indian HEIs. Every learner, as per their comprehension capacity and learning style, will have a unique way of creating a crisp visual representation of the impact of Anuvadini AI in the Indian classrooms. To have a better understanding of how this task will get manifested in the classroom, the researchers of this study have made a modest attempt in exemplifying the process by attaching some manually created infographics in Appendix 2b (Figures 7-9) for reference.

These different kinds of tasks in language teaching can make the whole process more communicative in nature. Such tasks, according to Littlewood (1981), become the basis for developing skills and strategies to use language in order to communicate meaning as effectively as possible in concrete situations. Communication is therefore, the first and the most essential soft skill that young adults are expected to learn even in the 21st century. The most vital takeaway from the above-mentioned scenarios is that technology in general and digital platforms in

particular can provide a platform for the students to collaborate and complete group projects easily and in a hassle-free manner which can further support comprehension and participation with regard to the training of soft skills. And given the user-friendly nature of Anuvadini AI as a tool to help young adult learners practice English through Hindi, Marathi, Telugu, or any other registered language present on the software, it acts as a digital platform that does not allow language to become a barrier. In fact, it aids in promoting regional languages of India that can motivate the learner to feel confident and self-dependent. This shift from dependent pedagogy to autonomous learning strategy is the most important shift for an adult learner which must get manifested in the classroom environment itself. Adult learners prefer self-directed learning that centers around problem-solving principles and are experience-based in nature (Knowles et al., 2015). But at the UG and PG levels, the majority of the facilitators fail to translate this principle into practice. Learners at this stage must be viewed as self-motivated and drawing on life experiences. By allowing choice, relating tasks to students' goals, and encouraging collaboration as a learning resource, the real application of andragogy can be witnessed. Given this context, the digital platform of Anuvadini AI can be used fruitfully in the English classrooms of HEIs which can greatly benefit the young adult learners. The researchers would now conceptually explore the modalities and functions of the digital platform before explicating the framework for developing autonomous learning styles of the target group through Anuvadini AI.

The first and most comprehensive category is 'Anuvadini Translation'. Using a combination of its own in-house Large Language Model and human linguists, it has produced over 4 lakh publications and translated more than 2 billion pages across 89 domains, all verified through a two-level human validation process. Tools like Chutki (Anuvadini AI, 2026) support instant multilingual writing with voice input, while Bujji **(**All India Council for Technical Education [AICTE], 2026) is described as the world's first patented bulk translation platform. It translates entire books, PDFs, and design files while preserving their original layout. Furthermore, ANANTA, an AI-powered knowledge engine, can process hundreds of pages of documents, videos, and websites and answer questions in the user's own language. The platform also features Voice-Based Form Filling for non-literate citizens, a Dictation Tool with 92% transcription accuracy, and an AI Legal Suite with 35000+ legal terms enabling real time collaboration between judges and transcribers across regional courts. The second category, 'Anuvadini Print', is a browser-based drag and drop publishing studio that allows authors, teachers, and publishers to create professional books, research papers, and magazines without expensive software like Adobe InDesign. It supports LaTeX formulas, real time collaboration and exports in PDF, Word, PNG and SVG formats. Moreover, 'Anuvadini GEO-AI' brings Make-in-India geospatial intelligence to sectors like agriculture, environment and urban planning. By analyzing satellite imagery, it monitors rivers, forests and water bodies, tracks construction progress in real time, and provides crop health and soil condition data directly to farmers empowering smarter, data-driver decisions at a national scale.

The fourth category, 'Anuvadini AI Agents', enables organizations to build intelligent multilingual chatbots trained on their own data, supporting text, voice and speech interactions across industries such as healthcare, banking and education. Additionally, its AI Detection and Surveillance sub-tool covers exam monitoring,

weapon detection, vehicle tracking and occupancy analysis, all built on Make-In-India technology. The fifth category, 'Anuvadini Bharatt', focuses on secure communication through the Hyped Samvadini app, offering end-to-end encrypted messaging, real-time translation across 59 languages, and an SOS emergency alert feature. The Desi AI GenZ Keyboard allows users to type and speak in 50+ languages with smart AI suggestions. Finally, 'Anuvadini Web and Mobile' delivers 75+ enterprise-grade solutions, including the AICTE Internship Portal with 2 crore+ students onboarded, the PRERANA youth leadership platform, and the Eco Clubs for Mission Life initiative reaching over 10 lakh schools across all 38 states and union territories of India.

These are the features of Anuvadini AI that can not only make students explore in a digitally-friendly manner but also allow students to excel in communication skills with some amount of guided learning and sufficient amount of practice. The factors of guidance and motivation play a crucial role in this regard. However, a point here to be noted is that there is a difference between teaching and training. When it comes to training someone, there is an added factor of monitoring the skill-development process alongside guidance and motivation. This paper is particularly interested in exploring the tenets of soft skills training. Because, the researchers firmly believe that, if hard skills like driving, swimming, etc. are 'trained practically' not 'taught theoretically' then, how can soft skills like communication, collaboration, empathy, time management, negotiation and the like be simply taught? It is this major research question that baffled the researchers and thus, made them look for options in the sphere of digital education that could cater to the needs of young adults yearning for soft skills training in an age of artificial intelligence and machine learning.

For soft skills training through Anuvadini AI, the following task-based learning protocols can be designed that simulate authentic classroom tasks:

a. ***Communication:*** In a communication skills class of UG engineering students, ask students to get divided into groups of 5-6 depending on the strength of the class. Additionally, groups can be formed based on their diverse L1s - there can be one group with Telugu as their L1, one group with Marathi as their L1, so on and so forth; there is no harm in having a mixed group of students with various L1s but comfortable with Hindi. Then, give them a paragraph in English that talks about the real-life application of the Fibonacci series. Ask them to translate the same in their respective L1s and discuss within the group the strong points and limitations of the translated piece. Ask them to explain the same in English. This oscillation between the languages will also make the target group more familiar with the concept without making them grapple for communicating their ideas. Throughout this process, the facilitator has to only hand-hold the students with their initial hiccups. Later, the learners will be self-directed and do the needful with their 'creative companion' software.

b. ***Teamwork:*** Cooperation, collaboration, and creativity are the three Cs that rule the world today. Anuvadini AI has two very smart features viz. Bujji and Chutki that have a range of sub-features under them. Under Chutki, one can instantly design content in multiple languages - it is meant for multilingual content creation. Team work is all about coming together, appreciating the differences present within the group, identifying the best ways of working together, and

delivering results within the deadline. So, in a communicative English class meant for any professional course in India, there are tons of writing assignments that UG and PG students struggle with. In this regard, Anuvadini AI's *Chutki* becomes the facilitator that can simply ask designated groups to collaboratively write blogs, notes, or articles as part of formative assessment. However, as part of the summative assessment, the facilitator can in fact, ask the target group to produce educational material on given topics where students get a chance to co-create content with the help of this software. Even researchers across the globe can benefit from this tool which does smart writing with the help of built-in virtual keyboard. The voice input support can allow learners to speak up to 47 minutes to generate content instantly via speech-to-text conversion. The mathematical integration feature is very useful for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) students who need to insert complex formulae and angles into translated technical papers.

c. ***Empathy:*** Anuvadini AI's *Bujji* is indeed the world's first patented platform designed specifically for small businesses. With this tool, not only teachers but even students can aim to publish their own book by translating and editing bulk images embedded inside Words/PDFs/PPTs/Canva/Photoshop/Indesign while preserving their original layout and design integrity. There is no compromise on professional output as the software ensures that the images remain high-quality, structured, clean and print-ready. In order to make optimum use of this tool, the facilitator can bank on Bujji for mass knowledge acquisition. If the cognitive load of the second language is taken off, complex interpersonal concepts such as negotiation tactics and interpersonal leadership can be developed in the target groups' first language. It is in fact, very challenging to cultivate the emotional intelligence of young adults; because, most of them come to HEIs with some fixed mindset and even certain stereotypes that can come in the way of understanding the other person and feeling for the other person who may not be exactly the same as this individual. Understanding individual differences is one thing, but appreciating individual differences is a rarity that hardly gets executed in the classroom surroundings. Given this context, when one learner coming from a rural background has pronunciation issues in English, the other learners cannot scoff at the idea of MTI (Mother Tongue Influence) being predominant in the other's speech. The need is to understand that within Indian English, there are a variety of accents and with practice, it is not so difficult to achieve a comprehensible level of professional English. In this regard, the facilitator can introduce students to Anuvadini AI's video and audio analyzer that can be used to record mock interviews and presentations. These tools provide subtitle generations alongside real-time speech-to-text baselines that can become a powerful mechanism to identify verbal fillers. This software can therefore provide a platform to all kinds of learners to work on their phonological and morphological aspects of the target language and reduce the speech clarity issues where the AI serves as the collaborator rather than replacing student agency.

In this way, communication, teamwork, empathy and adaptability can be fostered within the target group which, if integrated in the teaching-learning mechanism, have the scope to enhance employability skills within learners (Jaiswal, 2020). These activities can ensure pedagogical feasibility and thereby support the

shift towards self-directed learning of adult learners by means of Anuvadini AI. In terms of tool functionality, Anuvadini AI becomes the primary technological enabler, through its ability to bridge the gap between technical comprehension and English language proficiency.

Expected Contributions and Conclusion

The new project by the All-India Council of Technical Education, Anuvadini AI, a path-breaking project is a make-in-India effort by the Ministry of Education. Launched in the framework of the National Education Technology Forum (NETF), this platform has been offered using advanced artificial intelligence to offer a smooth translation of 22 Indian languages as mentioned above. Anuvadini AI removes these barriers by incorporating Microsoft Cognitive Services and based on natural language recognition, speech recognition, computer vision, and machine translation to promote inclusivity and economic development.

Fundamentally, Anuvadini AI provides a collection of easy-to-use tools that can be used in the real world. The flagship *Chutki* tool allows immediate translation of the text, saving the nuances, structure, and context of e-mails to academic notes. *Bujji*, which is a small program to translate documents, works with PDF files, Word files, and images with ease, is an invaluable tool to both students and professionals. In the case of multimedia, Bharat Tube adds voice-overs, subtitles with AI-powered speech recognition, and dubbing to YouTube videos and, Speak Pic turns speech into annotated photos, which is ideal in lectures or tutorials. And this whole process can further translate the fundamentals into concrete signals for all multilingual speakers because "multimodal input, particularly through captioned videos, benefits incidental vocabulary learning and that bilingual subtitles can be especially effective" (Li et al., 2016). More functions such as real time meeting translation through Bharat Messenger and custom integration APIs enable business in the fields of e-commerce and telemedicine. It is a complete ecosystem that is both web and mobile accessible and has free usage, which ensures its universal adoption.

Anuvadini AI has indigenous development in terms of technology, and this is towards the aspirations of self-reliance. It is based on the state-of-the-art AI models tailored to the specifics of the Indian environment, which deal with code-mixing (e.g. Hinglish), cultural idioms, and work-specific jargon more effectively than the generic translators, such as India-focused Google Translate. Its utilization of Microsoft Azure makes it scalable and secure, and such functions as offline capabilities are used in low-connectivity areas. By 2026, it is being further updated with the introduction of generative AI to make the translations sound more natural, which makes it an international competitor. Testimonials are the proof of its success: teachers say that the rate of note-taking has increased four times, and startups have increased the market size by a quarter through the use of localized content. The software does not only conserve linguistic heritage but, in equipping 1.4 billion Indians with the power to communicate with each other freely, it will also catapult India to a Viksit Bharat, a developed country by 2047. By garnering support from Indian HEIs, Anuvadini AI platform can facilitate a transition from guided assistance to learner autonomy in soft skills acquisition among young adults. As the platform supports the 'self-study' phase of students, learners can get instant access to global research in a regional language which in turn, will allow them to spend more time on analysis and less time on deciphering the English language.

There is scope for improvement even within the Anuvadini AI platform as certain users on 'free-tier' or beta versions have noted limitations on page counts and certain bugs while translating a greater chunk of text. For bulk document translation, 'Bujji' can digest a limited number of documents while maintaining the original formatting of the source text. However, simplicity and layout integrity remain the core strengths of 'Chutki', 'Bujji', and all other features present on Anuvadini AI that assure inclusive education, especially in the context of Indian HEIs. Any AI system, if kept unchecked, has scope to amplify biases and thus, nothing can replace human oversight with regard to the use of such software in educational setups. Ultimately, it is the human facilitator who can assure fair treatment, alignment to clear rubrics, and moderation with AI to achieve equitable outcomes. But interestingly, with a judicious use of an AI software like Anuvadini AI in HEIs to impart soft skills training to young adult learners, the same facilitator can experience increased confidence, more class participation, and clarity of communication within their target group of students. Such platforms can function as 'Small AI' models for offline teaching even in the rural areas with bandwidth issues, mitigating the problem of digital divide. This is how equity can be maintained in education which can allow learning for all. Hence, it can be affirmed that the Anuvadini AI platform has immense potential to dismantle linguistic barriers and facilitate autonomous self-directed learning among young adults.

In the India-AI Impact Summit 2026, the chakra of 'human capital' is focused on equitable skilling emphasizing the dictum that AI is totally capable to augment human productivity rather than replace it. The multilingual digital environment is here to act as a catalyst for human capital development and cognitive engagement. Even at the recently concluded *ETEducation Summit* 2026, leaders, educationists, and policy makers from across the globe explicitly charted out a policy framework for the democratization of AI resources in order to foster equity in education. The stakeholders were drawing attention to the four major pillars that will transform the face of education - "quality learning, innovation, teacher readiness, and responsible adoption of artificial intelligence" (ET Education, 2026). Thus, with these guidelines getting reiterated at both, the national and international levels, the researchers would like to conclude that in a 21st century global village where local voices find a prominent position, Anuvadini AI can function as a tool for translation, that can be academically integrated in HEIs with a focus on soft skills training of young adults. This digital platform can act as a scaffold for andragogical autonomy, enabling learners to transition from passive dependency to self-regulated skill acquisition.

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Appendices

End Note: The crux of the matter is how students, after navigating from high school education to the higher education learning institutions, mitigate the problem of comprehension issues in their second language. In India, English functions as an L2 or as a primary additional language in all educational set-ups. Therefore, be it literature teaching or professional content learning, it is the demand of adult education to impart soft skills training to young adults in a way that can make them comfortable with self-directed learning through role of experience and readiness to learn.

In this regard, here are a few scenarios and mind maps that can serve as a testimony to the fact that internal motivation of learners and a controlled monitoring by the facilitators drives students to participate wholeheartedly in the andragogical tasks in the context of soft skills training.

Appendix 1

Scenario 1



Fig. 1 – this is the first part of the short story *The Fun They Had* by Isaac Asimov, generated using https://www.storyboardthat.com/

(Here, this figure is a pedagogical task of developing a literary piece on a free storyboarding software which also provides freely downloadable illustrations for edutainment purposes. This particular illustration demonstrates multimodal narrative scaffolding in language-literature pedagogy.)

Scenario 1 (continued...)

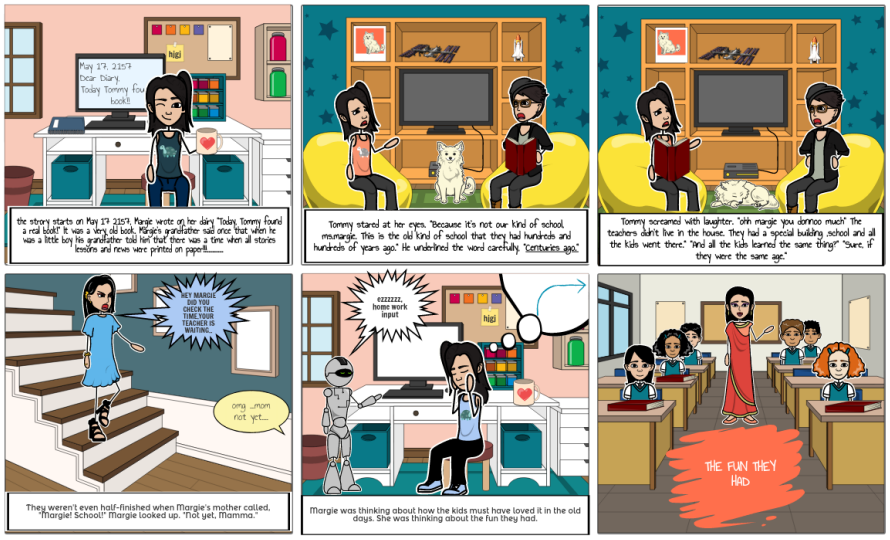


Fig. 2 – this is the second part of the short story *The Fun They Had* by Isaac Asimov, generated using https://www.storyboardthat.com/

Scenario 1 (continued...)



Fig. 3 – this is an empty template for the short story *The Fun They Had* by Isaac Asimov wherein students can create their own illustrations with the help of callouts or word bubbles that best represents the plot progression in the short story and allows participative learning without creating an overdependence on technological tools for the teaching-learning situation.
(this template has been curated using https://www.storyboardthat.com/)

Appendix 2

Scenario 2a: Individual differences in visual artifact creation
Mind map 1 – group one's representation of the reading comprehension passage

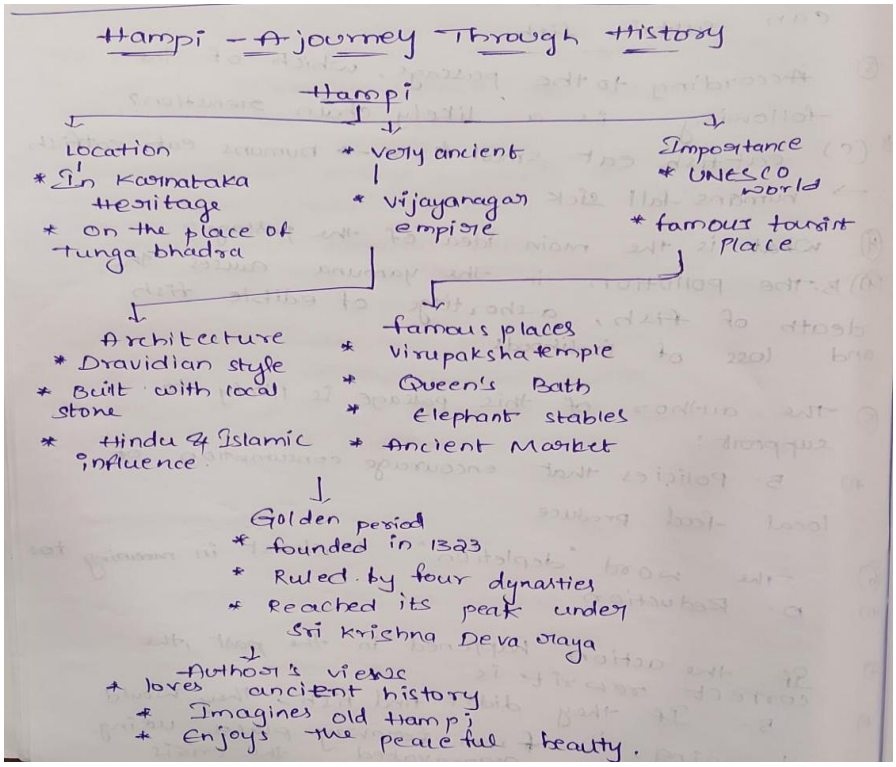


Fig. 4 – this is a staggered tree diagram which gives all the necessary details regarding the city Hampi

Mind map 2 – group two's representation of the reading comprehension passage

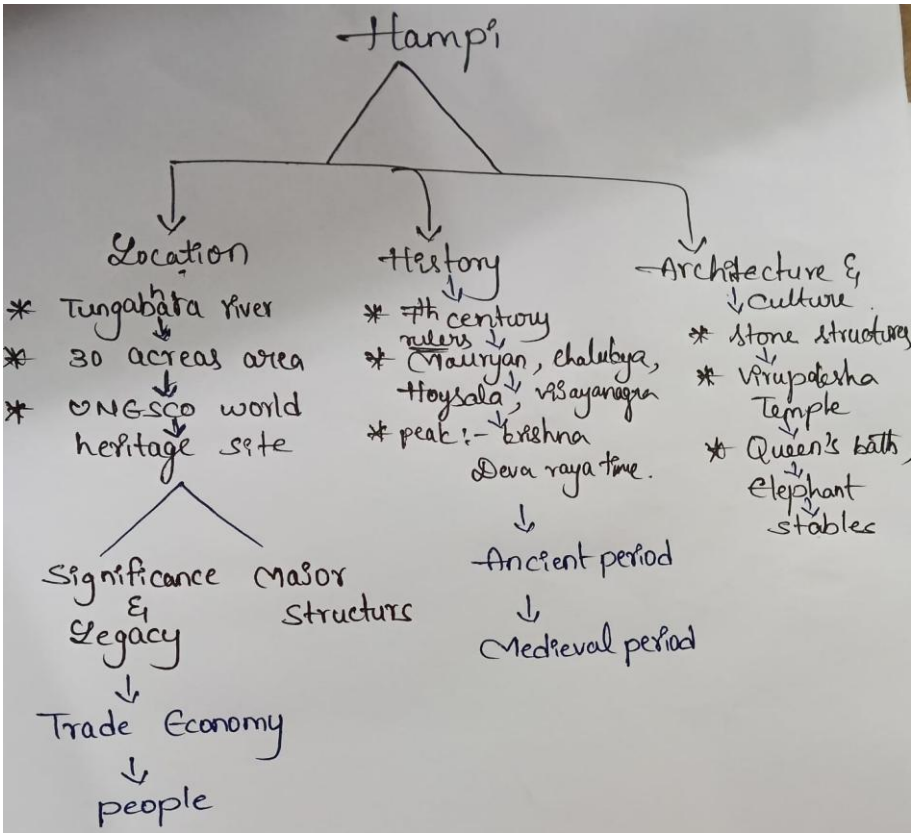


Fig. 5 – this is a linear flowing process diagram of the location, history, as well as architecture and culture of Hampi

Mind map 3 – group three's representation of the reading comprehension passage

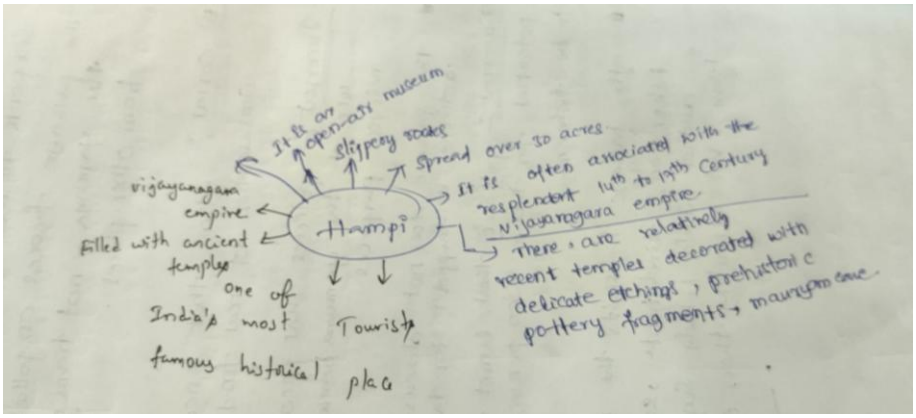
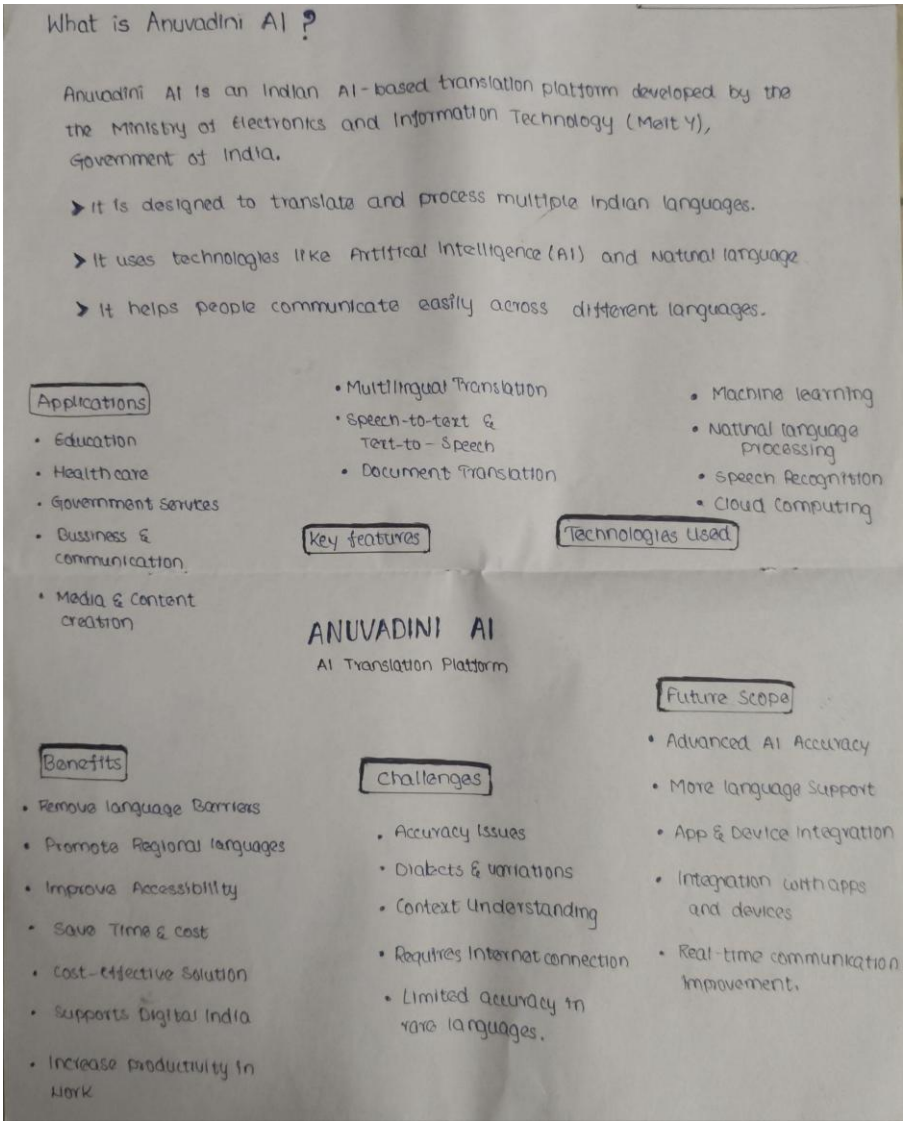


Fig. 6 – this is a non-linear representation of the details related to the city of Hampi expressed in a very crisp form

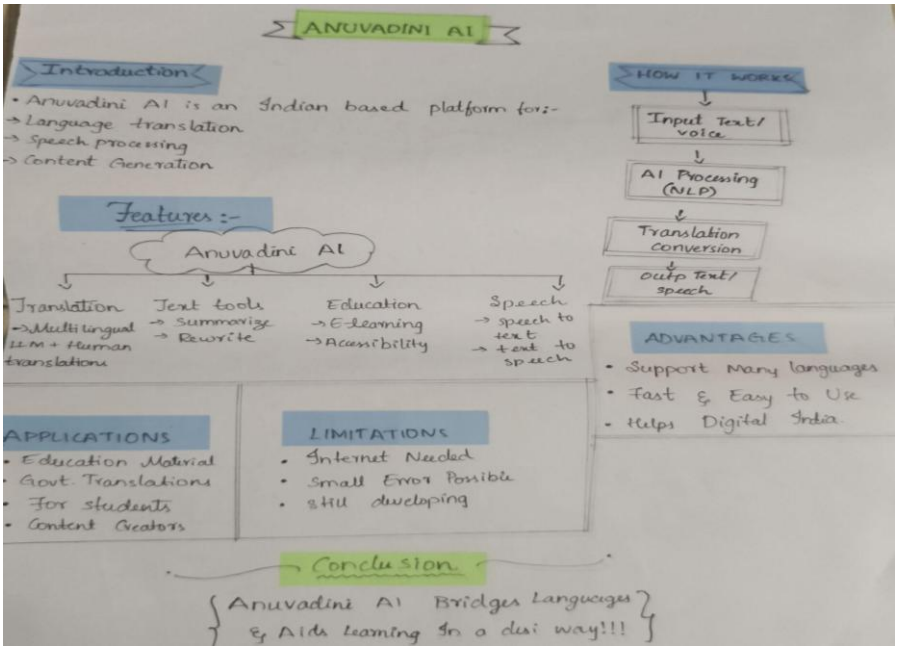
Scenario 2b:
Manually created infographics of Anuvadini AI as a digital tool that can be implemented and integrated in the Indian HEIs. The mind maps prove the diverse thinking capacities of the diverse learners present in a UG/PG classroom.

Figure 7.
Student-generated categorical matrix summarizing Anuvadini AI



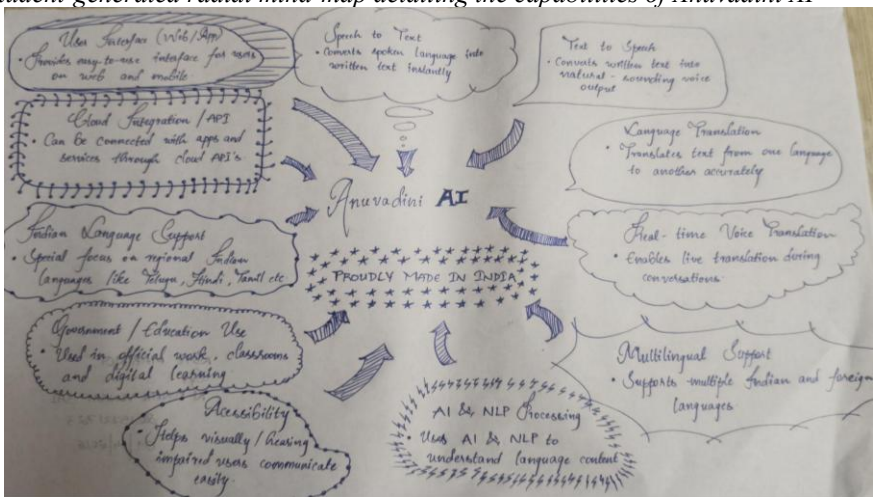
(Note: This formal mind map is a student artifact illustrating an analytical grid-structured breakdown of Anuvadini AI. The layout categorizes information into distinct operational domains – core definition, applications, key features, technology stack, benefits, challenges, and future scope. This was created by the student during the task of evaluating the digital platform in the field of education.)

Figure 8.
Student-generated process flow and structural map of Anuvadini AI



(Note: This is a student artifact demonstrating process mapping and systemic visual thinking. The colour-coded headings delineate core functional modules viz. features, applications, limitations alongside a step-by-step technical flowchart detailing input processing via Natural Language Processing [NLP] to translated output. This was created by the student during the task of evaluating the digital platform in the field of education.)

Figure 9.
Student-generated radial mind-map detailing the capabilities of Anuvadini AI



(This is a student artifact displaying a non-linear, radial mind-mapping strategy. The central node "Anuvadini AI" branches into interdependent technical, accessibility, and utility features using distinct cloud-like callouts and directional arrows. This was created by the student during the task of evaluating the digital platform in the field of education.)

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Beyond the Controller: Spectators as Linguistic Mediators in Game-Enhanced L2 Interaction

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Abstract

This study examines how non-controlling participants mediate access to and use of French as an L2 during classroom-based gameplay with commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) video games. It specifically investigates how spectators' contributions shape shared understanding, collective decision-making, and subsequent in-game action. The data comprise 13 video-recorded gameplay sessions, totaling 8 hours and 40 minutes, involving 24 Spanish university students with French proficiency levels ranging from A1 to B1+. The corpus included cooperative and solo gameplay, with the analysis focusing primarily on episodes from *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild*. Using a collection-based multimodal conversation-analytic approach, 60 episodes of peer linguistic and communicative assistance were identified and compared. The analysis shows that spectators participate by providing access to written text, translating or reformulating game language, converting interpretations into action, and temporarily assuming interactional leadership. Through these practices, non-controlling participants transform written, spoken, and visual game resources into actionable knowledge for the player and the wider group. The findings distinguish technical control from interactional agency: controller possession determines who can execute an in-game action, but not who organizes interpretation, decision-making, or strategic guidance. The study therefore shows how pedagogically organized solo gameplay can create situated opportunities for collaborative meaning-making and language-focused interaction.

Keywords: game-enhanced language learning, commercial off-the-shelf video games, *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild*, linguistic mediation, conversation analysis

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Introduction

Commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) video games have attracted increasing attention as potential resources for second-language learning and teaching (Reinhardt & Bain, 2026). Unlike serious games designed around instructional objectives, COTS video games circulate primarily as entertainment products and vernacular cultural artifacts. Their classroom use exemplifies game-enhanced language learning, in which an existing game is incorporated into a pedagogical activity without assuming that the game is intrinsically educational (Reinhardt, 2019; Reinhardt & Sykes, 2012). Such games' relevance instead emerges from the relationship among their semiotic resources, the activity design, and participants' situated practices.

Research suggests that COTS video games can provide exposure to contextualized vocabulary, narratives, instructions, and recurrent linguistic forms (Ranalli, 2008; Sundqvist, 2019; Sylvén & Sundqvist, 2012). However, much of this research concerns individual or extramural gaming. In L2 classroom settings, the use of solo games raises a distinct interactional and pedagogical problem. When only one learner controls the avatar, that learner appears to occupy the role of player, while classmates risk being positioned as passive spectators. This asymmetry may make solo games seem incompatible with collaborative language learning. Yet suitable COTS video games that combine local cooperative play with rich target-language input may not always be available for classroom use. Investigating learners' participation around solo games therefore addresses a practical challenge for game-enhanced language learning: determining how a technically single-player activity can be organized as an environment for peer linguistic assistance and collaborative meaning-making.

Controller possession grants control over in-game action, but it does not necessarily determine the extent of a participant's linguistic or interactional involvement. Research on gameplay watching and spectating suggests that non-controlling participants may remain consequentially involved in the activity (Andersson, 2023; Baldauf-Quilliatre & Colón de Carvajal, 2021a, 2021b). However, little is known about how co-present spectators in L2 classrooms transform game language into shared, actionable understanding.

Therefore, the present study examines how non-controlling participants mediate access to and use of the L2 during collective classroom gameplay with solo COTS video games, and how their contributions shape shared understanding, decision-making, and subsequent in-game action. Using a collection-based conversation-analytic approach, the study identified and analyzed episodes of peer linguistic and communicative assistance across a video corpus, with particular attention to assistance provided by non-controlling participants.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

COTS Video Games and Game-Enhanced Language Learning

COTS video games are entertainment products rather than materials designed for instruction. When incorporated into pedagogical activities, they exemplify game-enhanced language learning, in which educational value arises from the interaction among game resources, task design, and participants' situated practices rather than from the game alone (Reinhardt, 2019; Reinhardt & Sykes,

2012). Recent reviews confirm continued interest in COTS games while emphasizing that learning opportunities depend on game characteristics, pedagogical arrangements, and the social organization of gameplay (Rajendran et al., 2024; Reinhardt & Bain, 2026).

COTS games can provide contextualized language through dialogue, menus, instructions, narratives, visual cues, and action. Narrative relevance, contextual and visual cues, repeated encounters, and the need to understand language to progress may direct learners' attention to lexical items and support form–meaning connections (Franciosi et al., 2016; Janebi Enayat & Haghighatpasand, 2019; Lai & Chen, 2023; Lee, 2023). Research has also associated sustained participation in commercial multiplayer games with aspects of L2 development, although outcomes vary according to proficiency, game genre, exposure, and interactional conditions (Jabbari & Peterson, 2023).

Watching, Spectating, and L2 Game Interaction

Solo gameplay creates an apparent participation asymmetry because only one participant controls in-game action. Nevertheless, non-controlling participants retain access to the game's language, visual information, and unfolding consequences. Experimental comparisons challenge the assumption that controller possession necessarily produces greater learning: watchers have demonstrated vocabulary outcomes comparable to, and sometimes better than, players, possibly because players divide their attention between linguistic input and game mechanics (Andersson, 2023; deHaan et al., 2010).

Recent research confirms that watching gameplay remains underexplored in SLA, particularly from sociocultural perspectives concerned with the interactions surrounding play (Andersson, 2025). Interactional studies further show that playing and spectating are locally accomplished participation positions rather than fixed roles. Non-players may participate consequentially by commenting, instructing, assessing, and coordinating action (Baldauf-Quilliatre & Colón de Carvajal, 2021a, 2021b). Here, *watchers* refers to participants in experimental viewing conditions, whereas *spectators* designates co-present participants who do not currently control the game. What remains underexplored is how such spectators transform L2 game content into shared, actionable understanding. This matters because educators may use language-rich COTS games designed for individual play, raising the question of how learners without direct control can participate meaningfully. The present study therefore examines how spectators read, translate, reformulate, explain, and act upon French-language game content. It contributes by showing that control over in-game action and interactional agency can be distributed differently, and by identifying the multimodal practices through which spectators shape collective decisions.

Mediation and Peer Linguistic Assistance

The study is theoretically grounded in a sociocultural understanding of mediation and collaborative activity (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Mediation involves facilitating access to texts, concepts, and communication through practices such as relaying information, explaining, reformulating, and selecting relevant content (Council of Europe, 2020). These practices relate to collaborative dialogue, collective scaffolding, and peer assistance, through which learners pool partial

knowledge to address linguistic problems (Donato, 1994; Ohta, 2001; Swain & Lapkin, 1998). Recent classroom research demonstrates that participation in game-mediated activities combines talk with gesture, gaze, and bodily conduct to support explanations and communication (Gao, 2024). Learners also use strategies such as inferencing and seeking feedback to resolve comprehension difficulties (Calafato & Clausen, 2024; Hamat & Mahamad Amran, 2021).

Multimodal CA-SLA provides the analytical approach for examining how mediation is publicly and sequentially accomplished through talk, gaze, gesture, screen orientation, controller manipulation, and subsequent game action. This approach treats intersubjectivity as an observable achievement through which participants display, verify, and revise their understanding in the unfolding interaction.

Taken together, these perspectives conceptualize spectator mediation as a publicly organized interactional accomplishment rather than an individual cognitive variable. Game-enhanced language learning establishes the pedagogical status of the COTS games; sociocultural research on mediation and peer assistance identifies the practices through which learners facilitate access to language and action; and multimodal CA-SLA provides the analytical framework for tracing how these practices become consequential in the unfolding interaction.

Building on this theoretical and analytical framework, the study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1. How do spectators participate linguistically during collective gameplay with solo COTS video games in an L2 learning context?

RQ2. Through which mediation practices do spectators transform game texts, interface prompts, and narrative information into actionable resources for the controlling player and the wider group?

RQ3. How does the distribution of controller access shape participants' interactional roles and create situated opportunities for peer linguistic assistance and collaborative meaning-making?

Method

Participants and Research Context

The cohort comprised 24 Spanish university students enrolled in either English Studies or French and English Studies programs, with L2 French proficiency levels ranging from A1 to B1+. Some participants took part in multiple recorded sessions (see Appendix B for participants' profiles).

Participants were undergraduate students enrolled in the first, second, or third year of their degree programs. All participants had Spanish as their dominant language. In accordance with the research protocol approved by the university's ethics committee, further demographic information, including participants' age and gender, was not collected because it was not necessary to address the research questions.

All recorded activities targeted French as an L2, and the games were configured in French. "English Studies" and the bilingual "French and English Studies" refer to participants' university degree programs rather than to the target

language of the gameplay activities. Participants enrolled in English Studies were also taking French-language courses as part of their degree. Their reported proficiency levels, ranging from A1 to B1+ on the CEFR scale, refer exclusively to French. Spanish was the students' dominant language and was used occasionally by participants to translate, explain, or resolve interactional difficulties. English was relevant only to participants' degree programs and was neither the target language nor the configured language of the games.

The study received approval from the ethics committee of the author's university. Participants provided written informed consent, and participation in the recordings was voluntary. An equivalent alternative activity was available. Pseudonyms are used, and identifying information was removed or replaced. The recordings are not publicly available because participants consented only to restricted scholarly use.

Data Collection and Pedagogical Procedures

Data were collected over three months through 13 recorded gameplay sessions totaling 8 hours and 40 minutes; individual recordings lasted 25–49 minutes (see Appendix A).

Data collection occurred in two phases. The first comprised two laboratory sessions in which B1-level dyads played *Harry Potter* cooperatively. During the second phase, the remaining 11 recordings were collected during regular French L2 classes. Gameplay formed part of pedagogical sequences targeting movement verbs, spatial prepositions, imperatives, instructions, and proposals. The only instruction all participants received was to interact in French and minimize their use of Spanish, but L1 interactions occurred frequently within the beginner groups.

The data derive from a video corpus of French L2 gameplay involving three COTS video games: *LEGO Harry Potter: Years 1–4* (hereafter, *Harry Potter*), *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (hereafter, *Zelda*), and *Assassin's Creed: Valhalla*. The games generated different participation configurations. *Harry Potter* allowed two participants to control in-game action simultaneously, whereas *Zelda* and *Assassin's Creed: Valhalla* are solo games. During the solo-game sessions, one participant held the controller while classmates watched the shared screen and could contribute to interpretation and decision-making. The controller was passed to another participant approximately every five minutes or whenever the player was defeated. Control over in-game action was therefore asymmetric at any given moment but rotated over time, while linguistic and strategic participation remained open to the wider group.

In classroom sessions, the teacher introduced the task, provided the instructions necessary to use the controller and begin playing, and provided assistance when necessary. The teacher introduced the task, provided the instructions necessary to use the controller and begin playing, and offered assistance when necessary. The teacher did not prescribe specific game actions or systematically direct participants' interpretations or peer interactions. Participants interpreted the game content, made decisions, and coordinated their actions themselves, although the teacher occasionally responded to requests for assistance or communication difficulties, as illustrated in some extracts. Participants completed game-related tasks, including navigating, interpreting instructions, solving puzzles, and deciding

collectively on the player's actions. These tasks elicited language related to movement, location, instructions, and proposals, but did not require learners to produce predetermined linguistic forms. French instead served as a communicative resource for pursuing game objectives.

The recordings represent unscripted interaction occurring within researcher-designed pedagogical activities rather than fully naturalistic interaction. Although the games and broader objectives were introduced for pedagogical purposes, participants locally organized their decisions, help-seeking, and meaning-making without scripted contributions or predetermined researcher prompts.

No systematic consciousness-raising or teacher-led corrective-feedback procedure was implemented during gameplay. However, participants could spontaneously notice, discuss, reformulate, and correct linguistic forms, and these peer-mediated exchanges were retained as part of the interactional data.

Game input was not quantified because it varied with participants' actions and progression, but included recurring written, spoken, and interface-based resources.

Data Selection and Focus of the Present Study

The present article focuses primarily on *Zelda* because its single-player configuration makes the distinction between control over in-game action and interactional participation particularly visible. The game presents written and spoken resources relevant to progression, including dialogue, instructions, quest objectives, interface information, clues, and environmental cues. Interpreting these resources may create opportunities for reading, translation, reformulation, explanation, strategic advice, and validation.

Following the collection-based logic of conversation analysis (Clayman, 2024; Clift & Mandelbaum, 2024), the complete corpus was repeatedly viewed to identify episodes of peer linguistic and communicative assistance. The resulting collection comprised 60 episodes: 46 from *Zelda*, none from *Assassin's Creed: Valhalla*, and 14 from *Harry Potter*. The four practices were identified across the *Zelda* sessions, while the *Harry Potter* episodes provided contrastive cases involving cooperative gameplay.

An episode was included when four criteria were satisfied. First, at least one assisting participant did not hold the controller. Second, that participant assisted a peer in interpreting or producing the L2 in relation to a game text, instruction, objective, or unfolding situation. Third, the contribution became consequential for shared understanding, decision-making, or subsequent in-game action. Fourth, the assistance was observable through talk, gesture, gaze, pointing, screen orientation, or a combination of these resources.

The collection includes episodes in which non-controlling participants read texts, translated or reformulated game language, explained expressions, supported L2 production, selected relevant information, proposed strategies, or transformed instructions into courses of action. Through iterative comparison across the collection, these fine-grained mediational functions were consolidated into four broader, partially overlapping practices: providing access to written text, translating or reformulating game language, converting interpretations into action, and temporarily assuming interactional leadership.

The Results section presents four *Zelda* episodes illustrating these practices. An additional episode from *Harry Potter* provides a contrastive case in which two participants had simultaneous access to in-game control. The comparison clarifies how controller distribution shapes peer mediation rather than evaluating the games against one another.

Transcription and Analytical Procedure

The study adopts a conversation-analytic approach to second-language acquisition (CA-SLA; Markee & Kunitz, 2015; Mondada, 2013; Seedhouse, 2004). Transcripts were progressively refined using ICOR conventions from ICAR (ICAR, n.d.) to represent overlap, pauses, lengthening, cut-offs, uncertain hearing, language choice, and relevant embodied conduct (see Appendix C for full transcription conventions). To improve readability and convenience for readers, only the English translations of the transcriptions are provided in this paper. Participants' nonstandard productions were preserved in the English translations.

Each episode was analyzed in four stages. First, the analysis established who held the controller and how others displayed access to the activity. Second, it identified the linguistic, visual, and embodied resources mobilized by non-controlling participants. Third, it traced the assistance and its ratification, modification, rejection, or non-ratification, including whether it informed a decision or action. Fourth, each contribution was examined for its mediational function, such as reading, translating, reformulating, explaining, supporting L2 production, selecting information, or providing action-oriented guidance.

Multimodal conversation analysis was selected because the research questions concern how spectator mediation is accomplished sequentially and how its consequences become publicly observable. The approach permits analysis of talk alongside gaze, gesture, pointing, screen orientation, controller manipulation, and subsequent in-game conduct. Rather than treating mediation as a self-reported strategy, the analysis examines how participants themselves display the relevance, acceptance, modification, or rejection of an assisting contribution. Finally, consistent with the conversation-analytic approach, claims are grounded in participants' publicly displayed orientations within the recorded interactions rather than in retrospective accounts of their internal states.

Results

The analysis identifies four spectator practices represented across the collection: providing access to written text, translating or reformulating game language, converting comprehension into action, and temporarily assuming interactional leadership. These practices often overlap, but they have different sequential consequences. A contrastive episode from *Harry Potter* clarifies why spectator mediation becomes especially salient in collective solo gameplay, where only one participant has control over in-game action.

Spectators as Readers: Taking Responsibility for Textual Access

Extract 1 occurs when the group encounters a quest text explaining that the character should follow the location indicated on the map. Iris (IRI) does not hold the controller but initiates a collective reading activity.

Extract 1:

```
1. IRI   <((in Spanish))let's see let's read>
2. ((They all read; IRI reads under her breath.))
3.       (5.3)
4. IRI   <((in Spanish)) okay  so  she should go over there
5.       right>
6. ((they all laugh))
```

Iris's first-person plural formulation, *vamos a leer* ("let's read"), prospectively organizes reading as a shared task rather than an individual undertaking. The 5.3-second silence that follows is therefore not an absence of participation. It is an accountable interval during which the participants collectively attend to the screen. Iris's quiet reading also publicly displays her continued orientation to the text.

At line 4, Iris does not provide an exhaustive translation. Instead, she extracts its action-relevant point: the character must go "over there." The Spanish tag *no?* (translated here as "right?") invites confirmation and makes her interpretation available for collective ratification. Her intervention thereby opens a space in which an individual on-screen text can become an object of shared understanding before gameplay continues.

The text consequently changes participation status. Although it appears on the screen in front of the controlling player, it does not remain information for that participant alone. Iris takes responsibility for directing the group's attention toward it, allocating time for reading, and formulating its practical implication. It appears that, because she is not occupied with control over in-game action, she is available to monitor textual information while others remain oriented to the controller or the unfolding game. Her position as spectator provides a particular form of access rather than placing her outside the activity.

Spectators as Translators and Reformulators: Making Game Language Intelligible

Translation in the collection is frequently distributed across participants rather than delivered by one individually designated translator. In Extract 2, Iris and Luz jointly work through an extended narrative sequence concerning events that occurred 100 years earlier. Their contributions overlap and complement one another (TEA stands for teacher).

Extract 2:

```
They read the on-screen text.
1. IRI   <((in Spanish)) there are 100 years   it brought
         ruin and desolation.
2. LUZ   <((in Spanish)) years.>
3. LUZ   <((in Spanish)) inside the <((in French))  kingd->
         inside this castle>
4. IRI   <((in Spanish)) okay>
5.       (7.0)
The sentence "He suddenly appeared, ravaged towns and villages,
and left a trail of death behind him." appears on the screen.
6. LUZ   appeared <((in Spanish)) I don't know what (inaud.)>
7.       (1.4)
8. IRI   <((in Spanish))behind>
9.       (2.5)
10. LUZ  <((in Spanish)) lives or [(inaud.)>
```

11. IRI [(inaud.)
12. <((in Spanish)) that he did to the towns>
They begin translating the new text: "But for the past hundred years, his destructive power has been contained within the walls of the very symbol of our kingdom..."
13. LUZ <((in Spanish)) after 100 years>
14. (3.0)
15. LUZ [<((in Spanish)) continue>
16. IRI [<((in Spanish)) he has destroyed (inaud.)>
17. TEA [<((in Spanish)) For 100 years, his destructive
18. power has been contained>
19. TEA *he gestures to indicate that he is inventing the term
20. IRI <((in Spanish)) within the walls>
21. LUZ <((in Spanish)) the symbol of our> <((in
22. French))kingdom>
23. TEA <((in Spanish)) kingdom>
24. IRI ah:
25. TEA <((in French))kingdom> <((in Spanish))kingdom>
26. IRI <((in French))kingdom>
27. TEA <((in Spanish)) it is> <((in French))it was on the
28. vocabulary list>
29. IRI <((in Spanish)) that was there the castle>
30. LUZ <((in Spanish)) and (inaud.) there are several>

Neither participant produces a complete translation. Both contribute *años* ("years"), Luz relates the truncated French *royaume* ("kingdom") to the castle, and Iris supplies *detrás* ("behind"). Pauses, cut-offs, uncertainty, and overlapping contributions make the translation recognizable as an incremental collaborative accomplishment. Later in the episode, when the teacher asks what they have understood, Luz reconstructs the broader implication: the voice has warned them not to delay, and the person speaking must be helped. The practical outcome is not a sentence-by-sentence rendering but a sufficiently coherent account of the narrative problem.

Extract 3 illustrates the relationship among approximation, assistance, and repair. Kiko (KIK) reads quietly and displays difficulty with *bijou* ("jewelry"). He then shows the controller to Luz while asking how to open something.

Extract 3:
KIK ((he reads the text quietly))
KIK <((in Spanish)) is it an object for the night or what>
TEA <((in French))it's a:: piece of jewelry>
LUZ *she turns toward the teacher
KIK +he looks at her and mimes confusion-->
(4.0)+
KIK ----+
TEA <((in French))you don't understand jewelry/>
KIK +he shows his controller to LUZ
KIK <((in Spanish)) how [do you open (inaud.)>
TEA [like a: a necklace* earrings
TEA ¿he mimes the objects----->
LUZ *she presses the button on the controller, then turns toward the teacher

TEA **<((in French))you see necklace: jewelry¿>**
TEA ----------¿
LUZ **<((in Spanish)) jewelry>**
KIK **ah (inaud.)**

Luz's participation has two consequences. She presses the relevant controller button, enabling the immediate interface action, and subsequently provides a Spanish equivalent of the French word *bijou*, thereby resolving the lexical problem. Control over in-game action momentarily shifts through the physical handling of the controller, but the episode also depends on Luz's linguistic uptake of the teacher's examples.

Based on these cases, a distinction between translation for accuracy and translation for action can be proposed. The findings suggest that translation for accuracy makes linguistic form itself accountable and seeks an adequate equivalent, whereas translation for action seeks sufficient understanding for the group to proceed.

The two orientations can coexist, as Extract 3 demonstrates, but gameplay frequently privileges actionable sufficiency. Hesitations and approximate interpretations are tolerated when they do not prevent the identification of a relevant next action.

Spectators as Action-Oriented Mediators

Spectators do more than make game language intelligible. They transform linguistic information into gameplay decisions, as shown in Extract 4.

Extract 4:
1. LUZ <((in French)) we to go *(2.0) in front* *to *the
2. tower*>
LUZ *she points to the screen *she gestures the height of the tower
IRI **<><((in Spanish)) okay (0.9) <> that we go in front of the tower<>>**
IRI <>she nods <>then turns toward LUZ
LUZ **<((in Spanish)) to what is* there in front>***
LUZ *she points to the screen

Luz first offers an approximate French formulation while pointing at the screen and depicting height. Iris reformulates the proposal in Spanish, nods, and turns toward Luz. Luz then points again and specifies the visible destination. Talk, gesture, screen content, and spatial orientation jointly transform information from the preceding cutscene into a navigational proposal.

Spectators thus mediate among three linked spaces. In the linguistic space, they isolate a word, text, or instruction. In the semiotic space, they relate it to a visible tower, map location, interface element, or collectible object. In the actional space, they formulate what should be done next. This mediation is selective: participants retain information relevant to progression while leaving other material untreated. Such selectivity should not automatically be evaluated as incomplete comprehension. It is an interactional response to the immediate practical demands of gameplay.

Spectators as Interactional Leaders

Across these episodes, control over in-game action and interactional agency are distributed to different participants. Extract 1 provides the clearest case. Iris initiates reading, sustains the group's orientation to the text, extracts the quest-relevant meaning, and solicits confirmation, although she does not hold the controller. Similarly, Luz's reading, formulation, and pointing in Extract 4 organize the group's spatial interpretation, while Iris ratifies and reformulates it. The controlling player's subsequent action thus becomes contingent on linguistic work performed elsewhere in the participation framework.

Interactional leadership is locally achieved rather than permanently attached to a participant role. A spectator acquires epistemic authority when others treat their reading, translation, or proposal as relevant. This authority remains partial and contestable. Extract 2 contains competing fragments and visible uncertainty, while Extract 3 requires further lexical assistance before Luz provides an adequate category term. Nevertheless, spectators produce much of the task-related language through which a next action becomes recognizable.

The player therefore retains privileged control over execution but not necessarily over interpretation, decision-making, or the sequential progression of talk. In these episodes, collective solo gameplay generates a division of labor in which the most linguistically active participant is not necessarily the person holding the controller. The controller determines who can immediately execute an action, whereas the interaction determines whose understanding informs that action.

Contrastive Case: Cooperative Gameplay and the Limits of Spectator Mediation

Extract 5, from *Harry Potter*, presents a different participation configuration.

Extract 5:
1. TEA <((in French)) you have to go ou:t (0.5) no/ (1.3) to
2. go ou:t(1.3)>
LUZ <((in French)) [yes:>
TEA <((in French)) [outside>
IRI ah/ <((in Spanish)) we have to go [no>
LUZ <((in Spanish)) how (0.5) how>

The teacher reformulates the French verb *sortir* ("to go out") as *aller à l'extérieur* ("to go outside"). Luz acknowledges the instruction, while Iris renders it approximately in Spanish. Mediation remains relevant, but both learners can act through their respective controllers. The episode is therefore not organized around a durable distinction between one controlling player and spectators who must shape in-game action indirectly.

This contrast does not establish that cooperative games eliminate mediation or that solo games automatically generate it. Instead, gameplay configuration changes its interactional salience. In cooperative play, access to action is distributed

by the game, and participants can respond through their own controllers. In collective solo play, only one learner can execute the group's decision at a given moment. Reading, translation, reformulation, and guidance consequently become especially visible means through which spectators shape progression without direct control over in-game action.

The findings therefore qualify the category *spectator*. It describes a participant's relationship to the controller, not the limits of their linguistic, epistemic, or interactional contribution.

Discussion

In this section, the findings are interpreted through the study's three complementary perspectives: game-enhanced language learning situates the pedagogical use of the COTS games, sociocultural theory explains spectator contributions as mediation and peer assistance, and multimodal CA-SLA shows how these contributions become publicly consequential in unfolding interaction. They indicate that technical control and interactional agency are distributed differently during collective solo gameplay. Across the focal episodes, non-controlling participants read on-screen texts, translated or reformulated French L2, selected action-relevant information, and guided subsequent decisions. The discussion develops three implications of these findings while treating the observed episodes as situated opportunities for L2 engagement rather than evidence of language acquisition.

Participation Is Distributed Beyond the Controller

The first finding challenges a controller-centered understanding of gameplay participation. Although the controlling player has privileged access to the timing and execution of in-game action, this technical entitlement does not grant exclusive control over the activity's linguistic or strategic organization. In the analyzed episodes, spectators initiated reading, proposed translations, extracted instructions, and evaluated whether an interpretation was sufficient for action. Progress thus often depended on information made available by someone other than the controlling player.

This distribution became particularly visible when an on-screen text suspended progress. Such moments created a practical problem for the group rather than solely for the player. By making the text publicly relevant, translating part of it, or reformulating its actionable core, a spectator could temporarily organize the group's attention and guide its next decision. Interactional leadership was therefore not fixed by controller possession but shifted according to the local demands of reading, interpreting, deciding, and acting.

Solo gameplay consequently produced a division of labor rather than a stable opposition between active players and passive viewers. Only one participant could execute the next move, but control over action could be separated from control over meaning. This distinction develops Andersson's (2023) observation that

watching need not constitute linguistic inactivity. It also converges with Baldauf-Quilliatre and Colón de Carvajal's (2021a, 2021b) argument that spectatorship is interactionally achieved rather than defined simply by the absence of controller use. The present study identifies a specific form of spectator consequentiality in the L2 classroom: non-controlling participants mediate access to the target language and thereby influence the organization of gameplay.

From a CA-SLA perspective, these contributions are relevant because they make participants' understandings publicly inspectable. Reading aloud, candidate translations, repetition, repair, embodied orientation to the screen, and subsequent action display how French L2 becomes an object of joint attention. Such displays do not demonstrate durable learning; rather, they show how language, intersubjectivity, and gameplay progress are coordinated through interaction.

Spectator Mediation Is Action-Oriented

The second finding is that peer linguistic and communicative assistance is action-oriented. Spectators did not necessarily translate or reformulate game language to produce complete linguistic equivalents. Their contributions were shaped by the practical need to determine what should happen next. A partial translation or concise summary could be interactionally adequate when it identified a destination, object, direction, or required move. This accords with Piirainen-Marsh and Tainio's (2009a, 2009b) account of game language as a resource for situated participation and coordinated activity, rather than merely as input processed independently of gameplay. It also supports Reinhardt's (2019) view that the language-learning relevance of COTS games emerges through learners' engagement with game resources and objectives.

Understanding became observable through its practical consequences. A candidate interpretation could be treated as adequate when the player followed a proposed route or selected an option, and reopened when an action failed or another participant challenged it. This pattern is consistent with Mondada's (2011) description of understanding as an embodied, situated, and sequential achievement displayed through subsequent conduct. Gameplay thus provided an environment in which interpretations could be proposed, acted upon, tested, and revised.

Successful action, however, did not necessarily demonstrate accurate or complete linguistic comprehension. Participants could reach an appropriate outcome through partial interpretation, contextual inference, visual information, or other semiotic resources. The game instead provided a local criterion of practical sufficiency: whether the proposed understanding allowed the activity to continue.

This action orientation also highlights the relationship between spectator mediation and language-related episodes. Language-related episodes foreground problems concerning linguistic form, meaning, or use (Swain & Lapkin, 1998; Toth & Gil-Berrio, 2022). Some spectator-mediation episodes displayed these

characteristics through lexical searches, translation alternatives, repetition, explanation, or correction. Others remained primarily oriented toward extracting task-relevant meaning and progressing in the game. Spectator mediation may thus generate a language-related episode, but the categories are not interchangeable: the former may subordinate linguistic detail to the trajectory of play, whereas the latter makes a linguistic problem explicitly salient.

Finally, game feedback contributed to the establishment of intersubjectivity without independently determining it. An expected game outcome could provisionally support an interpretation, while an unsuccessful action could prompt participants to reconsider the text, revise a translation, or propose an alternative. The pedagogical relevance of feedback therefore emerged through its incorporation into interactional episodes of interpretation, proposal, action, and reassessment (Reinhardt & Sykes, 2012). Spectators served as mediators by connecting French L2 resources, visible game consequences, and the group's developing course of action.

Solo Games Can Become Collaborative Learning Environments

The third finding is that a technically solo game can support a collectively organized language-learning activity. Although the software is designed for one controlling player, participation was assembled through shared attention, linguistic assistance, embodied conduct, and strategic consultation. This further supports the view that playing and spectating are locally accomplished forms of participation rather than fixed roles determined solely by controller access (Baldauf-Quilliatre & Colón de Carvajal, 2021a, 2021b). Collaborative potential therefore depends not simply on the number of available controllers but on how opportunities and responsibilities are distributed among participants.

The contrastive cooperative extract helps clarify the relevance of this configuration. When participants can act independently through separate controllers, they may respond to a problem without first making their interpretations publicly available. In solo gameplay, a non-controlling participant must communicate an interpretation if it is to influence progression. This material asymmetry may make peer assistance especially visible and accountable, although it does not automatically produce collaboration. As sociocultural perspectives emphasize, the potential of a tool or activity structure is realized through participants' situated use of linguistic, material, and social resources (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Lantolf et al., 2015).

Controlling players and spectators can therefore be understood as complementary rather than hierarchically ordered participation positions. Controller rotation allowed learners to alternate between executing game actions and contributing from a non-controlling position. Participants could pool partial knowledge and construct solutions collaboratively, in line with research on collective scaffolding and peer assistance (Donato, 1994; Ohta, 2001). The findings do not establish that spectators necessarily process language more deeply than controlling players, but they show that controlling and non-controlling positions offer different resources and constraints for participation.

Accordingly, the pedagogical value of solo COTS video games does not require every learner to control the avatar simultaneously. It depends on a participation arrangement in which non-controlling learners have legitimate and consequential opportunities to contribute. This aligns with Reinhardt's (2019) account of game-enhanced language learning, in which pedagogical value arises through the orchestration of games, tasks, participants, and social practices rather than from the game's intrinsic educational properties. The analyzed episodes illustrate how such orchestration can create situated opportunities for peer assistance and collaborative meaning-making, while leaving questions of retention, transfer, and durable L2 acquisition to longitudinal or outcome-based research.

Conclusion

This study has shown that spectators need not remain passive during collective gameplay with solo COTS video games. Although only one participant could execute an in-game action at a time, non-controlling participants mediated L2 resources through reading, translation, reformulation, explanation, validation, and strategic guidance. These multimodal practices transformed game resources into shared interpretations and actionable guidance, demonstrating that technical control does not determine the distribution of interactional agency. The collaborative potential of solo gameplay therefore depends not only on the game's technical configuration but also on how participation is interactionally and pedagogically organized.

Solo games should not be dismissed as unsuitable for language classrooms simply because only one learner holds the controller. Game selection should instead account for interactional affordances and the pedagogical arrangement surrounding play. Text-rich moments, consequential choices, recurrent instructions, and pauses permitting joint attention may support collaborative activity when spectators have recognizable responsibilities. Accessibility, pacing, difficulty, and familiarity with the genre should also be considered. A solo game is not pedagogically useful by default, but controller scarcity need not be treated solely as a constraint.

A light role system may legitimize spectator participation and prevent non-controlling positions from being equated with silence. Possible responsibilities include action-oriented roles, such as player and strategy advisor; language-oriented roles, such as reader, translator, mediator, and lexical observer; and participation-management roles, such as comprehension checker and interaction facilitator. These should remain flexible responsibilities rather than rigid identities. Rotating them after a checkpoint, quest, or short interval can distribute controller access and linguistic responsibility while reducing the likelihood that confident participants monopolize translation or strategic authority. However, excessive role fragmentation may produce artificial turn-taking and weaken engagement. Teachers should therefore select only the roles needed for the task and group size.

Before gameplay, teachers can provide a concise role sheet and rehearse expressions connecting interpretation to action, such as "It means that we have to…," "I think we should…," and "We should read this first." The aim is not to pre-teach every lexical item, but to provide resources for requesting or offering assistance, proposing interpretations, and delaying action while the group attends to the target language.

Selected mediation episodes can subsequently be revisited without converting gameplay into continuous correction. Learners may reformulate instructions, compare translations, reconstruct the reasoning behind a successful action, or review vocabulary recorded during play. Practical success should not, however, be equated with linguistic accuracy. A brief post-game phase can distinguish language that was sufficient for action from more accurate or idiomatic formulations. In this way, situated solutions may become explicit learning opportunities without assuming that interactional participation necessarily produces acquisition.

The teacher's role is to make spectator participation legitimate and linguistically productive without over-instructionalizing gameplay. Mandatory translation, continuous interruption, or correction of every approximation may displace the action orientation that gives mediation its relevance. Intervention can instead focus on consequential moments, such as when the group cannot progress, an interpretation excludes other participants, a recurrent form warrants attention, or communication breaks down. Strategic use of learners' shared languages may also support mediation when a rapid explanation enables renewed engagement with L2 content (Swain & Lapkin, 2013).

Several limitations qualify these findings. First, the study involved a small cohort in a specific university context, which limits transferability to other learner populations, proficiency levels, and instructional settings. Second, the analysis focused primarily on *Zelda*. Its narrative structure, textual density, mechanics, and single-player configuration may have shaped the practices observed; other genres and games may generate different participation patterns. The *Harry Potter* data provided contrastive cases, but these were fewer and were not intended to support a systematic comparison between games.

Third, the four practices emerged from a collection of recorded episodes selected according to their observable interactional consequences. Less visible forms of attention or assistance may therefore have remained undocumented. Participants' interpretations of their roles and experiences were also not investigated through interviews or stimulated recall. Fourth, the analysis demonstrates opportunities for L2 engagement, mediation, and collaborative meaning-making, not durable language acquisition. No pre-tests, post-tests, or delayed measures were used to establish retention, transfer, or proficiency development. Finally, the teacher's influence and the effects of role rotation, group composition, gaming experience, and proficiency differences were not examined systematically.

Future research could compare solo and cooperative games across genres, proficiency levels, and classroom contexts; combine interactional analysis with learner reflections; and investigate how pedagogical roles affect participation. Longitudinal and mixed-methods studies could also determine whether spectator mediation supports the retention and transfer of linguistic knowledge beyond the immediate gameplay activity.

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Use of Artificial Intelligence

An AI language model, M365 Copilot, supported the editing and restructuring of text originally written in French by the author. Its role was limited to translation into academic English and assistance with concision and organization. It was not used to generate or analyze data, select extracts, interpret findings, or make research decisions. The author verified all AI-assisted content and takes full responsibility for the final manuscript.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Overview of the Recordings

Note: Program labels refer to students' degree tracks: English Studies or French and English Studies. The target language of all recorded activities was French.

Rec. No.	Setting	Participants	Pseudonyms	Program	Prof. Level	Minutes	Game	Game Mode
1	Pair	2	Eva, Juan	Bilingual	B1	41	*Harry Potter*	Cooperative
2	Pair	2	Alfonso, Rodrigo	Bilingual	B1	35	*Harry Potter*	Cooperative
3	Class	7	Sofía, Leo, Ana, Enrique, Zoe, Jorge, Elsa	English	A2	29	*Zelda*	Single-player
4	Class	3	Alba, Sara, Iker	Bilingual	B1+	41	*Zelda*	Single-player
5	Class	8	Leo, Ana, Enrique, Zoe, Jorge, Emma, Raúl, Pau	English	A2	25	*Assassin's Creed: Valhalla*	Single-player
6	Class	6	Carmen, Sofía, Leo, Ana, Enrique, Zoe	English	A2	37	*Assassin's Creed: Valhalla*	Single-player
7	Class	3	Alba, Sara, Iker	Bilingual	B1+	49	*Assassin's Creed: Valhalla*	Single-player
8	Class	5	Inés, Iris, Mar, Luz, Nora	English	A1	46	*Zelda*	Single-player
9	Class	2	Iris, Mar	English	A1	40	*Harry Potter*	Cooperative
10	Class	2	Luz, Iris	English	A1	46	*Harry Potter*	Cooperative
11	Class	2	Luz, Iris	English	A1	44	*Zelda*	Single-player
12	Class	3	Iris, Inés, Luz	English	A1	43	*Zelda*	Single-player
13	Class	2	Luz, Kiko	English	A1	44	*Zelda*	Single-player

Appendix B

Profiles of the participants

Participant	Is a Gamer	Had Played the Game Used in the Session Before
Alba	No	No
Alfonso	Yes	No
Ana	Yes	Yes (*Zelda*, but not *Assassin's Creed*)
Carmen	Yes	Yes (*Zelda*, but not *Assassin's Creed*)
Elsa	Yes	Yes (*Zelda*, but not *Assassin's Creed*)
Emma	No	No
Enrique	No	No
Eva	Yes	Yes (*Harry Potter*)
Iker	No	No
Inés	No	No
Iris	No	No
Jorge	Yes	Yes (*Zelda*, but not *Assassin's Creed*)
Juan	Yes	No
Kiko	Yes	No
Leo	Yes	Yes (*Zelda*, but not *Assassin's Creed*)
Luz	No	No
Mar	No	No
Nora	Yes	No
Pau	Yes	No
Raúl	No	No
Rodrigo	Yes	No
Sara	No	No
Sofía	Yes	No
Zoe	No	No

Appendix C

Transcription conventions

Note. Transcription conventions adapted from ICOR conventions created by ICAR (ICAR, n.d.).

Symbol	English description
&	Indicates that a turn continues across several lines when it is interrupted by other speakers' turns.
=	Latching (no discernible gap between turns or utterances).
[ ]	Indicate the onset and end of overlapping talk.
:	Sound lengthening. Colons are repeated according to the perceived duration of the lengthening.
-	Cut-off or abandoned word.
XXX	Unintelligible segment. Each **X** represents approximately one syllable.
(inaud.)	Completely inaudible segment.
(example; example)	Parentheses indicate uncertainty on the part of the transcriber. When two possible transcriptions are considered, they are separated by a semicolon.
(.)	Pause shorter than 0.2 seconds.
(0.8)	Pause longer than 0.2 seconds.
<((description)) transcription>	Vocal activities (e.g., laughter, crying, reading aloud).
/ \	Rising and falling intonation. Marked rises and falls are represented as // and \\, respectively.
CApitals	Perceptually salient emphasis.
((comment))	Description or transcriber's comment.
((in Spanish: sí))	Code-switching.
*** + <>, etc.**	Markers indicating the onset and offset of a gesture (one symbol is assigned to each participant).
------->	Indicates that a gesture continues across several transcript lines until the next boundary marker.
---->>	Indicates that a gesture continues throughout the remainder of the excerpt.

Author' Biography



Joffrey Caron holds a PhD in Applied Linguistics and is an Adjunct Professor at the University of Castilla-La Mancha (UCLM), Spain. His research focuses on conversation analysis, second-language acquisition, and the use of video games for language learning, with particular attention to interactions between learners in gaming environments.

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Academic Writing Performance in EFL Higher Education: The Roles of AI Literacy, Ethical AI Use, and Self-Efficacy

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Abstract

Academic writing methods have changed as a result of the quick adoption of artificial intelligence writing tools in higher education, especially in the setting of English as a Foreign Language. However, a lack of AI literacy, ethical concerns, and low writing self-efficacy make it difficult for many Thai EFL undergraduates to use these tools effectively. This study investigates the relationships of AI literacy and ethical AI use with perceived academic writing performance, with self-efficacy examined as a mediator and ethical AI use as a moderator. It draws on Bandura's (1997) Social Cognitive Theory, contemporary AI literacy frameworks, and international AI ethics standards. A quantitative cross-sectional design was employed with 401 EFL undergraduates from four Thai universities. A questionnaire measuring perceived academic writing performance, self-efficacy, ethical AI use, and AI literacy was used to gather data. Direct, mediating, and moderating associations between variables were tested using structural equation modeling. The findings showed that both AI literacy and ethical AI use were significantly and positively associated with perceived academic writing performance. Self-efficacy partially mediates the effects of ethical AI use and AI literacy on writing performance. Additionally, ethical AI use strengthens the relationship between AI literacy and writing performance. Supplementary sub-dimensional analyses further indicated the importance of application skills and adaptive confidence, critical engagement and transparent behavior, and core writing confidence. These results show that successful AI-supported writing requires integrating technical proficiency, ethical engagement, and learner confidence. The study provides critical pedagogical and empirical insights for ethical AI integration in EFL higher education.

Keywords: AI literacy; ethical AI use; self-efficacy; academic writing performance; EFL undergraduates

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Introduction

Higher education has seen a sharp increase in the usage of artificial intelligence (AI)-assisted writing tools, which has changed how students prepare, write, edit, and assess academic papers. Applications like grammar checkers, automated feedback systems, and generative language models are becoming more and more integrated into university learning settings, especially in courses that prioritize academic writing. These tools, which provide learners with scaffolding that might not otherwise be available, are frequently emphasized in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context as supports for linguistic accuracy, coherence, and efficiency (Gayed et al., 2022; Hwang & Tu, 2021). Badpa and Beikian (2025), in their comparative evaluation of academic writing textbooks, also recommended integrating AI-driven tools to enhance learners' engagement and interaction. Their recommendation provides further support for considering AI as part of academic writing instruction, although their study did not directly examine AI literacy or writing performance. As a result, AI-assisted writing is becoming an emerging part of academic literacy practices rather than a peripheral one. As Feng et al. (2025) documented in their systematic review of 112 studies on AI-integrated L2 writing, the majority of research has focused on undergraduate EFL learners, confirming the centrality of this population in current AI-assisted writing research.

The ethical and pedagogical ramifications of AI-supported writing are still little understood despite this quick uptake, particularly in non-Western EFL environments. There is little agreement on how students effectively interact with AI tools as part of their learning process, despite the fact that previous research typically reports increases in surface-level writing quality, such as grammar accuracy or lexical choice (Dai & Liu, 2024; Neshkovska, 2025). Their use is further complicated by issues with plagiarism, transparency, and an excessive dependence on automated systems, which raise concerns about academic integrity and responsible engagement rather than just technical efficacy (Eager & Brunton, 2023; UNESCO, 2023).

As a result, an increasing amount of research has started to highlight AI literacy as a crucial skill for students. Beyond operational abilities, AI literacy includes the capacity to assess AI outputs, strategically use tools for particular tasks, and identify their limitations (Alavi & Pakbaz, 2026; Alghamdy, 2023). This paradigm is consistent with more general frameworks for technology integration that highlight how technological tools, pedagogical intent, and domain-specific knowledge interact (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). AI literacy is especially important in EFL writing environments because students need to make both technological and linguistic decisions. However, empirical data indicates that students' levels of AI literacy differ significantly, frequently influenced by curriculum design, institutional support, and training accessibility (Polrak et al., 2024). These differences are particularly apparent in situations where national policies encourage digital transformation but implementation at the classroom level is still uneven. More broadly, Silva and Matsuda (2001) have argued that effective L2 writing pedagogy requires teachers to understand the diverse characteristics and experiences of L2

writers, a principle that extends to preparing students for AI-integrated writing environments.

A related and equally significant issue is the ethical application of AI. Transparency, accountability, and bias awareness are the cornerstones of responsible AI integration in education, according to international norms (UNESCO, 2024). However, students often express confusion regarding what is appropriate for using AI in academic writing, especially when it comes to originality, authorship, and citation (Meniado et al., 2024). This uncertainty could result in a complete avoidance of AI tools in EFL contexts or, on the other hand, an unthinking reliance on content produced by AI. Both answers complicate assessment procedures and undercut AI's instructional potential.

Beyond technical and ethical issues, the psychological aspect of AI-assisted writing, more especially, students' self-efficacy, is a crucial but understudied component. Self-efficacy is crucial in determining students' involvement, perseverance, and performance, according to Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1997). Self-efficacy affects how students handle challenging assignments, react to criticism, and control their learning techniques in writing environments. Foundational L2 composition scholarship has long recognized the importance of learner psychology; for instance, Ferris and Hedgcock (2023) situated writing pedagogy within learners' cognitive and affective domains, while Hedgcock (2005) emphasized that theoretical orientations in L2 teaching must account for learner confidence and engagement. According to recent studies, the use and perception of AI tools can either increase or decrease writing self-efficacy (Apridayani & Teo, 2021; De Vleeschauwer, 2023). Some students benefit from AI's ability to boost their confidence, while others feel more dependent and anxious about their ability to function on their own.

AI literacy, ethical AI use, and self-efficacy have all been studied separately in the past, but their combined and interacting effects on perceived academic writing ability are still little understood, especially in EFL higher education environments outside of Western settings. Instead of treating self-efficacy as a psychological mechanism via which AI-related competencies transform into performance, existing research frequently examines it as an outcome variable. In a similar vein, ethical AI use is usually considered normatively rather than experimentally as a factor that influences or enhances the efficacy of AI literacy. Because of this, there isn't much actual data that explains how and when AI literacy improves writing results. Historically, Leki et al. (2008) synthesized decades of L2 writing research and noted persistent gaps between research and pedagogy, while Silva and Leki (2004) traced how L2 writing's interdisciplinary roots (composition studies and applied linguistics) have created both richness and fragmentation, tensions that remain visible in the fragmented treatment of AI, ethics, and self-efficacy today.

In the case of Thai EFL, this disparity is particularly noticeable. As Ferris and Hedgcock (2023) emphasized in their pedagogical framework, effective L2 composition instruction must be responsive to local contexts, including institutional

support and teacher preparedness. Through national initiatives like Thailand 4.0, Thailand has actively promoted digital transformation in higher education; however, studies consistently report low adoption of AI writing tools among undergraduates and limited institutional guidance on ethical use (Krajka & Olszak, 2024; Subaveerapandiyan et al., 2024; Samngamjan et al., 2024; Worapongpat, 2025). Thai EFL students frequently experience ongoing difficulties with academic writing while also showing reluctance to use AI technologies because of inadequate training, moral ambiguity, and low confidence. Thailand is a theoretically and pedagogically relevant setting for investigating the relationship between self-efficacy, ethical involvement, and AI literacy because of these factors.

In order to close this gap, the current study examines the relationships of ethical AI usage and AI literacy on the perceived academic writing ability of EFL undergraduates, using self-efficacy as a mediating mechanism and ethical AI use as a moderating factor. The paper offers a conceptual model that takes into consideration the technical, moral, and psychological aspects of AI-assisted writing by fusing Bandura's (1997) Social Cognitive Theory with AI literacy and ethics frameworks. The study intends to: (1) investigate the direct relationships of ethical AI use and AI literacy on academic writing performance; (2) assess the mediation function of self-efficacy; and (3) investigate whether ethical AI use enhances the link between AI literacy and writing performance. Feng et al. (2025) recently called for further research on AI literacy development in L2 writing. Although the present cross-sectional design cannot examine longitudinal development, it contributes by testing the relationships among AI literacy, ethical AI use, self-efficacy, and perceived writing performance.

The contribution of this study lies in integrating technical, ethical, and psychological dimensions of AI-assisted academic writing within a single explanatory model. Previous research has examined AI-assisted writing, AI literacy, ethical AI use, and learner self-efficacy, but these dimensions have often been investigated separately. The present study connects these dimensions by examining AI literacy and ethical AI use in relation to perceived academic writing performance, while also testing self-efficacy as a mediating mechanism and ethical AI use as a moderator of the AI literacy–writing relationship. Thus, rather than examining whether AI use alone is associated with writing, the proposed model considers how technical competence, responsible use, and learner beliefs operate together in AI-supported EFL writing. This integrated approach provides a more specific account of these relationships among EFL undergraduates in the Thai higher education context.

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

AI Literacy and Academic Writing Performance

With AI-powered tools increasingly mediating students' writing processes, AI literacy has become a crucial ability in modern higher education. The operational definition of AI literacy in this study is the capacity of students to comprehend, assess, and use AI tools in academic writing assignments in an appropriate and successful manner. In line with recent educational conceptualizations that frame AI

literacy as a higher-order cognitive competence rather than a purely digital skill, this definition goes beyond basic technical operation to include evaluative judgment and strategic application (Alghamdy, 2023; Mishra & Koehler, 2006; Samngamjan et al., 2024).

Previous studies have not reported uniformly positive outcomes from AI-assisted writing. While AI writing tools can support linguistic accuracy, writing efficiency, and feedback during the writing process (Gayed et al., 2022; Zhao, 2023), other research has raised concerns about over-reliance on AI and insufficient critical engagement with AI-generated output (Zou et al., 2024). Bahremand et al. (2026) examined AI-supported microlearning in relation to vocabulary, grammar, and discourse competence among EFL learners. Their study provides a relevant context for examining the linguistic dimensions of AI-supported learning. These differences suggest that access to AI tools alone may not determine writing outcomes. One possible explanation is variation in students' AI literacy, which involves not only the ability to use AI tools but also the capacity to evaluate their outputs and apply them appropriately for particular tasks (Alghamdy, 2023; Samngamjan et al., 2024). Students with limited evaluative competence may accept AI-generated suggestions without sufficient critical examination, increasing the risk of inaccurate content, inappropriate language, or reduced authorial control. In contrast, stronger AI literacy enables students to evaluate AI-generated information and make more strategic decisions about when and how AI support should be incorporated into their writing (Alghamdy, 2023). Therefore, differences in students' ability to evaluate and strategically apply AI may help explain why AI-assisted writing produces different outcomes across learners and contexts.

Learner-level educational factors may further shape how students engage with AI-supported writing. Yan et al. (2026), for example, examined feedback-seeking interactions between EFL writers and GenAI and found that differences in language proficiency and technological competence were associated with different interaction patterns. The learner with stronger language and technological competence developed more sophisticated prompting strategies and engaged more effectively in dialogic interaction with GenAI, whereas the moderately proficient learner relied on simpler prompts and showed weaker sustained engagement. These findings suggest that students' ability to benefit from GenAI-supported writing may depend not only on access to AI tools but also on their language proficiency, technological competence, and ability to seek and process feedback through interaction.

Although direct empirical evidence linking AI literacy to academic writing performance remains limited, the broader literature on AI-assisted writing provides a reasonable basis for examining this relationship. AI literacy involves not only technical knowledge but also the ability to evaluate AI-generated information and apply AI tools strategically to academic tasks (Samngamjan et al., 2024). These competencies may help students make more informed decisions when using AI during writing rather than accepting generated content uncritically. At the same time, the mixed findings reported in the broader AI-assisted writing literature suggest that access to and use of AI alone do not consistently produce better writing

outcomes. Therefore, the relationship between AI literacy and academic writing performance remains an empirical question rather than an established effect. Accordingly, this study examines whether higher AI literacy is associated with better academic writing performance among EFL undergraduates.

H1: AI literacy is positively associated with EFL undergraduates' perceived academic writing performance.

Ethical AI Use in Academic Writing

Ethical considerations have become central to debates surrounding AI integration in education, particularly in relation to academic writing. Ethical AI use is commonly framed around principles such as transparency, accountability, and bias awareness, as articulated in international guidelines (UNESCO, 2023, 2024). In educational settings, these principles translate into practices such as acknowledging AI assistance, critically reviewing AI-generated content, and recognizing the limitations or biases embedded in algorithmic systems (Amini et al., 2026).

Much of the existing literature treats ethical AI use primarily as a matter of academic integrity or policy compliance. From this perspective, ethics is positioned as a constraint on AI use rather than as a factor that shapes learning outcomes. However, emerging research suggests that ethical engagement with AI may be directly relevant to performance, particularly in writing tasks that require originality, coherence, and critical reasoning (Eager & Brunton, 2023; Subaveerapandiyan et al., 2025).

Students who engage transparently and responsibly with AI tools are more likely to maintain authorial control over their texts, integrate AI suggestions selectively, and verify content against disciplinary norms (Wang et al., 2026). In contrast, unethical or unreflective use, such as copying AI-generated text without evaluation, can undermine text quality, introduce inaccuracies, and weaken argumentative coherence. Ethical AI use, therefore, functions not only as a normative requirement but also as a *performance-relevant behavior* that influences how effectively AI tools contribute to writing outcomes.

In EFL contexts, ethical ambiguity is particularly pronounced. Studies report that many students are uncertain whether using AI tools constitutes plagiarism, how AI-generated content should be cited, or where the boundary lies between assistance and substitution (Meniado et al., 2024). This uncertainty can lead to avoidance of AI tools altogether or to overreliance without critical engagement, both of which may limit learning gains. Importantly, these patterns are not evenly distributed; they often reflect institutional guidance, cultural norms, and individual differences in ethical awareness.

Existing research therefore provides stronger evidence for the importance of ethical AI use in maintaining academic integrity and responsible authorship than for a direct relationship between ethical AI use and writing performance. Studies

have raised concerns about plagiarism, inappropriate attribution, over-reliance on AI-generated text, and uncertainty about acceptable AI assistance in academic writing (Eager & Brunton, 2023; Meniado et al., 2024; UNESCO, 2023, 2024). At the same time, responsible AI engagement may support writing by encouraging students to critically review AI-generated content, retain control over their texts, and make deliberate decisions about whether and how AI suggestions should be incorporated. However, empirical research directly testing whether ethical AI use is associated with stronger academic writing performance remains limited. Thus, rather than assuming that ethical AI use produces better writing, the present study empirically tests whether a positive relationship exists between these variables.

H2: Ethical AI use is positively associated with EFL undergraduates' perceived academic writing performance.

Self-Efficacy in AI-Supported Writing

Self-efficacy, defined as individuals' belief in their capability to perform specific tasks successfully, is a well-established predictor of academic performance (Bandura, 1997). In writing research, self-efficacy has been linked to greater persistence, more effective strategy use, and higher-quality written output. Students with strong writing self-efficacy are more likely to engage in revision, seek feedback, and regulate their writing processes effectively (Geng, et al., 2024). However, research on other psychological characteristics has not always identified significant relationships with writing ability. Esmaeili et al. (2015), for example, found no significant relationship between overall emotional intelligence and writing ability among Iranian EFL university students. Although emotional intelligence differs conceptually from self-efficacy, this finding suggests that relationships between psychological characteristics and writing performance should be examined empirically rather than assumed.

The introduction of AI tools complicates this relationship. On one hand, AI can function as a scaffold, reducing cognitive load and providing immediate feedback, thereby enhancing learners' confidence and perceived competence (Selim, 2023). On the other hand, excessive reliance on AI may undermine students' belief in their independent writing ability, leading to anxiety or dependency (De Vleeschauwer, 2023). As a result, AI-assisted writing environments may both strengthen and weaken self-efficacy, depending on how tools are integrated into learners' practices.

From a social cognitive perspective, self-efficacy provides a plausible psychological mechanism connecting students' AI-related competencies with their writing outcomes. Bandura (1997) explains that self-efficacy develops partly through mastery experiences and influences how individuals approach tasks, sustain effort, and respond to difficulties. In writing research, stronger self-efficacy has also been associated with greater persistence, strategy use, and writing performance. However, AI-supported writing introduces a more complex relationship. Students

who understand how to evaluate and strategically use AI may experience greater control over the writing process, while responsible AI use may encourage them to retain ownership of their decisions rather than depend uncritically on generated content. These experiences may strengthen confidence in managing academic writing tasks. Conversely, limited AI literacy or excessive dependence on AI may reduce perceived control and confidence in independent writing (De Vleeschauwer, 2023; Selim, 2023). Self-efficacy may therefore represent one psychological pathway through which AI literacy and ethical AI use are associated with academic writing performance.

Despite the established relationship between self-efficacy and academic performance, its specific mediating role in AI-assisted EFL writing remains insufficiently examined. Previous research provides theoretical and empirical support for self-efficacy as an important psychological factor in writing, but considerably less is known about whether it explains the relationship between students' AI-related competencies and their academic writing performance. In particular, limited evidence has tested self-efficacy as a mediator between AI literacy and writing performance or between ethical AI use and writing performance. The present study therefore examines these indirect relationships rather than assuming that AI-related competencies translate directly into stronger writing outcomes.

H3: Self-efficacy mediates the relationship between AI literacy and academic writing performance.

H4: Self-efficacy mediates the relationship between ethical AI use and academic writing performance.

Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

Drawing on Social Cognitive Theory and contemporary AI literacy and ethics frameworks, this study proposes a conceptual model in which AI literacy and ethical AI use function as antecedent variables associated with academic writing performance directly and indirectly through self-efficacy. AI literacy represents students' technical and evaluative competence, while ethical AI use reflects responsible engagement with AI tools. Self-efficacy is positioned as a psychological mechanism that translates these competencies into effective writing behavior.

Beyond its direct relationship with academic writing performance, ethical AI use may also function as a condition that shapes how students apply their AI literacy in writing. AI literacy provides students with the knowledge and evaluative skills needed to use AI tools, but these competencies do not necessarily ensure that AI is used responsibly. Students with similar levels of AI literacy may differ in how transparently they acknowledge AI assistance, how critically they evaluate generated content, and how much authorial control they retain during writing. Existing literature emphasizes that responsible AI engagement requires critical evaluation, transparency, accountability, and awareness of the ethical boundaries of AI-assisted

academic work (Meniado et al., 2024; UNESCO, 2023, 2024). Therefore, ethical AI use may strengthen the relationship between AI literacy and academic writing performance by encouraging students to apply their AI-related competencies in ways that preserve critical judgment and authorial responsibility. However, because direct empirical evidence for this moderating relationship remains limited, the proposed interaction is treated as a relationship to be empirically tested rather than an established effect.

H5: Ethical AI use moderates the relationship between AI literacy and academic writing performance, such that the relationship is stronger at higher levels of ethical AI use.

Together, these hypotheses form an integrated model that accounts for technical, ethical, and psychological dimensions of AI-assisted academic writing in EFL higher education.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to investigate the relationships among AI literacy, ethical AI use, self-efficacy, and perceived academic writing performance among EFL undergraduates. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed to test the hypothesized direct, mediating, and moderating relationships, as SEM enables the simultaneous estimation of complex relationships among latent constructs while accounting for measurement error (Hair et al., 2019). This approach is widely used in educational and applied linguistics research examining psychological and behavioral variables in technology-enhanced learning contexts.

Participants and Context

Participants were EFL undergraduates recruited from four Thai universities offering bachelor's degree programs in English or closely related EFL-oriented majors. A purposive sampling strategy was employed, targeting second-, third-, and fourth-year students, as these cohorts are more likely to have sustained experience with academic writing tasks and exposure, formal or informal, to AI-assisted writing tools. A total of 421 questionnaires were collected. Following data screening procedures, including checks for incomplete responses, response patterns, and multivariate outliers, 401 valid questionnaires were retained for final analysis. This sample size exceeded recommended minimum thresholds for SEM analysis and provided adequate statistical power for testing the proposed model (Kline, 2016; Hair et al., 2019).

The final sample consisted of 401 Thai EFL undergraduates from four universities. Participants represented different age groups, genders, and academic years. The demographic characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 401)

Demographic Variable	Category	N	%
Age Group	18–20 years	165	41.1
	21–23 years	175	43.6
	24–26 years	48	12.0
	27 years and above	13	3.2
Gender	Male	132	32.9
	Female	263	65.6
	Other	6	1.5
Academic Year	1st Year	146	36.4
	2nd Year	156	38.9
	3rd Year	76	19.0
	4th Year	22	5.5
	5th Year and above	1	0.2

As shown in Table 1, most participants were between 18 and 23 years old (84.7%), and approximately two-thirds were female (65.6%). First- and second-year students constituted the largest academic-year groups, together accounting for 75.3% of the sample.

Participants were enrolled in university programs involving English-language study and academic writing. Individual English proficiency was not independently assessed using a standardized measure such as IELTS or TOEFL. Academic year and participation in English-related university programs therefore provide information about participants' educational exposure but should not be interpreted as standardized indicators of English proficiency. The absence of an independent proficiency measure is acknowledged as a limitation of the study.

Most participants had previous experience with AI tools, with 345 (86.0%) reporting prior AI use and 56 (14.0%) reporting no previous experience. AI use was also relatively frequent: 183 participants (45.6%) reported using AI often and 104 (25.9%) very often, while 92 (22.9%) reported using it sometimes, 18 (4.5%) rarely, and four (1.0%) never. ChatGPT was the most frequently reported AI tool (97.0%, n = 389), followed by Grammarly (13.5%, n = 54), QuillBot (3.5%, n = 14), and DeepSeek (3.0%, n = 12). Because participants could report more than one AI tool, percentages for tool use do not sum to 100%.

Instruments

Data were collected using a questionnaire consisting of demographic and AI-use questions followed by 60 Likert-scale items comprising four 15-item constructs: perceived academic writing performance (AWP), AI literacy (AIL), ethical AI use (EAU), and self-efficacy (SE). Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The items

were developed for the present study and informed by relevant theoretical and empirical literature, with wording contextualized to AI-supported academic writing in EFL higher education.

Academic Writing Performance (AWP) comprised 15 researcher-developed items assessing students' perceived performance across three dimensions: organization, content development, and language accuracy. These dimensions were informed by academic writing assessment literature identifying text structure, argument development and supporting evidence, and language use as central components of academic writing performance (Yung & Cai, 2020). The items were contextualized to EFL academic writing rather than adapted from a pre-existing questionnaire. Because AWP was measured through questionnaire responses, it is interpreted as perceived or self-reported academic writing performance rather than an objective assessment of writing ability. A representative item was, "Each paragraph I write has one main idea with supporting details."

AI Literacy (AIL) comprised 15 items across operational knowledge, application skills, and adaptive confidence. Item development was informed by AI-literacy literature, particularly work conceptualizing AI literacy as involving the knowledge and skills required to understand, use, evaluate, and appropriately engage with AI (Ng et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2025). The items were contextualized to academic writing and addressed students' understanding of AI writing tools, ability to apply and critically evaluate AI-generated suggestions, and confidence in adapting AI use to different writing needs. A representative item was, "I evaluate AI suggestions for relevance to my topic."

Ethical AI Use (EAU) comprised 15 items across responsible practices, critical engagement, and transparent behaviors. Item development was informed by UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence, particularly the principles of transparency and explainability, responsibility and accountability, human oversight, awareness and literacy, and fairness and non-discrimination (UNESCO, 2022). These principles were contextualized into student-level statements concerning responsible AI use, critical evaluation of AI outputs, transparency regarding AI assistance, and awareness of potential bias. The items therefore represent a contextual operationalization of UNESCO's principles rather than an adaptation of a pre-existing UNESCO questionnaire. A representative item was, "I critically evaluate all AI suggestions before use."

Self-Efficacy (SE) comprised 15 items across writing process, AI integration, and core confidence. Item development was informed by Bandura's (1997) task-specific conception of self-efficacy and contextualized to academic writing and AI-supported writing. The items addressed students' perceived capability to manage writing tasks, make appropriate decisions about AI integration, overcome writing difficulties, and produce academic writing successfully.

Before the main data collection, the questionnaire underwent translation and review for linguistic and conceptual appropriateness. Two bilingual experts independently translated the English questionnaire into Thai, and a third linguist back-translated the Thai version into English to check consistency. Three Thai EFL

instructors then reviewed both versions to resolve discrepancies and confirm conceptual equivalence. The questionnaire was subsequently pilot-tested with 30 students.

Supplementary Writing-Sample Analysis

To supplement the questionnaire findings, 31 final written assignments were obtained for a limited exploratory analysis of textual overlap. At each data collection site, the lecturer assisting with data collection was asked whether anonymized assignments from students in the participating classes could be made available for supplementary analysis. The number of assignments therefore depended on their availability across the participating sites, resulting in a total of 31 samples. All assignments were anonymized by the lecturers before being provided to the researcher. The assignments were screened using Turnitin's Similarity Report to identify patterns of textual overlap. Similarity indicators were treated as preliminary screening evidence rather than definitive evidence of plagiarism or academic misconduct. This supplementary analysis was not included in the SEM but was used to provide contextual evidence for interpreting students' self-reported ethical AI practices.

The similarity index was treated as an indicator of textual overlap rather than as evidence of plagiarism. No fixed similarity threshold was used to classify an assignment as plagiarized, because the interpretation of similarity depends on the nature and source of the matched text. AI-generated authorship was also not inferred from the similarity reports, and no separate AI-detection procedure was applied to these assignments.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection took place during the academic semester. The questionnaire was administered onsite, and participation was voluntary. Students were informed of the study's purpose and assured of anonymity and confidentiality prior to participation. No academic incentives or penalties were associated with participation. Ethical approval was obtained in accordance with institutional research guidelines.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS and AMOS. Initial screening procedures included checks for missing data, normality, and outliers. Descriptive statistics were computed for all variables. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted before structural testing to evaluate the measurement model. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's α and composite reliability (CR), while convergent validity was examined through standardized factor loadings and average variance extracted (AVE). Discriminant validity was evaluated using the Fornell–Larcker criterion and heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT) ratios. Model fit was assessed using CFI, TLI, RMSEA, and SRMR following established cutoff criteria (Hair et al., 2019).

The structural model was then tested to examine hypothesized direct effects (H1–H2). Mediation effects involving self-efficacy (H3–H4) were assessed using bootstrapping procedures with bias-corrected confidence intervals. Moderation analysis (H5) was conducted using a latent interaction SEM approach. An interaction term representing AI Literacy × Ethical AI Use was specified within the structural model, and the significance of the interaction coefficient was used to assess the moderating effect. The interaction pattern was further examined at low (−1 SD), mean, and high (+1 SD) levels of ethical AI use.

Methodological Rigor and Limitations

Although the study employed a robust analytical approach, certain limitations should be acknowledged. Academic writing performance was assessed through students' self-reported perceptions rather than an objective standardized writing test. Therefore, the findings represent perceived academic writing performance and should not be interpreted as direct evidence of students' actual writing competence. Self-reported assessments may also be influenced by students' confidence, self-awareness, or response tendencies. Future studies should incorporate objective writing assessments or independently rated writing tasks to examine whether the observed relationships are also reflected in demonstrated writing performance.

In addition, the purposive sampling strategy and the characteristics of the participating sample limit the generalizability of the findings beyond the participating Thai EFL contexts. Individual English proficiency was not independently assessed using a standardized proficiency measure, which also limits conclusions regarding whether the observed relationships differ across proficiency levels. In addition, purposive sampling from four Thai universities limits the generalizability of the findings beyond the participating Thai EFL contexts. Individual English proficiency was not independently measured, which also limits conclusions regarding whether the observed relationships vary according to proficiency level. The supplementary writing samples provided additional contextual evidence alongside the self-reported questionnaire data.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Prior to hypothesis testing, the dataset was screened for completeness, normality, and multivariate outliers. Of the 421 questionnaires collected across four universities, 20 responses were excluded due to incomplete data or response patterns indicating low engagement, resulting in a final sample of 401 participants. Descriptive statistics indicated acceptable distributional properties for all observed variables, with skewness and kurtosis values within recommended ranges for SEM analysis.

Correlations among the main constructs were positive and statistically significant, providing preliminary support for the proposed relationships. No indications of multicollinearity were observed, as variance inflation factor (VIF) values remained well below commonly accepted thresholds.

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations of the main study variables. Ethical AI use showed the highest mean score, followed by AI literacy, perceived academic writing performance, and self-efficacy. No evidence of multicollinearity was observed, with correlation coefficients remaining below critical thresholds.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics

Construct	N Items	Mean	SD
Writing Performance	15	3.72	0.68
AI Literacy	15	3.85	0.73
Ethical AI Use	15	4.02	0.71
Self-Efficacy	15	3.65	0.76

As shown in Table 2, mean scores ranged from 3.65 for self-efficacy to 4.02 for ethical AI use, indicating generally moderate-to-high levels across the four constructs.

Measurement Model

As shown in Table 3, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess the adequacy of the measurement model prior to hypothesis testing. The model included four higher-order constructs: AI Literacy, Ethical AI Use, Self-Efficacy, and Perceived Academic Writing Performance.

Table 3

Measurement Model Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	Items	Standardized Loading Range	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Perceived Academic Writing Performance	15	.68–.82	.91	.92	.58
AI Literacy	15	.71–.84	.85	.89	.61
Ethical AI Use	15	.73–.86	.86	.88	.63
Self-Efficacy	15	.69–.83	.90	.93	.59

Note. All standardized factor loadings were significant at $p < .001$. CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted.

All standardized factor loadings were significant ($p < .001$) and ranged from .68 to .86. Cronbach's α (.85–.91) and CR (.88–.93) exceeded the recommended .70 threshold, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. AVE values ranged from .58 to .63 and exceeded .50, supporting convergent validity. Discriminant validity was also supported: the square root of AVE for each construct exceeded its correlations with the other constructs, satisfying the Fornell–Larcker criterion, and all HTMT ratios (.53–.73) were below the conservative .85 threshold.

The four-factor measurement model also demonstrated acceptable fit, $\chi^2/df = 2.31$, CFI = .94, TLI = .93, RMSEA = .049, and SRMR = .043, supporting its adequacy for subsequent structural analysis.

Supplementary Sub-Dimensional Analysis

A supplementary sub-dimensional analysis in Table 4 was conducted to examine the relative contribution of the theoretically defined dimensions within each construct. Proxy subscale loadings were calculated by averaging the standardized item loadings within each five-item subscale. These values were used as supplementary indicators of the relative contribution of each sub-dimension to its corresponding construct rather than as independently estimated structural effects.

Table 4

Supplementary Sub-Dimensional Analysis

Construct	Sub-dimension	Proxy Loading
Perceived Academic Writing Performance	Organization	.594
	Content Development	.570
	Language Accuracy	.614
AI Literacy	Operational Knowledge	.520
	Application Skills	.618
	Adaptive Confidence	.674
Ethical AI Use	Responsible Practice	.546
	Critical Engagement	.542
	Transparent Behavior	.556
Self-Efficacy	Writing Process	.592
	AI Integration	.468
	Core Confidence	.658

Note. Proxy loadings represent the average standardized item loadings within each theoretically defined sub-dimension and should not be interpreted as independently estimated structural effects.

The results showed variation in the relative contribution of the sub-dimensions. Language Accuracy showed the highest proxy loading for perceived academic writing performance (.614). Within AI Literacy, Adaptive Confidence had the highest loading (.674), followed by Application Skills (.618), while Operational Knowledge showed the lowest loading (.520). The three Ethical AI Use dimensions showed relatively similar loadings (.542–.556), indicating balanced contributions to the overall construct. Within Self-Efficacy, Core Confidence showed the highest loading (.658), followed by Writing Process (.592), whereas AI Integration showed the lowest loading (.468).

Structural Model and Direct Effects

The structural model results in Table 5 were examined to test the hypothesized direct relationships of AI literacy and ethical AI use with perceived academic writing performance, as well as the proposed indirect and moderating relationships. Overall model fit remained satisfactory and comparable to the measurement model.

Table 5

Structural Path Estimates for Direct Effects

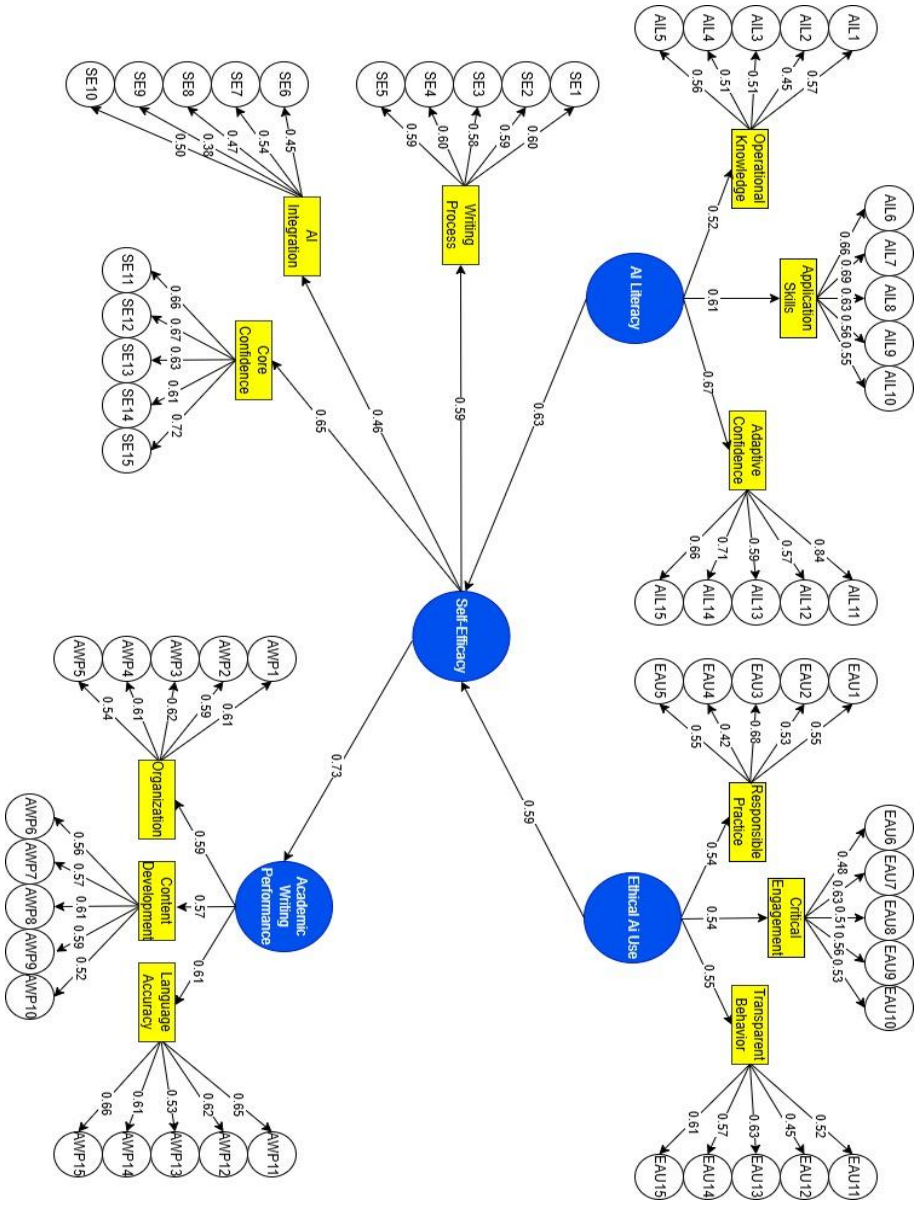
Path	β	SE	*t*	*p*
AI Literacy → Writing Performance	.28	.04	6.82	< .001
Ethical AI Use → Writing Performance	.19	.05	4.12	< .001
AI Literacy → Self-Efficacy	.42	.04	9.67	< .001
Ethical AI Use → Self-Efficacy	.31	.05	6.45	< .001
Self-Efficacy → Writing Performance	.46	.04	10.33	< .001

Note. All structural paths were statistically significant at $p < .001$.

Figure 1 presents the final structural model with standardized path coefficients. As illustrated, AI literacy and ethical AI use both showed significant positive direct associations with perceived academic writing performance, while significant indirect associations were also observed through self-efficacy. The model further showed a significant moderating role of ethical AI use in the relationship between AI literacy and perceived writing performance. All reported paths are statistically significant.

Figure 1

Final Structural Model with Standardized Path Coefficients



Mediation Analysis

Bootstrapping procedures (5,000 resamples) were used to test the mediating role of self-efficacy. In table 6, bias-corrected confidence intervals were examined to determine the significance of indirect effects.

Table 6

Mediation Effects of Self-Efficacy

Hypothesis	Indirect Path	β	SE	95% CI	p	Decision
H3	AI Literacy → SE → Writing Performance	.193	.03	[.142, .251]	< .001	Supported
H4	Ethical AI Use → SE → Writing Performance	.143	.03	[.098, .195]	< .001	Supported

Note. Bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals were based on 5,000 bootstrap samples. Indirect effects were considered significant when the confidence interval did not include zero. Both indirect effects were significant at p < .001.

In both cases, self-efficacy partially mediated the relationship between the predictor and perceived academic writing performance, as the direct associations remained statistically significant after inclusion of the mediator.

Moderation Analysis

To test Hypothesis 5, a latent interaction term representing AI Literacy × Ethical AI Use was specified within the structural model. The significance of the interaction coefficient was examined to determine whether the relationship between AI literacy and perceived academic writing performance varied across levels of ethical AI use.

Table 7

Moderation Effect of Ethical AI Use

Effect	Std. β	SE	t-value	p-value	95% CI	Interpretation
Main Effect: AI Literacy → WP	0.28	0.04	6.82	< .001	[0.20, 0.36]	Significant
Main Effect: Ethical AI Use → WP	0.19	0.05	4.12	< .001	[0.10, 0.28]	Significant
Interaction: AIL × EAU → WP	0.18	0.04	4.27	< .001	[0.10, 0.26]	Significant Interaction
Self-Efficacy → WP (control)	0.46	0.04	10.33	< .001	[0.38, 0.54]	Significant

Note. AIL = AI Literacy; EAU = Ethical AI Use; WP = Writing Performance. All reported effects were statistically significant at $p < .001$.

Follow-up simple-slopes analysis showed that the association between AI literacy and perceived academic writing performance increased from low ethical AI use (−1 SD; $\beta = .15$, $p = .023$) to the mean ($\beta = .28$, $p < .001$) and high ethical AI use (+1 SD; $\beta = .41$, $p < .001$), indicating a stronger positive association at higher levels of ethical AI use. The significant interaction therefore supported H5, indicating that the positive association between AI literacy and perceived academic writing performance was stronger at higher levels of ethical AI use.

Supplementary Evidence from Writing Samples

As a limited exploratory analysis, 31 anonymized writing assignments were examined to illustrate patterns of textual overlap. The assignments were obtained from participating classes based on availability through assisting lecturers. The assignments were screened using Turnitin's Similarity Report. Similarity scores were treated only as indicators of textual overlap and not as measures of writing quality, plagiarism, AI-generated writing, or academic writing performance. This analysis was not included in the SEM.

Table 8

Representative Cases from the Supplementary Writing-Sample Analysis

Case	Course/ Topic	Turnitin Similarity Index	Representative Anonymized Excerpt	Interpretation
Case A	Language Testing	4%	"Testing is important in education because teacher need to know what students already learn. A good test should measure the knowledge and skills that students study in the course. Teacher can also use the test result to find students problem and improve the teaching."	Only limited textual overlap was identified. The low similarity score suggested that most of the assignment did not match material in the comparison database.
Case B	Learning Strategies	13%	"Students use different learning strategies when they study English. Some students like taking note and repeat the new words, but some students can learn better when practice with their friends. If students choose suitable strategy, it can help them understand lesson and become more independent learner."	Several short passages showed similarity with existing material. The overlap was limited and was not considered sufficient by itself to establish inappropriate source use.
Case C	Chiang Mai Air Pollution	27%	"Air pollution is serious problem in Chiang Mai, especially in dry season. There are many smoke from forest fire, burning agriculture waste	A greater amount of textual overlap was identified in the assignment. The higher similarity warranted

	and also traffic. These can make PM2.5 in the air become higher. It can affect people health and make people difficult to live their daily life."	closer examination of the matched passages, but the percentage alone was not treated as evidence of plagiarism.

Note. Turnitin similarity scores indicate textual matches with material in its comparison database and were not treated as direct evidence of plagiarism or AI-generated writing.

The representative cases show that similarity indices reflected different forms of textual overlap across assignments from different academic subjects. The low-similarity case involved only a short common expression, whereas the higher-similarity case contained a longer matched passage that warranted closer examination. These examples were included to make the supplementary analysis transparent and to clarify how the Turnitin results were interpreted. Because the assignments were drawn from different courses and were not scored with a common writing rubric, they were not used as an objective measure of academic writing performance or as evidence of plagiarism or AI-generated writing. Instead, they served only as contextual evidence alongside the questionnaire findings.

Summary of Results

The results in Table 9 provide consistent empirical support for the proposed structural model examining the relationships among AI literacy, ethical AI use, self-efficacy, and academic writing performance among Thai EFL undergraduates. All five hypothesized relationships were supported. AI literacy and ethical AI use were both significantly and positively associated with perceived academic writing performance, indicating that students' technical–evaluative competence with AI tools and their responsible engagement practices independently were associated with higher perceived writing performance.

Table 9

Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hyp.	Description	Result
H1	AI literacy → Writing performance	Supported
H2	Ethical AI use → Writing performance	Supported
H3	Mediation by self-efficacy (AI literacy)	Supported (partial mediation)
H4	Mediation by self-efficacy (ethical AI use)	Supported (partial mediation)
H5	Moderation by ethical AI use	Supported

Discussion

The present study examined the relationships among AI literacy, ethical AI use, self-efficacy, and academic writing performance among Thai EFL undergraduates. By integrating technical, ethical, and psychological dimensions within a single structural model, the study responds to recent calls for more holistic investigations of AI-assisted writing in EFL contexts (Dai & Liu, 2024). Overall, the findings provide strong empirical support for the proposed framework and offer several theoretically and pedagogically meaningful insights. Reflecting the intellectual history traced by Silva and Leki (2004), the present study brings together influences from applied linguistics (technical competence) and composition studies (writer psychology and ethics), illustrating how L2 writing research continues to benefit from its interdisciplinary roots.

AI Literacy and Academic Writing Performance

AI literacy was significantly and positively associated with perceived academic writing performance, supporting Hypothesis 1. This finding aligns with prior research suggesting that AI tools can enhance writing outcomes when learners possess sufficient competence to evaluate and apply AI-generated feedback effectively (Gayed et al., 2022; Zhao, 2023). Importantly, the present study extends this line of research by demonstrating that AI literacy functions as a *latent, multidimensional construct*, rather than merely reflecting frequency of tool use.

Within the Thai EFL context, this result is particularly salient. Previous studies have reported low or uneven adoption of AI writing tools among Thai undergraduates, often attributing this pattern to lack of training or institutional support (Polrak et al., 2024; Samngamjan et al., 2024). The present findings suggest that access alone is insufficient; rather, students' ability to critically engage with AI output and strategically integrate AI support into their writing process is associated with higher perceived writing performance. This helps explain why earlier studies have produced mixed results regarding the effectiveness of AI-assisted writing in EFL contexts (Neshkovska, 2025).

The relationship observed in the present study may also be shaped by learner-level educational differences that were not directly modeled. Yan et al. (2026) showed that EFL learners with different levels of language proficiency and technological competence engaged differently in feedback-seeking interactions with GenAI. The learner with stronger language and technological competence used more developed prompting strategies and sustained more effective dialogic interaction, while the moderately proficient learner tended to use simpler prompts and showed less sustained engagement. This suggests that AI literacy may operate differently depending on students' linguistic resources, technological competence, and ability to engage actively with AI-generated feedback. In the present study, individual English proficiency was not independently measured, so future research should examine whether proficiency and feedback-seeking patterns condition the relationships identified in the structural model.

From a theoretical perspective, this finding supports the view of AI literacy as a learner-level competence involving the knowledge and evaluative skills required for meaningful engagement with AI-supported writing. The results suggest that access to AI tools alone is insufficient; students also need the ability to evaluate AI output critically and integrate it strategically into their writing. In this sense, AI literacy functions as an important learner-related competence in technology-mediated writing environments. This finding also responds to the call by Feng et al. (2025) for further research on AI literacy development in L2 writing.

Ethical AI Use as a Performance-Relevant Construct

Ethical AI use was also significantly and positively associated with perceived academic writing performance, supporting Hypothesis 2. This finding challenges the tendency in existing literature to conceptualize ethical AI use primarily as a compliance issue or institutional concern (UNESCO, 2023, 2024). Instead, the results indicate that ethical engagement with AI tools is positively associated with perceived writing outcomes. Students who reported higher levels of responsible practice, critical engagement, and transparent behavior also tended to report stronger perceived writing performance. This suggests that ethical AI use facilitates more effective writing practices by encouraging students to retain authorial control, critically evaluate AI-generated content, and integrate AI assistance selectively rather than indiscriminately. These behaviors are consistent with recommendations from AI ethics frameworks emphasizing human oversight and accountability (UNESCO, 2024).

This result is especially important in EFL contexts, where ethical uncertainty surrounding AI use is well documented (Meniado et al., 2024). Prior studies have shown that ambiguity regarding plagiarism and AI attribution can lead students either to avoid AI tools altogether or to rely on them excessively without critical engagement (Eager & Brunton, 2023). The present findings suggest that ethical clarity does not restrict learning; rather, it enables more productive use of AI by framing it as a support rather than a substitute for student effort.

The supplementary analysis of student writing assignments provides additional contextual evidence but should be interpreted cautiously. The illustrative cases showed variation in Turnitin similarity indices; however, similarity scores alone could not establish plagiarism, AI-generated writing, or students' ethical AI practices. Therefore, these findings do not independently validate the self-reported ethical AI use measure. Instead, they illustrate the difficulty of inferring responsible or irresponsible AI use from automated similarity indicators alone. Together, these findings support calls for integrating ethical AI instruction directly into writing pedagogy rather than treating it as an external policy concern (Subaveerapandiyan et al., 2024). From a broader L2 composition perspective, Ferris and Hedgcock (2023) have argued that effective writing instruction must address feedback, error treatment, and learner responsibility, principles that extend naturally to ethical AI use as a contemporary instantiation of responsible writing practice.

The Mediating Role of Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy was found to partially mediate the relationships between both AI literacy and academic writing performance (Hypothesis 3) and ethical AI use and academic writing performance (Hypothesis 4). These findings are consistent with Bandura's (1997) Social Cognitive Theory, which posits that individuals' beliefs about their capabilities influence how skills are translated into performance. The partial mediation observed in both cases suggests that AI-related competencies influence writing outcomes through dual pathways. On the one hand, AI literacy and ethical AI use exert direct effects by shaping how students engage with writing tasks and AI tools. On the other hand, these competencies indirectly enhance writing performance by strengthening students' confidence in their ability to manage AI-supported writing processes.

This finding helps clarify previously mixed results regarding the psychological impact of AI tools on learners (Apridayani & Teo, 2021). While some studies suggest that AI assistance may undermine learners' confidence, the present results indicate that this outcome is not inherent to AI use itself. Rather, self-efficacy appears to be strengthened when students perceive AI as a controllable resource that supports, rather than replaces, their writing ability. This interpretation aligns with research showing that scaffolding technologies enhance confidence when learners retain agency over task completion (Selim, 2023).

Notably, self-efficacy did not fully mediate either relationship, indicating that psychological confidence is an important but not exclusive mechanism. This nuance is theoretically important, as it cautions against over-psychologizing AI-assisted learning outcomes. Technical competence and ethical engagement retain independent explanatory power, even when accounting for self-efficacy. Historically, Hedgcock (2005) noted that theoretical orientations in L2 teaching, whether cognitive, social, or critical, must account for learner confidence as a pedagogical variable. The present findings empirically support this view, showing that self-efficacy operates alongside, rather than instead of, technical and ethical competencies in AI-supported writing.

Ethical AI Use as a Moderator

Beyond its direct and indirect effects, ethical AI use was found to moderate the relationship between AI literacy and academic writing performance, supporting Hypothesis 5. Specifically, the positive association between AI literacy and perceived writing performance was stronger among students with higher levels of ethical AI use. This interaction effect highlights a critical insight: AI literacy alone does not guarantee improved writing outcomes. Technical and evaluative skills appear to yield maximal benefit only when applied within an ethical framework that emphasizes responsibility, transparency, and critical oversight. In other words, ethical AI use functions as a *contextual amplifier* of AI literacy.

This finding addresses an important gap in literature. While previous studies have examined AI literacy and ethical considerations separately, few have explored how these constructs interact (Polrak et al., 2024). The present results suggest that ethical engagement conditions the effectiveness of technical competence, offering a more nuanced understanding of AI-assisted writing

practices. From an educational standpoint, this implies that training programs focusing exclusively on tool operation or prompt engineering may be insufficient. Without ethical grounding, students may misuse AI tools in ways that limit learning gains or undermine writing quality. This is particularly relevant in cultural contexts such as Thailand, where concerns about academic integrity and fear of misconduct may shape students' engagement with AI tools (Worapongpat, 2025). The moderation finding also resonates with Silva and Matsuda's (2001) argument that effective L2 writing pedagogy requires integrating multiple perspectives, technical, ethical, and psychological, rather than treating them as separate concerns. In AI-supported settings, this integration is not optional but foundational.

Sub-Dimensional Patterns and Their Implications

Supplementary analyses revealed meaningful differences among sub-dimensions within each construct. Within AI literacy, Adaptive Confidence and Application Skills showed stronger contributions to the overall AI Literacy construct than Operational Knowledge. This suggests that knowing *how* to use AI tools is less important than knowing *when* and *why* to use them, a distinction consistent with higher-order conceptions of digital literacy (Alghamdy, 2023). Within Ethical AI Use, Responsible Practice, Critical Engagement, and Transparent Behavior showed relatively balanced contributions to the overall construct, with Transparent Behavior showing a slightly higher proxy loading. These dimensions align closely with UNESCO's emphasis on accountability and human oversight in AI use (UNESCO, 2023, 2024), suggesting that ethical principles translate into concrete writing behaviors with performance implications.

For self-efficacy, the strongest contribution came from core writing confidence rather than AI-specific confidence. This finding underscores that, even in AI-supported environments, students' fundamental belief in their writing ability remains central. AI tools appear to augment, rather than replace, traditional sources of writing confidence, supporting concerns that over-reliance on AI may be counterproductive if it weakens learners' sense of authorship (De Vleeschauwer, 2023). This pattern is consistent with the synthesis provided by Leki et al. (2008), who concluded after reviewing twenty-five years of L2 writing research that learner beliefs and affective factors consistently mediate the relationship between instructional support and writing outcomes, a principle that holds true even as the nature of that support shifts from teacher feedback to AI assistance.

Implications of the Study

The findings of this study carry important implications for students, particularly EFL undergraduates navigating AI-supported academic writing. The results suggest that students benefit most from AI use when it is accompanied by sufficient AI literacy, ethical awareness, and confidence in their own writing abilities. Rather than functioning as a shortcut or replacement for independent writing, AI tools appear to support learning when students actively evaluate, revise, and contextualize AI-generated output. The mediating role of self-efficacy indicates that students who believe in their capacity to manage writing tasks, both with and without AI, are better positioned to use these tools productively. This implies that students should be encouraged to view AI as a cognitive support that enhances

decision-making and revision rather than as an authoritative source of content, a perspective consistent with social cognitive theory and prior research on learner autonomy in technology-mediated writing (Bandura, 1997; Dai & Liu, 2024; Selim, 2023).

For teachers, the findings highlight the need to move beyond permissive or prohibitive approaches to AI use in writing instruction. The positive relationships observed among AI literacy, ethical AI use, and writing performance suggest that instructional guidance plays a crucial role in shaping how students engage with AI tools. Teachers are therefore positioned not only as gatekeepers of academic integrity but as mediators who model responsible, critical, and reflective AI use. Explicit classroom practices, such as demonstrating how to verify AI output, discuss ethical boundaries, and revise AI-generated text, may help strengthen both writing performance and self-efficacy. These implications align with prior studies emphasizing that technology enhances learning outcomes only when instructors integrate it intentionally into pedagogy rather than treating it as an external add-on (Krajka & Olszak, 2024; Paladhi & Maruthaveeran, 2024). From a teacher preparation standpoint, Ferris and Hedgcock (2023) and Silva and Matsuda (2001) have long advocated for equipping writing instructors with the knowledge and resources to address diverse L2 writer needs. The present findings extend this advocacy to include AI literacy and ethics as core components of contemporary L2 writing pedagogy.

The study also has implications for syllabus and materials designers, particularly in EFL programs undergoing digital transformation. The multidimensional structure of AI literacy and ethical AI use observed in this study suggests that these constructs should be embedded across writing curricula rather than confined to standalone workshops or policy statements. Writing tasks and learning materials can be designed to incorporate guided AI use, reflective prompts, and ethical decision-making alongside traditional writing objectives. Such integration allows students to develop technical competence, ethical awareness, and confidence simultaneously, rather than in isolation.

For institutional leaders and pioneers of technology integration in educational settings, the findings underscore the importance of aligning policy, pedagogy, and student support systems. While national and institutional initiatives often emphasize access to AI tools, this study suggests that meaningful educational impact depends on how those tools are framed and supported within learning environments. Clear, pedagogically informed guidelines on ethical AI use, combined with structured training for both students and instructors, are essential for preventing misuse while maximizing learning benefits. In contexts such as Thailand, where policy-driven digital transformation coexists with uneven classroom implementation, these results point to the need for coordinated strategies that address not only technological infrastructure but also ethical clarity and learner confidence. Without such alignment, the potential of AI to enhance academic writing may remain underrealized despite widespread availability (UNESCO, 2023, 2024). As Leki et al. (2008) observed, sustained progress in L2 writing requires alignment among research, pedagogy, and institutional support, a lesson that applies with renewed urgency to AI integration.

Finally, the study opens several avenues for future research. Longitudinal designs could examine how AI literacy, ethical engagement, and self-efficacy evolve over time and across instructional interventions. Experimental or quasi-experimental studies may test the effectiveness of targeted AI literacy or ethics-focused writing instruction. Additionally, qualitative investigations could explore how students interpret ethical AI use in practice, particularly in relation to cultural norms and disciplinary expectations. Given the study's context-specific focus, comparative research across EFL settings would further clarify the generalizability of the proposed model. These future directions directly echo the call by Feng et al. (2025) for longitudinal studies that focus on AI literacy development in L2 writing, as well as the broader need articulated by Silva and Leki (2004) for L2 writing research to maintain its interdisciplinary vitality while developing context-specific, empirically grounded insights.

Conclusion

This study investigated the combined roles of AI literacy, ethical AI use, and self-efficacy in relation to perceived academic writing performance among EFL undergraduates. By integrating these dimensions into a single structural model and supplementing the self-reported data with exploratory analysis of student writing assignments, the study provides an empirically grounded account of their relationships within AI-supported academic writing. The findings showed that higher AI literacy was positively associated with perceived academic writing performance, particularly when AI literacy extended beyond basic operational knowledge to include evaluative and adaptive competencies. Ethical AI use was also positively associated with perceived writing performance and strengthened the relationship between AI literacy and perceived writing performance. Self-efficacy partially mediated these relationships, suggesting that learner confidence represents one psychological pathway connecting AI-related competencies with perceived writing performance.

Taken together, the results challenge reductive narratives that frame AI as either a threat to academic integrity or a neutral productivity tool. Instead, AI-assisted writing emerges as a complex learning practice shaped by students' skills, values, and beliefs. The effectiveness of AI in academic writing depends not on the presence of technology alone, but on how students are prepared to engage with it critically, ethically, and confidently. From a broader perspective, this study supports calls for pedagogical approaches that integrate AI literacy and ethics within disciplinary learning rather than treating them as add-ons or policy issues. For EFL writing instruction, this entails designing learning environments that emphasize critical evaluation, ethical reflection, and sustained authorial responsibility alongside technological competence.

While the study is limited by its cross-sectional design, reliance on self-reported writing performance, and contextual scope, it provides a foundation for future research using objective writing assessments, longitudinal designs, instructional interventions, and cross-cultural comparisons. As AI tools become increasingly embedded in academic practice, understanding the conditions under which they support rather than undermine learning will remain a central challenge for higher education.

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Intercultural Communicative Competence, Emotional Intelligence, and English Proficiency Among Iraqi Preservice EFL Teachers: An Exploratory Moderation Analysis

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Abstract

Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is widely held to underpin effective English language teaching, yet little is known about whether its association with preservice EFL teachers' own English proficiency depends on their emotional intelligence (EI). This exploratory study examined whether EI, treated both as a composite construct and through its five competency-based components, moderates this association among Iraqi preservice EFL teachers. A convenience sample of 163 student teachers at the University of Baghdad completed self-report ICC and a teacher-focused EI scale assessing self-awareness, managing emotions, motivating oneself, empathy, and social skills, alongside a free 25-item Cambridge English online general English test. Six simple moderation models were estimated using PROCESS Model 1, with inferences based on heteroscedasticity-consistent (HC3) standard errors and Holm adjustment across the six interaction tests. Participants reported moderate ICC and EI, and ICC was positively associated with proficiency in all models. Composite EI was associated with proficiency additively but did not moderate the ICC–proficiency association. Among the components, only empathy showed a robust interaction, with a stronger ICC–proficiency association among participants reporting higher empathy. A negative interaction for managing emotions did not survive the multiplicity adjustment, the negative interaction for social skills was not significant under robust estimation, and self-awareness and motivating oneself showed no moderating effect. The findings suggest that composite EI scores may mask differences among components and that the role of empathy merits confirmatory, longitudinal research using proctored proficiency measures.

Keywords: intercultural communicative competence, emotional intelligence, English proficiency, preservice EFL teachers, teacher education

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Introduction

The increasingly dominant place of English as a global means of communication has progressively enlarged the scope of competencies expected of language teachers. Effective intercultural communication requires not only linguistic proficiency but also the ability to recognize cultural differences and respond appropriately in cross-cultural encounters (Sercu, 2005). This ability, commonly referred to as intercultural communicative competence (ICC), can no longer be overlooked in contemporary language classrooms (Fantini, 2021). Nevertheless, many educational systems, particularly those outside Western contexts, continue to prioritize linguistic knowledge over the development of intercultural competence. This disparity is particularly consequential in preservice teacher education, where future teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) are still developing the proficiency on which their later teaching will depend.

The Iraqi EFL context exemplifies this problem. EFL classrooms in this context offer minimal authentic intercultural contact, with textbooks as the principal avenue to other cultures (Obaid et al., 2019), and instruction has long been form-driven (Borg & Capstick, 2024). Insufficient ICC has been reported among Iraqi preservice EFL teachers (Hassoon, 2019) and postgraduate EFL students (Abdullah, 2024; Ilyas, 2021), and Iraqi teachers, like their counterparts in other EFL contexts, tend to endorse intercultural teaching more readily than they practice it (Abdulhasan, 2024; Gün, 2023; Loo et al., 2018; Safa & Tofighi, 2022; Young & Sachdev, 2011). The present study, however, does not examine classroom practice. Its concern is an earlier link: whether the intercultural resources that preservice teachers bring to their training are associated with their own English proficiency, the foundation of their future professional competence.

The present research starts from the premise that the association between preservice teachers' intercultural competence and their English proficiency may depend on their emotional intelligence (EI). Multidimensional theories of ICC (Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017; Byram, 1997) and EI (Goleman, 1995, 1998; Mayer & Salovey, 1997) both integrate cognitive, motivational and affective elements. Byram's (1997) ICC model provides the core conceptual lens for the present research, and EI is conceptualized following Goleman's (1995, 1998) competency-based mixed model. The two constructs are assumed to play different roles: ICC supplies the knowledge, attitudes and skills needed for intercultural interaction, whereas EI competencies bear on how readily these resources are mobilized in actual interpersonal and linguistic encounters (Mercer & Gkonou, 2017). If EI governs the use of intercultural resources rather than simply adding to them, the strength of the ICC–proficiency association should vary with EI, which makes EI a candidate moderator rather than a parallel predictor. How components of the two constructs combine in relation to communicative ability remains underexplored (Klímová et al., 2025).

Non-native EFL teachers commonly face the twin challenge of developing second/foreign language (L2) communicative skills for professional success and of forming an identity that reflects new intercultural competence (Fantini, 2020, 2021).

Research on teachers who shift from teaching one language to another points to the relevance of intercultural and psycho-emotional competence to that identity (Rostami et al., 2021). Associations have been documented between EI and L2 achievement (Al-Obaydi et al., 2022; Deepika & Jennifer, 2026; Wang & Liu, 2026) and between ICC and L2 proficiency (Wang et al., 2025). We have not, however, identified studies that examine whether composite EI or its components condition the association between ICC and prospective EFL teachers' L2 proficiency.

The study is intended to contribute in two ways. Conceptually, it tests an interactive model in which EI and its components serve as moderators rather than merely parallel predictors. Pedagogically, the results may suggest, though not establish, how intercultural and emotional competencies might be combined in Iraqi teacher education. Because prior research did not support directional predictions for the individual EI components, the study is exploratory, and its findings are offered as a basis for confirmatory research.

Literature Review

Preservice EFL teachers live through a transitional state that identifies them simultaneously as language learners and as future language educators. Their English proficiency functions concurrently as an academic outcome, a professional resource, and a prerequisite for effective classroom communication. During teacher education, they are expected to develop not only an adequate level of L2 proficiency but also the psychological and intercultural competence required for teaching English in a foreign-language context.

An important question in such a learning milieu is whether L2 proficiency develops in conjunction with closely related competencies such as intercultural competence and psycho-emotional capacity. Preservice EFL teachers are not merely future instructors of linguistic or communicative competence; they are also prospective models of how language can be used to communicate across cultural boundaries. Effective intercultural communication in foreign-language education has been argued to depend on psycho-emotional characteristics as well as linguistic competence (Mercer & Gkonou, 2017), and Klímová et al. (2025) identified EI and related characteristics as relevant to intercultural competence and effective foreign-language communication.

ICC, which emerged partly in response to limitations in traditional conceptualizations of communicative competence, extends well beyond grammatical and sociolinguistic knowledge to include cultural knowledge, attitudes, and adaptable skills (Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017; Byram, 1997, 2021). Byram's ability-based framework defines ICC through five interconnected *savoirs*: intercultural attitudes (*savoir être*), knowledge (*savoirs*), skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*), skills of discovery and interaction (*savoir apprendre* and *savoir faire*), and critical cultural awareness (*savoir s'engager*). Deardorff's (2006) process model moves from attitudes to internal and external outcomes, and Fantini's (2012) framework treats language as constitutive of ICC: intercultural competence and language proficiency cannot be pulled apart without distorting both, since the capacity to decenter from one's own worldview is realized through the linguistic resources available for doing so. His model therefore positions target-language

proficiency as a further constitutive dimension rather than a precondition or by-product (Fantini, 2019, 2020, 2021).

The relationship between ICC and language proficiency is theoretically complex because the two constructs are both distinct and mutually supportive. ICC requires linguistic resources for intercultural interaction, while language proficiency can provide access to cultural meanings, pragmatic conventions, discourse practices, and interpersonal relationships. Byram's (1997, 2021) placement of linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse competence inside the ICC construct provides the strongest theoretical warrant for expecting the two to covary, and Fantini (2020, 2021) frames the relationship as a spiral in which each construct opens further scope for the other. Much applied linguistics research treats proficiency as the foundation for ICC; among 223 preservice teachers in an EFL context, for example, foreign-language proficiency predicted ICC more strongly than national-language proficiency did (Wang et al., 2025). The opposite path is also plausible, since intercultural engagement supplies exposure, motivation and pragmatic feedback that can support language learning, and ICC has been linked to L2-learning motivation (Mirzaei & Forouzandeh, 2013). Here, ICC is designated as the focal predictor because the research questions concern the conditions under which intercultural resources are associated with linguistic attainment; the designation is analytic rather than causal, as cross-sectional data cannot separate the two directions.

A psycho-emotional capacity that may condition the relationship between ICC and L2 proficiency is EI. Of the ability-based and the broader mixed or competency models of EI, the present study adopts the competency-based conceptualization associated with Goleman (1995, 1998), whose framework identifies five interrelated dimensions: self-awareness, managing emotions, motivating oneself, empathy, and social skills. EI is thus treated as a constellation of emotional and interpersonal competencies that may influence how individuals perceive themselves, regulate their emotional responses, maintain motivation, understand others, and manage social interactions (Liu & Liu, 2025). Sun et al. (2025) supported a five-factor, 37-item version of the Leadership Toolkit EI scale (U.S. Coast Guard, 2021) among 450 university teachers in China, providing a differentiated measure of teacher EI.

There are theoretical grounds for expecting the components to relate differently to the ICC–proficiency association, although the literature does not support directional predictions for each. Goleman's (1995, 1998) dimensions can be grouped into intrapersonal (self-awareness, managing emotions, motivating oneself) and interpersonal (empathy, social skills) competencies. Empathy overlaps conceptually with the attitudinal and interpretive *savoirs* of ICC (Byram, 1997) and is listed among the internal outcomes of intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006), so it may bear on how intercultural understanding is used in interaction. Managing emotions and social skills concern the conduct of interaction itself and could either support the use of intercultural resources or offer an alternative route to communicative success, whereas self-awareness and motivating oneself are more general learning resources. Because these considerations point in different directions, a composite score could mask component-level differences, and the component-level questions were posed as non-directional and exploratory.

The relevance of EI to language education is increasingly supported by empirical research (Al-Obaydi et al., 2022; Deepika & Jennifer, 2026; Peng & Shuhong, 2025; Wang & Liu, 2026). In a meta-analysis of 39 studies, Wang and Liu (2026) found positive, negative and non-significant associations between EI and second/foreign language achievement, with a moderate pooled effect (r = .43, 95% CI [.32, .53]) when the outcome was actual L2 performance. The relationship was stronger for female participants and for those from collectivist cultural contexts, but it did not vary across language skills, education level or major.

In another meta-analysis of 47 studies, Peng and Shuhong (2025) reported a small correlation (r = .24) when L2 achievement was measured subjectively and a moderate one (r = .41) when it was measured objectively; unlike Wang and Liu (2026), they found that the relationship varied with education level and language skill. A systematic review of 121 articles from 16 national settings likewise found mostly significant links between EI and L2 learning variables (Deepika & Jennifer, 2026). In a sample of 319 Iranian EFL learners, EI was the strongest of several affective predictors of L2 proficiency (Taherkhani & Sharafi, 2026), and EI has also been associated with cognitive variables such as executive functioning (Alavi et al., 2019).

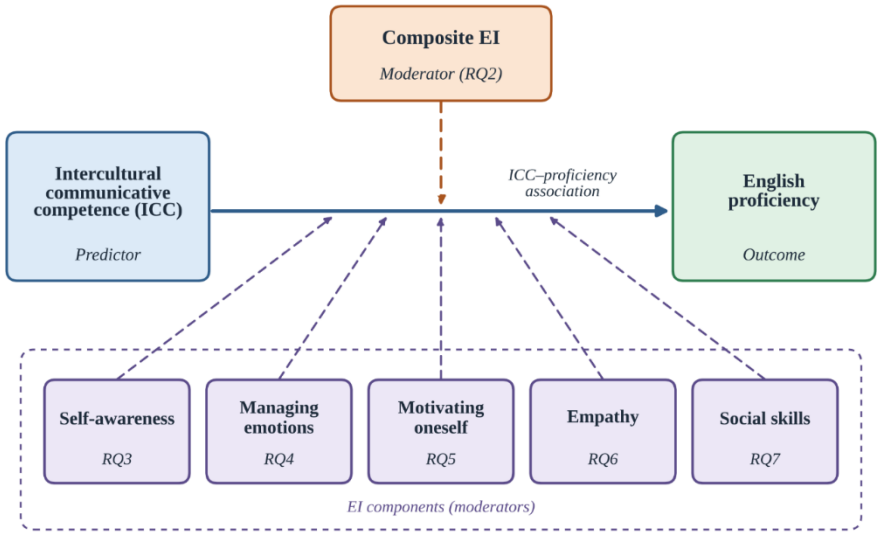
Research has also begun to connect EI with intercultural competence among teachers and teacher candidates. Mercer and Gkonou (2017) argue that the intercultural and interpersonal character of language teaching makes emotional and social competence intertwined capacities of language teachers. Although such research in EFL remains scarce, studies in mainstream education point to a close affinity between teachers' EI and intercultural competence (Gómez Yepes et al., 2026; Varis et al., 2025; Zheng, 2023). EI predicted intercultural sensitivity among 150 teachers of Turkish as a foreign language (Yılmaz & Eyüp, 2025) and correlated positively with all assessed dimensions of intercultural sensitivity among 629 prospective secondary teachers (Gómez Yepes et al., 2026). It has also been treated as an individual characteristic associated with the ways prospective teachers understand cultural difference (Varis et al., 2025).

The literature reviewed above documents associations between ICC and L2 proficiency, between EI and L2 proficiency, and between ICC and EI, but how EI bears on the link between intercultural competence and L2 proficiency remains open to investigation (Dombi, 2021; Figueroa & Hofhuis, 2024; Klímová et al., 2025). Kang (2025) found that the relationship between Korean language teachers' intercultural sensitivity and teaching performance was significantly moderated by EI, although not in the conventionally expected positive direction: the effect of intercultural sensitivity on teacher performance was stronger among teachers with lower EI ($B = -.097$, $p < .001$). EI may thus act as a moderator that either enables or limits the use of intercultural resources. A moderation model suits this reasoning better than a mediation model, because EI is conceptualized here as a relatively general set of competencies that conditions how intercultural resources are used rather than as an outcome of ICC, and because mediation would require a temporal ordering that cross-sectional data cannot support. To our knowledge, this moderation has not been tested among preservice EFL teachers, particularly in the Iraqi context.

The literature review thus points to two gaps. We found no study quantifying the relationship between ICC and L2 proficiency among Iraqi preservice EFL teachers, and none testing whether EI, as a composite construct or through its five components, moderates this relationship. The present study addresses both. Because conceptualizing EI solely as a monolithic construct may conceal important differences among its dimensions, the five competencies are also examined as individual moderators. The conceptual model of the study is displayed in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Conceptual Model of EI and Its Components as Moderators of the Association Between ICC and Iraqi Preservice EFL Teachers' English Proficiency



Based on this conceptualization, the present research addressed the following questions, of which RQ2–RQ7 were non-directional and exploratory:

RQ1. What levels of ICC and EI do the participating Iraqi preservice EFL teachers report?

RQ2. Does composite EI moderate the relationship between ICC and English proficiency among Iraqi preservice EFL teachers?

RQ3. Does Self-Awareness (SA) moderate this relationship?

RQ4. Does Managing Emotions (ME) moderate this relationship?

RQ5. Does Motivating Oneself (MO) moderate this relationship?

RQ6. Does Empathy (EM) moderate this relationship?

RQ7. Do Social Skills (SS) moderate this relationship?

Method

This study adopted a cross-sectional correlational design to investigate the interplay between ICC, L2 proficiency and EI among Iraqi preservice EFL teachers. EI and its componential features were treated as the moderating variables, meaning the study asked whether the strength or direction of the ICC–L2 proficiency association varies with EI; the design does not permit causal inference.

Participants

The target population for this study was Iraqi preservice EFL teachers, who are preparing to become the next generation of English language educators in a context where intercultural communication skills are increasingly vital yet remain largely underexplored in teacher training. In accordance with a convenience sampling procedure, 163 student teachers enrolled in the English Department at the University of Baghdad participated. Inclusion criteria were enrollment in the undergraduate EFL teacher education program and prior exposure to English learning in academic settings. Participants were 71 women and 92 men aged 20–28 years (M = 23.8, SD =2.14), in years 3–4 of the program; they had completed the teaching practicum, and all were native speakers of Arabic. Because all participants came from a single department, the sample cannot be considered representative of Iraqi preservice EFL teachers.

Because the sample size was determined by access rather than by an a priori calculation, a sensitivity power analysis was conducted (Lakens, 2022). For a single interaction term in a three-predictor model with $N = 163$ and $\alpha = .05$, the study had 80% power to detect effects of $f^2 \geq .049$, or about 3% of additional variance when the full model explains 35% (Cohen, 2013); at the strictest step of the Holm correction described below ($\alpha = .0083$), the threshold was $f^2 = .076$. Since moderator effects in field research typically account for 1%–3% of the variance (McClelland & Judd, 1993), the study was underpowered for small interactions, and non-significant interactions do not show that moderation is absent.

Instruments

Participants' self-perceived ICC was assessed with the scale developed by Mirzaei and Forouzandeh (2013) for Iranian EFL learners on the basis of the models of Deardorff (2006) and Byram (1997). Its 22 items, rated on a 5-point scale, measure knowledge, skills, attitudes, and awareness; only the total score was analyzed. Internal consistency in the present sample was acceptable (Cronbach's $\alpha = .76$; McDonald's $\omega = .79$). The scale has not been validated with Iraqi or preservice-teacher samples, however, and its factor structure was not examined in this study, so its construct validity for the present population is assumed rather than established.

EI was measured with the Emotional Intelligence Scale of a leadership self-assessment toolkit (U.S. Coast Guard, 2021), originally 50 items based on Goleman's (1995, 1998) model, in the 37-item, five-factor version validated by Sun et al. (2025) among university teachers in China. It assesses self-awareness (7 items), managing emotions (8), motivating oneself (6), empathy (7), and social skills (9) on a 5-point scale. Internal consistency was α = .81 for the total scale and α =.79, .76, .81, .74, and .78 for the five subscales, respectively. Here too the validity evidence comes from a different population, and the weak and occasionally negative correlations among subscales (see Results) suggest that the five-factor structure may not hold in the same form in this sample.

English proficiency was measured with the free Cambridge English online general English test (https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/test-your-english/general-english/), a self-assessment tool based on the criteria outlined by the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). The test includes 25 multiple-choice items arranged in five sets of five-item sections, and the score is the number of correct answers (0–25), which participants reported from the results screen (test accessed in November 2024). The test is designed to give learners a quick indication of their level rather than to serve as a research instrument. The scores are, therefore, treated as a brief, unsupervised indicator of general proficiency rather than as an objective or comprehensive assessment.

Data Collection Procedure

Prior to any data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants after a detailed explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, confidentiality measures, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. The ICC scale and the EI questionnaire were administered online using the Google Forms platform in their original English versions. Participants completed the proficiency test on the Cambridge English website at their convenience and then sent a screenshot of their results to the researcher. Responses were matched to test scores through a personal code, and participants were instructed to take the test once, without assistance or reference materials. Because the test was unsupervised, testing conditions such as time spent, external help, or repeated attempts could not be controlled or verified.

Data Analysis Procedure

The analyses proceeded in three stages. The data were first screened for missing values, distributional problems, outliers, and violations of the assumptions underlying regression. RQ1 was then addressed with descriptive statistics and one-sample *t* tests comparing each mean with the midpoint of the 5-point response scale (3.00), which served as the main basis for interpreting levels. As a descriptive aid only, scores were also grouped into three equal-width bands, each (5 − 1)/3 = 1.33 points wide: low (1.00–2.33), moderate (2.34–3.67), and high (3.68–5.00). These

bands are interpretive labels rather than established norms or diagnostic levels, and they were not used in any inferential analysis.

RQ2–RQ7 were tested as six simple moderation models, each corresponding to Model 1 in the PROCESS framework (Hayes, 2022). In each model, English proficiency was regressed on ICC, the moderator (composite EI or one of its five dimensions), and the product of the two. ICC and the moderators were mean-centered before the product terms were formed, so that each lower-order coefficient represents the effect of one predictor at the sample mean of the other. Separate models were used because composite EI, as a linear combination of its components, cannot be entered alongside them, and because a single model with the five components and their five product terms (11 predictors, $N = 163$) would have had even less power to detect any one interaction, with the product terms sharing much of the variance that the components share (rs up to .57). The separate models therefore show whether each component, considered on its own, moderates the ICC–proficiency association, not whether its effect is independent of the others. Significant interactions were probed by estimating the conditional effect of ICC at low (−1 *SD*), average, and high (+1 *SD*) values of the moderator (Aiken & West, 1991) and with Johnson–Neyman analyses.

Inferences about the interactions were based on HC3 heteroscedasticity-consistent standard errors, which are recommended for routine use in ordinary least squares (OLS) regression (Hayes & Cai, 2007) and were warranted here by evidence of heteroscedasticity in three of the six models (see Results); OLS results are reported alongside. To control the familywise error rate across the six interaction tests, the HC3 p values were adjusted with the Holm (1979) procedure, which is less conservative than the Bonferroni correction. Interactions that remained significant after adjustment were regarded as robust, and those significant only before adjustment as tentative. All primary analyses used the full sample ($N = 163$); models re-estimated without influential cases served only as sensitivity checks.

Results

Data Screening and Preliminary Analyses

Table 1 reports the descriptive statistics. Skewness ranged from −0.23 to 0.19 ($SE = 0.19$) and kurtosis from −0.60 to 0.19 ($SE = 0.38$); dividing each value by its standard error gave no ratio above 1.96 in absolute terms, which indicates approximately normal distributions. No standardized score exceeded the |3.29| criterion for univariate outliers (largest $|z| = 3.14$; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). English proficiency scores ranged from 6 to 23 out of a possible 25 ($M = 14.95$, $SD = 3.98$), with no floor or ceiling effects.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for the Study Variables

Variable	*M*	*SD*	95% CI	Skew.	Kurt.	*t*(162)	*d*	Band
ICC	2.99	0.48	[2.91, 3.06]	0.11	−0.37	−0.32	−0.02	Moderate
EI (composite)	3.01	0.39	[2.95, 3.07]	0.17	−0.50	0.36	0.03	Moderate
Self-Awareness	3.36	0.76	[3.25, 3.48]	−0.23	−0.44	6.13***	0.48	Moderate
Managing Emotions	2.65	0.71	[2.54, 2.76]	0.18	−0.60	−6.38***	−0.50	Moderate
Motivating Oneself	3.03	0.64	[2.93, 3.13]	0.13	−0.59	0.66	0.05	Moderate
Empathy	2.98	0.59	[2.89, 3.07]	0.19	−0.45	−0.47	−0.04	Moderate
Social Skills	3.06	0.54	[2.98, 3.15]	−0.20	0.19	1.51	0.12	Moderate
English proficiency	14.95	3.98	[14.34, 15.57]	−0.01	−0.57	—	—	—

The *t* tests compare each mean with the scale midpoint (3.00), and *d* expresses that difference in standard deviation units. Bands are descriptive equal-interval ranges (low = 1.00–2.33, moderate = 2.34–3.67, high = 3.68–5.00), not normative levels. Standard errors are 0.19 for skewness and 0.38 for kurtosis. English proficiency is reported in raw test scores (0–25).

***$p < .001$.

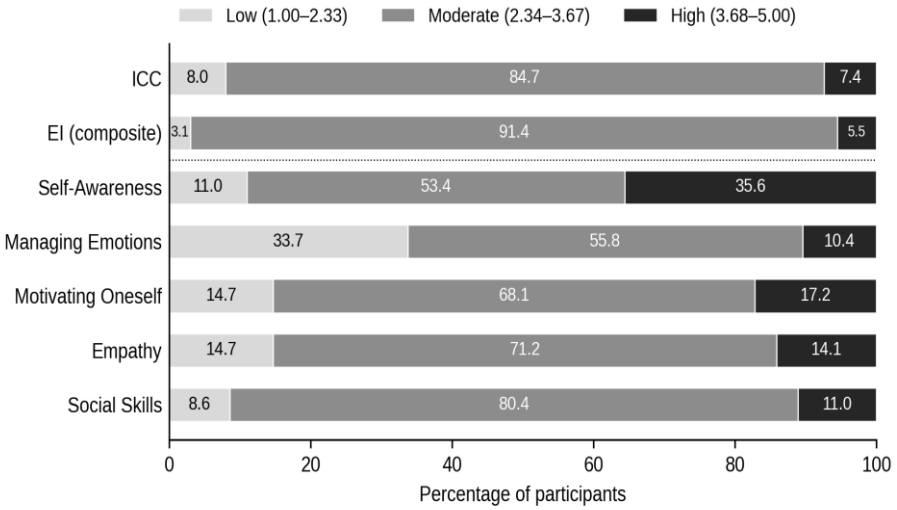
Across the six moderation models, variance inflation factors did not exceed 1.34, and the largest Cook's distance was .73, below the conventional cut-off of 1. Residuals were nearly symmetric (skewness ≤ 0.21) but somewhat flat (kurtosis between −1.38 and 0.01); with a sample of 163, this light-tailed departure was not considered a threat to inference. Breusch–Pagan tests, however, indicated heteroscedasticity in the composite EI, SA, and SS models (*p*s ≤ .031), which supports the use of HC3 standard errors as the primary basis for inference.

Research Question 1: Levels of ICC and EI

As Table 1 shows, the preservice teachers' mean ICC score was 2.99 (*SD* = 0.48), 95% CI [2.91, 3.06], and their mean composite EI score was 3.01 (*SD* = 0.39), 95% CI [2.95, 3.07]. Neither mean differed from the scale midpoint, $t(162) = -0.32$, $p = .753$, $d = -0.02$ for ICC, and $t(162) = 0.36$, $p = .721$, $d = 0.03$ for EI, and both fell in the moderate band. The distribution of individual scores points the same way (Figure 2): 84.7% of participants fell in the moderate band for ICC, with small and almost equal shares in the low (8.0%) and high (7.4%) bands, and 91.4% fell in the moderate band for composite EI. This clustering restricted the range over which moderation could be observed and reduced the power to detect it (McClelland & Judd, 1993).

Figure 2

Distribution of Participants Across Low, Moderate, and High Bands of ICC and EI



The five EI dimensions were less uniform. Their means were all in the moderate band, but Self-Awareness was the only dimension rated significantly above the midpoint, $t(162) = 6.13$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.48$, and Managing Emotions was the only one rated significantly below it, $t(162) = -6.38$, $p < .001$, $d = -0.50$. More than a third of the participants (35.6%) reported high self-awareness, while a similar proportion (33.7%) fell into the low band for managing emotions. Motivating Oneself, Empathy, and Social Skills did not differ from the midpoint ($ps \geq .134$).

Correlations Among the Study Variables

Zero-order correlations are presented in Table 2. ICC was positively correlated with English proficiency, $r = .52$, $p < .001$, a large association by Cohen's (2013) conventions. Composite EI was related to proficiency to a similar degree ($r = .49$), as were Social Skills ($r = .50$) and Self-Awareness ($r = .48$). The correlations for Managing Emotions ($r = .30$) and Motivating Oneself ($r = .23$) were more modest, and Empathy was unrelated to proficiency ($r = .08$, $p = .296$). ICC and composite EI shared a moderate positive correlation ($r = .45$). Correlations among the EI components were uneven: Self-Awareness and Social Skills were moderately related ($r = .57$), whereas Empathy was unrelated to Self-Awareness ($r = .00$) and Social Skills ($r = -.02$) and weakly negatively related to Managing Emotions ($r = -.18$). This departs from the expectation, in Goleman's (1995, 1998) model, that the competencies are positively interrelated.

Table 2

Pearson Correlations Among the Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. ICC	—							
2. English proficiency	.52***	—						
3. EI (composite)	.45***	.49***	—					
4. Self-Awareness	.25**	.48***	.68***	—				
5. Managing Emotions	.13	.30***	.38***	.22**	—			
6. Motivating Oneself	.38***	.23**	.66***	.17*	.02	—		
7. Empathy	.32***	.08	.31***	.00	−.18*	.35***	—	
8. Social Skills	.22**	.50***	.63***	.57***	.25**	.25**	−.02	—

$N = 163$. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$

Moderating Role of Emotional Intelligence (RQs 2–7)

The zero-order correlations establish that ICC, EI, and proficiency are associated, but they cannot indicate whether the strength of the ICC–proficiency association varies across levels of EI. Table 3 compares the interaction tests under OLS and HC3 estimation, with Holm-adjusted *p* values. ICC was a significant positive predictor of English proficiency in all six models, with effects at the mean of the moderator ranging from $b = 3.30$ to $b = 4.35$ (all ps $< .001$), and the predictors together explained between 27% and 46% of the variance in proficiency. The six moderation models are summarized in Table 4.

Table 3

Tests of the ICC × Moderator Interactions Under OLS and HC3 Estimation

Moderator	*b*	*SE*	*p* (OLS)	*p* (HC3)	*p* (Holm)	Evidence
Composite EI	−1.29	1.35	.341	.471	.942	Not supported
Self-Awareness	−1.33	0.73	.068	.082	.246	Not supported
Managing Emotions	−1.70	0.74	.023	.018	.090	Tentative
Motivating Oneself	−0.07	0.76	.923	.927	.942	Not supported
Empathy	2.22	0.84	.009	.001	.006	Robust
Social Skills	−2.82	0.91	.002	.056	.224	Inconclusive

b and *SE* are OLS estimates of the interaction coefficient. *p* (Holm) = HC3 *p* values adjusted for six tests (Holm, 1979). Robust = significant after adjustment; tentative = significant only before adjustment; inconclusive = significant under OLS only and sensitive to one influential case.

Table 4

Moderation Models Predicting English Proficiency From ICC, Emotional Intelligence, and Their Interaction (OLS Estimates)

Predictor	*b*	*SE*	*t*	*p*	95% CI
RQ2: Composite emotional intelligence (EI) as moderator					
ICC	3.30	0.61	5.37	< .001	[2.09, 4.51]
EI	3.20	0.72	4.44	< .001	[1.78, 4.63]
ICC × EI	−1.29	1.35	−0.96	.341	[−3.96, 1.38]
R^2 = .36, $F(3, 159) = 29.46$, $p < .001$; ΔR^2 = .004, $F(1, 159) = 0.91$, $p = .341$					
RQ3: Self-Awareness (SA) as moderator					
ICC	3.78	0.53	7.08	< .001	[2.73, 4.84]
SA	1.97	0.33	5.98	< .001	[1.32, 2.62]
ICC × SA	−1.33	0.73	−1.84	.068	[−2.77, 0.10]
R^2 = .41, $F(3, 159) = 37.37$, $p < .001$; ΔR^2 = .012, $F(1, 159) = 3.37$, $p = .068$					
RQ4: Managing Emotions (ME) as moderator					
ICC	4.12	0.54	7.64	< .001	[3.05, 5.18]
ME	1.15	0.37	3.10	.002	[0.42, 1.88]
ICC × ME	−1.70	0.74	−2.30	.023	[−3.16, −0.24]
R^2 = .35, $F(3, 159) = 28.30$, $p < .001$; ΔR^2 = .022, $F(1, 159) = 5.27$, $p = .023$					
RQ5: Motivating Oneself (MO) as moderator					
ICC	4.25	0.64	6.68	< .001	[3.00, 5.51]
MO	0.22	0.46	0.48	.635	[−0.69, 1.12]
ICC × MO	−0.07	0.76	−0.10	.923	[−1.58, 1.43]
R^2 = .27, $F(3, 159) = 19.92$, $p < .001$; $\Delta R^2 < .001$, $F(1, 159) = 0.01$, $p = .923$					
RQ6: Empathy (EM) as moderator					
ICC	4.35	0.59	7.41	< .001	[3.19, 5.51]
EM	−0.40	0.48	−0.85	.398	[−1.35, 0.54]
ICC × EM	2.22	0.84	2.65	.009	[0.57, 3.88]
R^2 = .31, $F(3, 159) = 23.83$, $p < .001$; ΔR^2 = .031, $F(1, 159) = 7.04$, $p = .009$					
RQ7: Social Skills (SS) as moderator					
ICC	3.56	0.50	7.13	< .001	[2.57, 4.55]
SS	3.25	0.45	7.25	< .001	[2.37, 4.14]
ICC × SS	−2.82	0.91	−3.10	.002	[−4.61, −1.03]
R^2 = .46, $F(3, 159) = 45.05$, $p < .001$; ΔR^2 = .033, $F(1, 159) = 9.64$, $p = .002$					

b = unstandardized coefficient; CI = confidence interval. Coefficient *t* tests have 159 degrees of freedom. ΔR^2 is the increase in explained variance due to the interaction term. HC3 tests of the interaction terms, which were used for inference, are reported in Table 4.

Composite Emotional Intelligence as a Moderator (RQ2)

Composite EI predicted proficiency in its own right (b = 3.20, p < .001), but the ICC × EI interaction was not significant, b = −1.29, SE = 1.35, p = .341, HC3 p = .471, and added less than half a percentage point of explained variance, ΔR^2 = .004. Its contribution was additive rather than conditional, and RQ2 was not supported.

Self-Awareness as a Moderator (RQ3)

Self-Awareness was associated with proficiency independently of ICC (b = 1.97, p < .001). The interaction was negative but did not reach significance, b = −1.33, SE = 0.73, p = .068, HC3 p = .082. RQ3 was not supported.

Managing Emotions as a Moderator (RQ4)

The ICC × ME interaction was significant before adjustment, b = −1.70, SE = 0.74, $t(159)$ = −2.30, p = .023, 95% CI [−3.16, −0.24], HC3 p = .018, ΔR^2 = .022, f^2 = .033, but not after Holm adjustment (p = .090), so RQ4 received only tentative support. The negative coefficient indicates that the association between ICC and proficiency was weaker at higher levels of Managing Emotions. As Table 5 and Figure 3 show, the conditional effect of ICC was b = 5.32 among participants low in this dimension, b = 4.12 at the mean, and b = 2.92 among those high in it, remaining significant at all three points. The Johnson–Neyman boundary fell at ME = 3.86. Below this value, a range that included 94.5% of the sample, ICC was significantly associated with proficiency; the region above it contained only nine participants.

Table 5

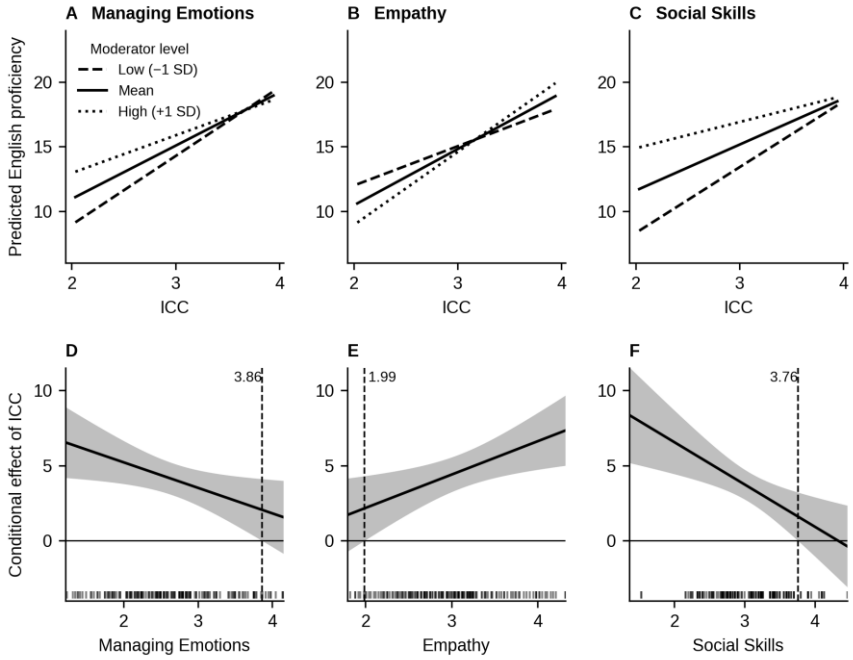
Conditional Effects of ICC on English Proficiency at Values of Managing Emotions, Empathy, and Social Skills

Moderator	Moderator value	*b*	*SE*	*t*	*p*	95% CI
Managing Emotions	Low (1.94)	5.32	0.76	7.03	< .001	[3.82, 6.81]
	Mean (2.65)	4.12	0.54	7.64	< .001	[3.05, 5.18]
	High (3.35)	2.92	0.75	3.91	< .001	[1.44, 4.39]
Empathy	Low (2.39)	3.05	0.82	3.70	< .001	[1.42, 4.67]
	Mean (2.98)	4.35	0.59	7.41	< .001	[3.19, 5.51]
	High (3.57)	5.66	0.70	8.04	< .001	[4.27, 7.05]
Social Skills	Low (2.52)	5.09	0.69	7.36	< .001	[3.72, 6.45]
	Mean (3.06)	3.56	0.50	7.13	< .001	[2.57, 4.55]
	High (3.61)	2.03	0.71	2.85	.005	[0.63, 3.44]

Low and high values are 1 *SD* below and above the moderator mean. b = conditional (unstandardized) effect of ICC; CI = confidence interval; t tests have 159 degrees of freedom. Johnson–Neyman boundaries: the effect of ICC was significant for ME < 3.86 (94.5% of the sample), EM > 1.99 (95.7%), and SS < 3.76 (90.8%). Estimates are based on OLS standard errors.

Figure 3

Simple Slopes and Johnson–Neyman Plots for Managing Emotions, Empathy, and Social Skills



Panels A–C show predicted English proficiency at low (−1 *SD*), mean, and high (+1 *SD*) values of each moderator, plotted across ICC scores within 2 *SD* of the mean. Panels D–F show the conditional effect of ICC (solid line) with its 95% confidence band across the observed range of the moderator. Dashed vertical lines mark the Johnson–Neyman boundaries, where the band crosses zero; tick marks along the horizontal axis show observed moderator scores.

Motivating Oneself as a Moderator (RQ5)

Motivating Oneself did not moderate the relationship, $b = -0.07$, $SE = 0.76$, $p = .923$, HC3 $p = .927$, and showed no unique association with proficiency once ICC was taken into account ($b = 0.22$, $p = .635$). RQ5 was not supported.

Empathy as a Moderator (RQ6)

Empathy moderated the relationship between ICC and proficiency, $b = 2.22$, $SE = 0.84$, $t(159) = 2.65$, $p = .009$, 95% CI [0.57, 3.88], $\Delta R^2 = .031$, $f^2 = .044$. The effect was clearer under HC3 estimation ($p = .001$) and was the only interaction to remain significant after Holm adjustment ($p = .006$); RQ6 was supported. In contrast to ME, the interaction was positive: the ICC–proficiency association was stronger at higher levels of empathy, with the conditional effect of ICC rising from $b = 3.05$ at low empathy to $b = 4.35$ at the mean and $b = 5.66$ at high empathy. The Johnson–Neyman boundary fell at EM = 1.99, so the effect of ICC was significant

for the 95.7% of participants scoring above that value. Empathy alone did not predict proficiency ($b = -0.40$, $p = .398$).

Social Skills as a Moderator (RQ7)

In the OLS model, the ICC × SS interaction was significant, $b = -2.82$, $SE = 0.91$, $t(159) = -3.10$, $p = .002$, 95% CI [−4.61, −1.03], and produced the largest increment of the six models, $\Delta R^2 = .033$, $F(1, 159) = 9.64$, $f^2 = .061$. The pattern resembled that for ME, with the ICC–proficiency association becoming weaker at higher levels of Social Skills: $b = 5.09$ at low, 3.56 at average, and 2.03 at high values. The Johnson–Neyman boundary was SS = 3.76, and 90.8% of participants fell in the region where ICC remained a significant predictor.

Under the primary HC3 criterion, however, the interaction was not significant ($SE = 1.47$, $p = .056$; Holm-adjusted $p = .224$). The influence statistics traced this discrepancy to a single case combining high leverage ($h = .33$), a large standardized residual (3.94), and a Cook's distance of .73. In a sensitivity analysis excluding this case, the interaction became larger and was significant under both OLS and HC3 estimation, $b = -4.05$, $SE = 0.91$, $p < .001$, $\Delta R^2 = .060$; removing the same case did not alter the conclusion for any other model. Because the primary analysis retained the full sample, RQ7 was not supported; the OLS and sensitivity results point to a possible negative interaction that requires confirmation in a larger sample.

Discussion

This exploratory study examined whether EI, as a composite and through its five components, conditions the relationship between ICC and English proficiency among Iraqi preservice EFL teachers. The participants reported moderate ICC and EI, and ICC was strongly associated with proficiency. Composite EI did not moderate this association, and among the components only Empathy showed a robust interaction; the negative interactions for Managing Emotions and Social Skills were weaker and less certain, and are best treated as leads for future research.

The moderate ICC profile, with 84.7% of participants in the middle band, presents a less discouraging image than reports of insufficient intercultural competence among Iraqi preservice and postgraduate students (Abdullah, 2024; Hassoon, 2019; Ilyas, 2021). It is broadly in accord with the medium-to-high intercultural sensitivity reported for Turkish teacher candidates (Hark Söylemez, 2025) and the high levels found among teachers of Turkish as a foreign language (Yılmaz & Eyüp, 2025), although comparisons across instruments are approximate. Within EI, the profile was uneven: participants rated self-awareness highest and managing emotions lowest. One reading is that they recognize their emotions more readily than they regulate them, an asymmetry resembling the gap between intercultural beliefs and practices reported among Iraqi teachers (Abdulhasan, 2024). The present data cannot establish such a parallel, however; the difference may equally reflect item content or response tendencies such as social desirability, and it

would need to be examined with behavioral or observational measures before conclusions about teacher education are drawn.

ICC was positively associated with proficiency in every model, consistent with frameworks that place linguistic competence within ICC (Byram, 1997, 2021) or treat language as constitutive of it (Fantini, 2012). Wang et al. (2025) examined the reverse path, with foreign-language proficiency predicting preservice teachers' ICC. Cross-sectional data cannot settle the direction, and Fantini's (2020, 2021) notion of a spiral, in which each competence widens the scope of the other, may capture the relationship better than either one-way account. Part of the association may also reflect unmeasured variables such as general academic engagement.

Composite EI was directly associated with proficiency (r = .49), somewhat more strongly than the pooled correlation that Peng and Shuhong (2025) reported for objectively measured achievement (r = .41), and in keeping with Taherkhani and Sharafi (2026), who identified EI as the strongest affective predictor of L2 proficiency, and with Fabumuyi's (2025) conclusion that EI and intercultural competence both matter for success in learning English. The collectivist cultural context of the sample, which Wang and Liu (2026) identified as strengthening the EI–achievement relationship, may partly explain the size of the association, although the brief, unsupervised proficiency measure calls for caution. Unlike in Kang's (2025) study of teaching performance, however, composite EI did not act as a moderator here.

One possible reason is that the components did not behave uniformly. The ICC–proficiency association was stronger at higher levels of Empathy and, less certainly, weaker at higher levels of Managing Emotions and Social Skills, and interactions of opposite sign may offset each other once the dimensions are averaged. Because only the Empathy interaction survived the multiplicity adjustment, this offsetting account remains a possibility rather than a demonstrated explanation, but it is consistent with the study's premise that a monolithic view of EI can conceal differences among its components.

Self-Awareness and Motivating Oneself did not moderate the relationship. Self-Awareness was directly associated with proficiency, and its non-significant interaction carried the same negative sign as those of Managing Emotions and Social Skills. Motivating Oneself showed no unique association once ICC was controlled, possibly because its content overlaps with ICC itself: it correlated more closely with ICC than any other EI dimension did, and motivation is a component of integrated models of intercultural competence (Arasaratnam et al., 2010).

Empathy, the one component with a robust interaction, showed a purely conditional pattern: it was unrelated to proficiency at the zero-order level (r = .08, p = .296) and as a main effect (b = −0.40, p = .398), yet its interaction with ICC was positive and withstood both robust estimation and the multiplicity adjustment. This conditional role fits accounts in which empathy links intercultural understanding to communicative performance: Deardorff (2006) places empathy among the internal outcomes that precede effective and appropriate communication, empathy is a core component of the integrated model tested by Arasaratnam et al. (2010), and Fantini

(2012) ties decentering from one's own worldview to the linguistic resources through which it is realized. One possibility, which the present data cannot test, is that empathic preservice teachers are better able to draw on their intercultural competence in the attentive, perspective-taking interaction through which language develops. The finding extends evidence linking EI with intercultural sensitivity among teachers and teacher candidates (Gómez Yepes et al., 2026; Yılmaz & Eyüp, 2025) to language proficiency, although Empathy's weak correlations with the other components suggest that it may capture something distinct from EI as a whole.

The negative interactions for Managing Emotions and Social Skills call for more caution, since the first did not survive adjustment and the second was significant only under OLS and depended on one influential case. If confirmed, they would mirror Kang's (2025) finding that intercultural sensitivity was more strongly associated with the professional performance of teachers with lower EI. We therefore offer a compensatory hypothesis, to be tested in future research rather than treated as a conclusion of this study. Preservice teachers who regulate their emotions well and interact with ease may reach proficiency through other routes, such as more sustained use of English with others, so that their intercultural resources make less difference. For those with weaker emotional and social resources, ICC may carry more of the load. Testing this idea would require longitudinal data, measures of actual language use, and samples large enough to estimate small interactions reliably.

Taken together, the component-level results suggest that the five EI dimensions may relate to the ICC–proficiency association in different ways: Empathy as an amplifying condition, Managing Emotions and possibly Social Skills as attenuating conditions, and Self-Awareness and Motivating Oneself as additive correlates or not at all. These labels describe statistical patterns rather than mechanisms; a significant interaction shows that an association differs across levels of a third variable, not that one competence enables, replaces, or makes another unnecessary.

If this differentiation holds in confirmatory research, the practice of entering composite EI into models of language learning outcomes may obscure differences among components, and offsetting effects among components would offer one possible explanation for the inconsistent findings that both available meta-analyses have documented in this literature.

Conclusion

In this sample, Iraqi preservice EFL teachers reported moderate levels of ICC and EI, and ICC was closely associated with their English proficiency. Composite EI did not condition this association, but Empathy did: the ICC–proficiency association was stronger among participants reporting higher empathy, a result that held under robust estimation and adjustment for multiple tests. Weaker and less certain evidence pointed to the opposite pattern for Managing Emotions and Social Skills. Treating EI componentially therefore appears worthwhile in modelling

the ICC–proficiency relationship, although the component-level findings require confirmation.

For teacher education in Iraq, the findings suggest, without demonstrating, that intercultural and emotional competencies might be developed together rather than in isolation. Intercultural tasks could be paired with perspective-taking activities that cultivate empathy, and emotion regulation, the lowest-rated EI dimension in this sample, may deserve explicit attention in the curriculum. Because individuals differ in how much they gain from intercultural training (Figueroa & Hofhuis, 2024), such provision might also be tailored to trainees' profiles, as suggested by Taherkhani and Sharafi (2026). These proposals are best regarded as hypotheses for intervention research, since correlational, self-report data cannot show that changing one competence would change another.

Several limitations qualify these conclusions. The most important concerns the proficiency measure: a free, 25-item self-assessment test taken without supervision, with scores reported through screenshots. We could not verify whether participants worked alone, used reference materials, or made repeated attempts; a short multiple-choice test samples only part of general proficiency; and its reliability could not be estimated. These features add measurement error, reducing precision and power, and uncontrolled assistance could introduce systematic bias if it was more common among some participants than others. The findings should therefore be replicated with a proctored, standardized proficiency test. Second, ICC and EI were self-reported and measured with instruments validated in other populations, their factor structure was not examined here, and the weak correlations among some EI components suggest that the five-factor structure may not hold in the same form.

Third, the single-site convenience sample limits generalizability and provided adequate power only for interactions of $f^2 \geq .049$. The observed interactions were small, the clustering of ICC and EI scores restricted the range over which they could be detected, and the Johnson–Neyman regions at the extremes of the moderators rested on few cases. Because six models were tested, the component-level findings are exploratory, and separate models cannot show whether each component's interaction is independent of the others. Finally, the cross-sectional design precludes causal or directional conclusions; ICC and proficiency may influence each other, and both may depend on unmeasured variables. Future research could test the Empathy interaction and the compensatory hypothesis in larger, multi-site samples, using structural equation modeling with the components of both ICC and EI, longitudinal or intervention designs, and performance-based measures of ICC and proficiency. Qualitative inquiry could also clarify how empathy and emotion regulation shape the ways preservice teachers draw on their intercultural competence when using English.

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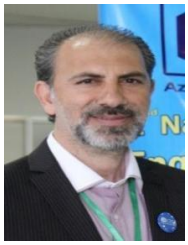
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"How Old Were You in 1989?": TIKKEH as Implicational Language in a Live Broadcasting Show

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Abstract

The phenomenon of implied language is an inherent element of language used in interactions while following certain purposes. The variants of this umbrella term, i.e., insinuation, innuendo, sarcastic language, etc. have more or less been previously discussed by scholars of pragmatics in English language. Such variants of implicatures are also used in Persian under the titles *TIKKEH*, *MATALAK*, among others. While previous research on *TIKKEH* has discussed the underlying components of the term in everyday conversations among Iranian interlocutors, the present article situates the term within a live broadcasting show in Sports Channel in 2020 in Iran, featuring the interview between two hosts and the president of the Football Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, as well as the comments of viewers posted on two opinion forums, reacting to the unrestrained use of implied language by the guest. The research corroborates the findings of Tayebi (2018) on *TIKKEH*, as it is made with the goals of humiliating the addressee, showing off one's shrewdness, leaving the addressee in an undecided situation, taking pleasure in watching the addressee being hurt, and staining the face of the addressee. My data also revealed that interlocutors at times employ *TIKKEH* to evade answering questions or to distract their addressees who they find challenging. Furthermore, it is discussed that the president of FFIRI exercises abundant use of implied language to bond with those viewers whose line of thought run contrary to that of IRIB, thus guarantying his truthfulness and commitment.

Keywords: impoliteness, implied language, *TIKKEH*, live broadcasting shows

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Introduction

Daily affairs oblige human beings to assume linguistic strategies and perspectives in order to either assume their presence and value on their environment or, at least, take control of the situation they are in. To this end, in interactional affairs through language, we usually deal with instances of observing the presence of others or violating their personality. Scientifically speaking, the latter issue has been discussed within the realm of pragmatics under the term linguistic (im)politeness since the 1980s, rising to prominence through Brown and Levinson's (1987) seminal work on politeness and face which refers to a "public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself" (p. 61). Study on impoliteness, however, began with Culpeper (1996, 1998, 2005), which marked the beginning of studies on using language to cause offense and aggression vis-à-vis politeness theories, the development of which owes much to data originally collected from TV (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2014, p. 3).

Making use of impolite language in live TV shows is of great importance and is constantly the locus of attention by viewers and researchers. As Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2014) has noted, "it is not easy to conceive of impoliteness research without bringing forth its symbiotic relationship with television" (p. 1). Within this area, broadcast interviews are locus for interviewers openly questioning the interviewees, thus causing threats to their faces (Anchimbe, 2009; Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2009). Researchers, including Tracy (2008), have developed the idea of "reasonable hostility," where a norm has been formed around the idea of politicians being questioned openly and experiencing face attacks from interviewers. As Anchimbe (2009) explains, in these situations, "the interviewer is assumed to have a right – a responsibility, even – to threaten the interviewee's political face and the interviewee is expected to allow this to happen without attacking the interviewer back" (p. 97). With this regard, faced with threats to his face, the interviewee, rather than directly engaging in overt use of impolite utterances, is expected to cleverly deal with the threats posed to his face. Violations of formal politeness norms are quite abnormal in these shows, and if not observed, would cause damage to the personal, national, and group face of the interviewee. Nevertheless, while it has been demonstrated that such incidents require participants to avoid attending their self-oriented face needs (Mahdavi Nejhad et al., 2024, p. 254), there are cases where the interviewee, rather than employing linguistic strategies to save their face, resorts to verbal aggression through impoliteness by acting condescendingly or employing implied language without regarding the cooperative norms of broadcasting interviews. That is to say, it is possible that they utilize strategies in order to cause threats to the face of the interviewer (and thereby viewers) overtly or covertly through patronizing language, regardless of the fact that their language is constantly monitored by the public and would be consequential to their reputation.

With regard to the above explanations, it is common practice to indirectly cause offence to others through employing innuendo or insinuation, each having been thoroughly delved into by Bell (1997) and Bertuccelli Papi (2014), respectively, in the English language. In Persian, however, the latter terms are metaphorically referred to as *tikkeh, zaxm-e zabân, matalak, ta'ne zadan*, *koloft*

goftan, inter alia[i]. A review of the available literature on the term shows that, with the exception of one scholarly article published in the journal of Intercultural Pragmatics, almost no research has been conducted on the underlying components as well as functions of *TIKKEH*. Tayebi (2018), however, as an Iranian linguist doing research overseas, has put forward valuable insights into the term in Persian. Locating her research within the realm of (im)politeness, she defines *TIKKEH* as an impolite utterance "almost always made with the intention of conveying an impolite belief with the potential of hurting the addressee [which] can even be much more hurtful than its direct and explicit form" (p. 95). The data provided by her to corroborate and theorize her points regarding the term mostly consist of polylogal interactions[ii] – where there are more than two or three participants – from instances of naturally-occurring implied interactions in modern Persian (p. 90). My concern, however, is the manipulation of the mentioned terms in a live show in a national broadcasting TV channel, i.e., Sports Channel, in the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (hereafter referred to as IRIB) which aired on 19 December 2022 with the purpose of questioning the president of the Football Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran (hereafter referred to as P) regarding the status of the national football team.

Decisions made by P have always been under criticism of media in the country. For instance, he took power of the federation nearly five months before the outset of the FIFA World Cup 2022 with the manifesto of bringing back the former coach Carlos Queiroz as the head coach, while it was Dragan Skocic who qualified the national team for the World Cup. As P won the seat, he dismissed Skocic and brought back Queiroz, known for merely defensive tactics, thus bringing to the mind of people a feeling of dissatisfaction as well as the power of lobby on the part of the newly-introduced president of the federation. Following the group-stage knock-out of Iran from the FIFA World Cup 2022, as the team received six goals in the first game against England and one against the United States in the third game, Iran's football federation, specifically its president, came under an intense criticism by media and the public. It was against this background that P was invited to a televised show called "2022 Cup" in Sports Channel, the sole national channel fully dedicated to national and international sports news in the country, in order to answer a myriad of questions regarding the status of the national football team and uncertainties regarding its future coach[iii]. From the very outset, the two hosts (hereafter referred to as K and M) tried to convince P that their questions represented those posed by people's comments as well as football elites. As the interview drew on, finding himself pressed by the questions of the hosts, P began to leverage linguistically-significant strategies in order to take control of the situation, thus attempting to save the face of himself, his colleagues, and that of Carlos Queiroz. The obvious point regarding this live interview was P's employing of condescending verbal aggression, insinuation, and *TIKKEH*, specifically toward M, the use of which is definitely uncommon in live broadcasting shows. By way of illustration, the following comment posted on https://www.varzesh3.com by one of the viewers brings to light P's "shameless normalization[iv]" of impolite behavior in a live TV show:

(1)

be vozuh didim mojri-e javân, [M], kâmelan bâ ehterâm va metânat sa'y mikard so'âlât-e xudeš ro bayân koneh, ammâ jenâb-e [P] bâ didi kâmelan az bâlâ sa'y dar taxrib-e šaxsiyati-e in mojri-e xub va javân dâšt. [We could clearly see that the young presenter, [M], tried to ask his questions respectfully and peacefully. But Mr. [P], condescendingly, tried to damage the personality of this competent and young presenter.]

Apart from exercising patronizing, authoritarian language on the hosts, P makes abundant use of implicatures to convey insinuation or *TIKKEH* on the hosts, specially M who is a young presenter, representing the young Iranian generation values, as opposed to that of K and his far-right tendencies. What makes the present investigation significant is the fact that a reversal of power relations, as well as broadcasting norms, is clearly visible in the above-mentioned show, which is entirely unprecedented in Iran's broadcasting history (Rahbar, 2022).

With regard to P's astute[v] employment of *TIKKEH* in this interview, my aim was to cull from among the interactions in this program to apply and test Tayebi's (2018) framework of *TIKKEH* in Persian on the interactions between a top-level manager and his two hosts. With this in mind, holding Tayebi (2018) in center, alongside Bell's (1997) research on innuendo, Bertuccelli Papi's (2014) on insinuation, Culpeper et al.'s (2003), and Culpeper's (2011) on impoliteness at hand, an examination of instances where, how, and why P employs *TIKKEH* will be presented. As it has been hotly debated in the realm of (im)politeness theory, considering whether (im)politeness must focus on the role of speaker or hearer in the evaluation of (im)politeness has been dealt with through second-order and first-order (im)politeness, respectively (Watts et al., 2008). Following Eelen's (2001) call for a discursive approach, however, I hold a view which regards (im)politeness as a "truly interactional phenomena" which is "located in both positions and in neither of them at the same time" (p. 120). As Haugh (2013) notes, holding this third view in examination of (im)politeness regarding "interpersonal evaluations" accentuates the "roles of *participants*, going beyond a general speaker-hearer model of interaction" (p. 61, emphasis added). Further, as Goffman (1981) has postulated, "when a word is spoken, all those who happen to be in a perceptual range of the event will have some sort of participation status" (p. 3). With this in mind, since I do not have access to the hosts' frame of mind to decide whether or not they really have taken offense by P's impolite utterances[vi], and as they have not issued any serious commentary regarding their stance toward P's language, while qualitatively analyzing the interactions between P and his hosts, a number of comments contributed after the incident by anonymous viewers of the show under pseudonyms, as well as media and journalists, (whose comments demonstrate that even they have been offended by P's utterances) as side-participants will be analyzed to assess the emotional responses of the Iranian society as whole. This has been inspired by Culpeper (2011, p. 11) who refers to these comments as "retrospective comments," thus regarding them as valuable and rich components to interpreting the perception of impoliteness[vii] as well as the first order approach adopted where instances of *TIKKEH* are assessed through participants' viewpoints (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich,

2014, p. 3). These comments were extracted from the opinion forums following the news break of the mentioned incident in the websites https://www.varzesh3.com, one of Iran's most popular and visited websites covering sports news on both national and international scales, and https://www.youtube.com.

All in all, it is believed that by investigating the phenomenon of *TIKKEH* in the Persian language, the present article will widen the scope of research on the term, thus paving the path for further examination of the phenomenon in variegated situations.

Literature Review and Method

Brief Overview of (Im)Politeness

Politeness theory has its roots in the second half of the 20th century as initiated by the "pragmatic turn" in the 1970s. As Locher (2012) has stated, the tendency toward pragmatics was a "reaction to the lack of study of language in use" (p. 37). With the emergence of pragmatics, however, emphasis was put on language in actual contexts as well as communicative competence. With this view, the focus of pragmatics was conferred on "meaning beyond what is said" (Kádár & Haugh, 2013, p. 9). It is within this context that the idea of politeness ensues. In its early days, politeness research "focused on studying linguistic behavior that was aimed at maintaining social harmony" (Locher, 2012, p. 7). Lakoff (1973), Leech (1983), and most importantly Brown and Levinson (1987) can be considered as three influential approaches to politeness[viii].

Inspired by Goffman (1981), Brown and Levinson (1987) formed their discussion around the idea of *face* which refers to a person's reputation and public image. Accordingly, they propose a rational model person who assumes to possess positive and negative face, which respectively refer to a person's want that their actions be approved by others and a person's want that their actions not be impeded by others. As they were concerned with social harmony, they proposed that one's face "can be lost, maintained or enhanced, and must be constantly attended in interaction" (1987, p. 66). They deemed threats to one's face as Face Threatening Acts (FTA) and assumed that a rational person usually adopts mitigating strategies (politeness strategies) for a smooth flow of communication to ensue.

While early work on politeness revolved around the idea of social harmony, more recent work hinges on aggression, i.e., using language to cause offense, which has been initiated by Culpeper (1996, 2005, 2011). While Brown and Levinson (1987) proposed "off-record" communication as being "vague or ambiguous" or "hinting," among others, thus regarding impoliteness as "pragmatic failure" or "anomalous behavior" (Culpeper, 2011, p. 6), here, much focus is conferred on impoliteness, i.e., "the use of strategies that are designed to have the opposite effect – that of social disruption" (Culpeper, 1996, p. 350) while concerning "a clash with expectations, particularly concerning behaviors associated with particular contexts (Culpeper, 2011, p. 14). It needs to be mentioned that impoliteness is not merely associated with overtly using taboo or swear words in a given context. The phenomenon can be extended to situations where participants feel offended by *how*

something is said, rather than *what* is said, which is the concern of implicational impoliteness" (cf. Haugh, 2015). Here, Culpeper (2011) speaks of "form-driven" implicational impoliteness, citing terms such as "insinuation," "innuendo," and "snide comments/ remarks," among others, as examples, explaining that they refer to "implicit messages which are triggered by formal surface or semantic aspects of a behavior and which have negative consequences for certain individuals" (pp. 156-157).

TIKKEH and its Status Within (Im)Politeness Theory

The phenomenon of *TIKKEH*, which is my concern in the present article, is discussed within the same realm mentioned above, i.e., impoliteness implicatures, referred to as an interactional practice "where someone implies something and thereby occasions impoliteness (Haugh, 2015, p. 3). As a dictionary definition of the term in Persian merely hinges on nomenclatures such as sarcasm or irony, what follows is a simple definition of the term in Persian through personal communication, bearing witness to its implicational and situatedness dimensions:

(2)

be nazar-e man tikke ya'ni bexây ye mas'aleh ro be kasi begi, vali tori ke nârâhat naše. Masalan gheyr-e mostaghim. albate bastegi be moxâtabet ham dâreh.
[In my opinion, *TIKKEH* means to intend to share something with someone, but in a way that doesn't irritate them. For example, indirectly. However, it also depends on whom you're talking to.]

In terms of pragmatics, Tayebi (2018) situates *TIKKEH* within the realm of "impolite belief" proposed by Leech (1983) who deems it as a person's engagement in "linguistic of other behavior in order to pursue competitive or convivial illocutionary goals" (pp. 104-105). With this in mind, Tayebi (2018) defines *TIKKEH* as "any utterance in which a speaker can potentially convey a negative impolite belief about the hearer(s)," which apart from being "venomous, derogatory and insulting[,] has negative emotional consequences for the hearer(s)" (p. 94). By way of illustration, notice the following utterance by a shop owner (SO) dissatisfied with the work of two of his employees (E2 and E3) while addressing E1 in the presence of all of them:

(3)

SO: *dišab dâštam durbin hâ ro chek mikardam. didam ke cheghadr mohkam dâšti šišeh hâ ro tamiz mikardi. ey kâš hame kârâmaun hamin tor bâšan.*
[Last night I was checking out on the CCTV. I saw how firmly you (E1) were wiping the glasses. I wish all of us would put the same amount of effort into our affairs.]
E1: *omidvâram!*
[I hope so!]
E2: *sokut mikonad.*
[Stays silent.]

E3: *sokut mikonad.*
[Stays silent.]

Following this interaction, with reference to the importance of retrospective comments in evaluating implicational language, all participants were interviewed. E2 claimed that he had felt offended by SO's utterance, thus taking it as an instance of *TIKKEH*, as his sense of job commitment had been threatened by SO, thus implicitly bringing to the fore that he did not show much diligence at affairs of the store. Brother to E2, E3, however, claimed that he had not felt any implicated inference in SO's utterance, which seems to have its roots in his great respect toward SO and the fact that he had always been frank to him. The fact that E1 does not remain silent while uttering "I hope so" shows that he has not been offended since he claimed in interview that he himself had been dissatisfied with E3's lack of commitment at work and had run it by SO previously. However, E1 claimed that upon second thoughts, even he had the thought in his mind that SO might have intended to criticize him, which renders *TIKKEH* as serving multilayered, paralleled purposes. In my interview with SO, he claimed that he had made the implicational inference specifically on purpose in order to criticize E3 and to reinforce solidarity among interlocutors (Bousfield, 2008). What captured my attention is that SO's utterance bears witness to the creativity existent in implicational language, thus engaging all side-participants in a double entendre, while only one of them was meant[ix].

Moreover, Bell (1997) and Bertuccelli Papi (2014) have suggested discussions of two types of implied impoliteness markers, i.e., innuendo and insinuation, respectively, which can be read as counterparts of *TIKKEH* in the realm of implicational impoliteness. Bell (1997) defines innuendo as a "non-overt intentional negative ascription, whether true or false, usually in the form of an implicature, which is understood as a charge or accusation against what is, for the most part, a non-present party" (p. 36). Accordingly, innuendo, however, parts with *TIKKEH* in that it intends to cause offence to a non-present party and their belief systems. Insinuation, however, comes closer to *TIKKEH* in that it is "a communicative strategy whereby a speaker intends to make an addressee believe p, but does not want to be held responsible for communicating p" (Bertuccelli Papi, 2014, p. 2).

Characteristics of *TIKKEH*

I adopt the framework proposed by Tayebi (2018) on the phenomenon of *TIKKEH* in Persian while also discussing Bell (1997) and Bertuccelli Papi (2014) in passing. By the word framework in relation to Tayebi's article, I mean the characteristics of *TIKKEH* which need to be distinguished in order for the term not to be mistaken for other similar terms.

According to Tayebi (2018), situated within the realm of implicational language, the phenomenon of *TIKKEH* possesses a number of general characteristics as follows: a) it is considered "venomous, derogatory, and insulting and has negative emotional consequences for the hearer(s), b) it is made with the "potential of hurting the addressee and can even be much more hurtful than its direct and explicit form,"

and c) an implicational *TIKKEH* is "almost always conveyed rather than communicated and this is done without the speaker *necessarily* aiming/wanting to be held *unaccountable*" for it" (pp. 94-95, italics original). Apart from these features, Tayebi (2018) provides three primary properties of *TIKKEH* including pseudo-overt and non-overt meaning, ascribed intentionality, and goal-orientedness. These goals include criticizing the addressee, humiliating the addressee by bringing to the fore their weaknesses, giving the addressee the impression of one's cleverness, and taking malicious pleasure at watching the recipient being hurt (p. 98). While Tayebi (2018) has investigated instances of *TIKKEH* within diary report forms, online data, and field notes, in what follows I will bring to light instances of implicational language (*TIKKEH*) in a live broadcasting show, i.e., the question-answer sequences between the president of the Football Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran (FFIRI) and his two hosts, where the latter are constantly targeted by implicational attacks of their guest.

Data and Procedure

The study draws on a 106-minute corpus of interactions in a live broadcasting program on Sports Channel in Iran occurring on December 19, 2022[x]. The participants included the president of FFIRI , aged 66, interviewed by K and M, aged 56 and 35, respectively. Drawing on the call for moving beyond dyads in examination of implied impoliteness (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2009, 2012; Dobs & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2013; Tayebi, 2018, among others), I adopted a polylogal perspective, thus taking into account the responses of all three participants. Moreover, as the data draw on a live broadcasting program, the need was further felt to take into account the responses of the viewers as side-participants. With this end in view, certain that the hosts took offence at P's language (the post written by K[xi] and the metapragmatic comment by M in exchange 14 below), I also collected a number of unsolicited comments demonstrating an unfiltered look at the offense taken by the viewers extracted from https://www.varzesh3.com and https://www.youtube.com. The comments were extracted from the opinion forums following the video and news of the incident in the mentioned websites. With this view, from among 178 comments, as well as the whole interactions between the hosts and the guest, I extracted those instances which I noticed to reveal hints at ideas of (im)politeness, face, implied language, *TIKKEH*, as well as those which were loaded with reactions toward the behavior of P, eventually amounting to 15 instances.

Accordingly, instances of question-answer between the interactants as well as comments by the viewers were carefully transcribed [xii] and analyzed in a qualitative manner by the researcher in terms of the framework on *TIKKEH* and its constituent parts advanced by Tayebi (2018), as well as innuendo by Bell (1997), insinuation by Bertuccelli Papi (2014), and impoliteness by Culpeper et al. (2003) and Culpeper (2011) in general.

Analysis

Upon surface scrutinizing, we find the interview of K and M with P as fraud with verbal aggression and sarcastic language mostly initiated by P himself.

The most noticeable language strategy employed by P is the phenomenon of implied language or *TIKKEH* throughout the show. The abundance of such instances in the interview has drawn negative criticism on the part of P, leaving him as a totally impolite manager and the interviewers as incompetent at responding appropriately to the offenses caused by P. It goes without saying that P pursues such strategies with the goal of threatening the public face of the interviewers, especially that of M who challenges the president's choices as well as the poor results of the national team. P also attempts to emphasize his own achievements while showing his dexterity at making use of implied language while puzzling the hosts as well as the viewers, and at times even showing that he takes pleasure in making use of such offensive language, which are anathema to democratic behavior on the part of managers and are constantly judged by the public. In what follows, a number of goals in relation to making use of implicational language (*TIKKEH*) assumed to have been pursued by P, and incidentally by the hosts, will be analyzed vis-à-vis the primary properties of the phenomenon in Persian.

Humiliating the Addressee:

As stated by Tayebi (2018), one of the underlying goals behind insinuation or *TIKKEH* is to humiliate the addressee(s). By way of illustration, let us consider the following utterance by P while addressing M:

(4)

P:*xub guš bedid ke haddeaghal, age xodetun befahmid, binandeh ham mifahmad.*
[Listen carefully, at least, if you understand, the viewers would understand too!]

This utterance on the part of P prima facie addresses M's faculty of understanding. However, it goes without saying that M's weakness at understanding things is not questionable since presenters go through a complicated process before being recruited (including IQ tests). What P's pseudo-overt intent is aiming here, apart from surface humiliating the young presenter, aims at leaving him and the viewers in a state of indeterminacy. In other words, he proposes something both true and false through implicational language in order to assume an unaccountable stance toward the truthfulness of his statement. It also needs to be mentioned that people's understanding of the ongoing discussion is not dependent on M's understanding, corroborating the fact that P merely uses implied language to uphold certain goals. Moreover, as M reminds him that he is asking the question posed by people, P responds "people understand!" thus implying a *TIKKEH* in order to convey the idea that M is not a capable person at understanding. The following comment from https://www.varzesh3.com, however, proves otherwise:

(5)

M, damet garm. mardom poštetan. unjâ-ei ke gofti futbâli-yâ mifahman xeyli xub bud! 😊

[Break a leg M! People are behind your back. The part where you said "football fans would understand" was perfect! 😊]

M, however, obviously takes offence at P's use of implied language and attempts to counter P's face attack by situating himself in the group of football fans, thus excluding P, the supposed president of football in the country, from the realm of football:

(6)

be xodâ futâbali-yâ mifahman man chi migam.
[By God, football fans would know what I mean!]

This, however, is again countered by P as he says:

(7)

wâllâ faghat sedâ va simâ-ei hâ mifahman va ye šabake hâ-ei.
[By God, only those from IRIB and a number of channels would understand it!]

What is obvious here is the "offensive-offensive" or "tit-for-tat impoliteness" (Culpeper et al., 2003), where each one of the interactants takes turns to "counter face attack with face attack" (p. 1562). However, this exchange parts with data provided by Culpeper et al. (2003) in that here P and M, instead of making use of overt aggressive language, make use of implied *TIKKEH*, which in Tayebi's (2018) words are more derogatory and biting than its direct form (p. 95). Accordingly, as M excludes P from the circle of football fans, here, through employing implied language, P turns the table on M by implying that the host merely enforces the policies adopted by the organization he works for, rather than having concerns for the national team.

As is shown, finding M a young and ambitious presenter, and having had his face threatened by him previously, P aims to attack M's face by questioning how old he was in 1989. To elucidate the point, notice the following exchange:

(8)

P *(be M negâh mikonad) šomâ chand sâletoon budeh 68?*
[Actually, since 1989 I was… (looks at M) How old where you in 1989?]
M: *(ejbâran labxand mizanad) do sâl.*
[(forcing a smile) Two years.]
P: *do sâletoon budeh? xob alhamdolellâh. mâ az sâl-e 1368 modir âmel-e bâšgâh budim tâ be emruz.*
[You were two years old? Then, thank God! I have been a club CEO since 1989 to date.]

In Persian, such questions are usually posed by adults or those assuming to have relative power or being superiors addressing inferiors to imply that the latter are not experienced enough or that they are not in the position to question an adult or a superior person, thus indirectly creating a feeling of humility in them. Here, P assumes to draw the attention of the viewers to his experience as well as his

achievements. Having found his status being shaken by M, he employs *TIKKEH* to belittle the young presenter, thus highlighting his own status. P's question here has a pseudo-overt intent which presumably enquires M about his age in 1989; the answer to this question could simply be, two years. However, as Tayebi (2018) puts it, in some instances, "*TIKKEH* is interpreted in light of understandings formed in prior interaction(s) that the offendee has held with the offender" (p. 103). Here, it could be deduced from M's negligent expression, as well as his half smile, that he has taken the offence. P's juxtaposition of the fact that he has been a club CEO since 1989 and that M has been a two-year-old then aims to indirectly imply that M is not in the position to question P's decisions and views, thus deterring him from posing further challenging questions.

Giving the Addressee the Impression of One's Shrewdness:

As is seen in my data, there are instances where P makes use of *TIKKEH* in order to show his cleverness and dominance over the situation. In data provided by Tayebi (2018) she has already illustrated an example where the speaker intentionally uses implied language in order to show that he has a good grasp of the situation. Also, Tayebi emphasizes that with regard to this strategy, *TIKKEH* can be discussed on a scale of self-focused to other-focused (p. 98), thus indicating that one may employ this implicational strategy to show their prowess in situations while aiming to achieve goals benefiting themselves, their groups, or their organizations. With regard to my data, there are instances where P openly confesses that he displays such behavior in the studio on purpose, convincing the viewers that IRIB follows certain goals pursued by its hosts. By way of exemplification, notice the following exchange:

(9)

M: *man vâgheiyateš ye kam jâ xordam az barxord-e šoma. hâlâ jâleb-e migin unjâ bâhâtoon sohbat šod, kâš man unjâ umade budam bâhâtun sohbat konam. fekr konam injâ ye kam tahammoletun kam šod.*
[I, to be honest, got a little shocked by your behavior. You just said that someone talked to you there. I wish I were there to talk to you. I think you ran out of patience here.]
P: *na injâ sedâ va simâ… sedâ va simâ ro man ye zareh ruš…*
[No. here, it's IRIB… My feelings toward IRIB are a little…]

With regard to the above exchange, it can be seen that P cleverly makes use of this type of language, i.e., condescending behavior, implicational language, among others, to show off his shrewdness, thus leading to more perplexing of the young presenter, leaving him in an indeterminate zone. A YouTuber has also touched upon the same issue, which is a proof of the effect of P's behavior on the viewers:

(10)

cheghadr herfe-ei do tâ mojri ro sar-e kâr gozâšteh va bâ a'sâbešun bâzi mikoneh…
[How professionally he is pulling the leg of the two hosts and gets on their nerves…]

Leaving the Addressee in a State of Indeterminacy:

As Tayebi (2018) has stipulated, indeterminacy and vagueness are an inherent feature of *TIKKEH* and insinuation (p. 108). Also, Haugh (2015) has asserted that "the relative indeterminacy of implicatures is what allows speakers to be held committed to or accountable for the real-world consequences of what they are taken to be implicating" (p. 89). Accordingly, in our case, through making excessive use of implied language, P leaves M in a state of bewilderment as to whether he really has been the target of his offence or not. This sense of indeterminacy is heightened as P targets IRIB as well, leaving M to think whether P's utterances genuinely target him or IRIB. Moreover, as K argues with P that the young generation expect him to answer such questions, P retorts that he had met a football fan in the same morning, who had asked the same questions, and P confesses that he answered his questions clearly and in peace of mind. This awakens in the hosts the curiosity as to why P takes offence at the same questions posed by them. P's answer that he regarded that person as guileless (*bi šileh pileh*) and the fact that he was not after a certain reply resonate with nuances of *TIKKEH*, thus implying that the hosts *are not* in fact sincere persons and are after taking certain replies from their guests. What matters is the inherent indeterminacy of implied language which renders P unaccountable for his statement[xiii]. The use of implied *TIKKEH* here, apart from offending the hosts, leaves them in an indeterminate zone where they need some extra effort of mind to decipher it. Moreover, the goal-orientedness of this implied language also obliges the hosts to reconsider their questions and avoid critical questions or those which are not in line with P's line of thought. Therefore, it could be hypothesized that *TIKKEH* is used to deter further face threats from interlocutors in an interaction.

Moreover, an explanation as to why P answered the lay man's questions while he had problems with answering the same questions posed by the hosts might lie in his view of as well as his defensive stance toward IRIB. As Garcés-Conejos Blitvich's (2014) discussion of impoliteness in television makes it clear, according to their comments regarding disputes in TV talk shows, for many YouTubers "it was not the behavior per se that was deemed appropriate, rude, and so on, but the person carrying out such behavior" (p. 3). The following comment by a YouTuber regarding the case of P is noticeable:

(11)

ettefâghan P xub javâbešun ro dâd. in do nafar haghešun-e.
[Quite the contrary, P answered them back in the best way possible. It serves them right.]

This comment illustrates the fact that even if P's behavior has occasioned indignation among a large number of viewers, yet there are people whom do not take offence at his words, as they deem IRIB and its hosts as liars, promoters of the government's policies, etc. Extending this argument to the case of P, it could be argued that his excessive use of implied language originates from his interpersonal expectations as well as relational histories (Tayebi, 2016, 2018) he has previously shared with IRIB managers and presenters, especially his interview with a host in

Channel 3 regarding the case of Mark Wilmots, where he was openly criticized for using media as a shield against his actions. Accordingly, it could be argued that P evaluates the hosts' questions as face-threatening, even if they have been posed by people, because he deems the hosts as looking for a chance to entangle him.

Taking Malicious Pleasure in Watching the Addressee Being Hurt:

As maintained by Bertuccelli Papi (2014) regarding the nastiness of insinuation, there are cases where insinuations involve the "speaker's malicious pleasure over the negative effect the message will have on the interlocutor" (p. 7). In the same vein, according to Tayebi (2018), one of the goals behind implied *TIKKEH* is "the mere malicious pleasure that the speaker takes in watching the recipient of the implied impoliteness being hurt" (p. 98). These discussions bear witness to the importance of taking into account the fact that implicational language might be used with the personal aim of pleasing oneself while watching others being hurt by one's venomous words. With regard to our case in this research, there are instances where P makes use of *TIKKEH* while confessing that he uses this language purposefully. The following exchange provides a case in point:

(12)

M: *nokteh-i ke hast in-e ke xob be har hâl aghâye keyruš seh doreh bud. ye doraš ke šomâ migid yek seri masâel-e digar-i ham budeh ke manam motavajeham bâvar konid.*
[The point is that Mr. Queiroz was our coach for three terms. In one term, you just mentioned that we've had a number of problems, which, believe me, I do understand!]
P: *(vasate harf-e M miparad) alhamdolellâh ke motavajeh šodid. man xeyli xošhâlam migooy man mifahmamâ. man xodam xeyli khošhâlam.*
[(interrupts M) Thank God you understand! I'm so delighted you said you'd understand. I myself am so delighted.]
M: *xob. xodâ ro šokr ke šomâ xošhâlid.*
[Well, thank God you're delighted!]
P: *(be K negâh mikonad) in ke šomâ migoy man mifahmam xodeš xeyli xoobeh dige (ârâm mixandad).*
[(looks at K) That you said you'd understand is itself so good then (chuckles).]

With regard to the above exchange, P states that he is delighted to find M claim that he has understood P's point. However, speaking from a prosody-oriented perspective, it could be argued that he is making use of implied *TIKKEH* to humiliate his addressee. In fact, his chuckling as well as employing falling intonation while repeating his utterance and looking at K (avoiding M's eyes[xiv]) show that he is taking pleasure in deriding M. The implied language here "triggers the suspicion that what is put forward is actually a distractor and that something else is going on in the speaker's mind" (Bertuccelli Papi, 2014, p. 2), as if M has deficiencies at understanding things. The important point following this exchange is that M not only does not return P's impolite language, but also ignores it, thus

practicing what Culpeper et al. (2003, p. 1567) has referred to. By ignoring P's face attack, in fact M astutely assumes that he did not take or that misunderstood the meaning behind P's pseudo-overt intent, thus countering his attack through a defensive strategy which might be more hurtful to P, than having overtly returned his attack. These examples are also evidence on how complicated and sensitive a case of implied *TIKKEH* might be and how it is managed within every day interactions in Persian.

Another case in my data where P employs implied *TIKKEH* with the goal of deriving malicious pleasure is where K enquires him about the case of Mark Wilmots, a case over which P had previously had a controversial debate with a presenter on Channel 3. Let us consider the following exchange between P and K:

(13)

K: *hâlâ, parvandeh-ye wilmots kojâs âghâ? (tekrâr mikonad) wilmots!*
[Now, where is the case of Wilmots, Mister? (repeats) Wilmots!]
T: *tu jib-e maneh.*
[It's in my pocket.]
K: *na, manozuram in-e ke be kojâ resideh?*
[No. I mean, which point has it arrived to?]

When it comes to questioning the status of something or a project, it is a common method in Persian to literally ask, "Where is it?" or "which point has it arrived to?" However, a prevalent response to such questions, especially when it comes to evading a clear-cut answer, pulling someone's leg, or making fun of someone is to respond by saying: "It's in my pocket!" It needs to be mentioned that such use of the utterance is mostly common among peers or people of lower-class, which renders it quite unusual to be used by a high-profile manager in a live broadcasting show. Regarding our own case, P, rather than sticking to a clear answer regarding the case of Wilmots, merely touches on the surface layer of meaning, thus retorting that it is in his pocket. At this point, K reformulates his question, thus ignoring the face attack occasioned by P, leaving him in a dead-end where he is unable to further inflict face attacks or respond. Following P's explanations regarding the mentioned case, through a face-saving strategy, K maintains: "Then Wilmots' case is not in your pocket! It is in the archives!" This strategy on the part of K is a tit-for-tat strategy inflicted upon P's face in order to convince him as well as the viewers that he only understood the surface level of meaning conveyed by P, i.e., that the case is in his pocket. This, however, is inferred by P to be an example of implied language, the use of which presumably is more hurtful to him than having been responded by, for example, "OK, then the case of Wilmots is resolved!" Moreover, that K has been offended is evident as, in a later interview, K expressed his disappointment regarding P's utterance[xv]. Also, as for our case which is malice included in P's statement, minutes later, following K's statement that the case is in the archives, P makes a mimicry of his previous statement to assert that he has made it intentionally.

Leaving a Lingering Effect of Staining the Addressee:

While revealing fundamental differences with innuendo as discussed by Bell (1997), *TIKKEH* comes close to the latter term in that it "has an inherent perlocutionary effect of staining the target by creating a lingering suspicion or doubt by bringing about an irrevocable change in the recipient's belief system" (p. 54). The same can be applied to implied *TIKKEH*, where the use of which in my data is presumed to be exploited by P with the purpose of damaging the reputation enjoyed by the two hosts. Such a goal behind making use of *TIKKEH* differs from the above instances, which are usually made for personal tendencies or affecting the person of the addressee(s), in that it follows certain goals on a scale of social to national, especially when it comes to shows which are televised. It needs to be added that the use of such language might have such deteriorating effect on the recipient in that even a denial or retraction would harden the effect yet more (Bell, 1997, p. 54). With this regard, notice the following climactic exchange nearly at the end of the show, where M overtly makes use of the metapragmatic label "*MATALAK*" to describe P's language. Here, K questions P on the content of the questions posed by the person who met P by chance the same morning. What follows is P's evaluation of that person:

(14)

P: *bardâšt-e man hadde aghal in bud ke xeyli bi šileh pileh bedoon-e in ke aslan donbâl-e ye javâbe xassi bâšeh, vâghe'an mixâst faghat rowšan šeh.*
[I evaluated him as a sincere person who did not seek a certain answer. He was really after a clear understanding of the matter.]
M: *miše šileh pileh hâ-i ke dar mored-e man dârid ro begid man xodam bedunam? Eškâl nadâre injâ. man fekr mikonid cherâ soâl miporsam?*
[Would you please clarify me why you would regard me an insincere person? No problem! Why would you think I ask you questions?]
P: *aslan sedâ va simâ mage miše kesi tu šileh pileh dâšteh bâše?*
[Can by any means an insincere person be found in IRIB?]
M: *na xob jeddi begin, eškâl-i nadâre. dar mored-e xodam ro dâram migam.*
[No. seriously, tell me! No problem! I'm saying, mention that which is about me!]
P: *âghâ sedâ va simâ daraje yek-an!*
[Mister, those from IRIB are top-notch!]
M: *na. matalak nagin. dar mored-e xodam begin.*
[No, don't say a *MATALAK* (*TIKKEH*). Mention that which is about me!]

The language adopted by P at the beginning of this exchange is fraud with implied language from which M takes offence and to which openly responds. Here, P attributes three features to the person who met him: that he was a sincere, guileless person, that he was not after a certain answer, and that the person genuinely wanted to be convinced by a clear answer. The important point here is that, with regard to the relational aspect of the interview of P whose face has been threatened by the hosts hitherto, here he exploits implied language (*TIKKEH*) three times in a row,

thus leading to M's taking and responding to it. When P asserts that the person in question was a guileless person, with regard to "their own relational and social reference" as well as the "nature of the relationship" (Tayebi, 2018, p. 105) they have developed from the beginning of the show, M presumably takes the pseudo-overt intent of P's utterance as containing a non-overt message, i.e., *TIKKEH* or *MATALAK*, as he openly mentions it. Therefore, by ascribing intentionality to P's implication, M evaluates P's utterance as containing the message that he, as well as IRIB, is not sincere and that whose job involves asking certain questions and deriving certain responses from the guests. Here, the offence has been taken, as P evaluates those from IRIB as top-notch and with M's use of *xodam* (myself), indicating that he insists on P explaining why he deems the host an insincere person, thus making it clear that the young host is fed up with the implied and indirect language of the guest which constantly targets IRIB, rather than directly addressing the person of M. However, P's *MATALAK* or *TIKKEH* seems to have taken its toll on IRIB, heightening the negative view of people toward IRIB, as the following comment by a YouTuber shows:

(15)

P gofteh mage tu sedâ va simâ šileh pileh dârim. 😂
[P has said he wonders if there are any insincere persons in IRIB. 😂]

With regard to my own discussion, that is the staining effect of *TIKKEH* on the recipient, it could be argued that in exchange (14) above, M responds to P's face-threat as he finds it an indirect derogatory and stinging remark to his person as well as the organization he works for. However, one level further, M's use of *xodam* is indicative of his concern that P's excessive use of implicational language might have a lingering effect on his reputation, as the denigrative effect of *TIKKEH* is much more hurtful than its direct form, thus having devastating consequences, especially on the mindset of the viewers. The following comment by YouTubers is indicative of the stain left on the face of the two hosts, judging them as unqualified for such an interview:

(16)

M vâghe'an bi khâye hast.
[M is a totally incompetent person!]

Or:

(17)

ye âdam-e bâ urzeh peydâ našod javâb-e ino mohkam bedeh.
[No qualified person was found there to firmly answer this guy (P) back.]

Conclusion

Implicational language is a prevalent phenomenon in everyday interactions among people, employed following certain purposes and empirically discussed within the realm of pragmatics and linguistic impoliteness. Apart from endeavors by scholars who have drawn attention to insinuation, innuendo, and sarcastic language as tentative and real-world metapragmatic representations of implied language, in

this paper I narrowed down the scope of research to a subtype of this umbrella term, i.e., *TIKKEH*. The term has already been introduced to the community of research by Tayebi (2018). However, the present paper parts with the latter in that it focuses on examination of *TIKKEH* in a live broadcasting show in Iran between the president of the Football Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran and his two hosts, foregrounding their interactions as well as a number of comments posted on two opinion forums by the viewers.

Upon analysis, while we expected P's face to be threatened by the criticism of the hosts due to the poor results of the national team, it was P himself who mounted attacks on the face of the hosts, causing emotional burst among the public viewers. Also, the guest was found to be a recurrent practitioner of implied language for the following purposes, introduced by Tayebi (2018): humiliating the addressees, showing off his dexterity at making use of language, leaving the addressees in an indeterminate zone, taking malicious pleasure at watching the addressees being hurt, and staining the face of the addressees and the organization they work for. My data, apart from confirming the reliability of the mentioned framework, have provided some other benefits drawn from employing *TIKKEH*, which is incumbent upon further research to be delved into. According to the metapragmatic comments of the viewers, speakers might employ *TIKKEH* to distract the addressee(s), thus deterring further face attacks, or they may employ it in order to evade providing clear and accurate answers to the questions they are asked. Furthermore, it was found in my data that in times of using *TIKKEH*, interlocutors usually avoid looking their addressee(s) in the eye, taking advantage of making eye contact with other participants to further show their unaccountability for their utterances. With regard to the goals followed by P in exploiting *TIKKEH*, a clear explanation of the motivation behind his use of implied language as well as impoliteness is as follows: as discussed by Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2009) regarding impoliteness in television, in contrast to politeness which is inherently leveraged to maintain rationality and harmony, impoliteness use reflects "true emotions" and "lack of restraint," thus "strategically used to construct the message as truthful." As such, P resorts to such use of language in order to build a sense of trust and truthfulness with the viewers. With this being implemented, he paves the way for many viewers to identify with him, as a portion of Iranian population deems IRIB and its policies as deficient and unreliable. Upon using such language by a high-profile manager, apart from bonding with these viewers, P convinces them that he seeks to bring about change and that he is "invested emotionally in the problem" (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2009, p. 287).

However, these findings need to be further delved into through qualitative and quantitative research. Moreover, other metapragmatic counterparts of *TIKKEH* in Persian that carry componential similarities to the phenomenon and their discrepancies are subject to further scrutiny in future.

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Author's Biography



Mohammad Hossein Mahdavi Nejhad received his B.A. and M.A degrees in English Language and Literature from University of Qom and Malayer University, respectively. In 2021, Mahdavi Nejhad joined the Department of English and Translation, Imam Reza International University, Mashhad, Iran, as a Sessional Lecturer. His most recent publications include *"Mastering the term of art": Linguistic Avoidance in David Mamet's Oleanna*, *JALDA*, 2024, *"I can't tell you exactly who I am": A Deleuzian Reading of F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, *Litera*, 2025, and *"I wear a cross at school and church and an Allah necklace while praying": Becoming and Deterritorialization in Selected Works of Zoya Pirzad*, *Asian and African Studies*, 2026. Mahdavi Nejhad's fields of interest include 19th and 20th century English and American fiction, modern Persian fiction, Deleuzian vitalist-inspired philosophy, post-humanism, pragmatics, and linguistic (im)politeness.

[i] I regard these terms as holding essentially similar resonances in Persian, thus all referring to malicious and derogatory language made with the intention of stinging the addressee(s).

[ii] For more on polylogal and dyadic interactions, see Kerbrat-Orecchioni (2004).

[iii] It needs to be explained that P is conspicuous for abstaining from showing up in live TV shows. This seems to have intensified following his presence two month earlier in a TV program called "Futbal-e Bartar," where he was harshly criticized for the scandalous and unsuccessful contract he signed with the former Belgian coach, Mark Wilmots, lasting merely for four months, and the heavy cost it inflicted on national capital, bringing the federation to the brink of bankruptcy. It also needs to be mentioned that it was P himself who chose to show up in Sports Channel, rather than in Channel 3.

[iv] For more on the term, see Wodak, Culpeper, and Semino (2020).

[v] The term astute has been employed to remind that, agonizing as it is, impoliteness should not be regarded as purely negative, as it is made through creative effort of mind, thus a constructive aspect of human interaction and sometimes even a practical solution (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2012, 2014; Culpeper 2011).

[vi] That the hosts have actually taken the offense implied by P's implied language is out of question. This can be inferred from K's post (https://www.varzesh3.com/news/1861052) in which he expresses his criticism of P by referring to an old Persian saying: "adab-e mard beh ze dolate-e ust" which can be literally translated as 'one's politeness is worthier than his [sic] status and belongings,' witnessing to the fact that the hosts have already perceived and interpreted P's utterances as containing impolite behavior (*TIKKEH*) targeting their faces.

[vii] It needs to be clarified that Culpeper (2011) contends that retrospective comments "often take the shape of long discussions by participants and/or observers about whether *X* counts as impolite" (p. 11).

[viii] Due to considerations of space, only Brown and Levinson's (1987) seminal work will be touched upon, as it is the most followed and controversial theory of politeness, and postmodern or discursive critiques of this work (Eelen 2001; Locher and Wats 2005; Mills 2003) are not mentioned here.

[ix] For a discussion of creativity in implicational language, see Culpeper (2011).

[x] The video of the televised show can be accessed at https://telewebion.com/episode/0x53df64b, https://telewebion.com/episode/0x53df896, or https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PXyTZifn9X4.

[xi] The post can be accessed at https://www.varzesh3.com/news/1861052.

[xii] As P is originally from Isfahan province, central Iran, he makes use of accented language occasionally. Therefore, transcriptions of his utterances do not completely comply with the standard Persian today.

[xiii] The exchange is available below in (14).

[xiv] One important point regarding the contextual use of *TIKKEH* is that interlocutors most often avoid looking at the eyes of their intended addressee(s), thus maintaining eye contact with other participants. A good example occurred in exchange (3) above where SO implied a *TIKKEH* toward E3 while addressing E1.

[xv] The video can be accessed at https://video.varzesh3.com/video/270411.

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Malabouian Plasticity in Porochista Khakpour's The Last Illusion

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Abstract

Malabou's concept of brain plasticity incorporates themes of fluidity and metamorphosis. It explores the dynamic relationship between human beings and the world, offering new perspectives on the boundaries of human identity. Although Porochista Khakpour's (2014) *The Last Illusion* has been examined from various perspectives, it has yet to be explored through the lens of plasticity. Thus, we aim to offer a Malabouian reading of *The Last Illusion* by applying the concepts of "trauma", "reparative plasticity", and the "neuronal self". We argue that changes in Zal's actions and thoughts suggest that his identity is a plastic entity—constantly changing and evolving. Zal's display of both human and avian characteristics highlights the adaptability of the neuronal self and its influence on his identity. The findings of this study highlight the metamorphic power of trauma. Furthermore, the findings suggest that the blurring of boundaries in Zal's brain is possible because the brain is a plastic entity, capable of delocalizing and reconfiguring neuronal connections through interaction with its environment. Zal's acquisition of self-awareness and self-acceptance stems from the brain's capacity to grow and change through the delocalization of neuronal networks and its flexibility in adapting to new experiences and memories. This also illustrates Zal's exercise of agency over his own identity, reflecting a sense of indeterminism grounded in brain plasticity and a movement toward empowerment.

Keywords: Catherine Malabou, identity, trauma, plasticity, Porochista Khakpour

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Introduction

Brain plasticity, also known as neuroplasticity, refers to the brain's ability to change, develop, and reorganize itself throughout an individual's life. It highlights the brain's dynamic nature and capacity for transformation. Understanding brain plasticity is essential for unraveling the mysteries of learning, memory, recovery from injury, and even the nature of human identity. According to Victoria Pitts-Taylor, "[t]he plastic brain is ontogenetically shaped in dynamic relation with its environment" (2015, p. 17). Similarly, Norman Doidge's findings on the developing and flexible nature of the brain show that "[t]he brain [changes] its very structure with each different activity it [performs], perfecting its circuits so it [is] better suited to the task at hand" (2007, p. xviii-xix). Both Pitts-Taylor's and Doidge's understanding of plasticity suggests a creative and positive transformation; yet, there are other perspectives in the realm of neuroplasticity not touched by either of them. Catherine Malabou offers a more nuanced theorization of brain plasticity by addressing its positive and negative aspects. The versatility of the idea of brain plasticity makes it possible to apply it to a variety of different realms. For example, Azadanipour, Maleki and Haj'jari (2022) use the concept of plasticity to suggest the existence of infinite realities and assert that "Toth's 'historioplastic metafictions' thus base [*sic*] reality on 'plasticity' in the course of time, allowing the freedom of thought and expression in different realities and flexibility of the past to be" (p. 257). The concept can also be applied to the realm of literature to flesh out how identity is shaped. Porochista Khakpour's (2014) novel, *The Last Illusion,* offers an engaging read on the ways Zal's character is formed as a result of various experiences of his life.

Porochista Khakpour is an Iranian-American author renowned for her insightful exploration of identity and belonging; her works often investigate themes of displacement and trauma as illustrated in her debut novel, *Sons and Other Flammable Objects* (2007). *The New Yorker* describes it as a well-written novel that adeptly examines "ethnicity, nationalism, and post-9/11 fear" (2007, para. 1). Another notable work of hers is *Sick: A Memoir* (2018), which Khakpour's webpage characterizes as "[a] story about survival, pain, and transformation" (Sick, n.d., para. 5). Additionally, Ann Tashi Slater praises Khakpour's collection of personal essays, *Brown Album: Essays on Exile and Identity* (2020), for its exploration of "alienation and the search for home" (2020, para. 1). Her most celebrated work, *The Last Illusion* also delves into the subject of identity formation.

The Last Illusion is Khakpour's imaginative reworking of *Shahnameh,* the famous Persian epic. It tells the story of Zal, an albino boy born in a rural Iranian village, whose mother sees him as a demon due to his unusual appearance. Ashamed of her son's physical abnormality, she locks him in a cage with birds. Growing up with no human contact until he is eight years old, Zal develops bird-like behaviors and features. After being rescued by Anthony Hendricks, a child psychologist and feral children researcher, Zal is brought to New York City, where he struggles to adapt to human society. Hendricks and his friend, Dr. Rhodes, work hard to help Zal adjust and learn the social norms. Zal meets Asiya McDonald in New York, an artist with whom he falls in love. She encourages him to embrace his uniqueness. While

Zal attempts to suppress his bird-like traits to fit in, he faces an existential crisis, made worse by Asiya's warnings of an approaching apocalypse. This internal conflict leads Zal to isolate himself and do things that he thinks would make him similar to a normal person. The novel explores themes of identity and the power of self-acceptance, as Zal learns that embracing both his past and present, his uniqueness and similarity to those around him is the true definition of being a "man".

Literature Review

Khakpour's *The Last Illusion* has been examined from a range of critical perspectives. Khanam, Rashid and Ahmad (2022) read the novel as a post-September 11th fiction and argue that it offers the author a way to express "the horrors of culturally traumatic boundaries", and to build "a third space for harmony" (p. 3406). They suggest that the novel aims to bridge the gap between First- and Third-World identities. Accordingly, it can "foster a feeling of civic equality in American culture" to calm down the chaotic society there (p. 3410). Keshavarz Shal (2018), in her thesis, which compares *The Last Illusion* with Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, employs Pierre Bourdieu's notions of habitus and Homi Bhabha's concepts of cultural hybridity, third space, mimicry and identity formation to argue that ethnic identity cannot be understood without considering the social class (p. 3). She asserts that the colonial discourses continue to marginalize non-Western identities as they reinforce European superiority. Similarly, Jafarnia (2019) uses the same ideas of Homi Bhabha's cultural hybridity, third space, mimicry and identity formation, as well as Bourdieu 's habitus to argue that the novel presents immigrant identity as a "structured social class", where characters "are treated with a continuous and sustainable relationship with the inequalities" (p. 83). He adds that this social field is a "battlefield" to either preserve or transform the power (p. 83). Elsewhere, Keeble reads the novel by drawing on magical realism. He contends that the novel offers correctives to the belief that "American 90s was a time of stability, innocence and optimism" which abruptly got punctured by the accident of September 11th, and the meanings it brought with itself (2022, p. 3). Moreover, he reveals that the experience of the end of the world in *The Last Illusion* works "as an evocative way to consider the experience of otherness in New York and America in the 90s" (p. 12).

There are also studies that have explored the novel's connections with Persian mythology, especially *Shahnameh*. Yusefabadi and Fatollahi (2025) review the impact of *Shahnameh* on the novel through a comparative analysis by using Rene Wellek's ideas. They argue that the traces of *Shahnameh* can be seen in "themes, motifs, and plots" in the novel (p. 16). The findings suggest that by retelling the story of *Shahnameh*, Khakpour establishes "a connection between her nostalgic past and the modern world in which she lives" (p. 17). In her review of the novel in 2014, Hermione Hoby introduces the characters and notes that what Khakpour does is a "reimagining of one of the most famous tales in the *Shahnameh*" as Zal, the character of *Shahnameh*, has white hair that frightens his parents (para. 5). She also points out that the novel is more about "falling rather than flying" (para.

9). Hoby ends the review by reporting that the story of Zal as a bird boy to a boy who is adapted and raised by a New Yorker to be normal shows us that we as human "must undertake the dogged, daily and lifelong work of becoming human beings" (para. 10). Manuel Gonzales (2014) has also reviewed *The Last Illusion* in *LA Times* where he argues that it is one of the best 9/11 novels in capturing the "contradictory sense Americans have of how easy and trivial life was before the attack" (para. 13). He highlights that the characterization of Zal is informed by the Persian epic, *Shahnameh*. Yet, he is no warrior like the Zal from *Shahnameh*. Rather, he is "battling against self-doubt, indecision and his own inability to be normal" (para. 11).

These studies have offered significant findings regarding the main character in *The Last Illusion* by looking at it through various lenses. However, Zal's bird-man traits have surprisingly remained under-researched. This novel offers a nuanced representation of identity formation, which can also be studied from a neuroplastic approach through a detailed observation of Zal's thoughts and actions. Thus, drawing on Malabou's theoretical framework, we argue that the various changes in Zal's actions and thoughts present identity as a plastic entity—constantly evolving and reshaping itself. In what follows, we introduce the theory on which we draw to read the novel, and then we flesh out traces of trauma in Zal's life and his mind's reparative plasticity. The second part of the analysis examines the neuronal self in Zal's character and his dual identity.

Method

As Kouppanou (2020) declares, Malabou is regarded as a "philosopher of change" because of her extended studies on "the nature of transformation, its mechanics and milieus" (p. 1970). In her book, *Ontology of the Accident: An Essay on Destructive Plasticity,* Malabou draws an analogy between one's identity and a snowball. This snowball changes in shape and size by various events in one's life; she describes the two forces responsible for these changes by saying "[s]ome metamorphoses disrupt the snowball that one forms with oneself over lived time, that big round ball: full, replete, complete. These strange figures rise out of the wound, or out of nothing, an unhitching from what came before" (Malabou, 2012a, p. 2). The theoretical framework of Malabouian plasticity, therefore, is used to explore the implications of neuroscientific findings on our understanding of subjectivity, identity, and the nature of being. This study makes an important contribution by presenting the possibility of applying Malabou's concept of brain plasticity to the field of literature. We aim to look at Zal's identity and his brain's structure by deploying Malabou's theorization of destructive and creative plasticity. We apply a content-based interdisciplinary analysis to examine Zal's actions and thoughts in *The Last Illusion* by utilizing Malabou's concepts of "trauma", "reparative plasticity" and "neuronal self". These concepts are used to interpret the passages from the novel that portray the character's thoughts and actions, the changes in both, as well as the development of his identity.

Discussion

Examining Zal's Trauma and Reparative Plasticity

As Malabou writes, "[t]he word 'trauma' in Greek means 'wound' and derives from *titrosko*, which means 'to pierce'" (2012b, p. 6). She maintains that trauma "designates the wound that results from an effraction—an 'effraction' that can be physical … or psychical" or simply, from an explosive accident (2012b, p. 6). An explosive accident is also defined as any physical or mental trauma that inflicts the life of an individual and produces the metamorphosis of someone who has become unrecognizable to the people who already knew them (Malabou, 2012b, p. 6). For destructive plasticity to occur, there is a need for a trauma to split the life into two parts: before and after the event, so that the "change of the personality" can take place (Malabou, 2012b, p. 15). Malabou considers trauma a qualified force that can cause metamorphosis to take place, resulting in the identity of the traumatized person being changed or lost. In a conversation with Reshe (2023) regarding destructive plasticity, Malabou states that the concept of trauma can be applied to "all kinds of traumatized people, including socially traumatized people, excluded people, but also people suffering from any kind of what I call 'social traumas'… , including natural phenomena like natural catastrophes that … appear as social catastrophes" (p. 49). Williams (2013) views Malabou's definition of trauma as a "radical reformation," one that Malabou initiates by awakening discourses rooted in the Enlightenment tradition (p. 9).

Zal's childhood experiences in the cage resonate with Malabou's metaphor of "cutting the thread of life" (2012a, p. 6). The explosive accident that pinpoints Zal's trauma is his experience of being raised in a cage for the first eight years of his life. When Zal's sister meets with him, it becomes clear that humanity is lost in the pitiful creature in front of her; "[S]quatting, motionless, eyes closed, suspended in a cage that was so small; he looked almost bound in a wiry eggshell, like a tiny, half-dead child embalmed in a womb-jail" (Khakpour, 2014, p. 6). An explosive accident is similar to a shock, which "forces open or pierces a protective barrier" (Malabou, 2012b, p. 6). In other words, an explosive accident is like removing the safety pin from a grenade—it leads to trauma. Malabou describes the life of individuals after experiencing such an accident thus:

> You could say: 'nothing' … They do not look like nothing because 'nothing' is a word that still resembles itself too much. It is one of those ontological inventions that says being backwards, and that consequently speaks of a way of coinciding that, even paradoxically, participates again in identity. Actually, … [they] look like less than nothing. (2012a, p. 71)

Zal's condition of being raised in a cage reflects the effraction Malabou discusses. It evokes a state of nothingness and the consequences of 'throwing the grenade' by portraying Zal as an embryo with closed eyes, confined in a womb-like jail. This image functions as a concrete dramatization of destructive plasticity as it depicts the moment Zal's identity is shattered and rewritten.

Zal's experience of being raised as a bird in a cage appears to be a traumatic event. Malabou argues that due to the pathological force of the explosive accident (trauma), the past life of the individual does not exist anymore; instead, it creates "another history" (2012b, p. 15). Zal's physical posture and his eating habits display the traces trauma has left behind on his body. When Mr. Hendricks comes to Iran and meets Zal for the first time, he realizes that Zal cannot talk or walk (Khakpour, 2014, p. 7). Mr. Hendricks believes that "it would take years and years to get [Zal] to walk upright, to get him to straighten his arms, to get him to hold utensils, a pen, another human" (p. 10). These are some of the easy tasks that any person can do; yet the event of being raised as a bird has deformed Zal's body. His ability to talk is just as much as a bird does, as "Khanoom [his mother] had seldom spoken to him but apparently sang to all the birds and he could sing back as much as they could" (p. 9). Moreover, Zal is incapable of eating normal food and his diet consists of "only seed and water" (p. 10). Because of this diet, "[h]e was thin but not emaciated, definitely too thin, but not in a way that disgusted" (p. 22). According to Malabou (2012b), the brain of a traumatized person is associated with destructive plasticity, which causes "an absolute metamorphosis of the subject" (p. 68). This metamorphosis manifests as physical or mental damage that affects the individual's life, which explains why Zal's human body appears to be replaced by a bird-like form that struggles with basic human functions, such as standing upright or speaking. Indeed, it demonstrates how the destructive force of trauma reshapes the lived body.

Zal's body deformation can also be looked at as another consequence of trauma. Zal's height is one of the many body deformations that he suffers from: "He was five feet seven inches … if he had grown up under normal conditions, he'd be well over six-two" (Khakpour, 2014, p. 22). The other distinction is his skin which "was pale and was prone to irritations—burns, eczema, acne, the works—but nothing so different from the usual blemishy human" (p. 22). Moreover, "his skin could not endure normal clothing, and would not for many years" because he has not worn any clothes since he was an infant (p. 10). These alterations indicate the way the traumatic effraction re-organizes Zal's entire bodily structure, as it creates a form that no longer aligns with normal human development. Zal slowly sheds his human physical traits as he transforms more into a bird. These changes alter him and alienate him from himself as a human. According to Malabou (2012b), destructive plasticity possesses "the power of creation *ex nihilo*, since it begins with the annihilation of an initial identity" (p. 68). All these physical distortions, as well as Zal's embodiment of avian habits, serve as evidence of the destruction and re-creation that follow destructive plasticity, showing how trauma creates a new identity entailing the loss of Zal's former human identity.

As Doidge (2015) points out, the problems caused by trauma are either due to the brain becoming 'miswired' by an external source or to its being 'undersupplied with sources' (p. 108). It is only because of the plasticity of the brain that it can "alter the connections between the neurons and to change its 'wiring'" (p. 109). Reparative plasticity is understood as the response of the brain to the destructive force of the trauma and destructive plasticity in general. In other words,

this plasticity only occurs once the brain is damaged as an effect of destructive plasticity, and the brain is trying to minimize the damage, and heal itself. According to Malabou, trauma and reparative plasticity have a cause-and-effect relationship. Reparative plasticity consists of two processes: neuronal renewal or secondary neurogenesis and the brain's ability to compensate for losses caused by lesions.

In the same vein, Zal's verbal and mental improvement can be analyzed by drawing on reparative plasticity. According to the narrator, it was believed that "language would not come to him, would never come to him; by the time Zal was fifteen he could speak and read on the level of a ten-year-old" (Khakpour, 2014, p. 21). Also, there are revealing passages about his progress during the therapeutic sessions with Dr. Rhodes; here is one illustrative excerpt: "'Am I a new man or something?' Zal joked. 'You tell me,' Rhodes said and smiled, a bit sinisterly. He wrote down immediate *levity* → *intro, comic greeting, a new thing*" (Khakpour, p. 164). This clearly illustrates that Zal has developed a good understanding of human language and communication. On another occasion, Zal states "'Look, shall I just spit it out?' 'Sure, a good use of our time,' Rhodes egged him on, scribbling *annoyance markedly heightened, bantering abilities also up*" (Khakpour, p. 165). Zal keeps surprising Rhodes with the change in his behavior. Malabou (2012b) explains: "The goal of such therapeutic processes—which combine the talking cure with the development of new adaptive behaviors … is to renew cerebral connections. Such treatments spur new processes of growth that allow the brain to regain its lost plasticity" (p. 167*).* Indeed, the various tasks and questions that Dr. Rhodes challenges Zal with are aimed at provoking the lost connections to heal themselves.

Dr. Rhodes' asking Zal to repeat certain sentences also represents the influence of reparative plasticity on the brain reformation. In one part of the novel Zal talks to himself saying, "*I am a boy* … and then, *I am a man*, he reminded himself. He was just that and that alone, he thought over and over and over, until it all sounded meaningless" to reassure himself (Khakpour, 2014, p. 23). At times when he doubts his normalcy, he repeats the same thing repeatedly: "for a moment he had the irrational worry the bird in him was bursting out. No. I am not a bird, he told himself, as he had told himself several thousand times before. *I am a man. Not a bird*" (Khakpour, p. 60). He repeats to himself that he is a man whenever he needs courage to do something he is not confident about, such as confessing his love to Asiya. "He went right ahead and told her—he was feeling so bold, bolder than ever, with her eyes all over him, all of him, a man, yes, he was a man, not a bird not a bird not a bird" (Khakpour, p. 133). As Malabou (2008) writes, "secondary neurogenesis [one of the two processes in reparative plasticity] also seems to permit a subject's personal experience to leave an imprint on the core of neuronal networks, in the form of regular morphological and functional reworking" (p. 27). In this manner, minor personal activities involving repetition and practice can help the brain repair itself.

Zal's physical and digestive progression prompts the brain's ability to regain its lost plasticity. When Zal first moves to New York City, Hendricks wants to show others that they are wrong to have no hope for his treatment: "They said his

body would forever remain deformed—but nine surgeries later, Zal went from a walker to standing upright on his own, with aches and pains and inflammation not so different from those of someone with MS" (Khakpour, 2014, p. 21). His digestive system also improves with the passage of time: "he had a sensitive digestive system and for years could tolerate only a bland diet of bread and rice and dull fruits and vegetables … As time went on, he began to indulge in the edibles of everyday life" (Khakpour, p. 24). These examples show us the processes by which reparative plasticity attempts to treat the consequences of trauma by "the power of *healing*—treatment, scarring, compensation, regeneration, and the capacity of the brain to build natural prostheses" (Malabou, 2008, p. 27). Zal's digestive system and general body posture begin to take a new form considering the new environment and living situation he is in, and this is all due to the self-repair nature of the body and the brain.

The emergence of Zal's emotions depicts the progress of reparative plasticity as well: "They said he would not be capable of experiencing human emotions, but Hendricks witnessed them all: the embrace out of nowhere he once or twice got, the welling of tears during frustrated episodes, *the fear the fear the fear"* (Khakpour, 2014, p. 22). Yet, there is no sign of him being successful in smiling. "Zal had cringed, Zal had grimaced, frowned, scowled, pouted, kissy-faced, even silent-scream-faced, but no smile" (Khakpour, p. 42). As is evident in a conversation between Zal and Dr. Rhodes, Zal develops a sense of embarrassment as well. "'Zal, I need to just make sure: how do you know it's sex? Are you sure you're having intercourse?' Zal turned red, and Rhodes wrote *registers significant embarrassment at idea of sex*" (Khakpour, p. 167). Zal is no longer the emotionless bird boy he had been before. He is healing and obtaining the normalcy that he wants. When numerous pathological factors interfere with brain functions — such as trauma or neurodegenerative disorders like Alzheimer's — the brain strives to adapt. According to Malabou (2008), the affected structures attempt to resolve the disruption by either "modify[ing] themselves so as to compensate for the new deficit" or forming "a new and abnormal organizational schema" to regain normalcy (p. 28). Zal's new ability to express his emotions is an example of reparative plasticity's functioning, where the brain generates new neuronal connections which account for emotions. Thus, the lost plasticity of areas responsible for emotions is coming back.

Exploring Zal's Neuronal Self and His Bird–Human Duality

Destructive plasticity refers to traumatic and destabilizing changes that can rupture identity, while creative plasticity involves constructive transformations that develop gradually throughout life. The neuronal self develops from creative plasticity, continually reshaping as the brain interacts with experience. As Malabou (2008) argues, the concept of neuronal self encompasses the three key notions of "network, delocalization and adaptability" together (p. 42). Network, which is also called "populations" or "assemblies", refers to an assembly of connections of neurons that forms the cerebral organization (Malabou, p. 42); as a result, an image or a concept, a mental object, needs a "correlated, transitory activity" in a large population of neurons in different cortical zones, which like "discrete assemblies of

neurons," form mobile and momentary centers to transfer the suppleness hand in hand (Malabou, p. 42). These networks have no function; instead, they work as "associative areas of the brain," which get activated in various cognitive tasks (Malabou, p. 42-3). In other words, the brain must show its adaptability and flexibility to switch from one situation to a completely different one and adjust to it. Silverman (2010) discusses Malabou's definition of the neuronal self and points out that, based on her conceptualization, "we are able to shape or sculpture ourselves, to overcome rigidities and limitations, so too a democratic society can develop, by further extension, in terms of its brain-like decenteredness and natural activity of self-forming," which results in systems of "mutual support, freedom of choice, harmony and justice" (p. 96). Malabou's definition of the concept and Silverman's comments help us gain a clearer vision of why and how a positive and healthy brain is associated with fluidity, and how the brain's plasticity directly influences the development of the self.

There are many passages in *The Last Illusion* that depict Zal as having bird characteristics. For example, Zal's dream of flying appears as a sign of mobility of networks and the emergence of his hybrid identity in the neuronal self. Regardless of being traumatized by his experience of being kept in a cage as a bird, his heart desires to have wings and to fly: "Zal wanted to fly more than anything" (Khakpour, 2014, p. 60). Additionally, he is well aware that he does not want to go back to the cage; "he knew no part of him wanted to be back with the birds, back in the cages, back to the birdseed and the beaks and the water feeders and the messes"; rather, it was "the part he never possessed: wings" (p. 60). In addition to representing the enduring influence of Zal's early life, his desire to fly also reflects the complex interplay between his past and present self, as there are still fragments of Zal's past identity within his newly emerging identity as a human. Malabou (2008) explains, "[t]he primary qualities of assemblies of neurons are their mobility and their multifunctionality" (p. 44). Therefore, flying carries a history in Zal's brain, and for the same reason bird-leaning characteristics might appear at times, making him resemble a bird. Due to the mobility and flexibility of the neuronal networks and the brain, Zal can shift between his two identities.

Similarly, Zal's inner desires serve as an illustration of delocalization as a key feature of neuronal self. While Zal and Asiya are spending time together in Asiya's art studio, which she refers to as a bird cage, she asks Zal to pose as what he most desires to be. "[H]e told her he would like to fly. And if he couldn't exactly fly, he wanted the next closest thing. … Real flight. … [M]aybe something like that photo of hers, the one with the dead bird suspended by string" (Khakpour, 2014, p. 133). Before long, Asiya's upcoming art gallery is full of pictures of Zal modelling like the dead birds in her old photos. This improves his sense of pride as he has had never been the "most important bird" (p. 142). Zal's choice to embody bird-like traits in modeling reflects the fluidity of his identity by blurring the boundaries between human and avian characteristics. Malabou compares the brain and assemblies with a capitalist company and its members. Drawing on Boltanski and Chiapello, Malabou writes, in capitalism, "'valued staff members are those who succeed in working with very different people, prove themselves open and flexible

when it comes to switching projects, and always manage to adapt to new circumstance'" (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2007, as cited in. 2008, p. 45). The blurring of boundaries in Zal's brain is possible because the brain is a plastic organ, able to shift and reorganize its connections in response to new experiences and stimuli.

Moreover, the formation and reformation of neural networks in the brain are accompanied by adaptability—another key feature of the neuronal self. Zal's depression and the way he expresses his sadness through self-torture exemplify this adaptability. He is depressed because he has been fired from his previous jobs; therefore, he decides to try a job he has long avoided. It is at a fried chicken restaurant that Zal confronts his depression. He had long refused to enter because of his history with birds and the discomfort of handling dead chickens, which made him feel like a serial killer. He chooses to do things he normally avoids to torture himself and, in doing so, express his emotional pain. His new job at the restaurant involves washing, cutting, and frying chicken, which is his worst nightmare. "He entered the restaurant that he had avoided so effectively for years … First step: he took deep breath after deep breath and almost relished the torture. It was worse than he thought" (Khakpour, 2014, p. 215). Khakpour describes Zal's joy of torturing himself thus: "[h]e was slashing his wrists and finding a certain joy in it. Worse than its smell was the fact that they were not hiring" (p. 215). Malabou (2008) writes, "[t]he connections that constitute the anatomy of the mature brain are obviously not the result of chance or spontaneous arrangement; the migration of nerve cells and their adaptation to their targets are programmed" (p. 18). Adaptability enables the brain to form new synapses, strengthen existing ones, and, at times, repurpose neuronal circuits for different functions. In other words, the newly reorganized neuronal patterns, initially developed in the context of Zal's upbringing, have become part of his cognitive and emotional repertoire. Therefore, this neuronal configuration emerges when he deals with complicated feelings such as sadness, depression, or experiences a mental breakdown triggered by an existential crisis. Zal's depression over his inability to hold a normal job reflects the coexistence of his bird and human identities. As a result, he chooses a job he would typically avoid—one that is painful for him to confront both as a human and as a bird.

There are also some passages in the novel that depict Zal as having human characteristics, which indicate the adaptability of the neuronal self and its influence on his identity. Similarly, delocalization and adaptability in neuronal networks show their influence on the neuronal self by overcoming genetic determinism. These passages illustrate indeterminism in the neuronal self. For example, Zal's sincere confession to his father about his secrets underscores the tension between determinism and free will in the neuronal self, highlighting his change in behavior over time. At the beginning, when Hendricks visits Zal, Zal tends to hide all the evidence that might lead his father to suspect that he is disobeying his instructions or behaving more like a bird than a man. However, after some time, he stops hiding the evidence of his avian characteristics and confesses to his father about his desire for insects, closing his eyes: "'Those, these, they're yogurt covered insects. Beetles'" (Khakpour, 2014, p. 251). He continues: "'I eat insects, Father,' Zal confessed. 'I've been doing it for years'" (p. 251). Another confession Zal makes is that he has been

dating Asiya all this time, despite his father's disapproval: "'And one more thing,' Zal said. 'Since, you know, I'm confessing.' Hendricks held his break for a moment. 'Go ahead.' 'I'm still seeing Asiya. She's in the bathroom. Asiya!'" (Khakpour, p. 252). Revealing these secrets not only does not intimidate him, but, as a matter of fact, makes him relieved: "Zal nodded, more slowly, a sudden peace floating over him. 'I think everything will be better from now on'" (Khakpour, p. 253). Malabou (2008) expresses, "to talk about the plasticity of the brain means to see in it not only the creator and receiver of form but also an agency of disobedience to every constituted form, a refusal to submit to a model", which is possible by "our individual experience, skills, and life habits, by the power of *impression* if existence in general" (p. 6). This agency of disobedience in Zal is shown by his embracing the change in behavior and point of view. Hence, his new identity is not fixed; rather, it is fluid—a dynamic product of his neuronal plasticity interacting with his life experiences—neither fully human nor purely bird-like. These cases demonstrate Zal's exercise of agency over his own identity, reflecting a sense of indeterminism and a movement toward empowerment.

Similarly, Zal's change of attitude towards his past fears and obsessions suggests the perception of indeterminism in the neuronal self because of adaptability. Throughout the story, Zal overcomes some of his past struggles and fears, one being his fear of looking at his own reflection. "Sometimes he found himself uncovering mirrors and really looking at himself and really seeing himself and weeping" (Khakpour, 2014, p. 170). Another example is his attachment to birds. He lets go of the canary in the pet store he worked in: "Until one evening, during closing, whether he meant to do it or not, he took her out and let her go into the night sky" (Khakpour, p. 205). He frees the bird he adores, and at some point, has developed feelings for it, into the sky which symbolizes the beginning of his journey to become normal. Malabou (2013) points out, "emotional and affective mechanisms are not predetermined. Experience plays a major part in forming neural connections. These connections are highly modifiable—their shape change—which shows that the brain is not a rigid structure, closed in on itself" (Johnston & Malabou, p. 27-8). In other words, due to the indeterminate nature of the brain, the emergence of changes in behavior and beliefs is possible within the neuronal self; as a result, Zal can develop his identity by going through various experiences and reforming the neuronal connections in his brain. Yet, he must first adjust to his current life. This means that Zal needs to recognize the uniqueness of the life he has experienced and accept the bird side of his identity. This requires him to let go of the definition of a "normal" human that he once believed he had to become. Only after this process of acceptance and transformation is Zal able to demonstrate how the neuronal self's indeterminism enables growth and change.

Accordingly, Zal's self-awareness serves as a foundational step towards indeterminism by showcasing delocalization in the neuronal self. One of the brain's main goals is to heal itself by reorganizing its network of neurons. Zal wonders how "he always came back to the same nagging thought: what was he waiting for? What was it? What on earth was *normal*?" (Khakpour, 2014, p. 293). Then he realizes something: "[h]e knew he was further away from it than he had been, or perhaps

thought he'd been, all along" (p. 293-4). The answer to his question about what it means to be 'normal' comes to Zal as he sees his own reflection in the huge mirror at the town: "He focused on the freeze-frame of what was actually in front of him, all that was still and frozen, with Zal at the center of it all, thinking one thing: *I exist. I am here. I am real*" (Khakpour, p. 316). In this way, he starts to form a new perspective about himself and his place in the world. This change in Zal can be explained by drawing on Malabou's theorization of delocalization as "making ourselves available, showing ourselves to be without attachment, ready to break old ties, to create new ones" (Malabou, 2008, p. 45). The various experiences Zal undergoes prepare him to come to terms with his unique identity. Malabou is right to argue that "every event coming from outside necessarily comes to affect homeostasis and calls upon 'another level of cerebral structure,' charged with transforming maintenance into a creative ability" (p. 74-5). She adds that homeostasis refers to "the maintenance of the system," which is the opposite of a self-generating system or "the ability to change the system" (Malabou, p. 74). Therefore, this act of questioning and answering demonstrates Zal's cognitive and emotional reconfiguration. Indeed, his brain is giving form to new patterns of thought and understanding to balance the new urge to redefine what it means to be normal with the old definition.

Zal becomes self-aware and accepts himself because the brain can grow and change. This happens as brain networks shift and adapt based on new experiences and memories. There are two incidents that touch Zal's heart and make him realize the way the human world works. The first moment occurs when Zal asks the prison officer what Asiya's room looks like. At that point, he realizes there is no real difference between the human world and the birdcage he once lived in. The officer responds, "It's like that. Cell blocks, cells. Nothing to see" (Khakpour, p. 297). But when the officer turns to open the door to retrieve Asiya, Zal describes the scene before him as "*row after row of cages*" (p. 297). Meanwhile, the second example sheds light on Zal's newly developed understanding of what it means to be a man; it no longer depends on physical similarities, but rather on something deeper—within a person's heart. This realization occurs when Zal sees his reflection in the mirror: "Zal had awakened to his own image, as if his own reflection had shaken him to consciousness. It was his face and body, but several stories high and wide and distorted … that he looked more monster" (Khakpour, p. 316). In this moment, Zal understands that anyone marked by a feature that sets them apart from what is considered "normal" is destined to be separated from others. As a result, he begins to see himself not as a man, but as a monster—though in this context, being a monster is not necessarily a negative thing. Drawing on LeDoux, Malabou writes that a person's identity depends on neuronal configurations, as the essence of the self is restored in the formation and destruction of neuronal connections, as well as in the interactions between different subsystems of the brain (2008, p. 58). She adds that there is a relation between the "synaptic mechanisms of memory" and the "neuronal basis of the self" which helps individuals to adapt to new circumstances (p. 58).

Zal's final conversation with his father reflects the influence of his earlier experiences of delocalization and adaptability—rooted in his self-awareness and

self-acceptance—and culminates in the formation of a new definition of what it means for him to be 'normal.' Amidst the following conversation with his father, Zal comes to a new realization about himself: "'I've never been normal and I'm never going to be normal," Zal announced. "And really, did I want all that stuff? Love and my own home and a job and wife and kids and all that stuff?'" (Khakpour, 2014, p. 301). His father asks him if he is okay, and he replies, "'I don't know. But I do know that's not the point. I know that doesn't matter." He paused again. "I know that now. So in a way, I guess I am okay'" (Khakpour, p. 302). Malabou (2008) writes, "we *live*, what in many respects we make—our brains, which are, once more, our work, fashioned throughout a whole life within the intimate experience of the outside" (p. 37). In this passage, Malabou explores themes of formation and modification, emphasizing the indeterminacy of the neuronal self. She also highlights the importance of external factors, such as environment and experience, in shaping the brain. Consequently, Zal's candid reflection provides evidence that he is entering a new phase of change and becoming, where his neuronal connections take on a new form after undergoing a variety of life experiences.

On this account, the concept of the neuronal self leads to the formation of what is called a mental object. Malabou (2008) defines a mental object as an "image or concept" (p. 42). These can include "visual images, auditory images, tactile images, and so forth—images that can convey any object, any relation, concrete or abstract, any word, and any sign" (Malabou, p. 61). Such images are produced through the dynamic flow and transition of neurons within networks, shaped by processes of delocalization and adaptability. These processes carry history formed by memories and experiences. The last sentence of the novel is regarded as a trace of a mental object, representing all of Zal's past efforts and experiences as an individual striving to appear normal. Throughout the novel, it is repeatedly mentioned that Zal gradually acquires human traits that make him seem more like a typical person and less like the feral child raised by birds—except for one thing: his inability to smile like everyone else. Thus, when the novel ends with the line, "Zal Hendricks was smiling," it signifies that a refined version of Zal has emerged—one who is now more like a typical man (Khakpour, 2014, p. 319). However, it takes many years and countless failed attempts for Zal to reach this point. Malabou (2008) notes,

> To exist is to be able to change difference while respecting the difference of change: the difference between continuous change, without limits, without adventure, without negativity, and a formative change that tells an effective story and proceeds by ruptures, conflicts, dilemmas. (p. 79)

If every attempt were to lead directly to the intended outcome, then would that truly reflect the ideas of freedom and indeterminism that Malabou's concept of brain plasticity describes? To embody these ideas, there must be rupturing, detours, and failures. Although Zal eventually succeeds in smiling, his earlier inability to do so highlights the uncertainty and indeterminacy at the core of his transformation. Smiling, then, becomes a metaphor for Zal's evolving understanding of what it means to be a normal man. It represents the multiple definitions he has formed—

shaped by the repeated reconfigurations of neuronal networks that occur through creative plasticity.

Conclusion

The application of Catherine Malabou's theory of brain plasticity to *The Last Illusion* highlights the fluidity of identity. As the findings suggest, the power of trauma lies in its ability to transform; it reshapes the past, allowing a new life to begin for the traumatized individual. Zal's emotional detachment and his struggle with various illnesses serve as one example of this metamorphic process. Following Dr. Rhodes' use of behavioral therapy, the signs of healing that appear in Zal demonstrate that the brain is a flexible structure, open to change and modification. The concept of brain plasticity challenges traditional views of strict localization, in which specific cognitive functions were believed to reside exclusively in particular brain regions. Indeed, brain plasticity rejects the idea of the brain as a fixed and rigid structure; rather, it emphasizes that the brain is constantly undergoing changes to adapt more effectively to its living conditions. Zal's gradual verbal and mental improvement, along with his growing ability to express emotions, illustrates the power of brain plasticity in its destructive, reparative, and creative forms. His embodiment of both human and avian characteristics further reflects the delocalization and adaptability of neuronal networks of the neuronal self and its influence on the formation of identity. Therefore, this study invites readers to reconsider the boundaries of selfhood, and to embrace the plastic nature of our neurological existence as a source of empowerment and renewal.

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Discursive Constructions of Freedom and Female Identity in American and Vietnamese Literature Between the 1960s and 1980s

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Abstract

This study examines discursive constructions of freedom and the ways in which they shape representations of female identity in selected American and Vietnamese literary texts during the 1960s and 1980s. Drawing on Critical Discourse Analysis, Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, and Systemic Functional Linguistics, this study analyzes four typical works of this period, including The Bell Jar (1963), Beloved (1987), Paradise of the Blind (1988, original in Vietnamese), and The General Retires (1987, original in Vietnamese). Key theoretical concepts underpinning the deductive thematic analysis comprise metaphor, modality, transitivity, evaluation, silence, temporality, and conditionality. Findings show that freedom is not conceived of as a stable or fully realized condition but rather something constrained, negotiated, and often deferred. In the American texts, limitations on freedom are more often expressed through psychological instability and institutional control, whereas they are more frequently naturalized through moral duties, social expectations, and collective obligations in the Vietnamese texts. These constructions contribute to shaping female identity by weakening agency, restricting voice, and reinforcing emotional labor and sacrifice. This study is significant for discourse analysis, feminist literary studies, and cross-cultural literary research in showing that freedom and female identity are intrinsically and dynamically constructed and negotiated through language.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, female identity, freedom, literature, Systemic Functional Linguistics

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Introduction

Freedom is often understood as a fundamental human value associated with self-initiated actions or activities and a lack of inhibition (Kienpointner, 2024). Female freedom is portrayed in literary works as susceptible to systems of power and ideology embedded in discourse (Fairclough, 1995, 2023), gendered social structures that constrain women's autonomy (de Beauvoir, 1956), and intersecting relations of race, class, and gender (Hadisi & Ameri, 2021; Hooks, 1984). Therefore, it is possible to examine not only whether female characters are free or constrained, but also how these conditions are expressed through language. From a discourse perspective, linguistic choices can position women as agents or as subjects acted upon, reinforce particular social duties, and shape the forms of resistance available to them (Fairclough, 1995, 2023; Lazar, 2005). Such patterns are important because they connect representations of freedom with the social and ideological conditions that influence female identity. Existing research tends to discuss freedom in broad philosophical, moral, or institutional terms, while feminist discourse research has concentrated more specifically on the relationships between language, gender, and power (Fairclough, 2023; Kienpointner, 2024; Lazar, 2005; Tayefi, 2021). It remains unclear how linguistic features provide a more specific way of understanding this construct not simply as a literary theme, but as an element negotiated through the language used to represent women and their experiences.

This gap becomes especially noticeable in cross-cultural literary research. American and Vietnamese literary traditions depart from different historical, ideological, and cultural contexts, and these differences shape the ways in which women's lives and experiences are depicted (Jamieson, 1993). However, comparative studies are often restricted to cultural contrast, without sufficiently examining the linguistic and discursive mechanisms through which such meanings are constructed. A further problem lies in the tendency to treat female identity as something that can be described directly through plot, character role, or symbolic meaning (Lionnet, 1995; Oleksandra et al., 2024). While these dimensions are important, they do not fully explain how identity is shaped through language. Given the relatively limited discourse-oriented comparative research on how freedom and female identity are signified in such sociocultural literary contexts (Gifford, 2020; Pola, 2013), this study provides a situated account of these constructs through selected American and Vietnamese works. It aims to examine how linguistic and discursive resources express freedom and position female characters in relation to agency, voice, social obligation, and sacrifice. The following research questions guide this study:

RQ1: How is freedom discursively constructed in selected American and Vietnamese literary texts between the 1960s and 2000s?

RQ2: In what ways do these discursive constructions of freedom reflect female identity in these texts?

Literature Review

Discursive Conceptualization of Freedom

Freedom is often treated as a universal condition associated with the capacity to act without constraints (Kienpointner, 2024). This view, however, does not fully account for the social and ideological conditions under which freedom becomes possible or restricted. Critical Discourse Analysis and feminist theory approach this limitation from different but complementary perspectives. Fairclough (1995, 2023) locates meaning within relations of discourse and power, drawing attention to the ways social realities are produced and legitimized through language. Feminist theorists extend this concern by showing that access to freedom is unevenly structured by gender and other relations of domination. De Beauvoir (1956) emphasizes the social construction of women's subordinate status, whereas Hooks (1984) reiterates the intersecting effects of gender, race, and class. Although these perspectives differ in emphasis, they subscribe to the view that freedom cannot be understood independently of the structures that define whose choices are recognized, restricted, or made socially acceptable. For the present study, this convergence is important because it shifts attention from freedom as an abstract ideal to the conditions through which it is represented and limited in literary discourse.

This broader understanding also suggests that freedom operates at more than one level. Psychological accounts foreground the capacity for internal autonomy and the effects of trauma, memory, and emotional instability on the self (Caruth, 1996; LaCapra, 2001), while Berlin (1969) and Foucault (1977) direct attention toward external structures that regulate action through political, institutional, and ideological power. These dimensions are analytically distinct, but literary representations frequently bring them together: external constraints may be internalized as psychological conflict, while individual choices remain shaped by wider social conditions. From discourse-oriented perspectives, the ability to articulate experience, refusal, or resistance is closely connected to relations of power, making the tension between voice and silence relevant to questions of freedom (Fairclough, 1995; Lazar, 2005). Freedom may therefore be negotiated, conditional, or deferred within existing structures of authority (Fairclough, 1995, 2023; Hooks, 1984).

Female Identity

Identity is a multidimensional construct that defies specific definitions and varies from one sociocultural context to another and across historical settings. According to Côté (2006), identity has been variably interpreted as a reflection of social affiliation, a representation of certain aspects of human self-definition, or an attachment to different labels such as personal identity and social identity. Regarding female identity, Butler (1999) points out that conceptualizations of gender are deeply rooted in repeated social practices and expectations, reiterating the role of discourse in shaping how this notion is constructed and maintained. Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis further shows that language plays a central role in sustaining gendered power relations. Lazar (2005) argues that discourse naturalizes

expectations of women as obedient, self-sacrificing, and emotionally responsible, thereby reinforcing inequality. In literary contexts, these patterns are reflected in representations of women within constrained social roles. Showalter (1977) notes that women's writing develops within restrictive cultural frameworks, while Gilbert and Gubar (2020) highlight how female characters are often positioned within limiting symbolic roles. These approaches to defining identity differ in theoretical focus, but they challenge the assumption that female identity simply reflects an already existing or natural category. Instead, it emerges through recurring expectations about how women should act, speak, and relate to others.

In the present study, female identity is viewed through the lens of agency versus passivity, voice versus silence, moral and social roles, and emotional labor and sacrifice. Firstly, agency versus passivity refers to whether female characters are represented as active participants in shaping their lives or as individuals positioned as acted upon by external forces (Halliday & Hasan, 1989; Lazar, 2005). Secondly, voice versus silence concerns the extent to which women are able to articulate their thoughts, emotions, and forms of resistance, or are instead constrained to silence (Fairclough, 1995; Lazar, 2005). Thirdly, moral and social roles relate to the expectations imposed on women in terms of family obligations, duty, and broader societal responsibilities (Butler, 1999; Hadisi & Ameri, 2021; Lazar, 2005). Finally, emotional labor and sacrifice reflect the normalization of endurance, self-denial, and the prioritization of others' needs over one's own (Hooks, 1984; Lazar, 2005). These dimensions of female identity provide a structured framework for analyzing how female identity is constructed, negotiated, and constrained across literary texts. It is important to note that these dimensions are interlaced, as restricted agency may be reinforced through silence, social obligation may require emotional sacrifice, and the ability to speak may itself constitute a form of agency.

Cross-cultural Construction of Freedom and Identity

The construction of freedom and female identity varies across cultural contexts because literary representations are shaped by different historical experiences, ideological frameworks, and social values. In American literary texts, freedom is often associated with individual autonomy, self-direction, and personal agency, especially in traditions that value freedom from external interference and the moral authority of the self (Berlin, 1969; Otter, 2010; Pylynskyi, 2020). As a result, limitations on freedom are frequently represented through institutional forms of control, particularly surveillance, normalization, and examination, which may be internalized in literary representation as inner conflict and emotional instability within the subject (Foucault, 1977). In Vietnamese sociocultural contexts, freedom in literary texts is more often configured in relation to moral duty, family responsibility, collective obligation, and ideological expectations, reflecting a sociocultural framework shaped by Confucian hierarchies, familial institutions, and bureaucratic systems of authority (Frenier & Mancini, 1996; Malarney, 2002; Woodside, 1971). Individual desire is superseded by social roles and communal values, attributing the construction of freedom and identity to cultural values such as filial duty, patriarchal authority, and spiritual belief (Nguyen, 2011; O'Harrow, 1995).

Female identity is also disparately constructed in Vietnamese and American literature. Vietnamese female characters are positioned within systems of moral obligation and familial expectations, where personal autonomy is often subordinated to collective responsibility. Such representations align with broader Vietnamese sociocultural frameworks, in which individual desire is frequently negotiated within the constraints of social and ideological norms (Frenier & Mancini, 1996; Tran, 2006). In American texts, female identity tends to be constructed through tensions between selfhood and restriction at the psychological level, whereas Vietnamese texts more frequently emphasize the conflict between personal autonomy and socially sanctioned duty. A cross-cultural perspective is therefore necessary because it allows examining not only how freedom is limited in different ways, but also how the meanings of agency, obligation, sacrifice, and identity are organized differently across literary and cultural traditions.

These theoretical concerns inform the four dimensions of freedom examined in this study, including (1) psychological, (2) social and ideological, (3) linguistic, and (4) deferred or negotiated freedom, and those related to female identity, such as agency, voice, social roles, and sacrifice. For RQ1, these dimensions provide a basis for examining how freedom is discursively constructed across the selected texts. RQ2 builds on this analysis by considering how the same constructions reflect female identity in terms of agency and passivity, voice and silence, social and moral roles, and emotional labor and sacrifice.

Method

Research Design and Analytical Approaches

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive research design grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 1995, 2023), Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) (Lazar, 2005), and Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (Halliday & Hasan, 1989). Rather than quantifying linguistic patterns, this study seeks to examine how meanings of freedom and female identity are discursively constructed within selected American and Vietnamese literary texts. These approaches, therefore, allow a nuanced examination of how women's constructions of freedom and identity are linguistically framed and constrained within historically and ideologically situated systems of power.

Following Fairclough (1995, 2023), discourse is conceptualized as a form of social practice embedded within broader ideological and institutional structures. Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model informs the analysis by examining discourse at three interrelated levels. At the textual level, attention is given to lexical choice, grammatical structures, modality, and metaphor. At the discursive level, the focus shifts to how meanings are produced, circulated, and interpreted. At the social level, discourse is situated within wider historical, political, and ideological contexts. This model enables the study to connect linguistic form with social meaning, revealing how literary narratives simultaneously reflect, reinforce, and contest dominant ideological norms.

Drawing on Lazar (2005), FCDA foregrounds gender as a central axis of power and examines how discourse reproduces and legitimizes patriarchal structures while attending to moments of resistance and rearticulation. FCDA focuses on the ways in which language positions women within systems of authority, normalizes inequality, and constructs expectations of femininity through everyday discourse. Within this study, FCDA is employed not merely as an analytical framework for examining how freedom and female identity are discursively constructed. It provides tools for analyzing how agency versus passivity is structured through narrative representation, how voice versus silence is controlled or suppressed, and how social and moral roles are imposed and normalized through discourse. It also allows examine how women are linguistically positioned in relation to duty, obedience, sacrifice, and emotional labor, and how these representations shape the meaning of female identity within wider ideological structures.

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), developed by Halliday and Hasan (1989), provides grammatical tools for analyzing how language encodes agency, responsibility, evaluation, and power. SFL conceptualizes language as a meaning-making resource that simultaneously performs ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions. Key analytical categories in this study include transitivity, which identifies who is represented as acting versus being acted upon, modality, which expresses degrees of obligation, permission, necessity, and certainty, and interpersonal meaning, which reveals stance, judgment, and evaluative positioning (Halliday & Hasan, 1989). These linguistic resources enable the analysis to trace how freedom, authority, and female subjectivity are grammatically constructed across narrative contexts.

Text Selection

This study examines four literary works published between the 1960s and the early 2000s. The texts were selected purposively on the basis of three considerations. First, each gives substantial attention to women's experiences of autonomy, constraint, obligation, or resistance in local sociocultural contexts. Second, each contains recurring situations relevant to the analytical dimensions established in this study, including psychological, social and ideological, linguistic, and deferred or negotiated freedom, together with questions of agency, voice, social roles, and sacrifice. Third, selecting two works from each literary tradition provides a balanced basis for examining how comparable concerns are represented within different historical and sociocultural settings. The purpose is therefore not to treat the four works as culturally or historically equivalent, but to examine them through a common analytical framework. The American texts include The Bell Jar (Plath, 1963) and Beloved (Morrison, 1987). The Vietnamese texts include Paradise of the Blind (Những thiên đường mù) (Duong, 1988, 2002) and The General Retires (Tướng về hưu) (Nguyen, 1987, 1992).

The Vietnamese works required an additional consideration because both were originally published in Vietnamese and subsequently translated into English. The English versions are used to facilitate cross-textual comparison, but translation is not treated as fully reproducing the lexical and cultural meanings of the source

texts. Where an interpretation depends on culturally specific wording, evaluative meaning, modality, or another linguistically significant feature, the Vietnamese original is consulted and given interpretive priority. The translated and original versions were therefore used together where necessary, allowing the analysis to maintain a common comparative framework while remaining sensitive to language-specific meanings.

Summary of Selected Texts

The Bell Jar (Plath, 1963) follows Esther Greenwood, a young woman who struggles with psychological breakdown while confronting social expectations surrounding femininity, career, and marriage in mid-twentieth-century America. As Esther becomes increasingly alienated from the roles imposed on her, the novel explores the tension between apparent opportunities and lived restrictions. Medical treatment, social judgement, and internal instability contribute to shaping her experiences. The novel is particularly relevant to this study because it presents freedom as psychologically fragile and socially regulated rather than fully available or secure.

Beloved (Morrison, 1987) centers on Sethe, a formerly enslaved woman haunted by the trauma of slavery and the memory of her dead daughter. Although slavery has formally ended, the novel demonstrates that freedom remains incomplete because trauma continues to shape memory, identity, and bodily experience. Through haunting, silence, and fragmented narration, Morrison shows how the past remains active within the present. The text is important to this study because it reveals how freedom may be legally acknowledged yet psychologically deferred and how female identity is constructed through suffering, maternal responsibility, and survival.

Paradise of the Blind (Duong, 1988) follows Hằng, a young Vietnamese woman who reflects on her family history and the burdens imposed by ideology, filial duty, and social expectations. Through her relationships with her mother and aunt, the novel critiques post-revolutionary Vietnamese society and the moral pressures placed on women to sacrifice themselves for family and political ideals. Rather than presenting freedom as direct liberation, the text portrays it as constrained by obligation and inherited responsibility. It is especially relevant to this study for its representation of moral duty, emotional labor, and the tension between personal autonomy and collective expectations.

The General Retires (Nguyen, 1987) depicts the return of an aging military general to his family home after war, where tensions emerge between traditional authority, domestic life, and changing social values. Although the general appears to embody public honor and patriarchal order, the story gradually reveals the often-invisible labor and sacrifice performed by women within the household. Female characters are positioned within roles of caregiving, endurance, and domestic responsibility, frequently without recognition or meaningful autonomy. The text contributes to this study by illustrating how female identity is shaped through moral obligation and how freedom is limited by family and social structures.

Analytical Procedures

This study drew on the six stages of deductive thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), including (1) gaining familiarity with the data set, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) writing the report. In this approach, the analysis "tend[s] to be driven by the researcher's theoretical or analytic interest in the area, and is thus more explicitly analyst-driven" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). The unit of analysis is the literary passage, including narrative description, character dialogue, and other segments in which freedom or female identity becomes linguistically salient. Each passage was coded according to one or more of the theoretical dimensions of freedom (i.e., (1) psychological, (2) social and ideological, (3) linguistic, and (4) deferred or negotiated freedom) and female identity (i.e., agency, voice, social roles, and sacrifice). Passages were selected when they contained evidence relevant to one or more of the analytical dimensions and could be examined through discourse features such as metaphor, modality, transitivity, and evaluation. Metaphor shows how psychological freedom is represented through symbolic constructions of enclosure, instability, limitation, and aspiration. Modality reveals the degrees of obligation, restriction, permission, and possibility, thereby illuminating the discursive construction of social and ideological freedom. Transitivity illustrates patterns of agency and passivity, showing whether female characters are represented as active participants or as individuals acted upon by external forces. Evaluation traces how moral judgment and affective positioning are linguistically produced, particularly in relation to emotional labor, sacrifice, and socially prescribed gender roles.

The same analytical categories were applied across the four selected texts while remaining sensitive to language-specific and cultural meanings. For the Vietnamese works, interpretive priority was given to the Vietnamese wording rather than assuming direct equivalence between the original and translated versions. To strengthen analytical credibility, coding and interpretations were reviewed iteratively and agreed upon between the two researchers. Passages that were ambiguous or appeared relevant to more than one category were reconsidered in relation to their surrounding textual context and the working definitions of the analytical dimensions.

Results

Discursive Constructions of Freedom

Psychological Freedom

Psychological freedom in the selected texts is constructed as fragile and provisional rather than as a stable condition. In Plath (1963, p. 302), the metaphor "to the person in the bell jar, blank and stopped as a dead baby, the world itself is the bad dream" frames psychological experience through enclosure. At the textual level, the noun phrase "bell jar" evokes a bounded space that separates the subject from the surrounding world. This metaphorical confinement continues in "The bell jar hung, suspended, a few feet above my head" (Plath, 1963, p. 274), where the verb

"hung" and the spatial phrase "a few feet above" represent constraint as temporarily displaced rather than completely removed. From a CDA perspective, these linguistic choices can be interpreted as constructing psychological freedom as vulnerable to circumstantial restrictions.

A comparable instability is realized differently in Morrison (1987). In "Nobody saw them falling" (Morrison,1987, p. 205), the pronoun "nobody" foregrounds the absence of recognition, while the participial form "falling" presents the experience as unfolding rather than resolved. Temporal limitations become more explicit in "For a moment, looking up, Sethe entered the perfect peace they offered" (Morrison, 1987, pp. 205-206). The phrase "for a moment" restricts the duration of "perfect peace," linguistically positioning her inner tranquility as temporary. These observations do not necessarily denote that psychological freedom is inherently unstable; instead, within the passages examined, metaphor and temporality repeatedly represent it as ephemeral. Psychological freedom is therefore discursively constructed through patterns of enclosure, instability, and momentary presence.

These findings indicate that psychological freedom in the selected texts is constructed as precarious rather than secure. Through metaphorical enclosure and temporally restricted moments of relief, the excerpts represent inner autonomy as something repeatedly threatened by disruption.

Social and Ideological Freedom

Freedom is also represented through linguistic forms that position social and ideological expectations as inevitable and, to some extent, obtrusive. In Plath (1963, p. 5), this pattern appears in "I was supposed to be having the time of my life." From an SFL perspective, the semi-modal expression "supposed to" encodes an externally oriented expectation rather than an unrestricted personal preference. At the level of CDA, this modality can be interpreted as positioning the character against socially recognizable norms for conveying her feelings. Such linguistic evidence therefore implies obligation and imposition, restricting her own space for emotional response.

In Nguyen (1987), generalization contributes to a different form of constraint. The statement "Mỗi người đàn bà đều có thiên tính người mẹ" (Nguyen, 1987, p. 61) [Every woman has a mother's nature] (Lockhart, 1992, p. 141) combines "mỗi" [every] with "đều" [all], presenting the proposition without individual exception. The phrase "thiên tính người mẹ" further represents motherhood as an inherent attribute. Within CDA and FCDA, this generalizing structure can be interpreted as naturalizing maternal responsibility by presenting it as a defining characteristic of women rather than as one possible social role. A similar pattern appears in "Tao là mẹ mày! Thật đấy! Chúng nó nói không sai đâu!" (Nguyen, 1987, p. 61) [I'm your mother! It's true! What they say is right!] (Nguyen, 1992, p. 141). The pronoun "chúng nó" [they] introduces an external collective voice, while "không sai đâu" [right] positively evaluates that voice. Linguistically, the character supports her position through reference to the judgment of others. From a CDA perspective, this can be interpreted as legitimatizing her viewpoint through collective authority.

In Duong (1988), evaluative and modal language associate endurance with moral value. The statement "Làm người cốt nhất là không được thối chí. Chỉ một phút xuôi tay, mọi sự sẽ đổ nát" (Duong, 1988, p. 7) [To live with dignity, the important thing is never to despair. You give up once, and everything gives way] (Duong, 2002, p. 14) uses "không được thối chí" [never to despair] to frame perseverance as necessary rather than optional, while "xuôi tay" [give up] denotes involuntary surrender. This proverb-like use of language reinforces an evaluative contrast between endurance and limited resistance. Within FCDA, these patterns can be interpreted as positioning perseverance and self-denial as socially contingent responses to hardships.

These findings demonstrate that freedom is discursively restricted, as individuals are positioned within frameworks of social and ideological expectations that appear evident rather than imposed. When norms are framed as universal, they become more difficult to challenge, and alternative forms of behavior become less visible.

Linguistic Freedom

Linguistic freedom in the selected texts concerns not only whether characters speak but also the conditions under which expression becomes available or restricted. In Plath (1963, p. 261), the repeated sequence "Joan had walk privileges, Joan had shopping privileges, Joan had town privileges" reiterates the noun "privileges." This lexical repetition represents ordinary activities as permissions granted within an institutional setting rather than as self-initiated actions. From a CDA perspective, the wording can be interpreted as locating the conditions of action and expression within institutional authority.

In Morrison (1987), restriction appears within the character's own formulation. In "I don't have to remember nothing" (Morrison, 1987, p. 216), the semi-modal expression "don't have to" rejects an obligation to remember, showing that the utterance rejects further engagement with memory. This linguistic evidence can be interpreted as a form of discursive withdrawal from painful recollection.

A different pattern appears in "It was not a story to pass on" (Morrison, 1987, p. 232). The formulation does not identify a particular person as the source of the restriction. Instead, the proposition presents the limitation on transmission without an explicit agent. From a CDA perspective, leaving the source of regulation unspecified can be interpreted as making the restriction appear generalized rather than individually imposed.

These findings suggest that linguistic freedom is constructed through lexical repetition, modality, and agentless formulation. As the selected excerpts reveal, expression is conditioned by institutional authority, the character's relation to memory, and restrictions whose source is not always explicitly identified.

Deferred and Negotiated Freedom

Deferred and negotiated freedom is constructed through linguistic patterns that make autonomy conditional on circumstances beyond the individual. In Plath (1963, p. 274), this conditionality is explicit in the exchange "That depends," Doctor

Nolan said, "on you and me." The verb "depends" marks contingency, while "you and me" distributes participation between the two characters. From a CDA perspective, freedom in this transaction is achieved through negotiation within an existing structure of authority rather than independently exercised. Similarly, in "Philomena Guinea was buying my freedom" (Plath, 1963, p. 282), "buying" from an SFL transitivity perspective is a material process in which Philomena functions as the agent and "my freedom" as the goal of the process. Linguistically, this construction of freedom is represented as something acquired through another person's material intervention. Temporality also contributes to deferred freedom. For example, the phrase "for a moment" that comes along with the description of Sethe's pursuit of peace (Morrison, 1987, p. 205) limits her duration of enjoyment. This lexical choice denotes temporary relief, showing freedom as provisional.

The Vietnamese texts contribute to this pattern through continuing obligation rather than explicit negotiation. As discussed earlier, Nguyen's "Mỗi người đàn bà đều có thiên tính người mẹ" (Nguyen, 1987, p. 61) [Every woman has a mother's nature] (Nguyen, 1992, p. 141) and Duong's "không được thối chí" (Duong, 1988, p. 7) [never to despair] (Duong, 2002, p. 14) present maternal responsibility and perseverance as continuing and assigned expectations framed within the sociocultural context of Vietnam. Because these expectations are repeatedly legitimized within social discourse, the possibility of autonomy remains postponed rather than directly denied.

These findings show that deferred or negotiated freedom is constructed as conditional, mediated, and temporally unstable. The presence of power in interpersonal exchanges, circumstantial restrictions and sociocultural obligations are the key elements shaping the construction of freedom in the selected texts.

Discursive Constructions of Female Identity

Agency vs. Passivity

Female identity in the selected passages is constructed through different configurations of agency, including cases in which grammatical aspects do not correspond to effective control. In "Only I wasn't steering anything, not even myself" (Plath, 1963, p. 6), the subject "I" occupies the grammatical position associated with agency, but the negation "wasn't" denies the realization of that control. From an SFL transitivity perspective, this linguistic evidence presents agency as grammatically available but practically unacknowledged. Within FCDA, this can be interpreted as a construction of female subjectivity in which the capacity for action is present but constrained.

Morrison (1987) realizes diminished agency through a different grammatical pattern. In "The bigger Beloved got, the smaller Sethe became" (Morrison, 1987, pp. 294-295), the parallel comparative structure establishes an inverse relationship between the two characters. The relational process "became" represents Sethe's condition as changing in relation to Beloved rather than through an independently directed action. From an FCDA perspective, the positioning of the female subject as dependent on another may represent a form of constrained selfhood.

In Nguyen (1987), agency is mediated through collective validation. In "Tao là mẹ mày! Thật đấy! Chúng nó nói không sai đâu!" (Nguyen, 1987, p. 61) [I'm your mother! It's true! What they say is right!] (Nguyen, 1992, p. 141), the character refers to "chúng nó" [they] as support for the legitimacy of her position. The external voice helps consolidate the character's claim of her agency. From a CDA/FCDA perspective, this suggests that identity is partly negotiated through socially recognized authority rather than individual assertion.

These findings show that female agency in the selected texts is structurally limited through different linguistic mechanisms. Negation, relational comparison, and collective legitimation each preserve the appearance of subjecthood while restricting effective control over action.

Voice vs. Silence

Voice in the selected passages is constructed not simply as the presence or absence of speech but through the conditions under which refusal, memory, and narration become available. In Plath (1963, p. 119), the statement "It never occurred to me to say no" makes refusal linguistically present through "to say no," while the construction "never occurred to me" represents that possibility as absent from the character's conscious consideration. This means that the character is not simply silent but the option of verbal refusal is cognitively blocked. From an FCDA perspective, these lexical choices convey a restriction on the discursive availability of resistance. As such, identity is constructed through the character's powerless and submissive voice.

A comparable dynamic appears in Morrison (1987), where silence operates through collective discourse. In "It was not a story to pass on" (Morrison, 1987, p. 323), the passive construction removes any identifiable agent responsible for the prohibition. Instead, silence is presented as embedded in mutual understanding. Because the phrase "to pass on" refers to the intergenerational transmission of stories, the restriction functions as a shared discursive boundary. Through CDA, this can be interpreted as a form of discursive regulation whose authority remains implicit.

These findings show that voice in the selected texts is governed by discursive conditions rather than mediated by the mere capacity to speak. Female identity emerges within restricted frameworks of articulation in which voice remains possible but is bounded by how the characters recognize and express their agency.

Moral and Social Roles

Moral and social roles are constructed in the selected texts through linguistic patterns that characterize particular forms of behavior as expected or valued. The evaluative and generalizing language used in the texts portrays particular qualities as intrinsic to womanhood, thus shaping the terms through which female identity is understood.

In Nguyen (1987, p. 61), "Mỗi người đàn bà đều có thiên tính người mẹ" [Every woman has a mother's nature] (Nguyen, 1992, p. 141), the determiner "mỗi" [every] together with the inclusive marker "đều" [all] removes individual variation.

The phrase "thiên tính người mẹ" further represents maternal disposition as inherent. From an FCDA perspective, these grammatical and lexical expressions associate femininity with nurturing and maternal responsibilities as if they were natural and self-evident qualities, thus narrowing the available ways in which female identity is represented.

In Duong (1988), evaluative language links femininity to moral worth developed through hardship. This is evident in "Gừng già gừng rụng, gừng cay, anh hùng càng cực càng dày nghĩa nhân" (Duong, 1988, p. 7) [They say ginger root becomes stringy, but pungent with age. Unhappiness forges a woman, makes her selfless, compassionate] (Duong, 2002, p. 14). The proverb-like wording "Gừng già gừng rụng, gừng cay" carries culturally specific associations with resilience and value intensified through hardship, since ginger in Vietnamese sociocultural discourse symbolizes sharpness, endurance, and lasting strength. Similarly, "anh hùng càng cực càng dày nghĩa nhân" equates suffering with the accumulation of compassion, righteousness, and moral depth. Through the use of evaluative and culturally resonant language, endurance and selflessness are presented not merely as responses to hardship but as desirable feminine qualities shaped through suffering.

A related pattern appears in "I was supposed to be having the time of my life" (Plath, 1963, p. 5). The semi-modal phrase "supposed to" marks an external expectation concerning the character's emotional response. Through SFL modality, this linguistic device positions the subject against a standard that does not originate solely from her own preference. Within FCDA, this provides evidence for examining how socially recognizable expectations contribute to the construction of female identity.

These findings reveal that discourse does not merely reflect social roles but actively contributes to shaping the norms through which femininity is understood. By framing caregiving, perseverance, and emotional selflessness as natural, necessary, or morally valuable, the selected excerpts define the boundaries within which female identity can be recognized.

Emotional Labor and Sacrifice

Emotional labor and sacrifice in the selected texts are realized through linguistic patterns that connect care and responsibility with personal cost. They are discursively constructed as recurring processes through which female identity is reduced in relation to others. This process appears in the statement "Đăng không chết, vì do Thu đẩy ngã. Còn Thu lại bị tàu điện cán gẫy nát chân" (Nguyen, 1987, p. 64) [Thu had saved him, but in doing so her legs had been broken by the tramcar] (Nguyen, 1992, p. 144). The English translation conveys the overall meaning of the experience, but it does not reproduce the causal structure of the first Vietnamese clause explicitly. Literally, "Đăng không chết, vì do Thu đẩy ngã" is equivalent to "Đăng survived because Thu pushed him down." From an SFL transitivity perspective, Thu is first represented as the agent in "Thu đẩy ngã" [Thu pushed him down] in which her intervention prevents Đăng's death. In the following clause, however, she becomes the victim in the adverse passive construction marked by "bị" [by], as she is struck by the tramcar and suffers severe injury. The contrastive conjunction "còn" [but] further sets Đăng's survival against Thu's bodily injury. At

the linguistic level, the passage therefore moves from female agency to female victimization or sacrifice. Within FCDA, this linguistic expression associates agency and care with sacrifice whereby female identity is recognized through personal loss in the act of saving others.

A comparable evaluation of female identity is realized in Morrison (1987) through relational structure. In "The bigger Beloved got, the smaller Sethe became" (Morrison, 1987, pp. 294-295), the parallel structure establishes an uneven dynamic in which one identity expands at the expense of another. The verb "became" signals gradual transformation, suggesting that emotional labor operates cumulatively over time. Here, identity is not abruptly undermined but progressively reconfigured through relational imbalance. From an FCDA perspective, this relational structure can be interpreted as a form of self-diminishment associated with sustained care and responsibility.

In Duong (1988), the relationship between obligation and resistance is expressed through modality and metaphor. In the statement "Không thể tiêu phí cuộc sống bởi những cánh hoa tàn héo, những tối tăm, lầm lạc của quá khứ" (Duong, 1988, p. 338) [I can't squander my life tending these faded flowers, these shadows, the legacy of past crimes] (Duong, 2002, p. 258), the imagery of "faded flowers" and "these shadows, the legacy of past crimes" evokes the past with decay, exhaustion and moral burden. The wording suggests that the character is resisting not a single duty, but an accumulated legacy of obligation that continues to shape the present. From an FCDA perspective, this can be interpreted as a moment in which obligation remains discursively present but is actively resisted.

These findings show that emotional labor functions as a discursive mechanism that aligns female identity with personal cost, self-reduction, and sacrifice for others. The discursive construction of female identity exhibited in the text was achieved through the character's shift from an agent to a victim in Nguyen (1987), relational diminishment in Morrison (1987), and an interaction of modality and metaphor in Duong (1988).

Discussion

Findings of this study align with discourse-based approaches that treat meaning as socially produced rather than naturally given. The discursive constructions of freedom and female identity implicated in the four texts support Fairclough's (1995, 2023) view that discourse functions as a form of social practice through which meanings are shaped. Freedom is not represented as a self-evident state of liberation but as a condition mediated by ideology, social expectation, trauma, and institutional authority. This finding responds to feminist perspectives such as those of de Beauvoir (1956) and Hooks (1984), who argue that women's access to autonomy is structurally constrained rather than universally guaranteed. From an SFL perspective, the present study contributes to illuminating more precisely how freedom is constructed through recurring linguistic features, including metaphor, modality, transitivity, and evaluation. The findings also align with feminist and discourse-oriented research that interprets female identity as socially and discursively produced. In particular, they support Butler's (1999) account of gender as performative and Lazar's (2005) argument that discourse naturalizes

expectations of femininity through obedience, self-sacrifice, and emotional responsibility. The findings expand contemporary literary research on female identity, explicating it not only as restricted at the thematic level but also as constructed through linguistic patterns that weaken agency, regulate voice, and moralize care and endurance.

The study also supports trauma-based approaches to subjectivity and freedom, particularly in relation to the American texts. Caruth (1996) and LaCapra (2001) concur that trauma disrupts continuity, coherence, and the possibility of full recovery. The findings are consistent with this view since The Bell Jar and Beloved repeatedly construct freedom as fragile, deferred, and psychologically unstable rather than secure or fully recoverable. However, the Vietnamese texts complicate any attempt to explain limitations only through trauma or inner fragmentation. This distinction can also be understood in relation to broader patterns beyond the literary corpus. The findings of this study suggest that limitations on freedom are constructed through multiple discursive dimensions, including psychological instability, social expectations, and ideological constraints.

The contrast identified between American and Vietnamese texts aligns with cross-cultural frameworks that highlight differences between individual autonomy and socially embedded obligation (Berlin, 1969; O'Harrow, 1995; Woodside, 1971). However, the analysis also extends these perspectives by demonstrating that, despite these differences, both traditions ultimately produce comparable constraints on female identity through distinct linguistic and discursive mechanisms. These findings suggest that the construction of freedom identified in this study is not limited to specific texts but reflects broader patterns in cultural discourse. This discursive construction of freedom closely aligns with contemporary literature that emphasizes familial and collective obligation in Vietnamese social contexts (Frenier & Mancini, 1996; Tran, 2006). However, the four texts do not provide sufficient evidence to treat these differences as general characteristics of Vietnamese or American discourse. Rather, the comparison suggests that freedom can be constrained through different but sometimes overlapping discursive routes.

Conclusion

This study shows that freedom in the selected American and Vietnamese literary texts is discursively constructed through a range of linguistic features, including metaphor, temporality, modality, evaluation, silence, and conditionality. In the American texts, freedom is frequently constructed through images of psychological fragility, institutional regulation, and temporary relief, suggesting that autonomy remains vulnerable and difficult to sustain. In the Vietnamese texts, freedom is more often shaped through naturalized duty, moral expectation, and collective obligation, where constraint appears culturally legitimate rather than openly imposed. Despite these differences, both contexts construct freedom as dependent on wider psychological, social, institutional, and ideological conditions rather than as a simple state of self-determination. Findings also demonstrate that these discursive constructions of freedom directly shape representations of female identity. Female identity appears limited, negotiated, and closely shaped by external expectations. In the American texts, these limitations often appear through

psychological instability, silence, and institutional control, whereas in the Vietnamese texts, they are more commonly expressed through moral obligation, family responsibility, and socially valued sacrifice. These findings suggest that women in these texts are not represented as fully autonomous subjects but as figures whose selfhood is discursively shaped by power, obligation, and constrained forms of agency.

Theoretically, this study brought the discursive constructions of freedom into direct relation with female identity. Instead of treating freedom only as a philosophical or political concept, the analysis shows how its meanings can be examined through linguistic patterns that position female identity in relation to agency, voice, obligation, and sacrifice. Methodologically, the study combined CDA, FCDA, and SFL as an integrated framework, thus offering a systematic way of examining how freedom and female identity are discursively constructed across different literary and sociocultural contexts within the selected texts. Several limitations exist in the present study. The corpus contains only four literary texts, so the findings cannot be generalized to American or Vietnamese literary discourse more broadly. Second, the study adopts a qualitative and interpretive approach, which inevitably involves a degree of researcher subjectivity. Although this subjectivity has been mitigated through systematic theoretical grounding and close textual analysis, interpretation remains shaped by the researcher's analytical decisions and positioning. Third, the analysis of Vietnamese texts may be affected by issues of translation and cultural nuance, as certain connotations may not be fully transferable across languages and cultural systems. Future research could expand the dataset to more American and Vietnamese literary works across a wider time range and cultures to reflect other literary traditions at different historical moments.

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Shaping Narrative Atmosphere via Modality: A Stylistic Inquiry into Tonal Shading in All the Light We Cannot See

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Abstract

The present research investigates the role of modality in establishing shading within Anthony Doerr's *All the Light We Cannot See* (2014), applying Simpson's (2004) stylistic framework. In this context, shading denotes the tonal trajectory of a narrative, ranging from positive to negative, which is articulated through specific linguistic patterns, notably modal verbs. Although shading has been extensively studied in classic literature and short stories, its application in contemporary novels remains underexplored. To bridge this gap, this study employs a methodology that synthesizes corpus linguistics with detailed stylistic analysis. A dataset comprising 1,378 instances of core modal auxiliaries (can, could, will, would, should, may, might, must) alongside the lexical verb think was extracted from the novel's complete text. Each instance was categorized based on modality type (epistemic, deontic, boulomaic, perception) and correlated with specific shading classifications. Quantitative results indicated a distinct polarization: 67.7% of the instances were associated with negative shading (primarily epistemic and perception), whereas 32.3% contributed to positive shading (deontic and boulomaic). Instances of neutral shading were negligible. A chi-square test validated a significant correlation between modality types and shading (χ^2 (2, N = 1,378) = 724.51, $p < .001$). Furthermore, these findings broadened the application of Simpson's model to contemporary fiction and offered new insight into Doerr's stylistic construction of wartime experience. They showed how patterns of modality contributed to the novel's persistent tension between uncertainty and hope. The study also illustrated the value of modality-based shading analysis for supporting interpretive and critical reading practices.

Keywords: modality, shading, stylistics, Simpson's model, narrative tone

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Introduction

Research on narrative discourse has consistently emphasized that fiction does not present events as neutral records of reality; rather, it represents them through linguistic and stylistic choices that shape narrative perspective and interpretation. Among the most fruitful approaches in stylistic analysis for capturing this aspect is the concept of "shading," which was coined by Simpson (2004) to refer to the ways in which the linguistic features of narrative contribute to the tone of the narrative. While this concept specifically captures the idea that the narrative discourse indicates attitudes of optimism, pessimism, certainty, or uncertainty, among other attitudes, it also, by necessity, draws the analyst's attention to the workings of the grammatical and lexical systems, not simply for the purposes of plotting the narrative, but for the ways in which these systems contribute to realizing the atmospheric, attitudinal, and connotative features of the narrative. According to Simpson, the conceptual areas of modality and shading overlap. According to this view, the system of modality is the language mechanism that is used for obligation, belief, possibility, and perception.

According to the definitions given by Palmer (2003) and Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), modality is an interpersonal resource. It is the ways that the narrator of the story communicates their stance on the proposition, indicating their commitment, certainty, or engagement with the utterance. In literature, according to Simpson (2004), the use of modality goes beyond the language of grammar and is used for stylistic effects, indicating the worldview and the narrative perspective. There are four major types of modalities: epistemic (certainty, probability, belief), deontic (obligation, duty), boulomaic (desire, will), and perception (sensory evaluation). These offer varying degrees of contribution toward the creation of the neutral, positive, and negative shadings of the narrative where the epistemic and perception modalities offer the negative, the deontic and boulomaic the positive, and the neutral offers the results of the minimal use of the modality.

Stylistic studies preceding the current examination have indicated the manner in which the use of shading is essential for the affective potential of literature. For example, Trimarco (2021) investigated the works of Edgar Allan Poe, concluding that epistemic modality is crucial for the creation of the horror and uncertainty effects. In other works, negative shadings of estrangement have been employed in modernist fiction, as opposed to positive shadings of ethical engagement in realist fiction, according to Toolan (2016). Furthermore, Parina and De Leon (2014) and Tenev (2019) illustrated that the use of clusters of modality affects the differences of shadings, essential for the evaluation of the narrator's reliability. Nonetheless, it can be asserted that contemporary novels, especially those that have complex narrative patterns and make use of shadings for the thematization of relevant motifs, have not been explored thoroughly.

Anthony Doerr's *All the Light We Cannot See* (2014) offers a rich site for analysis. The novel is told through the use of several focalizers, including Marie-Laure, "blind French girl," living in occupied France, and Werner, a German orphan drafted into Hitler's army, in the context of World War II. It is also characterized by

a rich narrative style that displays heavy modalization, using verbs like “can”, “must”, “might”, “would”, and “seem” very often. Notice that these frequently used modal verbs reflect the uncertainty of survival during war, the need imposed upon authoritarian states, and the hopes of the characters for survival amidst the rubble. More significantly, the novel illustrates the systematic variation of modalization. The novel’s sections dominated by epistemic and perception modalization promote a sense of uncertainty and ambiguity, reflecting the insecure situation of individuals living during war. However, the use of deontic and boulomaic modalization emphasizes the moment of morality, duty, and resilience, which project a strongly positive variation of the narrative's coloring. Neutral shading patterns occur relatively infrequently in the novel, suggesting a tendency toward evaluative positioning in the modal expressions analyzed. This pattern is consistent with the narrative's sustained engagement with uncertainty, obligation, resilience, and human experience.

Thematically, the contrast between negative and positive shadings of Doerr’s novel reflects the novel’s other concerns. On the one hand, the epistemic uncertainty of war, the fact that it is impossible to know what will happen, who will live, who will die, or whether liberation is near, is a hallmark of the "Reflector" sections of the novel. On the other, the deontic modalities and boulomaic messages of hope reflect the strength of individuals who, despite the oppression, go about their business with intention. This contrast between shadings also mirrors the contrast between fear and hope that exists during wartime. By this means, the modalities of the novel take on, not merely grammatical, but also narrative significance.

The present study examines how modality contributes to the construction of shading in Anthony Doerr's *All the Light We Cannot See* through the analytical framework proposed by Simpson (2004). Following Simpson's classification, epistemic and perception modalities are associated with negative shading, whereas deontic and boulomaic modalities are associated with positive shading. The study pursues two objectives. First, it investigates the distribution of modal categories in the novel through quantitative analysis. Second, it employs qualitative analysis to explore how these modal patterns contribute to evaluative tone and narrative perspective in specific textual contexts.

Beyond its theoretical relevance, the study may also have pedagogical value. In many TEFL and EFL contexts, modality is often taught primarily as a grammatical category, while its stylistic functions receive less attention. Examining shading provides an opportunity to connect modal choices with tone, attitude, and atmosphere, thereby linking linguistic analysis with literary interpretation. Stylistic approaches have frequently emphasized the importance of attending to linguistic features when interpreting literary texts, as such features can offer insight into uncertainty, obligation, stance, and evaluation. In this respect, modality may provide learners with a concrete linguistic resource through which aspects of narrative perspective and tone can be examined more systematically.

The study also contributes to ongoing discussions of Doerr's novel by investigating the linguistic mechanisms through which evaluative perspectives are

expressed. Rather than focusing solely on thematic concerns, the analysis explores how modal patterns are associated with recurring tensions between uncertainty and hope, vulnerability and resilience, which are central to the novel's wartime setting. By applying Simpson's framework to a contemporary historical novel, the study seeks to contribute to research on modality and shading while offering a linguistic perspective on narrative evaluation in *All the Light We Cannot See*.

Literature Review

Shading in Stylistics

Within stylistics, narrative discourse is generally understood as a linguistically mediated representation rather than a neutral record of events. While narratological approaches have long examined point of view, focalization, and narrative perspective, Simpson's concept of shading gives particular attention to the evaluative coloring produced by modal choices. Shading is therefore useful because it links grammatical form to tonal orientation: modal expressions may signal certainty, hesitation, obligation, desire, perception, or detachment, and these meanings influence how readers interpret narrative situations and viewpoints.

Recent research on literary narrative has also highlighted the importance of examining textual and narrative mechanisms underlying readers' responses to fiction. For example, Baghaei et al. (2022), in their study of Patricia Cornwell's Postmortem, examined how narrative organization, uncertainty, suspense, and curiosity contribute to readers' engagement with a literary text. Such work supports the broader view that narrative effects can be investigated systematically through features of narrative discourse. Building on this perspective, the present study focuses more specifically on modality as a linguistic resource through which evaluative perspective and narrative tone may be constructed.

Shading matters because it moves past simply asking "who speaks" and "who sees" to ask "how does the narrator evaluate things?" It acknowledges that narration rarely feels neutral and even descriptive snippets carry a subtle stance. This makes shading a powerful tool for understanding how texts position readers with respect to characters, events, and moral decisions.

Modality as the Engine of Shading

At the heart of shading lies modality, the method by which speakers encode obligation, possibility, necessity, and evaluation. According to Palmer (2003), modality encompasses the grammar of stance, including epistemic (knowledge and belief), deontic (duty and permission), boulomaic (desire), and perception (sensory stance) domains. This is echoed in Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), who tie modality to the interpersonal function of language and its part in negotiating meaning and stance.

Modality falls into shading in Simpson's map. Epistemic and perception modals point toward negative shading through highlighting doubt or lack of knowledge. Deontic and boulomaic modals drive shading toward the positive-obligation, aspiration, volition. When modality is removed or diminished, shading is more neutral, resulting in detachment. The link here between grammar and tone is in

common use within stylistics since it provides a clear measure by which one can relate form to mood.

Modal expressions therefore function simultaneously as grammatical markers and stylistic resources. In narrative contexts, forms such as *might* may encode probability while also contributing to uncertainty, whereas *must* may encode necessity while producing authority, urgency, or moral pressure.

Empirical Studies on Shading

Previous research has demonstrated the usefulness of modality and shading analysis across a range of literary and non-literary texts. Trimarco (2021), for example, found that negative shading was particularly prominent in Edgar Allan Poe's short fiction, contributing to the atmosphere of uncertainty and psychological tension.

Toolan (2016) likewise highlighted the role of linguistic perspective in shaping readers' interpretations of narrative texts. Studies applying modality-based approaches have also examined point of view, characterization, and evaluative stance in different literary contexts (Parina & De Leon, 2014; Tenev, 2019). Collectively, these studies suggest that modal patterns provide valuable insights into the linguistic construction of narrative perspective, although most analyses have focused on shorter texts or standard literary works.

Shading in Contemporary Fiction

Even with this solid work on shading, most studies have focused on either canonical texts (Poe, Lawrence) or on short fiction. Much fewer studies have systematically explored shading in contemporary novels and few include twenty-first-century novels. This is a lacuna, since modern narratives often display complex structures-shifting focalizations, time jumps, and experimental themes.

The fiction also often engages with historical trauma, war, and global crises-all contexts in which shifts between despair and hope count for a great deal. In such works, shading isn't ornamentation; rather, it becomes an essential element of expression that depicts uncertainty, duty, and resilience. Yet systematic stylistic analyses of shading in modern novels remain scant.

Critical Perspectives on *ALL THE LIGHT WE CANNOT SEE*

To situate the present study within existing scholarship, it is necessary to consider the main critical approaches that have been applied to Anthony Doerr's *All the Light We Cannot See*. Existing studies have examined the novel from several perspectives, including sensory perception, disability, trauma, hope, existential conflict, and narrative design. Anghel (2020), for example, reads the novel as an artfully structured war narrative in which memory, music, literature, and the legend of the Sea of Flames contribute to its puzzle-like form. Goh (2019) approaches the novel through the idea of touch, arguing that Marie-Laure's world requires readers to attend to tactile and sensory modes of literary experience. Hossain (2023)

similarly focuses on Marie-Laure's blindness, cognition, and language, emphasizing the relationship between sensory limitation and psycholinguistic representation.

Other studies have approached the novel through psychological and ethical concerns. Waddell (2019) offers a psychoanalytic and poetic reading of hope, while Pandit (2019) examines trauma and transformation in the context of war. Herdianti (2021) focuses on Marie-Laure's struggle as a blind teenager, and Sakinah (2019) studies Werner Pfennig's search for meaning through an existential-psychological framework. More recently, Sriee and Kannadhasan (2024) examine Werner's dread and desperation, highlighting his moral conflict, uncertainty, and existential anxiety during wartime.

Taken together, these studies show that *All the Light We Cannot See* has been discussed in relation to perception, blindness, trauma, hope, morality, existential struggle, and narrative structure. However, they do not systematically examine the linguistic mechanisms through which evaluative perspective and narrative tone are constructed. In particular, the role of modality in shaping shading, uncertainty, obligation, hope, and narrative stance remains underexplored. The present study addresses this gap by examining how modal patterns contribute to evaluative orientation through Simpson's framework of shading.

Positioning *ALL THE LIGHT WE CANNOT SEE*

Anthony Doerr's *All the Light We Cannot See* offers a suitable text for examining modality and narrative shading because the novel is shaped by war, uncertainty, and shifting perspectives. Its narrative moves between Marie-Laure and Werner in situations where knowledge is limited and choices are difficult. Hossain (2023) shows that Marie-Laure's blindness is closely connected with cognition and language, while Sriee and Kannadhasan (2024) read Werner's experience through dread, desperation, and existential conflict. Taken together, these studies suggest that the novel repeatedly presents scenes of insecurity, moral pressure, and emotional struggle.

At the same time, the existing scholarship has mainly examined what the novel represents rather than how its evaluative stance is linguistically produced. For example, studies of Marie-Laure have emphasized blindness, tactile perception, and cognitive-linguistic adaptation; studies of Werner have focused on guilt, dread, desperation, and the search for meaning; and broader readings have examined war, trauma, hope, art, and narrative structure. These studies provide important interpretive contexts, but they leave room for a more systematic stylistic account of the language through which uncertainty, duty, fear, and hope are textually organized. This is where Simpson's framework becomes useful. Studies on shading and modality have shown that modal patterns can be used to examine point of view, narrator reliability, and evaluative stance (Parina & De Leon, 2014; Tenev, 2019; Toolan, 2016; Trimarco, 2021). In the same line of inquiry, corpus-based and stylistic studies have continued to show that modality is a useful resource for

analyzing stance and meaning in literary discourse (Mahmoud, 2024; Nawaz, 2023; Siddique & Ahmad, 2022; Virdis, 2024). The present study therefore extends this line of research by applying modality-based shading analysis to a contemporary historical novel.

On this basis, the present study examines modality as a stylistic resource in Doerr's novel and uses Simpson's (2004) framework to trace how modal choices contribute to shading. Rather than treating shading as a result already known in advance, the study looks at how modal expressions are distributed across the text and how they contribute to evaluative tone. In this way, *All the Light We Cannot See* becomes a useful case for extending shading analysis to a contemporary historical novel and for adding a linguistic perspective to existing discussions of Doerr's work.

Methodology

Methodological Justification

The methodology of this study is designed to connect systematic corpus retrieval with context-sensitive stylistic interpretation. Since the study investigates the relationship between modal expressions and narrative shading, it requires a procedure that can first identify relevant modal forms across the whole novel and then interpret their functions in specific narrative contexts. A purely quantitative approach would identify frequency patterns but would not explain how modal choices contribute to tone, perspective, or evaluative meaning. Conversely, a purely qualitative reading would provide interpretive depth but might overlook the broader distribution of modal forms across the text. For this reason, the study combines corpus-based frequency analysis with close stylistic reading.

Corpus-based approaches have increasingly been employed to identify and quantify recurring linguistic patterns across systematically constructed datasets. Such approaches are particularly useful when the objective is to move beyond impressionistic interpretation and establish a systematic account of linguistic features across a complete or carefully defined corpus (Khaghaninejad et al., 2022). In the present study, a corpus-based procedure was adopted for the systematic retrieval and quantitative examination of modal expressions throughout the complete text of the novel.

This approach is appropriate for three reasons. First, it is aligned with Simpson's model because the analysis focuses on core modal auxiliaries and the lexical item *think*, which are central to the present investigation of modality and shading. Second, the use of AntConc allows for systematic retrieval of all selected modal forms rather than selective sampling. Third, close reading ensures that each modal expression is interpreted in relation to its local narrative context, since the same form may perform different modal functions in different passages. In this way, the methodology provides both systematic coverage and interpretive depth.

Research Design

This paper combines a corpus-based quantitative analysis of modality with qualitative stylistic reading to examine how modal patterns contribute to the

construction of shading in Anthony Doerr's *All the Light We Cannot See*. A mixed-methods approach is appropriate for the study of shading because it is at once quantifiable-through the modal verb distributions-and interpretive, requiring context for understanding. The quantitative component charts modality patterns; the qualitative component describes how those modality patterns sculpt tone. Using both approaches allows the findings to be triangulated and provides a more comprehensive account of shading as a stylistic feature.

Text Selection and Corpus

The dataset for this research is the complete text of Doerr's *All the Light We Cannot See.* Three reasons led to this choice: its stylistic complexity and extensive use of modal expressions make it particularly suitable for investigating modality and shading; its themes swing between despair and hope, fear and duty, which fall into shading's evaluative functions. Also, filling the gap in research, Simpson's (2004) model has been applied mainly to canonical or shorter fiction, not commonly to long contemporary novels. The whole text was digitized and processed so as not to miss any single modal verb, avoiding limits related to offering a comprehensive view of modality-related shading patterns across the novel.

Analytical Framework

This study adopts Simpson's framework as an interpretive model through which modality patterns are examined. Modal expressions are first classified according to modality type and are subsequently interpreted in relation to Simpson's positive, negative, and neutral shading orientations. The analysis therefore focuses on how modality contributes to evaluative perspective and tonal effects within the narrative.

Scope of Modal Verbs Analyzed

The study focuses on a restricted set of modal expressions selected on both theoretical and methodological grounds. Consistent with Simpson's (2004) framework, the analysis concentrates on core English modal auxiliaries because they provide the most explicit and systematically identifiable realizations of epistemic, deontic, and boulomaic modality in the text. In addition, the lexical item *think* was included due to its frequent use as a marker of epistemic judgment and uncertainty, making it relevant to the investigation of modal shading.

Restricting the dataset to these forms ensured consistency in coding and facilitated reliable comparison across modality categories. While other modal and semi-modal expressions (e.g., *have to*, *need to*, *ought to*) may also contribute to evaluative meaning, they were excluded in order to maintain alignment with the analytical scope of Simpson's model and to preserve a manageable and systematically coded corpus. The modal expressions analyzed were:

- **Core modals:** *can, could, will, would, should, may, might,* and *must*
- **Lexical item with modal function:** *think*

These nine items were then systematically retrieved and analyzed.

Tools and Data Retrieval

The modal verbs were extracted using AntConc (Version 3.5.9) (Anthony, 2018), a widely used concordance tool in corpus stylistics. Separate searches were conducted for each target form, and the resulting concordance lines were examined in context to determine modal function. Raw frequencies were then exported into Microsoft Excel, where each instance was coded for modality type: epistemic, deontic, boulomaic, or perception. These classifications were subsequently interpreted within Simpson's shading framework. This procedure balanced computational efficiency with interpretive accuracy.

Coding Scheme

Each token was coded in three layers:

1. The identity of the modal verb itself, such as can, must, might.
2. Modality type (according to Simpson's categories):
- Epistemic: might, could, think
- Deontic: (must, should)
- Boulomaic/would love, can hope, would in volitional contexts
- Perception: seems, will in predictive use
3. Interpretation within Simpson's shading framework:
- Epistemic + Perception = Negative shading
- Deontic + Boulomaic = Positive shading
- Absence of modality = Neutral shading

Context matters, since the same form can be put to different functions. Thus, "will" is deontic in the imperative: "You will report immediately" and a perception in the predictive sense: "This will happen even now?". Similarly, would is boulomaic in the expression of desire: "I would love to see you again" but epistemic in signaling hypotheticality.

According to Simpson's model, epistemic and perception modalities are associated with negative shading, whereas deontic and boulomaic modalities are associated with positive shading. These associations were used as an interpretive basis for examining tonal patterns in the corpus.

Reliability Procedures

To ensure reliability, a pilot coding procedure was conducted on the first three chapters, representing approximately 10% of the text. This subset was double-coded, and Cohen's kappa for modality-type classification was $\kappa = .71$, indicating substantial agreement. The main coding challenges involved distinguishing deontic and predictive uses of *will* and separating epistemic from boulomaic uses of *would*. After the differences were discussed and the coding rules were refined, the remaining corpus was coded according to the revised criteria.

Quantitative Analysis

This consisted of three steps:

1. Frequency counts: total number for each modal verb e.g. will 380, can 375, might 88.
2. Interpretation within Simpson's framework: frequency distributions of modality types were examined in relation to Simpson's positive and negative shading orientations.
3. Descriptive frequency comparisons were used to examine the relative prevalence of modality categories associated with different shading orientations.

Qualitative Analysis

Close reading was combined with quantitative data in order to demonstrate exactly how modals create shading in context. Each category of shading is exemplified with representative excerpts:

- Negative shading: epistemic, perception in passages of uncertainty or sensory limitation. For instance, Werner's thoughts about hearing distant voices ("He might still hear her voice in the static") create a doubtful negatively shaded mood.
- Positive shading: deontic (must, should) and boulomaic (would love, can hope) in duty- or aspiration-forward passages. The imperative 'must not leave' is interpreted as positively shaded within Simpson's framework because it foregrounds obligation and commitment. Marie-Laure's "I would love to see you again" shows how boulomaic modality yields hopeful, positively shaded tone.
- Neutral shading: Instances approximating neutral shading were relatively infrequent and are discussed in relation to their local narrative contexts.

Ethical Considerations

The data are from a published novel, so no human subjects were involved. Consent and anonymity are not issues, but ethical scholarship was maintained through accurate attribution of frameworks (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Palmer, 2003; Simpson, 2004) and transparent method reporting. Excerpts from the novel were used solely for scholarly purposes.

Results

The goal of this study was to investigate how modality constructs shading in *All the Light We Cannot See* (2014). Following Simpson's (2004) framework, modal verbs were classified into epistemic, deontic, boulomaic, and perception categories and mapped onto shading orientations: negative (epistemic + perception), positive (deontic + boulomaic), and neutral (absence or minimization of modality). This section first presents the quantitative distribution of modals across shading categories, followed by statistical testing. It then provides a qualitative analysis of representative passages to illustrate how shading operates stylistically in the novel.

Quantitative Findings

To establish the overall modal profile of the novel, frequencies were calculated for each of the selected modal expressions. Table 1 summarizes the distribution of modal verbs across the modality categories used in the analysis.

Modal Verb Frequencies

Table 1 shows the frequency of the nine modal verbs included in the dataset (core auxiliaries plus *think*).

Table 1

Frequencies of Modal Verbs in All the Light We Cannot See

Modal Verb	Epistemic	Deontic	Perception	Boulomaic	Total
can	104	223	44	4	375
could	72	18	27	11	128
will	241	40	72	27	380
would	131	8	11	35	185
should	14	25	2	4	45
may	12	8	12	0	32
might	77	0	11	0	88
must	41	42	0	0	83
think	62	0	0	0	62
Total	754	364	179	81	1,378

There are a number of points that can be raised here. Firstly, will and can are the most frequently occurring modals, which together represent 55% of the total number of tokens. Secondly, epistemic modality is the dominant modality in the entire corpus, which stands at 54.7% followed by 26.4% for the deontic modals, 13.0% for the perception modals, and 5.9% for the boulomaic modals.

Distribution by Shading Categories

Table 2 reorganizes the data by shading orientation.

Table 2

Distribution of Modal Verbs by Shading Category

Shading Category	Frequency	Percentage
Negative (Epistemic + Perception)	933	67.7%
Positive (Deontic + Boulomaic)	445	32.3%
Neutral (Absence of modality)	0	0%
Total	1,378	100%

The data show a notable prevalence of negative shading, where more than two-thirds of the modal instances are involved in uncertainty, doubt, or ambiguity. Positive shading, while less prevalent, encompasses one-third of the tokens. Instances corresponding to Simpson's neutral shading were infrequent within the modal dataset examined in this study.

Statistical Analysis

To determine whether the distribution of modality types across shading categories was random, a chi-square test of independence was conducted.

- χ^2 (2, N = 1,378) = 724.51, p < .001
- Phi = .724, Cramer's V = .724

These values indicate a very strong association between modality type and shading category. The absence of neutral shading also contributed to the strength of the statistical association.

Qualitative Findings

Quantitative results alone cannot capture the stylistic force of shading. Therefore, this section presents close readings of representative passages for each shading category.

Negative Shading

Modal categories associated with negative shading are considerably more frequent than those associated with positive shading.

Example 1 (Epistemic):
"She could be lost, scraping her fingers along walls at the edge of town, drifting farther away every second."

Here, *could* signals possibility rather than certainty, foregrounding Marie-Laure's vulnerability. The use of an epistemic modal colors the passage with doubt, immersing readers in the fear of disorientation.

Example 2 (Epistemic):
"He might still hear her voice somewhere in the static."

Might conveys low probability, reinforcing Werner's uncertainty. The modalization here produces negative shading by highlighting the unreliability of sensory experience.

Example 3 (Perception):
"This will happen even now? Without Madame?"

Although *will* typically encodes futurity, here it expresses a predictive judgment, classified as perception modality. The shading effect is negative because the prediction carries an undertone of inevitability and dread.

Example 4 (Epistemic):

"The shell may be broken, and even portions of it removed."

The modal *may* presents the condition of the shell as a possibility rather than a certainty. By withholding definite knowledge, the passage foregrounds uncertainty and aligns with Simpson's characterization of negative shading.

Example 5 (Epistemic):

"He might be that voice just now drawing nearer."

The modal *might* signals conjecture and limited certainty. Rather than establishing a stable fact, the statement reflects the speaker's tentative assessment of the situation, thereby contributing to an atmosphere of ambiguity.

Example 6 (Perception):

"What would happen if the goddess took away the curse?"

Here *would* functions predictively by projecting a hypothetical future outcome. The question invites speculation about an unknown situation and therefore contributes to the uncertainty associated with negative shading.

Taken together, these examples illustrate how epistemic and perception modals generate an atmosphere of ambiguity, fear, and insecurity, consistent with life under occupation and war.

Positive Shading

Positive shading was realized through deontic and boulomaic modals, encoding obligation, volition, and hope.

Example 7 (Deontic):
"No person must attempt to leave the old city. No one must."

The repetition of *must* encodes obligation and prohibition. While semantically restrictive, deontic necessity here produces positive shading by imposing clarity and authority. The tone conveys order amid chaos, anchoring the narrative in external rules.

Example 8 (Boulomaic):
"I would love to see you again."

The boulomaic expression *would love* encodes longing and aspiration. In the context of wartime separation, it projects positive shading by foregrounding hope and emotional desire.

Example 9 (Deontic/Boulomaic overlap):
"We should remember, we must continue."

Here, *should* and *must* work together to reinforce moral duty. Deontic obligation and aspirational force together establish a highly positive attitude in an effective way that resists despair.

Example 10 (Deontic):

"Open your eyes and see what you can with them before they close forever."

Although the modal *can* expresses ability, within this imperative context it reinforces a directive orientation. The passage emphasizes purposeful action and commitment and characteristics associated with positive shading.

Example 11 (Deontic):

"We will take only the purest, only the strongest."

In this context, *will* expresses determination and institutional commitment rather than simple futurity. The modal contributes to a sense of decisiveness and obligation that aligns with positive shading.

Example 12 (Boulomaic):

"She can only hope for the best."

The lexical expression *hope* explicitly encodes desire and aspiration. Despite the uncertainty of the circumstances, the passage projects an orientation toward a desired outcome, making it a clear example of positive shading. By contrast, positive shading helps to moderate the otherwise pervasive message of negativity presented by the novel.

Neutral Shading

Because neutral shading is characterized by minimal modalization rather than by specific modal expressions, it is less readily illustrated through isolated examples. In the corpus, neutral shading typically appeared in brief descriptive passages focused on physical settings or actions without overt expressions of certainty, obligation, prediction, or desire.

Example 13 (Neutral):

"The street is empty. Smoke drifts across the rooftops."

The passage describes observable details without introducing modal evaluation or subjective judgment.

Example 14 (Neutral):

"The model house sits on the table. The rooms remain unchanged."

Here the narration remains largely descriptive, presenting information without explicit modal orientation.

Although such passages occur throughout the novel, they are comparatively infrequent and are often followed by modalized discourse that reintroduces evaluative perspective.

Stylistic Interpretation

Modality patterns contributing to shading reveal several stylistic principles in Doerr's narrative design:

1. Prevalence of negative shading: With nearly 70% of modal tokens contributing to negative shading, the novel foregrounds the uncertainty and precariousness of wartime life. Characters rarely speak or think with certainty; instead, their discourse is saturated with speculation and prediction.
2. Instances of positive shading: Positive shading, though relatively rare, emerges at critical points to establish obligation or convey hope. Such instances recur throughout the narrative to sustain it and prevent the text from descending into despair.

3. Relative absence of neutrality: The scarcity of neutral-shading patterns suggests that evaluative modal expressions play a prominent role in the novel. Within the modal dataset analyzed, expressions associated with negative and positive shading occur substantially more frequently than those corresponding to neutral shading.

These stylistic tendencies are consistent with Simpson's (2004) model and support it by showing how shading can be systematically analyzed in a contemporary novel.

Thematic Connections

The shading patterns are closely aligned with the novel's thematic concerns.

- Negative shading corresponds to the uncertainty of war. Epistemic and perception modals mirror the unpredictability of survival, the fragility of sensory experience, and the vulnerability of individuals.
- Positive shading corresponds to resilience and duty. Deontic and boulomaic modal constructions evoke the needs of war-era resistance and the ambitions of the characters who hold on to hope.
- Alternations between modal patterns associated with negative and positive shading contribute to the thematic contrast between uncertainty and hope that recurs throughout the novel.

Discussion

This paper investigated how modality affects shading in Anthony Doerr's *All the Light We Cannot See* (2014), working within Simpson's (2004) stylistic framework. By combining corpus-based frequency analysis with close reading, the study demonstrates that shading in the novel proceeds according to a detectable pattern: it follows the distribution of modal verbs. Epistemic and perception modals cluster in negative shading, while deontic and boulomaic modals cluster in positive shading. The researchers find virtually no neutral shading in the corpus. A key implication of this study is that modality serves not just as a stylistic cue but also as a structural principle informing narrative design in contemporary long fiction.

By comparison, there is more extreme shading in Doerr's novel, with very few neutral passages. In comparison, Trimarco (2021) observed that shading was generally negative in Poe's Gothic tales, although some neutral moments were present. Toolan (2016) also observed a balance of shading in realist versus modernist texts. However, neutral shading patterns appear considerably less frequent than positive- and negative-shading patterns, resulting in a strongly evaluative modal profile. This pattern may reflect the evaluative demands of wartime storytelling in this novel, although broader comparisons would be needed before extending this observation to historical fiction more generally.

Theoretical Implications

The results advance stylistics on three counts. First, they illustrate how Simpson's modality-based account of shading can be applied to a contemporary novel. Second, they extend the reach of shading analysis beyond the canonical texts-

works such as Poe or Lawrence-where the approach has traditionally been applied-to a contemporary work of historical fiction. This suggests that shading may be a useful stylistic concept across different literary contexts. Third, the polarized shading witnessed in Doerr's novel-negative and positive, with hardly any neutral-suggests a refinement to Simpson's framework: neutral shading patterns may occur less frequently in narratives characterized by sustained evaluative tension.

Literary and Narratological Implications

Beyond its theoretical contributions to stylistics, this study offers significant insights for literary criticism and narratology. The findings reveal that modal patterns provide a linguistic perspective through which the novel's moral ambiguity can be examined. The strong polarization of shading, where negative modality dominates the scenes of war and positive modality marks moments of resilience, offers a linguistic account of how the novel represents uncertainty, obligation, resilience, and hope.

From a narratological standpoint, this analysis refines our understanding of "focalization" in the novel. Examples from Marie-Laure's sections frequently feature perception-related modality, which linguistically construct a world defined by sensory uncertainty, while Werner's internal conflicts are frequently expressed through deontic modal forms in the passages examined. The findings suggest a close relationship between modal patterning and thematic concerns within the novel. This supplements literary interpretation with systematic linguistic evidence, demonstrating the value of linguistic stylistics as a tool for rigorous narratological analysis.

Pedagogical Implications

These results also bear on language-and-literature teaching. Shading analysis may be used to:

- Indicate to students that modal verbs contribute to the construction of tone and evaluative perspective
- Assist the learner in distinguishing between the use of epistemic, deontic, boulomaic, and perception functions
- Explain the relationship between stylistic features and themes, and show how the skills are linked to linguistics

By closely reading shading in *All the Light We Cannot See*, students can observe how language indicate both uncertainty and hope, binding form to human experience.

The research indicates that modality plays a central role in the shading patterns identified in the novel *All the Light We Cannot See*. Negative shading prevails, making uncertainty widespread, while positive shading is used in the context of resilience and obligation. Neutral-shading patterns were comparatively infrequent within the dataset analyzed. This polarized pattern aligns with the novel's recurring themes of uncertainty, resilience, obligation, and survival.

While this analysis deepens our understanding of modality and shading in narrative fiction, it also shows how such linguistic insights can be brought to bear on

teaching practice. By foregrounding the connection between modal choice and the design of tone, the study provides teachers with a framework through which students may be directed toward more systematic, text-based understandings of narrative stance. This pedagogically oriented perspective widens the applicability of the findings beyond literary scholarship to classroom practice itself, demonstrating just how stylistic tools can enable more engaged approaches to complex narratives.

Methodological Contributions

The value of combining corpus tools with stylistic interpretation is also thrown into relief by the study. AntConc enabled the precise extraction and measurement of modal verb use, adding systematic quantitative evidence, and close reading contributed context and insight. There is clearly the potential for such mixed-methods research to illustrate how stylistics can facilitate the combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques to provide quantitative analysis and qualitative interpretation.

Beyond theory, the findings have practical implications for teaching by offering concrete classroom strategies. In literature classes, shading analysis helps students see how grammar and tone intersect, deepening engagement with narrative voice and atmosphere. Instructors can implement this by designing comparative exercises where students analyze excerpts from the novel to identify how specific modal verbs shift the emotional weight of a passage. For example, students can be asked to locate epistemic modals like "might" or "could" in scenes of danger and contrast them with deontic modals like "must" or "should" in scenes of moral decision-making. This activity moves students beyond intuitive interpretation, simply saying a text feels "scary" or "serious", to a precise linguistic analysis where they can demonstrate exactly how the author constructs those feelings. In TEFL contexts, where modal verbs are often taught in isolation as dry grammar rules, this study suggests that they can be introduced as stylistic devices that shape tone and attitude. By framing grammar as a tool for literary expression, teachers can enhance both linguistic accuracy and critical interpretation skills simultaneously, making the learning process more integrated and meaningful.

Beyond its pedagogical relevance, the study contributes to the growing body of scholarship on Anthony Doerr's *All the Light We Cannot See* (2014) by providing a linguistic account of how evaluative perspective is constructed through modality. While previous studies have largely focused on the novel's themes, narrative structure, and representation of perception, the present analysis shows how patterns of epistemic, perception, deontic, and boulomaic modality contribute to the portrayal of uncertainty, obligation, resilience, and hope throughout the narrative. In this way, the study complements existing literary interpretations by identifying specific linguistic resources through which these thematic concerns are expressed. The findings may also have applications in language and literature education, particularly in EFL contexts where students often encounter difficulties in identifying tone and narrative stance. Analyzing modality may help learners develop more systematic and text-based approaches to literary interpretation. Modal auxiliaries provide accessible entry points for examining how varying degrees of uncertainty, obligation, desire, and emotional conflict are conveyed within a text. Classroom activities incorporating modality-based stylistic analysis may therefore

encourage students to connect linguistic choices with characterization, perspective, and thematic development.

The shading patterns in Doerr's novel, moving between fear, uncertainty, duty, and hope, invite taking a closer look at culturally embedded expressions of emotion and perspective. Seen this way, stylistic analysis may provide opportunities for connecting linguistic awareness with intercultural reflection.

Limitations

As with any single-text study, this work has limits. The results are limited to *All the Light We Cannot See* and cannot be generalized to all modern fiction without further evidence. Not taking semi-modals - need to, have to, ought to - into account reduces the dataset; this was necessary, however, so that this study would remain consistent with Simpson's model and the data. Moreover, while shading was examined at the level of modal verbs, other linguistic features responsible for tonal orientation, such as adjectives, adverbs, or narrative syntax, are also worthy of future study.

Future Research

Future work might extend this analysis in a variety of directions: Comparative studies across several contemporary novels would show whether the polarized shading pattern seen here is representative of modern historical fiction, or distinctive to Doerr's style. Cross-linguistic studies of translations could examine the extent to which shading patterns are maintained or altered across languages, thereby providing further insight into the interaction between modality, translation practices, and cultural context.

The analysis could also be extended to multimodal contexts by examining how shading interacts with visual and cinematic representations of narrative events and perspectives. Finally, the integration of modal analysis with reader response studies might show in detail how shading influences reader perception and emotional uptake.

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Persian Abstracts:

شایستگی جامعه-کاربردشناختی در آموزش عالی پزشکی: ساختار، معیارها و روش‌های سنجش

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چکیده

شایستگی جامعه-کاربردشناختی، یعنی توانایی استفادهٔ مناسب از زبان متناسب با بافت‌های اجتماعی، نهادی و فرهنگی، همچنان یکی از ابعاد اساسی و در عین حال فاقد فهم کامل نظری در حوزهٔ ارتباطات حرفه‌ای پزشکی در آموزش عالی به زبان آموزشی ازبکی به شمار می‌رود. تاکنون هیچ الگوی ساختاری یا چارچوب سنجشِ اعتبارسنجی‌شده‌ای برای این سازه در بستر آسیای مرکزی ارائه نشده است. پژوهش حاضر با هدف توسعهٔ الگویی ساختاری و مبتنی بر مبانی نظری برای شایستگی جامعه-کاربردشناختی در آموزش عالی پزشکی، تبیین معیارهای اختصاصی ارزیابی برای هر مؤلفه و شناسایی روش‌های مناسب سنجش انجام گردید. در این مطالعه از روش مرور نظام‌مند تلفیقیِ متون علمی در پایگاه‌های اطلاعاتی اسکوپوس، وب آو ساینس، اریک، پاب‌مد سنترال و گوگل اسکالر بهره گرفته شد. در نهایت، پس از اجرای فرآیند غربالگری بر اساس دستورالعمل‌های PRISMA-ScR، تعداد ۵۴ منبع برای ترکیب موضوعی انتخاب شدند. همچنین، استدلال اکتشافی با اتکا بر معیارهای انسجام درونی، استحکام نظری و قابلیت کاربرد عملی به‌کار گرفته شد. یافته‌های پژوهش به ارائهٔ «الگوی MedSPC» مشتمل بر پنج مؤلفه منجر گردید که در دو سطح سلسله‌مراتبیِ بنیادی (دانش جامعه-کاربردشناختی و شایستگی سازمان‌دهی گفتمان) و عملکردی (شایستگی ایفای نقش تعاملی، شایستگی مدیریت وجهه و انطباق‌پذیری کاربردشناختی) سازمان‌دهی شده‌اند. افزون بر این، یک چارچوب چهارسطحیِ اختصاصی برای ارزیابی هر مؤلفه و نیز «بستهٔ سنجش چندروشی» (MMAB) شامل چهار ابزار مکمل طراحی و از منظر نظری توجیه شدند. الگوی MedSPC نه به‌عنوان مجموعه‌ای از ادعاهای اعتبارسنجی‌شده، بلکه به‌مثابه چارچوبی مولد برای پژوهش‌های تجربی ارائه می‌شود که فرضیه‌های قابل‌آزمونی را دربارهٔ ساختار، فرایند رشد و شیوه‌های سنجش شایستگی جامعه‌کاربردشناختی در حوزهٔ پزشکی تولید می‌کند. اعتبارسنجی تجربی این الگو، گام ضروری و فوری بعدی در این حیطهٔ پژوهشی به شمار می‌رود.

واژگان کلیدی: شایستگی جامعه-کاربردشناختی؛ آموزش پزشکی؛ شایستگی ارتباطی؛ سنجش زبان؛ گفتمان حرفه‌ای

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رابطه بین منابع - مطالبات و فرسودگی شغلی معلمان زبان انگلیسی ایرانی: یک پژوهش ترکیبی

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چکیده

در بستر چالش‌برانگیز آموزش زبان انگلیسی به عنوان زبان خارجی در ایران، فرسودگی شغلی معلمان کیفیت آموزش و حفظ نیروی انسانی را تهدید می‌کند، اگرچه ارتباط آن با مطالبات شغلی و منابع کمتر بررسی شده است. این پژوهش از الگوی مطالبات شغلی-منابع برای بررسی چگونگی تأثیر عوامل محیط کاری، به‌ویژه مطالبات شغلی همچون بار اداری زیاد، کار عاطفی، و منابع از جمله خودمختاری و حمایت همکاران بر فرسودگی شغلی معلمان زبان انگلیسی ایرانی استفاده می‌کند، در حالی که تأثیرات فرهنگی و زمینه‌ای نظیر انتظارات اجتماعی و سیاست‌های آموزشی را نیز بررسی می‌کند. طرح پژوهش توضیحی توالی‌یافته با روش‌های آمیخته به کار رفت که در آن مرحله کمی ۱۴۶ معلم در سراسر ایران با استفاده از پرسشنامه فرسودگی شغلی کپنهاگ و پرسشنامه مطالبات شغلی-منابع، با بهره‌گیری از آزمون‌های کروسکال-والیس و مقایسه‌های زوجی بود. مرحله کیفی شامل مصاحبه‌های نیمه‌ساختاریافته با ۳۹ معلم بود که از طریق پدیدارشناسی استعلایی با استفاده از مکس‌کیودا تحلیل شدند. یافته‌های کمی نشان دادند که مطالبات شغلی بالا به‌طور معناداری فرسودگی را تشدید می‌کنند و معلمان در گروه‌های با مطالبات بالا خستگی عاطفی و بدبینی بیشتری گزارش می‌کنند، در حالی که منابع فراوان به‌طور چشمگیری فرسودگی را کاهش می‌دهند. بینش‌های کیفی مضامین کلیدی را روشن ساختند: مطالبات ساختاری همچون حقوق ناکافی، برنامه‌های درسی تحمیلی، و فشارهای اجتماعی نظیر انتظارات غیرواقعی والدین فرسودگی را تشدید می‌کنند، در حالی که منابعی همچون توسعه حرفه‌ای و حمایت همسالان به عنوان محافظ‌های حمایتی عمل می‌کنند. راهبردهای مقابله‌ای معلمان، شامل ورزش و تدریس انطباقی، در کنار انتقادها از تجاری‌سازی آموزش و ناکارآمدی‌های سیاستی، این پویایی‌ها را بیشتر زمینه‌مند می‌سازند. این پژوهش قدرت پیش‌بینی‌کننده الگوی مطالبات شغلی-منابع را در بستر آموزش زبان انگلیسی ایران تأیید می‌کند و بر نیاز حیاتی به مداخلات هدفمند نظیر بازساختاری بار کاری، بهبود آموزش، و کمپین‌های آگاهی فرهنگی برای کاهش فرسودگی، تقویت تاب‌آوری معلمان، و ارتقای پیامدهای آموزشی تأکید می‌کند. این یافته‌ها بینش‌های عملی را برای سیاست‌گذاران و مربیان ارائه می‌دهند، با پیامدهایی برای بسترهای جهانی آموزش زبان انگلیسی که با چالش‌های مشابه روبرو هستند.

واژگان کلیدی: مطالبات شغلی، منابع شغلی، فرسودگی شغلی معلمان

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ارتقای واژگان، دستور زبان و گفتمان از طریق یادگیری خردِ مبتنی بر هوش مصنوعی در میان زبان آموزان ایرانی: یک مطالعه شبه‌آزمایشی

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چکیده

پژوهش‌های اخیر، هوش مصنوعی و یادگیری خرد را به‌عنوان دو رویکرد آموزشی مستقل مورد بررسی قرار داده‌اند. با این حال، تأثیر ترکیبی این دو بر توسعه زیر مهارت های زبان همچنان کمتر مورد توجه قرار گرفته است. مطالعه شبه‌آزمایشی حاضر با هدف بررسی تأثیر یادگیری خردِ مبتنی بر هوش مصنوعی بر ارتقا واژگانی، دستوری و گفتمانی زبان‌آموزان ایرانیِ انجام شد. بدین منظور، در مجموع ۶۰ زبان‌آموز در سطح متوسط از مؤسسه زبان طنین در شهر کرمان انتخاب شده و به‌طور مساوی در دو گروه آزمایشی (۳۰ نفر) و کنترل (۳۰ نفر) قرار گرفتند. در طول یک دوره آموزشی هشت‌هفته‌ای، گروه آزمایشی در فعالیت‌های یادگیری خردِ پشتیبانی‌شده با هوش مصنوعی مشارکت داشت، در حالی که گروه کنترل آموزش‌های متداول را دریافت کرد. داده‌ها از طریق آزمون‌های پیشرفت واژگان و دستور زبان، به‌همراه یک تکلیف تولید گفتمان، در دو مرحله پیش‌آزمون و پس‌آزمون گردآوری شدند. به‌منظور کنترل تفاوت‌های اولیه بین گروه‌ها، از تحلیل کوواریانس استفاده شد. یافته‌ها نشان داد که زبان‌آموزان گروه آزمایشی در هر سه متغیر مورد بررسی، به‌طور معناداری عملکرد بهتری نسبت به گروه کنترل داشتند و اندازه اثرها نیز بزرگ گزارش شد. این نتایج حاکی از آن است که ادغام بازخورد تطبیقی مبتنی بر هوش مصنوعی با یادگیری خرد می‌تواند از توسعه هم‌زمان زیر مهارت های زبان حمایت کند. در پایان، دلالت‌های آموزشی برای به‌کارگیری یادگیری خردِ مبتنی بر هوش مصنوعی در آموزش زبان انگلیسی و همچنین پیشنهادهایی برای پژوهش‌های آتی ارائه شده است.

واژگان کلیدی: یادگیری خردِ مبتنی بر هوش مصنوعی، هوش مصنوعی در یادگیری زبان، واژگان، دستور زبان، گفتمان

اطلاعات مقاله

مقالهٔ پژوهشی
تاریخ دریافت: دوشنبه، ۱۴ اردیبهشت ۱۴۰۵
تاریخ تصویب: شنبه، ۴ مهر ۱۴۰۵
تاریخ انتشار: پنجشنبه، ۹ مهر ۱۴۰۵
تاریخ آنلاین: پنجشنبه، ۹ مهر ۱۴۰۵
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تولید محتوای رسانه‌ای اصیل در یادگیری زبان انگلیسی مبتنی بر پروژه: بررسی دیدگاه‌های دانشجویان درباره توسعه زبانی، مشارکت و مهارت‌های حرفه‌ای در یک دانشگاه اردنی

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چکیده

تحقیقات یادگیری زبان مبتنی بر پروژه، تکالیف تولید رسانه‌ای معتبر را به پیشرفت‌های ادراک‌شده در مهارت‌های زبانی و حرفه‌ای مرتبط دانسته‌اند، اما در حال حاضر درک محدودی از چگونگی و چرایی درک این پیشرفت‌ها توسط دانشجویان وجود دارد. مطالعه کیفی حاضر برداشت دانشجویان آموزش زبان انگلیسی از یادگیری زبان، انگیزه و توسعه مهارت‌های حرفه‌ای را متعاقب یک پروژه تولید رسانه‌ای معتبر بررسی کرد. این مطالعه در دانشگاه فیلادلفیا، عمان، اردن، در یک دوره انگلیسی برای رسانه و روزنامه‌نگاری در ترم دوم سال تحصیلی ۲۰۲۶/۲۰۲۵ انجام شد. شصت دانشجوی سطح متوسط تا پیشرفته، به عنوان یک کلاس کامل، یک پروژه یک ترمی را با تولید یک گزارش خبری ویدیویی یا مصاحبه همراه با یک گزارش بازتابی کتبی به پایان رساندند. داده‌ها از طریق مصاحبه‌های نیمه ساختار یافته و گزارش‌های بازتابی کتبی جمع‌آوری و با استفاده از تحلیل موضوعی بازتابی تجزیه و تحلیل شدند. سه الگوی کلی پدیدار شد. اول، دانشجویان دستاوردهای زبانی جامع و چند مهارتی را به جای توسعه محدود به یک مهارت واحد توصیف کردند، و ایجاد اعتماد به نفس را به عنوان نتیجه تمرین مکرر و کم‌ریسک و نه عملکرد نهایی معرفی کردند. دوم اینکه مشارکت دانشجویان بطور غالب به بُعد انسانی و ماهوی تبادلات در مصاحبه، مطابق با سازه سرمایه‌گذاری، مرتبط بود تا صرفاً به تکلیف زبانی، و برخی از دانشجویان گزارش دادند که این تجربه، چشم‌انداز تحصیلی یا شغلی آنها را تغییر داده است. سوم، پروژه ارائه شده توانست طیف وسیع‌تری از شایستگی‌های حرفه‌ای و مرتبط با رسانه را نسبت به آنچه معمولاً از یک تکلیف گفتاری مرسوم انتظار می‌رود، از جمله کاربردشناسی مصاحبه، آگاهی از ژانر و سیاق کلام، و در موارد جدیدتر، حساسیت ترجمه و مهارت تولید صوتی-تصویری، ایجاد نماید. این یافته‌ها نشان می‌دهد که تکالیف رسانه‌ای اصیل و مبتنی بر پروژه می‌توانند توسعه یکپارچه زبان و هویت حرفه‌ای را در محیط‌های انگلیسی به عنوان زبان خارجی تسهیل کنند، و پیامدهایی برای طراحی برنامه درسی به زبان انگلیسی برای رسانه و روزنامه‌نگاری و برنامه‌های زبانی مشابه با محتوای یکپارچه در پی داشته باشند.

واژگان کلیدی: اعتمادبه‌نفس زبان‌آموز، آموزش زبان انگلیسی به عنوان زبان خارجی، توسعه هویت حرفه‌ای، یادگیری تلفیقی محتوا و زبان، تولید ویدئو

اطلاعات مقاله

مقالهٔ پژوهشی

تاریخ دریافت: یکشنبه، ۲۱ تیر ۱۴۰۵

تاریخ تصویب: دوشنبه، ۶ مهر ۱۴۰۵

تاریخ انتشار: پنجشنبه، ۹ مهر ۱۴۰۵

تاریخ آنلاین: پنجشنبه، ۹ مهر ۱۴۰۵

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استفاده از هوش مصنوعی Anuvadini برای آموزش مهارت‌های نرم: گذار جوانان از کمک گیری به خودمختاری

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چکیده

با وجود اقبال روزافزون به حوزه «آندراگوژی دیجیتال» (آموزش بزرگسالان در بستر دیجیتال) به عنوان چارچوبی برای حمایت از یادگیریِ متناسب با سرعتِ فردیِ فراگیران بزرگسال، پیامدهای آن در هند همچنان ناشناخته مانده است. مقالات علمی بسیاری در زمینه بررسی همکاری انسان و هوش مصنوعی به عنوان ابزاری کارآمد برای آموزش و یادگیری زبان منتشر شده است؛ اما با توجه به تنوع زبانی جمعیت هند، نمی‌توان مطالعات مشابه را با رویکردی یک‌سویه در این کشور به کار بست. پژوهش‌ها نشان می‌دهند که در کلاس‌های مقطع کارشناسی در هند، آموزش «مهارت‌های نرم» غالب است و در آن تلاش می‌شود تا در صورت لزوم از روش تدریس دوزبانه استفاده شود. از این رو، برای پاسخگویی به نیازهای مخاطبانی با پیشینه‌های زبانی گوناگون در میان جوانانی که دوره‌های آموزش حرفه‌ای را در هند می‌گذرانند، تلاش‌هایی برای ایجاد فضایی مبتنی بر هوش مصنوعی و فناوری‌های انطباق‌پذیر صورت گرفته که در قالب سامانه «Anuvadini AI» نمود یافته است. هوش مصنوعی آنوادینی ابتکاری از سوی وزارت آموزش هند برای ایجاد پلتفرمی مبتنی بر هوش مصنوعی با سازوکار «انسان در چرخه» است. در این پژوهش، قابلیت‌ها و امکانات پلتفرم «Anuvadini AI» بررسی می‌شود تا کاربرد آن در حوزه آموزش مهارت‌های نرم به جوانان ارزیابی گردد. محور اصلی روش‌شناسی این پژوهش، «پژوهش مبتنی بر طراحی» است که با مفهوم‌سازی و اصلاح تدریجی و تکرارشونده‌ی توصیه‌های آندراگوژیک، چارچوبی را برای توسعه سبک‌های یادگیری مستقل در گروه هدف پیشنهاد می‌کند. پژوهش حاضر به عنوان کاری پیشگام در مطالعه ثمرات «Anuvadini AI» در جهت ارائه آموزش دیجیتال باکیفیت برای همگان عمل خواهد کرد.

واژگان کلیدی: هوش مصنوعی Anuvadini، جوانان، آموزش مهارت‌های نرم، آندراگوژی دیجیتال، یادگیری خودمختار

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مقالهٔ پژوهشی

تاریخ دریافت: جمعه، ۱۹ خرداد ۱۴۰۵

تاریخ تصویب: چهارشنبه، ۱۱ شهریور ۱۴۰۵

تاریخ انتشار: پنجشنبه، ۹ مهر ۱۴۰۵

تاریخ آنلاین: پنجشنبه، ۹ مهر ۱۴۰۵

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فراتر از دستهٔ بازی: تماشاگران به مثابه میانجی‌های زبانی در تعاملات زبان دوم با محوریت بازی

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چکیده

پژوهش جاضر بررسی می‌کند که چگونه شرکت‌کنندگان غیرکنترل‌کننده، قادر می شوند دسترسی و استفاده از زبان فرانسه را به عنوان زبان دوم در طول گیم‌پلی مبتنی بر کلاس درس با بازی‌های ویدیویی تجاری آماده (COTS) میانجی‌گری کنند. این مطالعه به طور خاص بررسی می‌کند که چگونه مشارکت تماشاگران، درک مشترک، تصمیم‌گیری جمعی و اقدامات بعدی در بازی را شکل می‌دهد. داده‌ها شامل ۱۳ جلسه گیم‌پلی ضبط‌شده ویدیویی، در مجموع ۸ ساعت و ۴۰ دقیقه، شامل ۲۴ دانشجوی دانشگاهی در اسپانیا با سطوح مهارت فرانسوی از A1 تا B1+ است. این مجموعه شامل گیم‌پلی مشارکتی و انفرادی بود و تجزیه و تحلیل آن عمدتاً بر قسمت‌هایی از بازی «افسانه زلدا: نفسِ وحش» متمرکز بود. با استفاده از یک رویکرد چندوجهی مبتنی بر مجموعه، ۶۰ قسمت از کمک زبانی و ارتباطی همسالان شناسایی و مقایسه گردید. این تجزیه و تحلیل نشان می‌دهد که زبان آموزان تماشاگر با فراهم کردن دسترسی به متن نوشتاری، ترجمه یا اصلاح زبان بازی، تبدیل تفاسیر به عمل و به عهده گرفتن موقت رهبری تعاملی، مشارکت می‌کنند. از طریق این شیوه‌ها، شرکت‌کنندگان غیرکنترل‌کننده، منابع بازی نوشتاری، گفتاری و بصری را به دانش عملی برای بازیکن و گروه گسترده‌تر تبدیل می‌کنند. یافته‌ها، کنترل فنی را از عاملیت تعاملی متمایز می‌کنند: مالکیت کنترل‌کننده تعیین می‌کند چه کسی می‌تواند یک عمل درون بازی را اجرا کند، و نه اینکه چه کسی تفسیر، تصمیم‌گیری یا هدایت استراتژیک را سازماندهی می‌کند. بنابراین، این مطالعه نشان می‌دهد که چگونه گیم‌پلی انفرادی سازمان‌یافته از نظر آموزشی می‌تواند فرصت‌های موقعیتی برای معناسازی مشارکتی و تعامل متمرکز بر زبان ایجاد نماید.

واژگان کلیدی: یادگیری زبان مبتنی بر بازی، بازی‌های ویدیویی تجاری آماده‌مصرف، افسانه زلدا: نفسِ وحش، میانجی‌گری زبانی، تحلیل مکالمه

اطلاعات مقاله

مقالهٔ پژوهشی

تاریخ دریافت: پنجشنبه، ۲۹ مرداد ۱۴۰۵

تاریخ تصویب: چهارشنبه، ۸ مهر ۱۴۰۵

تاریخ انتشار: پنجشنبه، ۹ مهر ۱۴۰۵

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چکیده

روش‌های نگارش دانشگاهی در نتیجه پذیرش سریع ابزارهای نگارش مبتنی بر هوش مصنوعی در آموزش عالی، به‌ویژه در زمینه آموزش زبان انگلیسی به‌عنوان زبان خارجی، دستخوش تغییرات قابل توجهی شده‌اند. با این حال، کمبود سواد هوش مصنوعی، نگرانی‌های اخلاقی و خودکارآمدی پایین در نگارش، استفاده مؤثر از این ابزارها را برای بسیاری از دانشجویان کارشناسی زبان انگلیسی به‌عنوان زبان خارجی در تایلند دشوار نموده است. این مطالعه روابط میان سواد هوش مصنوعی و استفاده اخلاقی از هوش مصنوعی را با عملکرد ادراک‌شده در نگارش دانشگاهی بررسی می‌کند؛ در این میان، خودکارآمدی به‌عنوان متغیر میانجی و استفاده اخلاقی از هوش مصنوعی به‌عنوان متغیر تعدیل‌گر مورد بررسی قرار گرفته‌اند. چارچوب نظری پژوهش بر نظریه شناختی-اجتماعی بندورا، چارچوب‌های معاصر سواد هوش مصنوعی و استانداردهای بین‌المللی اخلاق هوش مصنوعی استوار است .در این پژوهش از طرح کمی مقطعی با مشارکت ۴۰۱ دانشجوی کارشناسی زبان انگلیسی به‌عنوان زبان خارجی از چهار دانشگاه تایلند استفاده شد. داده‌ها با استفاده از پرسشنامه هایی گردآوری شدند که عملکرد ادراک‌شده در نگارش دانشگاهی، خودکارآمدی، استفاده اخلاقی از هوش مصنوعی و سواد هوش مصنوعی را اندازه‌گیری می‌کنند. روابط مستقیم، میانجی و تعدیل‌گر میان متغیرها با استفاده از مدل‌سازی معادلات ساختاری مورد آزمون قرار گرفتند. یافته‌ها نشان دادند که هم سواد هوش مصنوعی و هم استفاده اخلاقی از هوش مصنوعی، رابطه‌ای مثبت و معنادار با عملکرد ادراک‌شده در نگارش دانشگاهی دارند. خودکارآمدی به‌طور جزئی اثرات استفاده اخلاقی از هوش مصنوعی و سواد هوش مصنوعی بر عملکرد نگارشی را میانجی‌گری می‌کند. افزون بر این، استفاده اخلاقی از هوش مصنوعی رابطه میان سواد هوش مصنوعی و عملکرد نگارشی را تقویت می‌کند. تحلیل‌های تکمیلی در سطح ابعاد فرعی نیز اهمیت مهارت‌های کاربردی و اعتمادبه‌نفس انطباقی، تعامل انتقادی و رفتار شفاف، و اعتمادبه‌نفس اساسی در نگارش را نشان دادند. این نتایج نشان می‌دهند که موفقیت در نگارش با پشتیبانی هوش مصنوعی مستلزم تلفیق مهارت فنی، تعامل اخلاقی و اعتمادبه‌نفس یادگیرنده است. این مطالعه بینش‌های آموزشی و تجربی مهمی برای ادغام اخلاق‌مدار هوش مصنوعی در آموزش عالی زبان انگلیسی به‌عنوان زبان خارجی ارائه می‌دهد.

واژگان کلیدی: سواد هوش مصنوعی، استفاده اخلاقی از هوش مصنوعی، خودکارآمدی، عملکرد نوشتاری آکادمیک، دانشجویان کارشناسی زبان انگلیسی به عنوان زبان خارجی

اطلاعات مقاله

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تاریخ تصویب: سه شنبه، ۱۷ شهریور ۱۴۰۵

تاریخ انتشار: پنجشنبه، ۹ مهر ۱۴۰۵

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شایستگی ارتباطی بین‌فرهنگی، هوش هیجانی و مهارت زبان انگلیسی در میان معلمان عراقیِ در حال آموزشِ زبان انگلیسی: تحلیل تعدیل‌گر اکتشافی

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چکیده

شایستگی ارتباطی بین فرهنگی به طور گسترده به عنوان زیربنای آموزش مؤثر زبان انگلیسی در نظر گرفته می‌شود، اما دانش موجود در مورد احتمال وابستگی ارتباط این توانش با مهارت زبان انگلیسی معلمان زبان انگلیسی به عنوان زبان خارجی در دوره پیش از خدمت به هوش هیجانی آنها کامل نیست. این مطالعه اکتشافی به بررسی نقش تعدیل کنندگی هوش هیجانی، هم به عنوان یک سازه مرکب و هم از طریق پنج مؤلفه مبتنی بر شایستگی، در رابطه بین شایستگی ارتباطی بین فرهنگی و مهارت زبان انگلیسی در میان معلمان عراقی زبان انگلیسی به عنوان زبان خارجی در دوره پیش از خدمت پرداخته است. نمونه ای در دسترس از ۱۶۳ دانشجو-معلم در دانشگاه بغداد، پرسشنامه خودگزارش‌دهی شایستگی ارتباطی بین فرهنگی و یک مقیاس هوش هیجانی متمرکز بر معلم را که پنج مؤلفه خودآگاهی، مدیریت احساسات، انگیزه بخشی به خود، همدلی و مهارت‌های اجتماعی را ارزیابی می کرد، در کنار یک آزمون آنلاین انگلیسی عمومی ۲۵ سؤالی کمبریج تکمیل کردند. شش مدل تعدیل ساده با استفاده از مدل PROCESS 1، با استنتاج‌های مبتنی بر خطاهای استاندارد سازگار با ناهمسانی واریانس (HC3) و تعدیل هولم در شش آزمون تعاملی، تخمین زده شد. شرکت‌کنندگان، شایستگی ارتباطی میان فرهنگی و هوش هیجانی متوسطی را گزارش کردند و شایستگی ارتباطی میان فرهنگی به طور مثبت با مهارت زبان انگلیسی در همه مدل‌ها مرتبط بود. هوش هیجانی کل به طور فزاینده‌ای با مهارت مرتبط بود، اما ارتباط شایستگی ارتباطی میان فرهنگی با مهارت انگلیسی را تعدیل نکرد. در میان مؤلفه‌ها، تنها همدلی تعامل قوی نشان داد، و ارتباط شایستگی ارتباطی میان فرهنگی و مهارت در بین شرکت‌کنندگانی که همدلی بالاتری را گزارش کردند، قوی‌تر بود. تعامل منفی برای مدیریت احساسات تحت تأثیر تعدیل چندگانه قرار نگرفت؛ تعامل منفی برای مهارت‌های اجتماعی نیز تحت تخمین قوی معنی‌دار نشد؛ و خودآگاهی و انگیزه بخشی به خویش هیچ اثر تعدیل‌کننده‌ای نشان ندادند. یافته‌ها نشان می‌دهد که نمرات هوش هیجانی ترکیبی ممکن است تفاوت‌های بین مؤلفه‌ها را پنهان نماید و نقش همدلی شایسته تحقیقات طولی و تأییدی با استفاده از معیارهای مهارت کنترل‌شده است.

واژگان کلیدی: شایستگی ارتباطی بین‌فرهنگی، هوش هیجانی، مهارت زبان انگلیسی، معلمان زبان انگلیسی پیش از خدمت، تربیت معلم

اطلاعات مقاله

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تاریخ تصویب: دوشنبه، ۶ مهر ۱۴۰۵

تاریخ انتشار: پنجشنبه، ۹ مهر ۱۴۰۵

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"شما چند سالتون بوده ۶۸؟": تیکه به عنوان زبان ضمنی در یک برنامه پخش زنده

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چکیده

پدیده زبان ضمنی عنصری ذاتی در زبان است که در تعاملات و با اهدافی مشخص مورد استفاده قرار می گیرد. انواع این اصطلاح فراگیر نظیر کنایه، اشاره، زبان طعنه آمیز و غیره کمابیش قبلا توسط محققان کاربردشناسی در زبان انگلیسی مورد بررسی قرار گرفته اند. چنین انواعی از تلویحات در زبان فارسی نیز تحت عناوین تیکه، متلک و غیره استفاده می شوند. در حالی که طیبی (۲۰۱۸) اجزای اساسی تیکه را در مکالمات روزمره در میان فارسی زبانان بررسی نموده است، مقاله حاضر این پدیده را در یک برنامه تلویزیونی که در سال ۱۴۰۱ در شبکه ورزش جمهوری اسلامی ایران به صورت زنده پخش شد بررسی می نماید که در آن رئیس فدراسیون فوتبال جمهوری اسلامی ایران، توسط دو مجری مورد مصاحبه قرار می گیرد. از آنجا که مهمان این برنامه با استفاده از تیکه اهدافی نظیر تحقیر مخاطب، نمایاندن زیرکی خود، قرار دادن مخاطب در موقعیتی بلاتکلیف، لذت بردن از تماشای رنج مخاطب و لکه دار کردن چهره مخاطب را دنبال می نماید، مقاله حاضر تاییدی بر یافته های طیبی(۲۰۱۸) می باشد. داده های این تحقیق همچنین بیانگر این امر می باشند که طرفین گفتگو گاها از تیکه برای طفره رفتن در پاسخ به سوالات یا پرت کردن حواس مخاطبان چالش برانگیز استفاده می نمایند. علاوه بر این بحث می شود که مهمان از زبان ضمنی به منظور پیوند با بینندگانی که خط فکری آنان در تضاد با سازمان صدا و سیما می باشد بهره می برد تا صداقت و تعهد خویش را تضمین نماید.

واژگان کلیدی: بی ادبی، زبان ضمنی، تیکه، برنامه های پخش زنده

اطلاعات مقاله

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تاریخ دریافت: جمعه، ۱۷ بهمن ۱۴۰۴
تاریخ تصویب: پنجشنبه، ۲۹ مرداد ۱۴۰۵
تاریخ انتشار: پنجشنبه، ۹ مهر ۱۴۰۵
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پلاستیسیتی مالابویی در «آخرین توهم» اثر پروچیستا خاکپور

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چکیده

مفهوم پلاستیسیتی مغز مالبو مضامین سیالیت و دگردیسی را در بر میگیرد. این مفهوم، رابطه پویای بین انسان و جهان را بررسی کرده و دیدگاه‌های جدیدی در مورد مرزهای هویت انسان ارائه می‌دهد. اگرچه کتاب «آخرین توهم» اثر پروچیستا خاکپور (۲۰۱۴) از دیدگاه‌های مختلف مورد بررسی قرار گرفته است، اما هنوز از دریچه پلاستیسیتی بررسی نشده است. بنابراین، هدف ما ارائه خوانشی مالابویی از «آخرین توهم» با به‌کارگیری مفاهیم «تروما»، «پلاستیسیتی ترمیمی» و «خود نورونی» است. ما استدلال می‌کنیم که تغییرات در اعمال و افکار زال نشان می‌دهد که هویت ماهیتی پلاستیکی دارد، به این معنی که دائماً در حال تغییر و تکامل است. وجود هم ویژگی‌های انسانی و هم ویژگی‌های پرندگان در زال، سازگاری خود عصبی و تأثیر آن بر هویت او را برجسته می‌کند. یافته‌های این مطالعه، قدرت دگردیسی تروما را برجسته می‌کند. علاوه بر این، یافته‌ها حاکی از آن است که محو شدن مرزها در مغز زال به دلیل ماهیت پلاستیکی مغز امکان پذیر است؛ زیرا مغز می تواند در تعامل با محیط پیوندهای نورونی خود را از جای محوری رها کرده و دوباره سازمان دهد. کسب خودآگاهی و پذیرش خود توسط زال، ناشی از ظرفیت مغز برای رشد و تغییر از طریق غیرمحلی سازی و انعطاف‌پذیری آن در سازگاری با تجربیات و خاطرات جدید است. یافته ها همچنین نشان دهنده‌ی اعمال اختیار زال بر هویت خود است که منعکس کننده‌ی حس عدم قطعیت مبتنی بر انعطاف‌پذیری مغز و حرکتی به سوی توانمندسازی است.

واژگان کلیدی: کاترین مالبو، هویت، تروما، پلاستیسیتی، پروچیستا خاکپور

اطلاعات مقاله

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تاریخ تصویب: چهارشنبه، ۲۴ تیر ۱۴۰۵
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ساخت‌بندی‌های گفتمانی آزادی و هویت زنانه در ادبیات آمریکا و ویتنام در دهه‌های ۱۹۶۰ تا ۱۹۸۰

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چکیده

این مطالعه به بررسی ساختارهای گفتمانی آزادی و چگونگی شکل گیری بازنمایی هویت زنانه از طریق این مفاهیم در متون ادبی منتخب آمریکایی و ویتنامی در طول دهه‌های ۱۹۶۰ و ۱۹۸۰ می‌پردازد. این مطالعه با بهره‌گیری از تحلیل گفتمان انتقادی، تحلیل گفتمان انتقادی فمینیستی و زبان‌شناسی کارکردی نظام‌مند، چهار اثر شاخص این دوره، شامل «شیشه زنگوله‌ای» (۱۹۶۳)، «محبوب» (۱۹۸۷)، «بهشت نابینایان» (۱۹۸۸، نسخه اصلی به زبان ویتنامی) و «ژنرال بازنشسته می‌شود» (۱۹۸۷، نسخه اصلی به زبان ویتنامی) را تحلیل می‌کند. مفاهیم نظری کلیدی که زیربنای تحلیل موضوعی قیاسی هستند، مفاهیمی چون استعاره، وجهیت، انتقال‌پذیری، ارزیابی، سکوت، زمانمندی و مشروطیت را شامل می‌شوند. یافته‌ها نشان می‌دهد که آزادی به عنوان یک وضعیت پایدار یا کاملاً تحقق‌یافته تصور نمی‌شود، بلکه مفهومی مقید، قابل بحث و اغلب به تعویق افتاده است. در متون آمریکایی، محدودیت‌های آزادی بیشتر از طریق بی‌ثباتی روانی و کنترل نهادی بیان می‌شوند، در حالی که در متون ویتنامی، این محدودیت‌ها بیشتر از طریق وظایف اخلاقی، انتظارات اجتماعی و تعهدات جمعی طبیعی جلوه می‌کنند. این ساختارها با تضعیف عاملیت، محدود کردن صدا و تقویت کار عاطفی و فداکاری، در شکل‌دهی به هویت زنانه نقش دارند. این مطالعه برای تحلیل گفتمان، مطالعات ادبی فمینیستی و تحقیقات ادبی بین فرهنگی از این جهت اهمیت دارد که نشان می‌دهد آزادی و هویت زنانه ذاتاً و به صورت پویا از طریق زبان ساخته و پرداخته می‌شوند.

واژگان کلیدی: تحلیل انتقادی گفتمان، تحلیل انتقادی گفتمان فمینیستی، هویت زنانه، آزادی، ادبیات، زبان‌شناسی نقش‌گرای نظام‌مند

اطلاعات مقاله

مقالهٔ پژوهشی

تاریخ دریافت: چهارشنبه، ۲۸ مرداد ۱۴۰۵

تاریخ تصویب: سه شنبه، ۷ مهر ۱۴۰۵

تاریخ انتشار: پنجشنبه، ۹ مهر ۱۴۰۵

تاریخ آنلاین: پنجشنبه، ۹ مهر ۱۴۰۵

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شاپای‌الکترونیکی: ۲۸۲۱-۰۲۰۴ شاپای‌چاپی: ۲۸۲۰-۸۹۸۶

شکل‌دهی به فضای روایی از طریق وجهیت: پژوهشی سبک‌شناختی بر سایه‌گذاری در رمان «همه نورهایی که ما نمی‌بینیم»

محدثه ثقفی

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چکیده

پژوهش حاضر به بررسی نقش وجهیت در ایجاد سایه‌گذاری در رمان «همه نورهایی که ما نمی‌بینیم» (۲۰۱۴) اثر آنتونی دُر می‌پردازد و در این راستا از چارچوب سبک‌شناختی سیمپسون (۲۰۰۴) بهره می‌برد. در این مطالعه، سایه‌گذاری به معنای جهت‌گیری لحنی روایی (چه مثبت، چه منفی و یا خنثی) است که از طریق الگوهای زبانیِ خاص، به ویژه افعال وجهی، بیان می‌شود. اگرچه پژوهش‌های پیشین به بررسی سایه‌گذاری در آثار کلاسیک و داستان‌های کوتاه پرداخته‌اند، اما مطالعه نظام‌مند این مفهوم در رمان‌های معاصر مغفول مانده است. برای پر کردن این خلأ، مطالعه حاضر روشی را به کار می‌بندد که زبان‌شناسی پیکره‌ای را با تحلیل سبک‌شناختی دقیق ترکیب می‌کند. مجموعه داده‌ای شامل ۱,۳۷۸ مورد از افعال وجهی اصلی (can, could, will, would, should, may, might must) و همچنین فعل واژگانی think از متن کامل رمان استخراج شد. هر یک از موارد بر اساس نوع وجهیت (معرفتی، تکلیفی، آرزویی و ادراکی) طبقه‌بندی و با دسته‌بندی‌های سایه‌گذاری مرتبط شدند. یافته‌های کمی نشان‌دهنده قطبیت آشکاری بود: ۶۷.۷ درصد از موارد به سایه‌گذاری منفی (عمدتاً معرفتی و ادراکی) و ۳۲.۳ درصد به سایه‌گذاری مثبت (تکلیفی و آرزویی) اختصاص داشتند. موارد سایه‌گذاری خنثی ناچیز بودند. آزمون کای-اسکوئر همبستگی معناداری بین نوع وجهیت و سایه‌گذاری را تأیید کرد (χ^2 (2, N = 1,378) = 724.51, p < .001). علاوه بر این، تحلیل کیفی نشان داد که افعال وجهی معرفتی و ادراکی فضایی از عدم قطعیت و تردید را ایجاد می‌کنند، در حالی که افعال تکلیفی و آرزویی بر مفاهیم مسئولیت، تاب‌آوری و امید تأکید می‌ورزند. این یافته‌ها نه تنها دامنه مدل سیمپسون را به ادبیات قرن بیست و یکم گسترش می‌دهند، بلکه کاربرد تحلیل سایه‌گذاری مبتنی بر وجهیت را در محیط‌های آموزشی برای ارتقای مهارت‌های تفسیری و خواندن انتقادی دانش‌آموزان به نمایش می‌گذارند.

واژگان کلیدی: وجهیت، سایه‌گذاری، سبک‌شناسی، مدل سیمپسون، لحن روایی

اطلاعات مقاله

مقالهٔ پژوهشی

تاریخ دریافت: جمعه، ۱۵ اسفند ۱۴۰۴

تاریخ تصویب: جمعه، ۱۶ مرداد ۱۴۰۵

تاریخ انتشار: پنجشنبه، ۹ مهر ۱۴۰۵

تاریخ آنلاین: پنجشنبه، ۹ مهر ۱۴۰۵

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دانشگاه شهید مدنی آذربایجان

دو فصلنامهٔ *زبان‌شناسی کاربردی ادبیات کاربردی: پویش‌ها و پیشرفت‌ها*

صاحب امتیاز:
دانشگاه شهید مدنی آذربایجان

مدیر مسئول:
دکتر داود امینی

سردبیر:
دکتر کریم صادقی

مدیر داخلی:
دکتر رضا یل شرزه

نشانی:
کیلومتر ۳۵، جاده تبریز- مراغه، دانشگاه شهید مدنی آذربایجان، دانشکده ادبیّات و علوم انسانی، دفتر دو فصلنامه.

تلفاکس:
۰۴۱-۳۴۳۲۷۵۵۹

کدپستی:
۵۳۷۵۱۷۱۳۷۹

آدرس سایت نشریه:
URL: http://jalda.azaruniv.ac.ir

شمارهٔ انتشار:
سال چهاردهم، شماره دوم

تاریخ انتشار: پنجشنبه ۹ مهر ۱۴۰۵

بها: ۵۰۰۰۰۰ ریال

شمارگان: ۱۰۰ جلد

این دوفصلنامه با مجوز شمارهٔ ثبت ۹۱/۳۴۷۱۵ وزارت فرهنگ و ارشاد اسلامی چاپ و منتشر می‌شود.

شاپای‌الکترونیکی: ۲۸۲۱-۰۲۰۴
شاپای‌چاپی: ۲۸۲۰-۸۹۸۶

اعضای هیأت تحریریه بین المللی

پروفسور جین ماتیسون اکستم	استاد ادبیات انگلیسی، ادبیات کانادا و فرهنگ بریتانیا	*دانشگاه آستفولد، نروژ*
پروفسور لوردس اورتگا	استاد زبانشناسی کاربردی، دوزبانگی و فراگیری زبان دوم	*دانشگاه جورج تاون، واشنگتن، ایالات متحده آمریکا*
پروفسور گری بارکوزن	استاد زبانشناسی کاربردی، مطالعات زبان و زبانشناسی	*دانشگاه اوکلند، اوکلند، نیوزیلند*
پروفسور پل جان ثیبالت	استاد زبانشناسی کاربردی	دانشگاه آگدر، کریستین ساند، نروژ
پروفسور شمیم رافیک گالا	استاد زبانشناسی کاربردی و آموزش زبان انگلیسی	داشگاه سه گی، پتالینگ جایا، سلانگور، مالزی
پروفسور لویس وان فلوتو	استادمطالعات ترجمه	*دانشگاه اوتاوا، اوتاوا، کانادا*
پروفسور سورش کاناگاراجا	استاد زبانشناسی کاربردی، زبان نگلیسی و مطالعات آسیا	*دانشگاه ایالتی پنسیلوانیا، استیت کالج، ایالات متحده آمریکا*
پروفسور کلثیر جین کرمش	استاد بازنشستهٔ زبانشناسی کاربردی	*دانشگاه کالیفرنیا در برکلی، کالیفرنیا، برکلی، ایالت متحده آمریکا*
دکتر سعید کریمی اقدم	دانشیار آموزش زبان انگلیسی و زبانشناسی کاربردی	*دانشکدهٔ علوم تربیتی و علوم انسانی، دانشگاه نورد، لوانگر، نروژ*
پروفسور جیمز پی لانتولف	استاد آموزش زبان و زبانشناسی کاربردی	*دانشگاه ایالتی پنسیلوانیا، استیت کالج، پنسیلوانیا، ایالات متحده آمریکا*
پروفسور پل کی ماتسودا	استاد زبان انگلیسی و مدیر برنامهٔ مهارت نوشتاری زبان دوم در دانشگاه ایالتی آریزونا	دانشگاه ایالتی آریزونا، تمپه، آریزونا، ایالات متحده آمریکا
دکترجایاکارا مواکاندان	استاد انگلیسی بعنوان زبان خارجی	*گروه زبان و آموزش علوم انسانی، دانشکده مطالعات آموزشی، دانشگاه پوترا مالزی*
پروفسور آری هوتا	استاد زبانشناسی کاربردی و سنجش زبان	*مدیر مرکز مطالعات کاربردی زبان، دانشگاه یيواسکیلا، یيواسکیلا، فنلاند*
پروفسور ماریولین ورسپور	استاد زبانشناسی کاربردی	*دانشکده دکتری چندزبانگی، دانشگاه پانونیا، وزپریم، مجارستان*
پروفسور لی وی	استاد زبانشناسی کاربردی	*دانشگاه کالج لندن، لندن، انگلستان*

دانشگاه شهید مدنی آذربایجان

دو فصلنامهٔ *زبان‌شناسی کاربردی ادبیات کاربردی: پویش‌ها و پیشرفت‌ها*

صاحب امتیاز:
دانشگاه شهید مدنی آذربایجان

مدیر مسئول:
دکتر داود امینی

سردبیر:
دکتر کریم صادقی

مدیر داخلی:
دکتر رضا یل شرزه

نشانی:
کیلومتر ۳۵، جاده تبریز- مراغه، دانشگاه شهید مدنی آذربایجان، دانشکده ادبیّات و علوم انسانی، دفتر دو فصلنامه.

تلفاکس:
۰۴۱-۳۴۳۲۷۵۵۹

کدپستی:
۵۳۷۵۱۷۱۳۷۹

آدرس سایت نشریه:
URL: http://jalda.azaruniv.ac.ir

شمارهٔ انتشار:
سال چهاردهم، شماره دوم

تاریخ انتشار: پنجشنبه ۹ مهر ۱۴۰۵

بها :۵۰۰۰۰۰ ریال

شمارگان: ۱۰۰ جلد
این دوفصلنامه با مجوز شمارهٔ ثبت ۹۱/۳۴۷۱۵ وزارت فرهنگ و ارشاد اسلامی چاپ و منتشر می‌شود.

شاپای‌الکترونیکی: ۲۸۲۱-۰۲۰۴
شاپای چاپی: ۲۸۲۰-۸۹۸۶

اعضای هیأت تحریریه داخلی

دکتر داود امینی	دانشیار آموزش زبان انگلیسی	*دانشگاه شهید مدنی آذربایجان*
دکتر علی اکبر انصارین	استاد آموزش زبان انگلیسی	*دانشگاه تبریز*
دکتر بیوک بهنام	دانشیار بازنشستهٔ آموزش زبان انگلیسی	*دانشگاه شهید مدنی آذربایجان*
دکتر بهرام بهمن	دانشیار آموزش زبان انگلیسی	*دانشگاه شهید مدنی آذربایجان*
دکتر کریم صادقی	استاد آموزش زبان انگلیسی	*دانشگاه ارومیه*
دکتر فرهمن فرخی	استادآموزش زبان انگلیسی	*دانشگاه تبریز*
دکتر پروین قاسمی	استاد بازنشستهٔ ادبیات انگلیسی	*دانشگاه شیراز*
دکتر کاظم لطفی‌پور ساعدی	استاد بازنشستهٔ زبان‌شناسی کاربردی	*دانشگاه تبریز*
دکتر احد مهروند	دانشیار ادبیات انگلیسی	دانشگاه شهید مدنی آذربایجان
دکتر ابوالفضل رمضانی	دانشیار ادبیات انگلیسی	دانشگاه شهید مدنی آذربایجان

اعضای مشاور هیأت تحریریه

دکتر فریده پورگیو	استاد بازنشسته زبان و ادبیات انگلیسی	*دانشگاه شیراز*
دکتر علیرضا جلیلی‌فر	استاد زبان‌شناسی کاربردی	*دانشگاه شهید چمران اهواز*
دکتر ثلاثیه چلا	استاد زبانشناسی کاربردی	*دانشگاه USM مالزی*
دکتر ابوالفضل رمضانی	استادیار زبان و ادبیات انگلیسی	*دانشگاه شهید مدنی آذربایجان*
دکتر مهناز سعیدی	استاد آموزش زبان انگلیسی	*دانشگاه آزاد اسلامی واحد تبریز*
دکتر مینو عالمی	استاد آموزش زبان انگلیسی	*دانشگاه آزاد اسلامی واحد تهران غرب*
دکتر رضا عبدی	استاد آموزش زبان انگلیسی	*دانشگاه محقق اردبیلی*
دکتر سید محمد علوی	استاد زبانشناسی کاربردی	*دانشگاه تهران*
دکتر بهروز عزیدفتری	استاد بازنشستهٔ زبانشناسی کاربردی	*دانشگاه تبریز*
دکتر جواد غلامی	استاد آموزش زبان انگلیسی	*دانشگاه ارومیه*
دکتر سعید کتابی	استاد زبانشناسی کاربردی	*دانشگاه اصفهان*

ویراستاران انگلیسی: دکتر ابوالفضل رمضانی و شهلا ناظری
صفحه‌آرا و حروف‌چین: مؤسسهٔ آیشن کامپیوتر