Understanding English Language Acquisition Hurdles Among Vietnamese Gen Z Students in Higher Education

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Abstract: *This study investigates the acquisition and enhancement of English communication skills among Vietnamese Generation Z university students, emphasizing the challenges faced and the strategies used to overcome these difficulties. The study employed a **qualitative case study methodology**, guided by **three theoretical frameworks**: **sociocultural theory**, the **theory of planned behavior**, and **self-determination theory**. The research included **seven** undergraduate and **three** foreign language instructors from selected universities in Ho Chi Minh City. Data were gathered via extensive open-ended interviews, subsequently subjected to **triangulation** through teachers' perspectives and subsequent thematic analysis. The findings indicated the existence of four primary categories of issues: (1) Linguistic Competency Challenges—gaps in grammar, vocabulary, and listening/speaking abilities worsened by grammar-heavy, teacher-centered teaching; (2) Emotional and Motivational Barriers—low self-esteem, worry, fear of being judged, and lack of motivation; (3) Instructional and Practice Gaps—few chances to communicate in a real-life way; and (4) Sociocultural Exposure Limitations—too much reliance on translation tools and not enough time spent with native speakers. In response, students employed three primary categories of strategies: (1) Instructional Support and Classroom Climate—preference for interactive, student-centered teaching, timely feedback, and psychologically safe learning environments; (2) Interactive, Game-Based, and Real-Life Communication—use of role plays, games, and guest speakers to reduce speaking anxiety; and (3) Learner Autonomy and Technology-Enhanced Practices—self-directed learning, reflective habits, and digital tools such as Duolingo, ELSA, and ChatGPT. The research indicates that the advancement of English communication skills among Vietnamese Gen Z necessitates the evolution of pedagogical approaches, the augmentation of sociocultural involvement, and the fair incorporation of technology with interactive components. This study employs a **student-teacher triangulation** to enrich the **Southeast Asian** English as a Foreign Language (EFL) literature by incorporating systemic, affective, and technological dimensions, producing noteworthy insights for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers aimed at improving communicative competence among Gen Z learners in Vietnam.*

Keywords: *English communication skills, Vietnamese Generation Z, learning challenges, coping strategies, technology-enhanced learning*

INTRODUCTION

The English language is becoming increasingly important for Vietnamese Generation Z college students who want to do well in their careers (Nguyen, 2024; Nguyen & Lo, 2022). Because traditional courses don't encourage speaking practice and many students don't have much real-world speaking experience, low confidence and fluency are common (Du et al., 2024; Loan, 2022; Ly, 2022). Students still don't feel confident enough to join in on conversations, even after years of school investment. Classrooms also still don't use tools like artificial intelligence (AI) as much as they could (Duong & Suppasetseree, 2024). This occurrence has considerable implications for educators, lawmakers, and educational institutions. So, we need to come up with better strategies that affect students in different ways to help them connect what they learn with how they use it.

Language barriers often lead to misunderstandings, as non-native speakers find it difficult to learn the English communication skills needed for high-stakes fields like science and medicine (Amano et al., 2023; Carrión et al., 2024). People who are learning a second language need to understand not only how complicated language is but also how complicated cultural differences can make it harder to understand things like metaphor and irony (Fattah, 2024; Fernández & Recalde, 2024). This pressure is mostly due to the dominance of English, which has made it impossible for non-native speakers to become fluent like native speakers and has often led to unfair treatment of non-native speakers (Liu, 2023).

In Vietnam, where a lot of people have trouble with confidence and fluency in English, schools are now required to teach the language (Du et al., 2024). Students have a challenging time speaking because there aren't many immersive settings where they can use the language in real-life situations, which leads to low proficiency (Tuong, 2022). Psychological barriers, such as anxiety and diminished self-esteem, persist as impediments to students' engagement in writing and speaking tasks within communication activities (Ramadhani et al., 2022; Umisara et al., 2024). Competency-based education is presently difficult to implement due to pedagogical and systemic barriers that students must navigate to achieve language proficiency standards (Nguyen, 2024; Nguyen et al., 2024).

Vietnam has many qualitative studies about how challenging it is for students to communicate in English, but none of them focus on Gen Z university students. The contextual challenges encountered by non-majors frequently remain obscured, as current research predominantly pertains to different student cohorts or is confined to English majors exclusively (Ly, 2021; Ly, 2022; Anh, 2023; Thao et al., 2023). Moreover, this study often neglects the influence of current classroom norms and the communication styles of Gen Z students. This study aims to address the gap by investigating how Vietnamese Generation Z university students perceived, adapted to, and managed their communication barriers in English.

Given the evolving educational paradigms and technological progress, this study aims to investigate the challenges faced by Vietnamese university students of Generation Z in their English language acquisition. This study seeks to offer a thorough understanding of the variables affecting English acquisition by synthesizing results from prior research. This study may also yield innovative concepts for improved pedagogical approaches and technological interventions aimed at Vietnamese Gen Z students. This study will examine cultural attitudes, technological proficiency, and instructional strategies to offer solutions that can improve English oral communication skills. It's a way to help students succeed better at their jobs, do better in school, and become more globally competent.

The study aims to address a practical and task-oriented gap often neglected in global language learning research by investigating the perceptions of the challenges faced by Vietnamese Generation Z university students in acquiring English communication skills. Given Vietnam's cultural and educational context, the findings on strategies will assist educators in formulating effective interventions specific to the local environment and in developing curricula and policies that conform to international proficiency standards. Generation Z university students are digital natives who need to learn English to better fit in with their new cultural environment and meet the needs of cultural, social, and professional integration. To help students learn better, they need to know about these attitudes and behaviors.

Theoretical Framework
This research is based on three related theories: the Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978), the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), and the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000). When viewed together, the perspectives show how students confront problems, learn new things, and acquire the motivation to speak English. To reduce possible bias, the researcher practiced reflexivity by using these theoretical lenses to look at data from the whole data set while making sure that the voices of the participants were always at the center of the analysis.

Sociocultural Theory (SCT)

Socio-cultural Theory (SCT) has two main sources, but Lev Vygotsky is the most important one. He stressed how important social interaction and cultural contexts are for cognitive development. Vygotsky also said that cultural tools and symbols are the main ways that people think, learn, and do other things. It makes sense that cognitive development would not be fully understood by exclusions that consider the sociocultural settings of the people they are in (Luong et al., 2022; Newman and Hinrichs, 2018; Zhou. et al., 2024). One of the most important concepts in SCT is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). It shows the range of tasks that a learner can do with help but not yet on their own. In this zone, students learn with the help of teachers, peers, or More Knowledgeable Others. This research reinforces the importance of collaborative learning environments that facilitate the acquisition of new skills and knowledge for learners (Lantolf et al., 2020; Luong, 2022; Zhou, 2024).

SCT also sees that different backgrounds and ways of learning are important for making education open to everyone. Response Entity is all about inclusion. This adaptability is essential for creating an inclusive teaching approach that meets the needs of all students (Bernard, 2024; Zhou, 2024). SCT posits that cognitive development in early childhood education is fundamentally interconnected with and significantly dependent on educators; consequently, educators must engage with the cultural contexts of their learners (Bernard, 2024; Edwards, 2006). Importantly, SCT encourages educators to engage in reflective teaching practices that involve consciously theorizing and analyzing the societal forces that shape their pedagogical strategies (Shah, 2022).

SCT also has a big effect on learning a second language (SLA). It contends that language acquisition is not merely a cognitive endeavor, devoid of social interaction or contextual relevance. Consequently, SLA research focuses on examining how learners acquire language within the framework of authentic communicative situations and cultural exchanges (Duff, 2007; Lantolf et al., 2020; Newman, 2018). SCT provides a significant framework for understanding how social interactions, cultural tools, and educational environments within the dependent classroom facilitate cognitive and linguistic change and development (Bernard, 2024; Cong-Lem, 2022; Newman, 2018).

Theoretically, Sociocultural Theory (SCT) serves as an appropriate framework to analyze the English communication challenges and language acquisition opportunities of Vietnamese Generation Z at the university level within the scope of this study. The theoretical framework of SCT, which emphasizes social interaction, cultural context, and mediated tools in shaping learning processes, reflects the intricate realities that these students navigate (contending with exam-focused instruction, restricted communicative opportunities, and varied cultural norms regarding English usage). The theory characterizes language acquisition as a social process wherein students evolve in response to the support provided or denied by teachers, peers, and digital technologies within learning contexts.

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)
The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), created by Icek Ajzen in 1991, is used by many models to explain how people think before acting. TPB says that a person's intention to do something is the most important and immediate thing that will affect their behavior. The intention to get vaccinated is influenced by three main factors: **attitude, subjective norms**, and **perceived behavioral** control (Kim & Jeong, 2021; Lu et al., 2011; Skoglund et al., 2020).

Attitudes indicate the degree to which an individual possesses a favorable or unfavorable assessment of the behavior in question. People's evaluations of these behaviors depend on what they think will happen as a result and how much they value those results. For instance, if a student believes that practicing English communication will help them find a job in the future, they may be more likely to want to practice English (Vallance et al., 2010; Wan et al., 2017).

The **subjective norms** construct denotes the perceived social pressure or expectations from significant individuals (e.g., family, peers, educators) to either engage in the behavior or refrain from it. This means that the more important other people think he should be doing something, like speaking English in school, the more likely he is to want to do it (Quinn et al., 2010, Wan et al., 2017). This component emphasizes the influence of social and cultural factors on individual decision-making.

Perceived behavioral control indicates the individual's confidence in executing the behavior. This phenomenon is presumed to serve as a surrogate for the perceived ease or difficulty of executing the behavior and may conceptually intersect with Bandura's notion of self-efficacy. Students who believe they have the necessary skills, resources, and effective strategies to communicate in English, as well as the ability to overcome learning obstacles, are more likely to use English in their daily lives (Javadi et al., 2013; Kraft et al., 2005).

Interactions between these three parts lead to behavioral intentions. For example, a Vietnamese Gen Z university student might be motivated to participate in an English-speaking activity due to their perception of the advantages of English proficiency, encouragement from peers and teachers, or their self-assessed ability to speak English (Navabi et al., 2020; Vallance et al., 2010).

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan created Self-Determination Theory (SDT) as a big idea about human motivation, personality, and the best way to grow. They had a lot of respect for how strong and capable people are when faced with challenges. SDT posits that individuals are predisposed to thrive when three fundamental psychological needs are satisfied: **autonomy**, **competence**, and r**elatedness** (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2000). **Intrinsic motivation** means doing something just because it feels beneficial; extrinsic motivation means doing something to receive a reward or payment (or to avoid punishment) based on what happens next; and motivation means not having a favorable reason to do something. Self-endorsed actions lead to more high-quality and long-lasting behaviors.

The first of the core principles is autonomy, which means feeling like you are responsible for your actions. Individuals exhibit maximal motivation when they regard their actions as aligned with their values and interests, rather than being influenced by external pressures or persuasion (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2000). **Competence** encompasses the intrinsic aspiration of an individual to perceive themselves as capable and effective in their interactions within their environment. Perceived efficacy refers to the extent to which individuals believe they can achieve desired outcomes through their actions (Bartholomew et al., 2011). The feeling of connectedness and support from others is known as **relatedness.** Belongingness and inclusion enhance motivation by providing emotional safety and a sense of purpose (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Гринберг et al., 2024). In educational and health contexts, this feeling has consistently correlated with improved well-being, motivation, and engagement (Fortier et al., 2012; Ng et al., 2012).

Empirical research substantiates this assertion, demonstrating that these psychological needs forecast a multitude of favorable outcomes across diverse life domains. In health psychology, SDT-informed interventions have facilitated the maintenance of physical activity (Russell & Bray, 2009), emotional resilience, and disease recovery (Ng et al., 2012). For instance, in educational settings, autonomous-supportive environments that acknowledge student voice and facilitate opportunities for initiative-taking have been associated with academic motivation, engagement, and long-term outcomes (Deci et al., 2017; Fortier et al., 2012). Conversely, environments that obstruct these needs may result in disengagement, reduced well-being, and ineffective learning.

The beauty of Self-Determination Theory is that it provides a complete picture of how people act by showing how their inner psychological needs drive their motivation and performance. The model guides the creation of environments and interventions that promote self-sustaining engagement, mental health, subjective well-being, and deeper involvement across diverse life contexts (Ryan et al., 2021; Deci & Ryan, 2008). Consequently, as it has been progressively utilized in education, sports, and health promotion, SDT offers a robust framework for examining motivation from a learner-centered perspective and its behavioral outcomes.

Self-Determination Theory provides a valuable framework for examining how Vietnamese Generation Z university students respond to challenges in acquiring English communication skills. These students meet classroom expectations, utilize digital platforms, engage in conversations with passersby, and acquire motivation based on their sense of freedom, even while navigating these activities or using these features. That is, if students are free (recruit for autonomy) to choose which digital tools they would like to use depending on their learning style, if they can perceive success in mastering the communication tasks (recruit for competence), and if they feel energetically supported by either peers or instructors (recruit relatedness), they may sustain motivation and improve their language performance. Conversely, environments emphasizing rigid grammar rules devoid of social interaction or real-world applicability may undermine their intrinsic motivation. This study employs Self-Determination Theory (SDT) as the theoretical framework to examine social and educational contexts that influence the motivation of Vietnamese Gen Z learners in cultivating internalized motivation. It elucidates learner-centered and autonomy-supportive strategies that are likely to enhance sustainable English communication objectives.

Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

The researcher is a non-Vietnamese educator with an academic and professional background in English language teaching and education research and an outsider to the experiences of Vietnamese Generation Z university students. This position created an important distance that made it possible to ask tough questions and look at cultural patterns, but it also required people to protect themselves from bias and stay humble

about their culture. The researcher already knew a lot about how sociocultural factors affect learning and what motivates learners, thanks to the Sociocultural Theory, Theory of Planned Behavior, and Self-Determination Theory.

During the research process, reflexivity was maintained through the documentation of analytical insights, the re-examination of interview data, and the facilitation of themes emerging from participant narratives devoid of theoretical biases. The researcher tried to keep their biases out of the study by focusing on what the participants said about their experiences and how they planned to improve their English communication skills. To enhance credibility, the researcher triangulated student responses with insights obtained from English instructors, thereby achieving a multi-perspective approach to comprehending the phenomenon. With this reflexivity, the researcher wanted to use his theoretical lenses in a way that would help him understand the data.

Significance of This Research

This study is significant as it offers an innovative approach to enhancing English communication skills, grounded in the authentic experiences of Vietnamese Generation Z university students acquiring a new language within a globalized academic and professional context. Previous studies have either generalized language learning difficulties across various student demographics or concentrated solely on English majors; consequently, this paper may constitute the first account from Gen Z learners with heterogeneous academic backgrounds. The authors clarify the diverse challenges stemming from language, emotions, pedagogical approaches, and sociocultural barriers they face, while also outlining the adaptive strategies they implement to mitigate these issues.

This study is important because it takes place during a time when the needs of Vietnamese higher education are changing. The importance of English in teaching and securing employment is growing, and the use of digital technologies in language learning is increasing. This paper offers theoretically informed, context-sensitive perspectives that can promote the progress of learner-centered, technology-enhanced, and culturally responsive language education reform.

This study is significant to the following stakeholders:

English Language Instructors—helping teachers figure out what problems their students are having inside and outside of school, improve their teaching methods, and create a safe and interesting learning environment.

Curriculum Developers and Program Coordinators—to help with aligning the curriculum, integrating different cultures, and figuring out how to best use technology and student feedback in English programs

Educational policymakers should obtain a bottom-up view of what some of the language policies and national English proficiency strategies should be.

Vietnamese Higher Education Institutions – to adapt their support systems and resources to the needs of Gen Z learners as they improve.

Researchers in Language Education and Applied Linguistics aim to enhance academic discourse regarding students' identities, educational deficiencies, and cross-cultural language acquisition opportunities in Southeast Asia.

Generation Z University Students – to affirm their experiences, encourage self-reflection, and provide authentic peer-led narratives that foster autonomy and enhance English communication skills.

Research Aims / Objectives

This study examined the difficulties faced by Vietnamese Generation Z university students in enhancing their English communication skills. The study specifically aimed to

1. Identify the difficulties faced or hurdled by Vietnamese Generation Z university students in enhancing their English communication skills.
2. Look into how cultural norms and the Vietnamese school system affect how well they learn English
3. Examine the impact of digital platforms, social media, and online tools on the English learning of Gen Z students
4. Assess the degree to which Vietnamese Gen Z university students can utilize English communication skills in academic, social, and professional settings.
5. Additionally, suggest learner-centered and evidence-based approaches to address the identified challenges and enhance communicative competence.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In a globalized society, English has become recognized as a lingua franca because it allows people from different cultures to communicate with one another and facilitates access to academic, professional, and social resources. English abilities are required for current university careers and society, as well as graduation from many schools. Despite significant changes in how English is taught in Vietnam over the last 20 years (1991-2012), Generation Z undergraduates continue to struggle with learning and using practical English communication skills. There are numerous linguistic, cultural, technological, and systemic issues that make the learning process difficult. It alters the way pupils understand the true purpose of English.

This narrative review seeks to consolidate recent scholarly works published from 2020 to 2025 that examine the perceived English communication strategies of Generation Z Vietnamese undergraduates. Most of the research incorporated in this review is sourced from scientific, peer-reviewed journals accessed via Google Scholar and the Consensus App, indicating their status as academic sources. To maintain scholarly integrity, we deliberately omitted non-peer-reviewed materials, opinion articles, and anecdotal evidence.

Literature addressing the research objectives: (1) Challenges faced by Vietnamese Gen Z university students in communicative English; (2) Cultural expectations and the influence of the Vietnamese education system; (3) The impact of technology, digital platforms, social media, and online tools; (4) The effects of communicative English on academic, social, and professional endeavors; and (5) Evidence-based strategies to facilitate learning.

This chapter is structured around a **thematic** framework established according to the study objectives. It discusses problems like long-term language and cognitive deficits that make it challenging to communicate in English. The second thing it looks at is the cultural norms and systemic factors that shape the Vietnamese education system. Ishii-Kuntz also discusses the pros and cons of technology in relation to online learning tools, social media, and digital platforms. The study examines the practical application of English communication skills in various scenarios. Thereafter, it combines teaching methods and learner-centered approaches from the literature on how to help Vietnamese Gen Z students strengthen their communication skills.

This review has not only brought together the most recent research in the field, but it has also found important gaps and suggested ways to improve English communication skills among Vietnamese university students in the digital and global age.

Challenges Faced by Vietnamese Generation Z University Students in Cultivating English Communication Proficiencies

Vietnamese Generation Z university students had problems with language, thinking, and feelings. However, the help you gave them and the atmosphere you created in the classroom made a big difference. A significant number of students advocate for interactive teaching as an essential strategy to enhance communication through motivational encouragement and assurance pathways. An interactive classroom includes games, music, multimedia tools, and conversations with native speakers that are based on the ideas of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). CLT is based on real-life communication processes and real-life situations where language is used. Teachers who supply students personalized feedback quickly encourage them to keep improving their strategies and keeping track of their progress (Jimenez-Gomez et al., 2021).

Motivation and emotional well-being are both factors that contribute to the ongoing development of communication skills (Zhang et al., 2020; Barros et al., 2020). People believe that experiences reinforcing these traits boost motivation, and they view the appropriateness of the learning environment as engaging and supportive. Statistics indicate that Vietnamese Gen Z students exhibit a strong receptiveness to classroom activities that enhance the likelihood of meaningful and enjoyable speaking interactions. The findings indicate that the subjective evaluation of classroom strategies regarding their ability to cultivate communicative aspirations among students significantly influences scholars' satisfaction with English conversation.

These complexities collectively constitute the foundation upon which Vietnamese Generation Z university students encounter challenges in enhancing their English communication skills. A large part of it comes from the way teachers in Vietnam teach. Today's English textbooks aim to improve students' communication skills, yet this isn't always the case. Insights from both teachers and students (Tu and Thao, 2020) indicated that their textbooks offer theoretical knowledge that is not utilized in authentic communicative contexts, thereby illustrating the challenge of cultivating practical communication skills. Le and Tran (2023) discovered that, although textbook reforms in Vietnam aimed to enhance communicative activities, these initiatives were frequently sidelined due to competing time-intensive tasks and the pressure to conform to assessment preferences.

Nguyen (2022) emphasizes that while teachers advocate for the integration of computer-based activities for English-speaking students, inadequate proficiency in information technology hinders the educational outcomes associated with such initiatives. This is why students have trouble communicating eloquently, even though they understand the ideas in theory. In a similar vein, Vu and Burns (2021) assert that the integration of technology in English language teaching can lead to diminished communicative potential when educators lack proficiency in digital pedagogy.

Alongside these factors, students' perceptions and attitudes towards language acquisition significantly influence their communication skills. Tran and Moskovsky (2022) discovered that Vietnamese university EFL teachers frequently encounter disengaging factors in the classroom, attributed to students, including low motivation for learning English and a lack of drive. These factors can affect students' motivation and ability to engage with English, creating a cycle of demotivation that slows down language learning. Pham and Vo (2021) made a similar point when they said that students didn't believe in their ability to speak in front of others, which made them less likely to want to do communicative tasks.

There are both beneficial and adverse things about the current environment for these students, and one of the primary challenges is the introduction of new technology streams. Since this group includes tech-savvy Generation Z, their schools might not make effective use of their computer skills when teaching them languages. Maqbool et al. Li et al. (2020) contend that digital technology is fundamentally integral to the lives of contemporary learners; however, they assert that its incorporation into educational curricula remains insufficient, thereby hindering the development of essential communication skills among students. Furthermore, the reliance on outdated traditional teaching methods, prevalent in numerous Vietnamese universities, obstructs the development of a more effective learning environment by neglecting interactive and engaging technological resources (Drăghici et al., 2022). Nguyen and Bui (2014) also say that many digital learning projects focus on grammar and vocabulary drills and don't let students speak freely or develop their critical thinking skills.

Another level of difficulty stems from social pressure and the increased necessity of finding work. According to Pham (2021), such practices do not exist for students on English language platforms who live in a structured learning environment that includes crucial practical components for skill development, such as communication proficiency. Employers have indicated that new graduates increasingly lack soft skills, particularly effective communication, which suggests they are unprepared to provide essential workforce competencies (Lan, 2023). Dang and Nguyen (2020) back this claim up, stating that, while a high level of English proficiency is required for many positions in the country's highly competitive labor market, many graduates fail to meet professional communicative standards due to a lack of authentic user-based practice.

The Impact of Cultural Expectations and the Vietnamese Educational Framework

Vietnamese schools used to be all about grammar-based English lessons with little real-life communication practice. For this reason, students often switch from a passive learning style to an interactive, social one by using new engage-to-learn and learn-to-share models. This movement shows how important it is to use communicative pedagogy in college by giving students safe, simple, and socially relevant ways to practice and experiment with English without being afraid of making mistakes or being embarrassed (Taraldsen et al., 2020; Bisanti et al., 2022).

They also said that play-based, culturally relevant games and meaningful peer and group learning experiences helped them feel more confident speaking English. These strategies not only help reduce emotional barriers, but they also fit in with the growing global trend toward learner-centered teaching. However, systemic limitations like fixed and out-of-context curricula, large classes, and short exposure times for language contact with native or advanced speakers still make things difficult. Because of this, teachers need to identify ways to include real communication opportunities within these limitations (Pham & Vo, 2021).

Different parts of cultural expectations and elements of the Vietnamese education system take on different shapes, affecting both how teachers do their jobs and what attitudes people in society choose to have. The goal is for pre-service teachers to examine how these results connect to Confucian cultural values, like the high regard for authority or the focus on academic success. In fact, this cultural current has been a big part of the rigid educational practices

in Vietnam, where formal education relies heavily on tests and rote memorization (Yen et al., 2023). Le and Phan (2022) say the same thing: they say that Confucian heritage culture creates a power dynamic between teachers and students that makes it challenging for students to take risks when talking to each other.

Confucianism and other cultural beliefs also support this idea of respect and public relations between students and teachers. Confucianism and other cultural beliefs also foster a teacher-student relationship that prioritizes adherence to rules and obedience over creativity and critical thinking. However, there is some evidence indicating a shift in momentum. Some lesson study projects, for instance, seem to go against traditional ideas about education by creating more collaborative and democratic classrooms (Nguyen & Trân, 2022; Thao et al., 2024). Do and Nguyen (2023) found that using the peer teaching method in English language classrooms also helps both sides get around hierarchical barriers, allowing students to actively participate in communicative tasks.

Academic pressure adds another layer to this equation. In their world, students perceive those who excel academically as social climbers who bring pride to their families. Cultural stories, which portray education as a means of social advancement, incorporate these pressures (Nguyen & Phan, 2024). Studies have also shown that these kinds of pressures can make students feel negative, which makes them less likely to take risks when it comes to talking (Nguyen & Phan, 2024; Tran et al., 2023).

Vietnam is trying to make its education system more global, so it has started programs and changes to make the traditional model less strict. Several changes in higher education have led to more flexible curricula, international standards, and different teaching styles, such as the Happy School Model (Nguyen et al., 2024). Even changes in language education aim to improve communication skills and cultural awareness; however, the way these changes are put into practice varies from one school to the next (Huynh & Truong, 2023). The problem is that you need to respect traditional educational values while also developing your creativity and critical thinking skills to be ready for a globalized economy.

There are also cultural factors at work here. Vietnam is a communist country that follows the national education policy, which leads to more research capacity (Thien, 2021). It is part of a larger effort to connect education and economic needs and to make educational spaces fairer and more open to everyone. Still, critics argue that this method of teaching English remains test-driven and fails to effectively teach basic communication skills, a point also supported by Pham and Bui (2023).

The Importance of Digital Platforms, Social Media, and Online Tools
Apps like Duolingo, ELSA, ChatGPT, and others help people learn new words, practice their pronunciation, and have conversations (Nugroho et al., 2023). Students also use multimedia tools like English songs, movies, and online games to help them strengthen their vocabulary and listening skills in context. This is because social media and other online communication tools let people from different cultures talk to each other in real time in their language (Permatasari & Aryani, 2023; Wei, 2023).

They are very well-known for being digital natives who want more personalized learning. They are drawn to interactive and gamified learning platforms that mimic the ability to learn in places that provide immediate feedback and have a visual element. One of the language immersion methods that can be done on platforms like TikTok and Instagram, where easy-to-use video-based tools improve both receptive and productive language skills (Nasution, 2023; Citraningtyas & Cendana, 2024). These are meant to be fun, but they also make for a casual but effective learning space, especially when students are told to make content in English.

At the same time, digital platforms make learning more collaborative and communicative by allowing for things like virtual role-plays, peer feedback sessions, and real-time discussion boards, which help students practice speaking in a real-world setting (Sumartono, 2023). Maqbool et al. Gudgeon et al. (2020) say that their use of technology here is in line with how Gen Z learns, since it encourages interaction and connection. In the same way, Simkova et al. (2023) found that digital inclusion in language classrooms facilitates equitable participation, which is crucial for diverse contexts, particularly where students from varied backgrounds struggle to fully engage in English communication tasks.

In addition to social media, online educational tools like podcasts, MOOCs, and interactive quizzes can help students become more independent. Noting that Gen Z learners often use digital tools in and out of the classroom, added tasks to help with instruction and informal learning for certain self-directed methods that they want, Dinçer (2020). Sedanza et al. (2023) emphasize that teachers' beliefs significantly influence students' utilization of these tools and that supportive pedagogical practices facilitate sustained adoption. In the same way, teachers have taken on this challenge by using these materials in structured lessons to meet their teaching needs (Guimarães & Júnior, 2021; Amin & Paiman, 2022).

There are already some virtual exchange programs, like Vân (2020), and cross-border online collaborations that are very helpful for improving language skills and understanding other cultures (Wang, 2022). Alakrash and Razak (2021) assert that effective technology-enhanced language instruction necessitates digital literacy and the capacity to incorporate technology into curriculum development within the Vietnamese context. Davydova (2024) argues that adolescents with an active use of digital media in English are more confident and fluid speakers in real-life communication.

Benefits of Technology for university students, even though these are clear benefits, students have some strong criticisms of the limits of technology. Conventional problems include not enough chances for long periods of oral collaboration, content that is too abstract and needs to be put into practice, and not enough connections in some stages (Kazu & Kuvvetli, 2023). This self-awareness reflects a broader trend wherein individuals transition from passive consumers to active evaluators of their learning. Ismail (2023) and Cao et al. (2023) caution that, in the absence of guidance, students may utilize resources that do not align with their communicative objectives.

Utilization of English Communication Skills in Academic, Social, and Professional Settings

Generation Z students in Vietnam actively seek real-world applications through English conversations with native speakers, participation in international online communities, or by utilizing English in collaborative university group projects. Experiential learning methods foster environments that facilitate the application of knowledge, thereby improving the transition from theoretical understanding to practical proficiency (Saroinsong et al., 2024; Li et al., 2024).

This is also true for technology-enhanced, real-life communication opportunities. For instance, online debates, gaming communities, and collaborative media projects can make students much more confident and fluent. This situation also illustrates the communicative competence approach, which emphasizes genuine language use in authentic contexts rather than rote grammar exercises. When students engage in such activities across academic, social, and professional domains, they acquire competencies akin to linguistic proficiency, including adaptability, intercultural awareness, and pragmatic fluency (Jung & Lee 2023; Poonpon 2021).

In an academic setting, being able to speak English well serves many purposes. Bondarchuk et al. (2024) contend that students possessing practical English communication skills are more inclined to engage in class discussions, collaborative activities, and academic presentations, thereby resulting in improved academic performance. For example, being able to speak English well in business and accounting is linked to having access to more international resources, being better at solving problems, and having a more appealing profile (Almakaleh & Mahafouz, 2022; Dania & Dunnakheer, 2023). Lastly, academic literacy, or skills like reading research articles and writing scholarly papers, is essential for students to learn how to do well in the graduate program and work with other researchers from around the world (Bok & Cho, 2022; Nguyen & Hamid, 2021).

Many people desire to use English for social interactions. If you know English, you can make friends from other cultures, join international student groups, and take part in intercultural exchanges. Students from rural or monolingual backgrounds can build cultural capital and make new friends through these kinds of chances (Nguyen & Lo, 2022). In this context, emotional intelligence (EI) is paramount: students with elevated EI are less susceptible to severe language-related anxiety and engage more actively in various social settings (Thao et al., 2023; Gkonou et al., 2020). There is evidence from studies that adding EI training to language classes can help students become more psychologically resilient and empathetic, as well as better able to adapt to different cultures when communicating with people from other cultures.

The professional part also includes more than just grammar and vocabulary. That said, it does focus on certain "soft skills," like negotiation, teamwork, and communication between people from different cultures. These skills are becoming increasingly important in the job market, especially for multinational companies and industries that are somehow connected to global markets (Putri et al., 2022; Santos et al., 2024). Effective English communication is crucial for selling to clients, establishing business connections, and collaborating on cross-border projects (Klimova, 2021). AI-assisted speaking tools provide students the chance to get used to these situations by giving them flexible, interactive, and personalized practice opportunities (Duong and Suppasetseree, 2024).

Despite these benefits, challenges still exist. Most Vietnamese students feel that they don't possess enough real chances to use the target language correctly and that grammar is given too much importance compared to task-based or project-based learning (Tu & Thao, 2020; Pham & Pham, 2023). Furthermore, systemic pressures, such as performance in high-stakes examinations in other academic disciplines, often impede the advancement of communicative and interactional competence. Evidence suggests that the incorporation of authentic tasks, such as workplace simulations or intercultural exchange and service-learning initiatives, may enhance motivation for learning and facilitate skill transferability (Chan, 2021; Nguyen & Lo, 2022).

Strategies-Centered on Learners and Grounded on Evidence to Augment Communicative Competence

Literature has identified various English communication challenges faced by Vietnam Generation Z university students, along with learner-centered strategies to effectively mitigate these issues. These components encompass the implementation of interactive teaching methodologies, an emphasis on culturally pertinent pedagogy, and the significant incorporation of technology into educational practices. It is also important to encourage student independence. Students who set their own goals and engage in reflective practice, such as reviewing vocabulary every day or getting ready for class ahead of time, show more motivation, self-control, and understanding of how they learn (Jin, 2021; Phan, 2021).

This balance of digital engagement will also be important, along with face-to-face interaction to reinforce it. Therefore, adding those tech tools to teaching methods makes it possible to talk to each other in person and provides students chances to use their new language skills in real life and obtain feedback on specific problems (Jurado et al., 2023; Leshchenko et al., 2023). By combining digital tools with well-planned classroom activities (like meaningful role-plays for pair or group work or peer feedback cycles), students strengthen their language skills and their desire to use them in different situations (Sumartono, 2023; Citraningtyas & Cendana, 2024).

Recent research shows that collaborative and interactive learning experiences are more effective than ones that try to mimic real-life communication situations. Researchers recognize task-based learning, which engages students in meaning negotiation and problem-solving while adapting communication strategies in interactive contexts, as the most effective approach (Saidah et al., 2020; Yassin et al., 2024). The experience provides learners with the opportunity to practice speaking in a risk-free, pressure-free environment and address communication challenges as they arise in real time, facilitating the refinement of their oral or nonverbal techniques.

Likewise, various studies highlight the importance of diverse learning strategies—metacognitive, cognitive, and social—that are essential for cultivating communicative competence (Bhusal, 2020; Manalo, 2022). Metacognitive strategies assist students in planning, monitoring, and assessing their performance; cognitive strategies involve practice or language manipulation to enhance retention; and social strategies facilitate interaction with peers and more proficient speakers. Learning styles are as diverse as individuals, and customizing instruction can greatly enhance engagement and performance (Maqbool et al., 2020; Yustitiasari, 2020).

Body language is an important but often overlooked part of communication. A lot of nonverbal communication comes from gestures, facial expressions, and body language. Regrettably, standard EFL syllabuses typically do not include these skills. Matthews (2023) asserts that direct instruction in nonverbal communication enhances learners' interpretive and presentational skills, fundamentally transforming the nature of communication.

Developing soft skills, especially in negotiation, conflict resolution, and adapting to different cultures, is critical for getting students ready for a career and a trip to another country. Hoa (2021) and Saidah et al. (2020) contend that instructing students in effective language strategies for articulating their ideas, resolving misunderstandings, and sustaining interpersonal relationships in a foreign language is beneficial. This trend aligns with the global initiative to incorporate 21st-century skills into language education for communicative competence, which encompasses linguistic knowledge, sociocultural awareness, and strategic interaction.

Research Gaps

The literature review indicates multiple research deficiencies concerning the English communication competencies of Vietnamese Generation Z university students. Literature identifies various issues, such as limited linguistic competence, outdated grammatical teaching methodologies, inadequate access to authentic language usage, and minimal support for the integration of digital technologies (Le & Tran 2023; Nguyen 2022; Tu & Thao 2020; Vu & Burns 2021). However, there has been a scarcity of empirical analyses examining the key factors that are evolving in response to broader socio-cultural and institutional transformations within the Vietnamese higher education context. While individual factors such as technology use (Drăghici et al., 2022; Maqbool et al., 2020), cultural expectations (Le & Phan, 2022; Yen et al., 2023), and learner motivation (Pham & Vo, 2021; Tran & Moskovsky, 2022) have been examined in isolation, there is a paucity of integrated approaches that utilize a multi-dimensional framework to assess their collective impact on the development of communicative competence. Additionally, the current literature predominantly consists of descriptive accounts of challenges, with a scarcity of evidence-based or longitudinal studies to ascertain the enduring impacts of pedagogical strategies (Chan, 2021; Nguyen & Lo, 2022).

Secondly, while learner-centered and technology-enhanced strategies are frequently sought by educators (Citraningtyas & Cendana, 2024; Saidah et al., 2020; Sumartono, 2023), only a limited number of studies have empirically demonstrated their contextual relevance for Vietnamese Gen Z learners, who may exhibit distinct digital habits alongside social expectations and cultural learning norms. Nonetheless, minimal prior research has been undertaken regarding the integration of technology for its general advantages with communication language

teaching methodologies or task-based scenarios within Vietnamese university contexts (Amin & Paiman, 2022; Guimarães & Júnior, 2021). Furthermore, while nonverbal communication (Matthews, 2023), emotional intelligence (Gkonou et al., 2020; Thao et al., 2023), and soft skills (Hoa, 2021; Santos et al., 2024) are recognized as essential components of intercultural communication globally, these concepts are scarcely addressed in the current research on Vietnamese EFL teaching and learning. The gap pertains to the formulation and assessment of integrated programs that amalgamate language, culture, and communication competencies to ensure their applicability in academic, social, and professional contexts (Duong & Suppasetseree, 2024; Putri et al., 2022).

The works discussed indicate that English communicative competence can be developed from multiple perspectives, particularly in the context of Generation Z students and their relationship to global English norms and traditions. This scenario is exemplified in Vietnam, where cultural ambiguities persist, highlighting the challenge of fostering English communicative competence among college-bound students navigating the intersection of tradition and increasingly familiar technologically mediated environments. There are always problems with linguistic competency gaps, fake interactions, and misaligned teaching methods. As a result, there is a need for more creative and intriguing ways to learn that support constructivist approaches by meeting the needs and expectations of tech-savvy students. Research also supports the use of learner-centered strategies, culturally relevant pedagogy, and technology-enhanced learning at the individual level (Citraningtyas & Cendana, 2024; Maqbool et al., 2020; Sumartono, 2023). Noteworthy aspects are emerging, including nonverbal communication training, emotional intelligence enhancement, and the incorporation of soft skills (Hoa, 2021; Matthews, 2023; Thao et al., 2023).

This body of work is pertinent to qualitative analysis as it influences the formation of the interpretive lens. The identified emergent themes and categories were then put into context with the mapped existing evidence. This gave them a theoretical basis for confident interpretation. Situating qualitative analysis within established patterns from analogous conditions can yield documentation of both consistencies with previously characterized phenotypes and the emergence of novel features. Furthermore, the results can be contextualized within a broader pedagogical discourse by examining the potential contributions of evidence-based and learner-centered interventions, thereby reframing the themes as integral components of an ongoing academic dialogue concerning English language instruction in a global context. Therefore, the literature review establishes a theoretical framework and an empirical standard for evaluating, interpreting, and contextualizing the qualitative findings.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section describes the method used to investigate the learning problems that Vietnamese Generation Z university students have when they try to communicate in English. The chapter organizes the research questions and goals in a clear way, based on how clear the purpose is. Following this, the research design is presented, along with a broad strategy for tackling the issue. This chapter is followed by a discussion of the theoretical framework and research methodology, which provide a strong conceptual basis for and validate the employed methods.

Furthermore, this study delineates the research site, the population, the sample size, and the sampling method employed to establish the study group. This chapter also explains how the data was collected and the methods used to ensure that the data collection process was open and honest. **Reflexivity** is included to show where the researcher stands, and ethical considerations are explained to show how research ethics are supported. The last part of a mini-ethnographic study is the part where the data is analyzed. It describes how the information collected was processed to conduct research and develop the findings methodically.

Research Objectives
This study examined the difficulties faced by Vietnamese Generation Z university students in enhancing their English communication skills. The study specifically aimed to

1.Identify the difficulties faced or hurdled by Vietnamese Generation Z university students in
enhancing their English communication skills.
2. Look into how cultural norms and the Vietnamese school system affect how well   they learn English.
3. Examine the impact of digital platforms, social media, and online tools on the English learning of Gen Z students.
4. Assess the degree to which Vietnamese Gen Z university students can utilize English communication skills in academic, social, and professional settings.
5. Additionally, suggest learner-centered and evidence-based approaches to address   the identified challenges and enhance communicative competence.

Research Question
As a guide for this research, the study seeks to answer the following questions to determine the perspectives, techniques, and contextual experiences of Vietnamese Generation Z university students developing English

communication skills:
1. How did Generation Z university students in Vietnam perceive the problems of learning English?
2. How did Generation Z university students in Vietnam overcome barriers in learning English communication and evaluate the success of their techniques and resources?

Research Design
This study used a **case study approach**, which is a beneficial way to look at complicated things in real life (Yin; Smith). Case studies allow you freedom, depth, and many contexts, and they might even help you discover things that quantitative methods can't (Turnbull et al., 2021; Putri & Julia, 2022). A case study would use various methods and sources of information, such as **interviews**, **observations,** and **documents**, to confirm that the information is accurate (Soselisa et al., 2024; Pirzada et al., 2020). This is because it focuses on a specific system, like a person, a group of people, an institution, or an event. Furthermore, the approach is based on the idea that these bigger contexts shape how people act and talk to each other. Researchers who use case studies often include people and places to gain a better idea of how things work in a specific area and how people interact with each other (Bozkaya, 2023; Aydoğdu & Çimen, 2021). Because of this, the case study method is a beneficial way to solve problems in many areas of life today, such as education, public health, and government (Carey et al., 2024; Intalar et al., 2021).

This study used a **case report design** to look at how Vietnamese Generation Z university students used English in school, in cultural settings, and online. In this unique case, **seven students** and **three EFL teachers** from three universities in Ho Chi Minh City were given the freedom to investigate how students actively create struggle, deal with or get rid of social norms, and adapt or adopt technologies based on their needs. The study gave us more detailed and specific information that could help shape the conversation about language teaching and learning in Vietnam's higher education system. The case study framework also made it possible to look at things from many different points of view, such as from the perspective of a student and an instructor. The findings gave a more detailed and ecologically valid understanding of how English communication skills are practiced, limited, or helped in complex academic settings.

Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology
In this paper, the theoretical framework—anchored in Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978), the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), and Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000)—is intrinsically linked with a qualitative research rationale to guarantee coherence between theorization and methodological groundwork. Together, these three complementary viewpoints help understand how factors are motivating Vietnamese Generation Z university students to learn English communication skills. At the same time, these aims would be unintelligible without reference to broader social, cultural, and motivational frameworks.

Theoretical insights are applied to **qualitative methodology** via comprehensive, context-aware data collection and analysis practices that prioritize participants lived experiences while promoting reflexivity to maintain the centrality of participant voices in interpretation. Theoretically, theory directs the identification of relevant phenomena (e.g., social interaction in SCT, attitudinal and normative influences in TPB, and autonomy-supportive circumstances in SDT). Simultaneously, it methodologically offers the means to honestly and inductively investigate these phenomena inside the genuine sociocultural surroundings of participants. This guarantees that the study is both theoretically robust and methodologically consistent, thereby elucidating the intricate interplay among learners' motivations, behaviors, and contextual factors.

Research Site
The study took place at three universities in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, which offered full programs or some courses in English for language practice and improvement or as a basic requirement. These institutions were chosen to encompass schools from diverse academic contexts to facilitate a more in-depth exploration of the research. The study, which needed permission from the universities involved, was being done in specific places (like meeting rooms) to guarantee that interviews were held in a quiet and private setting.

Study Population, Sample Size and Sampling Technique

Seven first-year university students from Generation Z, aged 18 to 23, and **three** English language instructors from the universities participated. They were determined as early undergraduates during their journey of higher education, which marked the initial and crucial stages of moving from secondary-level English learning into university communicative contexts. However, the instructors were able to provide validation and context because they were professionals who knew the material well. A sample size of **ten** participants was sufficient for the inquiry's qualitative question, yielding rich and detailed narratives not intended for statistical generalization. The researcher was recruited first-year undergraduates from the selected universities through purposive sampling. Students are officially enrolled in the General English programs where English was a major language to ensure their recruitment. Participants who were teachers had to have at least two years of experience teaching English communication skills. Recruitment was done through digital ads on university bulletin boards, personal recruiting through English classes at the universities, and email invitations. After screening to see if they were eligible, all participants gave their permission willingly

Data-Collection Methods

This study conducted semi-structured interviews with students and instructors, utilizing two distinct question types to investigate various aspects of their experiences and viewpoints. Student interviews that focused on the Vietnamese educational and cultural context included conversations about problems with English communication, differences in behaviors and norms between cultures, teaching methods in Vietnam that stress rote learning, the use of digital tools (or lack of them), and how English can be used in real-life situations like school, social situations, and the workplace. All interviews took place in a private setting to ensure confidentiality and were audio-recorded by the interviewer, usually lasting 60 minutes or more, with the participants' consent. Taking field notes helped me remember things I saw and heard that weren't spoken. This approach encouraged participants to think deeply and respond with detailed answers by using **open-ended questions** and **follow-up probes**.

Research Process

After getting permission from the institutions, potential participants were found for this study. We set up interviews that worked for the participants, and all the recordings were saved in password-protected digital folders. All the interviews were written down word for word, and preliminary coding started at the data collection stage to help plan the next round of interviews.

Reflexivity

The researcher maintained a reflexive stance during the process, recognizing that personal history, professional background, and cultural perspectives might affect data interpretation. During the study, a reflexive journal was kept, recording choices about how to do things, new biases that came up, and new ways of looking at things.

Ethical Considerations

This study was performed in alignment with the tenets of the Belmont Report: Respect for Persons, Beneficence, and Justice. Participants provided written informed consent, affirming that their information would remain confidential, their identity and personal data would not be published or disclosed to third parties, and they could withdraw from the study at any time without repercussions. The participants' names were changed to pseudonyms, and any identifying information in the transcripts was removed. The files with the data were password-protected so that only the researcher could gain access to them.

Data Collection Methods

To gain comprehensive insights for this research, two sets of semi-structured interviews were conducted to contextualize the study: one with a cohort of seven Vietnamese Generation Z university students and another with a group of three English language instructors from three universities in Ho Chi Minh City. The student interviews focused on their personal experiences learning English, including difficulties in communication and the influence of cultural and educational backgrounds, as well as the impact of digital tools. Instructor interviews, on the other hand, were meant to gather ideas about teaching, observations about how students learn, and suggestions for how to improve teaching.

The interview questions were also designed to obtain many qualitative responses. They asked about the participants' backgrounds in learning languages, their experiences in the classroom, the cultural and educational factors that affected their English learning at that time, the digital tools they used to fill in gaps, and how they used their English skills in real life. Open-ended questions were included to encourage more thought, build on what people said at first, and let common themes come out. The interview protocols for students and teachers were made to fit their roles. The questions for students asked them to talk about their experiences and the strategies they used in class, while the questions for teachers asked them to talk about what they saw or knew as effective teaching.

This guide was meant to be used in a 60-minute session and encouraged the use of open-ended questions that let people supply long, thoughtful answers. All interviews were done in person and recorded in a quiet space chosen by PWC (i.e., a place with little background noise) and supplemented with field notes that included non-verbal cues and context. There were no major risks or problems with any part of the study, and everything went as planned. In Ho Chi Minh City, each university can do research, which makes it easy to locate both students and teachers to talk to. We successfully recruited all the targeted Generation Z students and English teachers, who agreed to participate. The engagement script prompted thoughtful and comprehensive responses, and this research encountered no technical difficulties during data collection. This study successfully backed up and stored a complete set of recordings safely, and the researcher stayed healthy and ready to go during the data collection phase. In the end, we didn't need to use any of our risk mitigation measures.

Trustworthiness of the Study (*Instead of Reliability test which is for quantitative study*)
The researcher adhered to the **four fundamental criteria** proposed by Lincoln and Guba: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, to guarantee the trustworthiness and rigor of the qualitative study. This study also used methods to keep the language of the data collected authentic, since the research process involved more than one language. These steps ensured that their methods were high quality, and their institutions were strict (Ahmed 2024; Bingham 2023).

Credibility was validated through multiple methodologies aimed at enhancing the authenticity and veracity of the outcomes. The triangulation was conducted utilizing perspectives from both student participants and English instructors. We shared verbatim transcripts of the interviews and early themes with all research participants to verify their interpretations. Additionally, prolonged engagement with the data via iterative reading and coding significantly augmented the researcher's theoretical sensitivity. I regularly discussed theme development with my academic peers (Ahmed, 2024; Bingham, 2023; Singh et al., 2021), a process like peer debriefing, to ensure a second opinion or reduce bias.

Transferability was accomplished through comprehensive descriptions of the context in Vietnamese universities, encompassing educational environments, student backgrounds, and socio-cultural dynamics. The authors gave readers the chance to judge how generalizable their results were by telling them if similar situations existed outside of their area. Other people can use these thick descriptions to decide how well the results might work in their situations (Kwantes & Kartolo, 2021; Dolan et al., 2023).

Dependability was established prior to maintaining an **audit trail,** which is a detailed record of the research process from interview protocol creation and data entry to data analysis, coding, and theme creation. For example, there were formative comments and an archive of methodological decisions, allowing internal reviewers or auditors to track how effectively the study was following the original plan throughout its lifetime. The researcher reflected on how their actions influenced data interpretation and recorded methods automatically (Eryılmaz, 2022; Nyirenda et al., 2020).

Confirmability was attained by ensuring that the findings were rooted in the narratives and not swayed by the researcher's personal biases or preconceived notions. To accomplish this, the researcher meticulously recorded the coding process and substantiated their theme-building methodologies. Having more than one reviewer examine the themes and come to an agreement during data analysis also made the study more objective (Cloutier & Ravasi, 2020; Crick, 2020; Martino et al., 2024).

Data Analysis

Braun and Clarke's **six-phase framework** (2016) was used to analyze the data using thematic analysis. This framework presents a structured but flexible way to look at qualitative data. In the **first** stage, the researcher got to know the data by reading and rereading interview transcripts and taking notes on possible patterns. The researcher identified significant data units in the **second** phase by manually creating initial codes that aligned with the research questions. The **third** phase involved sorting and organizing these codes to group similar ones together and identify commonalities that would lead to the creation of initial themes. In the **fourth** phase, the researcher looked at the themes again and improved them, coding the data across the whole dataset to ensure it was consistent and made sense. In phase **five**, each theme was carefully and precisely defined and given a name based on what we learned about it in relation to the research goals. In the **sixth** phase, the researcher integrated data extracts with interpretive analysis to create a coherent narrative.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section outlines the findings and analyses derived from in-depth interviews conducted with Vietnamese Generation Z students in higher education, along with their English instructors. This chapter addresses the two primary inquiries: (1) the ways in which Vietnamese Generation Z college students perceive the obstacles in acquiring English communication skills and (2) the methods they employ to tackle these challenges through effective strategies and resources. The findings are organized into themes to illustrate the consistent, unique, and thorough experiences of participants as they engage with English in their academic, cultural, and technological environments. This analysis contextualizes the findings of each subtheme by examining them in relation to the theoretical frameworks and prior literature discussed earlier. This method offers a more profound insight into the students' viewpoints regarding their experiences.

How Vietnamese Generation Z University Students Perceive the Challenges of Learning English Communication Skills

In the interview, the thematic analysis of the interview data reveals that Vietnamese Gen Z university students face challenges in learning English communication skills, which can be categorized into four interconnected themes: Linguistic Competency Challenges, Emotional and Motivational Barriers, Instructional and Practice Gaps, and Sociocultural Exposure Limitations. Figure 1 shows the thematic tree of problems that students have when they try to learn how to communicate in English:
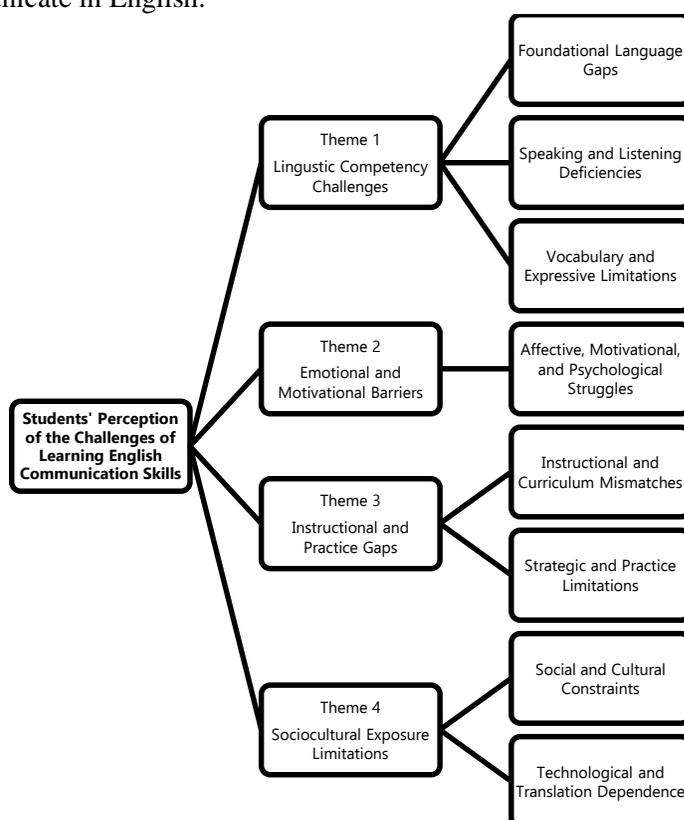

Figure 1: Thematic Tree on How Vietnamese Generation Z University Students Perceive the Challenges of Learning English Communication Skills

Theme 1: Linguistic Competency Challenges

Linguistic Competency Challenges are the hard problems that college students have when they learn and use English in four areas: grammar, vocabulary, listening (comprehension), and speaking. There are three parts to this theme that are all related: Foundational Language Gaps, Speaking & Listening Deficiencies, and Vocabulary & Expressive Limitations. A school system that prioritizes grammar and teachers, yet values written English more than spoken English, is the root cause of many of these problems.

Foundational Language Gaps

Vietnamese Generation Z university students often struggle with grammar, language, and speaking skills, which are the primary factors that make learning to communicate in English challenging. They often have trouble talking to English writers and thinkers because of things like language structure, common words, or conjunction patterns. As the name suggests, foundational language gaps are problems with basic English language skills, grammar, vocabulary, and speaking. These problems are mostly due to how they were taught in school when they were young. The focus on grammar, reading, and writing, rather than interactive, communicative practices, led to these gaps in their education. University students participated in the in-depth interviews.

> *"At first time, I find it very difficult because I have to learn grammar and pronunciation." (IDI, Student 1)*
> *"I think it's reading." (IDI, Student 4)*
> *"I think the most challenging is about our self-education. In school, we don't properly learn all of the vocabulary." (IDI, Student 5)*
> *"We have to learn too much grammar and vocabulary… We're like robots…" (IDI, Student 6)*
> *"They didn't have basic foundation… can't understand." (Student 6)*
> *"In Vietnam, we focus on the grammar and the writing. So, some students don't speak very well." (IDI, Student 7)*
> *"Speaking in high school, I think it's very little. Because it's just a teacher speaking and students don't speak." (IDI, Student 7)*

The exemplars also point to an earlier education that was more formal and focused on grammar, which didn't help students become fluent in speaking. Students said they didn't feel ready and didn't have the right words or confidence to speak because there wasn't much interactive practice and the classroom was mostly run by the teacher.

Teacher 2, on the other hand, said that "they have trouble telling nouns and adjectives apart" (IDI, Teacher 2). This fits with what students said about having weak grammar skills. This observation backs up the idea that students' weaknesses in basic language structures are still there because they had to endure grammar-heavy, unhelpful teaching in school. It also backs up the idea that this is the reason they can't communicate well in English.

Speaking and Listening Deficiencies

The speaking and listening problems of Vietnamese Generation Z college students made it challenging for them to communicate eloquently in English, especially in academic or everyday situations. Their difficulty is because they haven't had much practice listening to real-life speech, their pronunciation is too fast, their intonation is strange, and they use a lot of words that native speakers or non-natives don't use. The following excerpts come from a transcription of the full interviews that the university student informants did.

> *"Sometimes I also find it very difficult to hear or understand what foreign teachers are saying because sometimes they use complex words or sometimes their English accents are very hard to hear." (IDI, Student 1)*
> *"Sometimes they talk too fast, and I can't hear the vocabulary." (IDI, Student 2)*
> *"My classmate, listening is not good." (IDI, Student 2)*
> *"For me, the most challenging is speaking." (IDI, Student 6)*
> *"My teacher didn't focus on listening… I became a bad student…" (IDI, Student 6)*
> *"Speaking... it makes me know more vocabulary and know more grammar." (IDI, Student 7)*
> *"Because they use difficult words, so I can't..." (IDI, Student 7)*
> *"They don't practice speaking and listening." (IDI, Student 7)*

There are many reasons why the examples show that students are having trouble speaking and listening. These are much harder than reading or writing, so if you do poorly on them, your English will really fall behind. Most students find it challenging to understand teachers who speak quickly, whether they are

native or foreign. The same is true for students who are not native speakers and have to confront unfamiliar accents and complicated vocabulary. The evidence shows that even if listening to the spoken language is part of a course, it is not enough. Furthermore, the lack of regular practice and the focus on listening and speaking in previous training have led to poor results and less confidence.

Teachers mentioned,

> *"Speaking and listening... they don't know when to use past simple, present simple..."* (IDI, Teacher 1)
> *"The most challenging, of course, is the speaking."* (IDI, Teacher 3)
> *"Listening activity... I need to play the audio... two, three, or four times..."* (IDI, Teacher 3)

Teachers agreed with students that they were uncomfortable with speaking and listening. These results align with students' reports of difficulties in understanding fast speech, complex vocabulary, and insufficient conversational practice, especially considering their lack of fluency.

Vocabulary and Expressive Limitations

Vocabulary and Expressive Limitations refer to the constraints in lexical knowledge encountered by students acquiring English as a foreign language, along with their challenges in articulating themselves with eloquence and confidence while maintaining clarity of thought.

The students said,
> *"Because I don't have enough vocabulary."* (IDI, Student 4)
> *"Of course, I don't have enough vocabulary."* (IDI, Student 4)
> *"Because I'm not good at vocabulary, so my speaking was really not convincing."* (IDI, Student 5)
> *"I realized that my vocabulary was really poor."* (IDI, Student 5)
> *"They can't speak... They don't know how to answer."* (IDI, Student 6)
> *"I didn't know many words and pronunciation was hard."* (IDI, Student 7)
> *"I think they don't know the vocabulary."* (IDI, Student 7)

Persistent vocabulary and expressive constraints indicate the need for sustained, intentional, and contextualized instruction in a dynamic framework for cultivating meaningful language. These results suggest that just memorizing words may not be enough. Maybe students need more immersive, meaning-centered lessons that include listening, speaking, and context. Teachers said,

> *"Pronunciation difficulties, limited vocabulary, and lack of exposure to English live conversations."* (IDI, Teacher 3)
> *"Struggle in spontaneous discussions due to limited vocabulary and self-confidence."* (IDI, Teacher 3)

Teachers were aware that students possessed a limited vocabulary and faced difficulties in responding reactively. While not identical to the original quote, these observations support the notion of students experiencing word poverty who exert considerable effort in articulating their thoughts, indicating a need for targeted communicative vocabulary training.

Theme 2: Emotional and Motivational Barriers
Emotional and Motivational Barriers occur when university students' emotional, psychological, and motivational issues make it difficult for them to fully participate in English language learning interactions. The category "Affective, Motivational, and Psychological Struggles" demonstrates that students have internal issues such as fear, concern, low self-esteem, and a lack of intrinsic motivation.

Affective, Motivational, and Psychological Struggles
Psychological, Affective, and Motivational Struggles refer to internal emotional obstacles and mindset-related difficulties that impede university students' interest in learning English communication skills.

These include low self-efficacy, fear of failing, performance anxiety, lack of interest in some tasks, and mental exhaustion brought on by demanding academic workloads and intimidating teaching methods, as well as intimidating or upsetting past experiences and peer pressure. The students report that

> *"Some teachers are very harsh and strict to our students." (IDI, Student1)*
> *"It also makes us feel stressed." (IDI, Student 1)*
> *"I feel like my speaking skill is not good enough to speak with the French people." (IDI, Student 1)*
> *"It's hard because of grammar and pronunciation..." (IDI, Student 2)*
> *"I don't have confidence, so I don't have more vocabulary." (IDI, Student2)*
> *"I think when we speak, I can learn more English. And I'm confident." (IDI, Student 2)*
> *"Because we feel tired when we study all the time." (IDI, Student 2)*
> *"I feel very scared because I don't know what they are going to teach me." (IDI, Student 3)*
> *"I'm really shy about my voice. So, I can't say anything when he told me to speak to everyone..." (IDI, Student 3)*
> *"It makes me don't really want to speak English to everyone." (IDI, Student 3)*
> *"The biggest problem is my friends. They don't really want to learn English." (IDI, Student 3)*
> *"I think I am too old to learn more English...My schedule is really full now." (IDI, Student 3)*
> *"One of the challenges I face is self-confidence. Sometimes, I'm not confident enough to join all these events." (IDI, Student 4)*
> *"In the past, I don't know. Because I thought that was not a very important subject, so I haven't learned properly." (IDI, Student 5)*
> *"They don't like to and they think they don't know anything, so they don't want to study. I think it's very difficult." (IDI, Student 5)*
> *"I'm really scared and nervous to speak with strangers, especially the foreigners." (IDI, Student 5)*
> *"When I was in primary school, I didn't understand the English subject and I thought... boring." (IDI, Student 6)*

The fact that people were having emotional, motivational, and psychological problems showed how important it was to take care of emotional health in ESOL. We need to change that by creating an environment that is supportive, encouraging, and psychologically safe, where fear and anxiety are kept to a minimum and learners' self-confidence and motivation are boosted. By using positive reinforcement, working together, giving each student extra help, and including fun and meaningful learning experiences, they can change the way they perceive learning English as a whole.

> Teachers shared,
> *"They lack confidence. They struggle to apply and translate... grammatical structures, and the vocabulary... into speaking." (IDI, Teacher 1)*
> *"Students initially lack confidence in speaking..." (IDI, Teacher 3)*
> *"Don't be shy if you will be laughed at your mistakes... practice and practice..." (IDI, Teacher 1)*
> *"They don't know what to say because they lack self-confidence." (IDI, Teacher 3)*
> *"Sometimes they are very motivated, but... next week, they don't want to listen..." (IDI, Teacher 1)*
> *"They are quite reserved, and they don't want to make mistakes." (IDI, Teacher 2)*
> *"In Vietnamese culture, students don't want to make mistakes... they don't want to get judged." (IDI, Teacher 2)*

The teachers who used triangulation to back up our findings said that students often have experiences like not being sure of their work, being afraid of being judged, and having different levels of motivation. Insights confirmed the emotional reasons behind students' complaints about

anxiety, mental fatigue, shyness, and lack of interest, showing that these are psychological and emotional barriers to learning English.

Theme 3: Instructional and Practice Gaps

Instructional and Practice refer to the differences between English training approaches in academic contexts and real-life communication for Vietnamese Generation Z university students. The categories include Instructional and Curriculum Mismatches, as well as Strategic and Practice Limitations.

Instructional and Curriculum Mismatches

Instructional and Curriculum Mismatches mean that teaching methods and curriculum content differ from the proper communicative needs of university students in English education. Students report,

> *"In Vietnam, I think they mostly pay attention to how to use correct grammar and pronunciation...So I think most Vietnamese students...it's not good at speaking. And also listening." (IDI, Student 1)*
> *"I think speaking is not good because teachers don't help me speak more." (IDI, Student 2)*
> *"Sometimes I feel that's so boring." (IDI, Student 2)*
> *"Sometimes, the lesson or the class are really boring...She just focus on some people." (IDI, Student 3)*
> *"Traditional teaching methods mainly focus on grammar and translation, while communication skills like speaking or listening are not given much attention." (IDI, Student 4)*
> *"Maybe they learn in wrong way." (IDI, Student 4)*
> *"The way the teacher taught us is very boring." (IDI, Student 6)*
> *"Some Vietnamese teachers, they are just quick… subject is boring and scary…" (IDI, Student 6)*

The exemplar shows that lessons often focus on grammar, translation, and pronunciation, with a lot of trust in traditional teacher-centered methods, but not many chances to speak and listen. Students say that their learning journey is boring, not engaging, and only focused on getting a few things done. The others show less involvement and a decreased drive to work harder. As a result of this disconnect, students miss opportunities to practice communicating with one another. Because it's common for lessons and curricula to not match up, this calls for an urgent change in how English is taught, where the way it's taught must match the students' communication goals.

> Teachers stated,
> *"I think there is a mismatch when it comes to the level of English they are studying and the actual level of the students." (IDI, Teacher 1)*
> *"Note memorization and grammar-based learning… affects the student's ability to communicate effectively." (IDI, Teacher 3)*

Current teaching methods do not adequately support students' communicative development. The need for learner-centered and communication-oriented pedagogical reforms is further supported by teachers' observations, which validate students' dissatisfaction with traditional, grammar-focused, and unengaging instruction that does not provide opportunities for speaking and listening practice.

Strategic and Practice Limitations

Strategic and Practice Limitations mean that there aren't many good ways for university students to learn a language, and there aren't many chances for them to practice, which makes it hard for them to build up their English-speaking skills. More students fall into this group when they have a strong theoretical base but don't receive enough practice and think too much about translation. Students say,

> *"Some students in W*$%#n University are really good, but they cannot speak....Just because they don't practice." (IDI, Student 3)*
> *"I can't remember the English word… my brain just has to translate…" (IDI, Student 6)*

This category shows how important it is to ensure that the way you use language in an English class is in line with the way you learn. For students, communicative environments let them use language in more real-life situations, along with all the tips and tricks for speaking fluently and finding vocabulary online. In the meantime, teachers talked about

> *"Students rarely practice English outside the classroom... hesitation to speak and fear of making mistakes." (IDI, Teacher 3)*
> *"Accustomed to learning English through written exercises, translation, rather than practical communication." (IDI, Teacher 3)*
> *"We don't have a lot of oral exams." (IDI, Teacher 2)*

This issue could stem from factors other than a lack of English proficiency. Teachers also said that the students didn't receive many chances to really practice the language and that they tend to rely on writing or translating. This indicates that students struggle with spontaneous speech and frequently rely on mental translation. This shows that English classes need to focus more on practice and strategy.

Theme 4: Sociocultural Exposure Limitations
Sociocultural Exposure Limitations prevent Vietnamese Generation Z college students from effectively using real and immersive English language experiences due to their impact. This topic can be broken down into two parts: Social and Cultural Constraints and Technology and Translation Dependence.

Social and Cultural Constraints
Social and Cultural Constraints are the things that limit university students' chances to use English in idealistic ways, like when they talk to each other or, more importantly, when they talk to each other and make things happen. Students talked about,

> *"I feel it's very hard. And it's not interactive a lot because we spend most of our time to learn English with our Vietnamese teacher." (IDI, Student 1)*
> *"We have six lessons in English. We spend five lessons to learn with Vietnamese teachers and only one lesson to learn with foreign teachers." (IDI, Student 1)*
> *"Making it difficult for students to speak or listen naturally even though they have good skills." (IDI, Student 4)*
> *"In my opinion, in our country, some people still think English was not really necessary." (IDI, Student 5)*
> *"Some students, they are too lazy. They don't care about English." (IDI, Student 6)*
> *"At university, it's a challenge and interesting." (IDI, Student 7)*
> *"Yes, this university makes me confident. Because teachers help me speak more and more." (IDI, Student 7)*

Social and cultural barriers include not being around English speakers (native or foreign), the fact that people in your community aren't concerned about learning English (like "English pas hi hai"), and the fact that your peers don't encourage you to do so. In Vietnam, teachers usually teach English to students in their native language. Such an environment makes it harder for people to talk to each other freely, which is what international dialogue is all about. Furthermore, cultural norms and friends' laziness in practicing and learning communication skills make people less likely to want to speak English. Because there are social and cultural barriers, it is essential to offer English education that includes more real, interactive, and culturally relevant communication experiences.

> Teacher 1 expressed,
> *"Mostly it's the culture that push them to study English." (IDI, Teacher 1)*
> *"Vietnamese students... it's more on collectivist... their own motivation is lost in the process." (IDI, Teacher 1)*
> *"Many of the students, they just want to finish the course." (IDI, Teacher 1)*

Teacher 1 said that cultural norms and the social environment helped students become interested and motivated to learn English. The evidence supports students' beliefs regarding cultural attitudes, the lack of opportunities to converse with foreign teachers, and how passive peers limit their exposure to and appreciation for using English in conversations with one another

Technology and Translation Dependence
Overreliance on digital tools, especially automatic translation apps like Google Translate, to translate words from or into English is what the term "Technology and Translation Dependence" means. "Google

Translate... produces wrong words, wrong meanings," said Student 4, who said something similar about Google Translate. (IDI, Student 4)

Translation tools can help you faster, but they often give you wrong translations that have different meanings, which makes it challenging to classify and overall goes against a profound understanding. It also suggests a memetic approach, where people learn a language without really understanding it and lose sight of the critical thinking skills it can give them. This group is at the heart of encouraging a more thoughtful and strategic use of technology in teaching and learning English as a second language.

> Teachers triangulated,
> *"They rely a lot on AI... they just copy and paste, basically, the ideas from AI and they don't actually think." (IDI, Teacher 2)*
> *"Too dependent on these apps... not the purpose of learning." (IDI, Teacher 2)*
> *"Students struggle with digital tools due to lack of proper guidance." (IDI, Teacher 3)*

The study found that students have become too dependent on digital tools like AI and translation apps and are not really learning the right way. These results back up what students have said about the accuracy of translations and surface learning in some areas. They also suggest that English language teaching should be more critical and guided when it comes to using technology.

DISCUSSION WITH LITERATURE

Vietnamese Generation Z university students face a complex web of challenges that intertwine their educational context, emotional state, instructional relationships, and sociocultural environment, making it necessary to address the barriers to their learning English communication skills. The four main themes that emerged from their voices highlighted the individual and systemic challenges that hindered their ability to communicate in English. Throughout history, these concepts have also been critical of traditional teaching approaches and more general forms of communicative, culturally sensitive, and emotionally encouraging techniques in English language instruction.

Theme 1: Linguistic Competency Challenges
Vietnamese Generation Z college students at the A2 or B1 levels have trouble with grammar, vocabulary, listening, and speaking because of traditional grammar-based English teaching. This anomaly is a sign of bigger problems in Vietnam's English language education system. Nguyen (2024) says that the students have a challenging time reaching B1-level communicative competence because they want to balance all of their skills. This difficulty arises because the tests and rules primarily focus on grammar. Meadseena et al. (2023) also show that students are always having trouble listening and speaking. Role-plays, multimedia exercises, and open dialogue are all important ways to improve oral fluency, but they aren't always used in classrooms. Minh and Ngoc (2024) noted that traditional methods for vocabulary acquisition and language usage negatively impact the vocabulary learning process. Li et al. (2024) concurred. Advocate for the prioritization of communicative competence in language education to enable students to communicate effectively in real-life contexts.

The wide range of perceived foundational language gaps among university students indicates a deeper problem characterized by teacher-centered practices and a grammar-dominant orientation. Students frequently expressed dissatisfaction with their grammar and vocabulary skills, akin to claiming an inability to perform a chop stroke. They attributed their educational experiences to institutions that emphasized reading and writing over communicative engagement. This fits with what Soomro (2023) saw: that having fewer chances to speak leads to less confidence in speaking and a smaller vocabulary.

"Teacher talk" and rote exercises take up most of the time in the classroom, which makes it challenging for students to use English naturally. This means that our students aren't ready for the real world. The absence of communicative tools and practices, which Communication Language Teaching (CLT) methodologies primarily emphasize, exacerbates these deficiencies. Such competence encompasses active participation, peer interaction, and contextualized tasks (Aslan & Şahin, 2020), all of which are significantly lacking in the initial language experiences of our students.

Bhowmik & Kim (2022) also point out that the lack of ESL-specific strategies in teacher training for ESL practices makes this approach stronger and keeps inadequate entryway mechanisms to communicative competence in place. To fill these gaps, we need to move toward learner-centered, participatory classrooms where grammar and vocabulary are taught along with their real-life uses, not just in drills. Yassin et al. (2024) assert that the development of practical communicative skills is essential for establishing a legitimate connection between academic English and everyday language use.

The speaking and listening deficiencies reported by Vietnamese Generation Z university students reflect persistent shortcomings in their English education. This is because they talk fast, have an accent that is challenging to understand, and use many words that are more complicated than those of a non-native English speaker. Most of these issues stem from a lack of real listening materials in the past. La'biran and Dewi (2023) say that students' true performance in academic and even everyday communication tasks can be hurt by not having access to real-life English listening materials.

Students' performance and self-esteem suffer as a result. Kids also struggle because they don't focus on speaking, listening, and understanding in their first lessons. Nguyen et al. (2024) also say that students often feel unprepared to speak English because their schooling has focused on grammar and reading instead of speaking. Without regular chances to practice speaking and planned lessons on listening, students remain passive learners, unable to speak fluently or respond when the target language is used in social or academic settings.

To address these challenges, educators ought to concentrate on integrated methodologies that enhance comprehensive language acquisition. This would mean giving students more real-world, contextual listening tasks and encouraging them to practice speaking on a regular basis with help. Tanaiyo et al. (2023) agreed that technology like speech recognition tools, interactive audio materials, and multimedia applications can help fill in these gaps by giving students different ways to listen and keeping them interested. When you add this advice to the development of oral language in context and effective teacher training in communicative methods, you create a much stronger environment for improving oral language.

Furthermore, the vocabulary and expressive barrier that Vietnamese Generation Z undergraduates face has revealed a major flaw in English learning. Many students find it challenging to explain themselves in an academic or persuasive way because they don't know many words and don't see full sentences very frequently. This illustrates a broader concern in EFL environments, where vocabulary acquisition often relies on rote memorization rather than engaging in meaningful communicative activities. This is why a traditional system of rote memorization in schools can't help people remember things for a long time or use them in real life. Instead, it needs effective and contextualized approaches, as Alfadil (2024) explains.

New ideas like immersive learning spaces, especially virtual reality (VR), and interactive simulations are more promising because they supply students the tools and social situations, they need to learn vocabulary. Alfadil (2024) says that engaging spaces make people more interested and help them understand better, which leads to better vocabulary retention and better expressive skills. Vu and Peters (2020) investigated different ways that students learn new vocabulary and found that active reading and listening activities help students learn new words better than passive learning, especially if the students are shown how to use the words they just learned in speaking or writing tasks.

It is possible to improve EFL expressive language skills with communicative, multimodal methods that see vocabulary as an interactive tool rather than separate knowledge. Learning vocabulary in real-life situations helps with fluency and expression, as Luo (2024) said that students need to use their word knowledge in real life. Adding vocabulary lessons through listening, speaking, and task-based activities can help English-language learners develop better at using the language.

Theme 2: Emotional and Motivational Barriers
Fear, anxiety, a lack of self-respect, and an inwardly external motivation are some of the emotional and motivational barriers that stop Vietnamese Generation Z college students from communicating in English. Hostile classrooms, too much schoolwork, and negative experiences in the past are all things that can cause emotional problems. Gupta and Poudel (2024) talk about the well-known emotional and motivational problems that EFL learners face. These problems can make it very challenging to strengthen

their language skills. Students are less likely to take part in communicative activities when they are anxious or unmotivated. This means they have fewer chances to practice and become better. Because of this, the emotional toll makes people less willing to take linguistic risks, which also makes it harder to communicate.

Studies indicate that feelings are crucial for learning a language. Zhu (2024) and Jing & Wei (2023) say that negative emotions, especially anxiety and low self-esteem, can make it harder for students to do well in school by making them less likely to participate and less motivated to do so. David Gingrich says that teachers need to make the classroom a safe and welcoming place to move past these obstacles. According to Purcia et al. (2023), strategies like positive reinforcement, working with peers, and giving students fun and meaningful tasks can help change their attitudes and boost their motivation. We are certain that students need holistic methods that encompass both their emotional and cognitive sides to move past these barriers and feel confident about speaking English.

Theme 3: Instructional and Practice Gaps
The results showed that the Gen-Z English major college students from Vietnam found important gaps in their learning, especially when it came to the curriculum not being satisfactory enough and not enough communicative exercises being used. Students' lack of interest and skill development is largely due to a mismatch between their needs and the way they are taught. Teacher-centered methods that don't teach grammar, translation, or pronunciation well enough don't value speaking and listening. This lack of alignment resembles the disconnect between academic and theoretical content in language classrooms, as noted by Nguyen and Pham (2021) and Demir & Sönmez (2021). This makes it challenging for students to practice communicative activities. Sedanza et al., Rizki (2023), and Sumartono (2023) all want learner-centered and technology-enhanced lessons that fit Gen Z learning styles. They suggest using active learning methods like role-play and task-based exercises done by Wiraharja et al. (2023) to make lessons more relevant and engaging, which can help students become better communicators. These results show how important it is to make significant changes in education to close the gap between teaching that is based on theory and teaching that is based on communication.

When designing a curriculum, it's important to remember that students also have real-world limits on their fluency and use of natural language. The students who know what to learn, on the other hand, have trouble because they don't receive enough practice and experience using their English skills in real life. Morales & Limpot (2023) and Peng (2024) say that this gap is caused by not paying enough attention to all aspects of language proficiency, such as linguistic, sociolinguistic, and strategic skills. Bourina and Дунаева (2021) say that artificial or simulated environments are beneficial for improving real-time communication. Mashhura (2024) says that learning strategies should be used in regular classrooms. In more situations like that, where the context is so immersive and meaningful, people may rely less on structured native language and more on fluent, spontaneous interaction. Nguyen et al. (2023) also stress how important it is for students to be able to communicate in real-life situations to connect what they learn in class with what they do in real life.

These results indicate that gaps in teaching and practice not only make it harder for students to do well but also make them less confident and motivated to communicate in English. Moving away from passive, form-focused teaching and toward active, contextualized learning experiences can help protect against this. Task-based, student-centered teaching methods can help make English language learning less rigid and more useful, which would demonstrate to Vietnamese Gen Z students the skills they need to communicate in the real world when used with technology.

Theme 4: Sociocultural Exposure Limitations
Vietnamese Gen Z students in college Vietnamese Gen Z college students are stuck in a sociocultural bind where social and cultural expectations, as well as their growing reliance on translation machines, make it challenging for them to have real and immersive English communication experiences. The most important information received is about the first group, Social and Cultural Constraints. This is because students who didn't have much experience with the language had trouble meaningfully participating in debates. They mostly learn from teachers who don't speak English and are part of peer groups that don't speak or encourage the use of English. Less exposure makes it harder to communicate eloquently. As Amiruddin et al. (2022) and Chan et al. (2022) point out, peer interaction and social engagement are important for language development because they give students real-life situations to use it in.

However, indifferent classroom cultures and societal norms that downplay the significance of English learning can equally encourage a lack of engagement. Maqsood et al. (2024) found that students are less likely to adapt effectively when they encounter culturally diverse situations if they have not been exposed to a range of cultural and linguistic contexts (Bothwell & Chu, 2024). Intercultural experiences should be integrated into English education, and socially enriching learning environments should be cultivated that recognize the utility of English beyond the classroom.

The second category, Technology and Translation Dependence, shows how students use tools like Google Translate to help them understand things right away, but this can hurt their understanding because it leads to surface learning. They make students learn too quickly and build a basic vocabulary instead of focusing on fully understanding the material. This makes it impossible to understand advanced feature descriptions in the long run. For example, Nurhayati and Lahete (2024) and Bangun and Mustafa (2021) say that automated translation tools often supply wrong or misleading translations that make it harder for students to understand how to use language and build their critical literacy skills. Moreover, Pikhart et al. (2024) and Robin & Aziz (2022) assert that the beneficial educational effects of these tools are associated with users' digital literacy and strategic integration. Gao (2024) asserted that we need to better balance technology-focused language teaching with linguistic accuracy, cultural competence, and higher-level cognitive engagement.

Therefore, the fact that sociocultural exposure has its limits makes it challenging to learn how to communicate in English in real life. But learners still don't connect with the fluid, cross-cultural uses of English if they don't join online communities and use new technologies in their busy lives. Therefore, teachers need to come up with more ways for students to interact with each other and with digital tools in a critical and cross-cultural way to move past these problems. This, in turn, helps students strengthen their language skills and become ready for real-life conversations on a global scale.

Overall, the Vietnamese Generation Z university students in this group believe that their problems with learning to communicate in English are deeply rooted in systemic, emotional, instructional, and sociocultural factors. These gaps can be caused by grammar-based, teacher-centered education that doesn't teach basic language skills; emotional and motivational problems like anxiety and low self-esteem; a mismatch between the curriculum and real-world communication needs; and a lack of focus on real-life sociocultural settings. These problems, along with an over-reliance on translation tools and a lack of chances for immersive practice, make it difficult to improve the English skills, confidence, fluency, and flexibility needed to communicate eloquently in English. These views all support a complete reorganization of English language education in this country that puts the learner at the center. This change would include real communication through interactivity, emotional support, strategic practice, and cultural engagement, which would help these students learn how to communicate eloquently on the world stage.

Discussion with the Theoretical Lens

Their social, cultural, and educational backgrounds strongly affected the Vietnamese Generation Z university students who struggled with learning to communicate in English. This study examines the systemic, emotional, and motivational aspects of language learning utilizing sociocultural theory (SCT), the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), and Self-Determination Theory (SDT). These theories elucidate the underlying causes of students' challenges and offer direction for the formulation of effective and empowering interventions. The sections above will combine the thematic results with the theoretical lenses and the researcher's own thoughts on this discussion.

Sociocultural Theory (SCT). Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory says that learning happens through social interaction, changes in the use and meaning of cultural tools, and mediated environments. The basic language gaps mentioned above are related to the focus on speaking and listening throughout the work, which is in line with SCT's idea that learning happens in social contexts. Typically, teachers centered their language development on the use of grammar, providing little or no assistance or opportunities for interaction with other students. Increasingly, advances in social interaction, such as conversational learning and feedback during the ZPD, showed how little students were being pushed to use English in meaningful ways.

Students' sociocultural barriers, like not being able to talk to native speakers and the fact that Vietnamese is the main language of their education, also show that they don't have any intercultural communication experiences. SCT says that doing things that are important to your culture is how you learn. There isn't much evidence of socially mediated language acquisition, which means that the students don't interact with many different language communities and rely on translation tools.

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior provides a useful framework for understanding the specific motivational and behavioral inclinations that students have regarding English communication. The TPB framework further elucidates the theme of personal emotional and motivational barriers. The first reason is that students have had poor experiences learning English, like failing, being bored, or being too strict with teachers. But having a negative opinion of something can make it less likely that someone will make a strong commitment to doing communication activities.

The second point is that subjective norms significantly influence students' attitudes and behaviors. Students often noted peer indifference and insufficient classroom engagement, suggesting a cultural devaluation of English language acquisition in certain contexts. These social pressures to speak their language are making people less likely to want to use English on their own. Students who felt they lacked confidence or the skills to speak and understand English also experienced a low sense of perceived behavioral control. This indicates that they lacked confidence in their ability to perform the behavior. This seeming lack of control—when it comes to speaking and listening on the fly—has a direct effect on how they communicate in general. The TPB lens reveals that self-efficacy, subjective norms, and past experiences influence language behavior.

The Self-Determination Theory (SDT). The self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) adds to this conversation by talking about how meeting psychological needs can be a source of motivation. Many of the feelings listed, like fear, anxiety, shyness, and lack of interest, can be linked to students not being able to meet their basic needs for independence, competence, and connection.

In the past, when grammar was still taught in a very strict, traditional way, students couldn't do learning tasks that were naturally meaningful or intriguing to them. Similarly, the lack of feedback, lack of speaking practice, and repeated failures prevented students from feeling successful. Students' lack of peer support or fear of their teachers disrupted the dynamics of relatedness. On the other hand, positive changes occurred when students felt supported and connected. This suggests that meeting these needs could boost inner motivation and lead to engagement.

Students who had positive experiences with technology-based and interactive learning methods liked them and thought they were beneficial. They were also better at controlling their learning. This finding is in line with SDT theory, which says that intrinsic motivation grows in places where learners' voices are heard, mastery is encouraged, and there is a sense of belonging and social support. The study's communication and instruction alignment issues are not just poor teaching; they are also motivation issues caused by unmet psychological needs.

Reflexive Positioning. The researcher adopted a reflexive stance throughout the study to consistently interrogate the impact of theoretical frameworks on interpretation. As a non-Vietnamese researcher with the liberty to explore novel theories, critical distance necessitated vigilance against ethnocentric bias and tunnel vision that obscured the salient details presented in Getting Saved. We used analytical memos and peer debriefings to go over the in-depth interviews. The researcher conducted numerous rounds of coding to amplify the voices of the participants, ensuring that theoretical assumptions did not drown them out.

Triangulating student narratives with teacher insights facilitated a more comprehensive analysis that circumvented the capture of isolated snapshots. This also included understanding the lens of theoretical frameworks instead of absolutes, which is called reflexivity (Krefting & Krefting, 1991). Instead, these theories guided the researchers to let the data speak for itself and present a more complete picture of what it seems to mean, rather than trying to fit the data into strict categories.

How Vietnamese Gen Z University Students Address Their English Communication Learning Challenges and Evaluate the Success of Their Strategies and Resources

The following are three identified key themes in the data to understand the ways of Vietnamese Gen Z university students when addressing challenges in learning English, by which they assess their successful practices: **Theme 1: Self-Directed and Technology-Enhanced Learning Practices**, **Theme 2: Interactive, Game-Based, and Real-Life Communication Engagement** and **Theme 3: Pedagogical Support and Classroom Climate**. Figure 2 The best responses from learners were seen from friendly, interactive teachers whose approach provides encouragement and feedback rather than through language drills and fill-in-the-blank exercises.
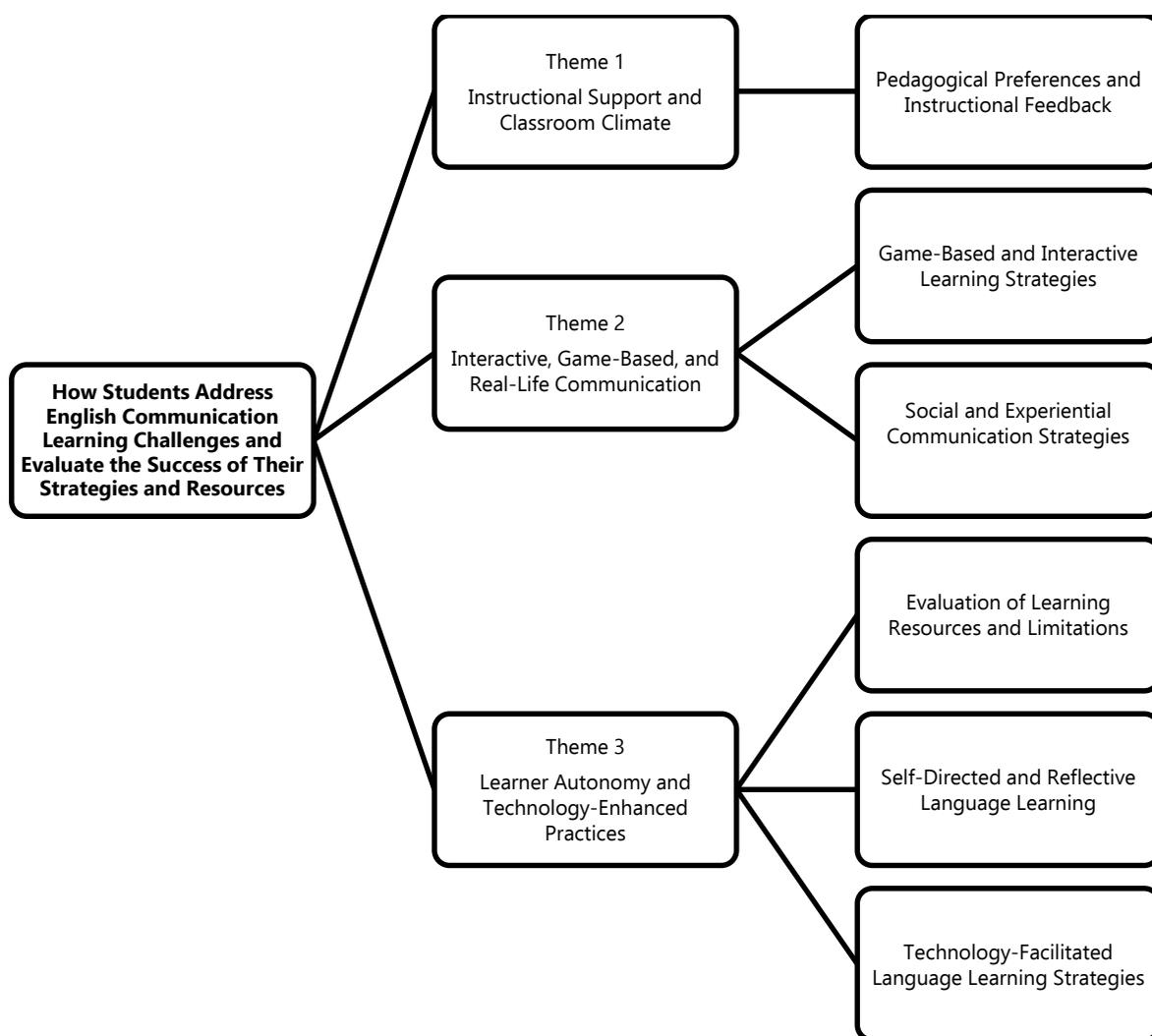

Figure 2: Thematic Tree on How Vietnamese Gen Z University Students Address Their English Communication Learning Challenges and Evaluate the Success of Their Strategies and Resources

Theme 1: Instructional Support and Classroom Climate
Instructional Support and Classroom Climate is described as the learning environment and educational interactions that mold how Vietnamese Generation Z university students interact with English communication. This theme highlights the importance of interactive teaching methods, student-centered activities, and effective feedback for promoting motivation, confidence, and language acquisition.

Pedagogical Preferences and Instructional Feedback

Pedagogical Preferences and Instructional Feedback are the learning styles and needs of students in their teaching to enhance their English Communication skills. Students constantly mentioned the following:

> *"Learning English is very easy and it helps me to use English more creatively because foreign teachers are very interactive." (IDI, Student 1)*

> *"I'm usually learning English on YouTube and Spotify...reading the lyrics...search to the translations and I can learn a new word." (IDI, Student 1)*
> *"Foreign teachers...need to speak more slowly...Vietnamese teachers...make the atmosphere more exciting." (IDI, Student 1)*
> *"Teachers need to know what the students' weaknesses and strengths are...make the atmosphere more exciting." (IDI, Student 1)*
> *"I went to school to learn and I learned on YouTube." (IDI, Student 2)*
> *"In my free time, I listen to English songs so I can practice my listening." (IDI, Student 2)*
> *"When I speak to some foreign people...they will give me some hint, some tips..." (IDI, Student 3)*
> *"Learning with movies, songs, or just talk with foreigners." (IDI, Student 4)*
> *"I will give some activities like a game… Guess the word by describing." (IDI, Student 4)*
> *"I think learning English is not like you must learn... it's like part of your life." (IDI, Student 5)*
> *"After the lesson, we have a game to practice… very comfortably…" (IDI, Student 6)*
> *"We need to improve the speaking practice in the class... and must have fun activities like games." (IDI, Student 7)*

Interactive and enjoyable learning experiences, including games, songs, conversations with foreigners, and multimedia resources, significantly aided the students in developing their listening, speaking, and vocabulary skills. They also highlighted the importance of teachers who know their merits and demerits and construct a positive learning environment. These preferences reflect a desire by students for lessons that have purposeful meaning, voice, and choice; to be interconnected with real-life activities; and for responsive learning journeys. The review of the final category indicates that the learning of English communication at the university level is notably enhanced by instruction based on interactive approaches, learner-centered strategies, and an awareness of differentiation.

Teachers expressed,

> *"I recognize first the effort of the students... I tried to commend the effort... I will just give you 7.5... next time... it could go higher." (IDI, Teacher 1)*
> *"I divide it into segments... then the prompt AI prompt... after the group practice... I then proceeded to individual practice like random picker." (IDI, Teacher 1)*
> *"When they present... they just have to write the keywords... they are not allowed to read." (IDI, Teacher 1)*
> *"They get familiarized with 60 follow-up questions... Part 1... Part 3... other students' questions." (IDI, Teacher 1)*
> *"Students perform better in structured activities like presentations… struggle in spontaneous discussions." (IDI, Teacher 3)*
> *"Provide a good environment inside the classroom that they feel comfortable…" (IDI, Teacher 3)*
> *"Given a special task, like a role play… but tend to read some scripts…" (IDI, Teacher 3)*
> *"Use visual aids, storytelling, group discussions…" (IDI, Teacher 3)*
> *"Know the non-verbal and verbal cues… to address problems." (IDI, Teacher 3)*
> *"I need to slow down… talk slowly… adapt." (IDI, Teacher 3)*
> *"Give them a welcoming environment… trust their teachers… they like to learn." (IDI, Teacher 3)*
> *"Schools should integrate more speaking and listening… not just grammar and writing." (IDI, Teacher 3)*

The teachers' comments come together to emphasize the common view of the importance of teaching in an interactive way that responds to students. This alignment says that, as much as the students feel, even the teachers are too long for a student-centered environment where the method of teaching engages them, feedback is constructive, and aims are differentiated in terms of learner needs.

Theme 2: Interactive, Game-Based, and Real-Life Communication

Interactive, Game-Based and Real-Life Communication refer to the dynamic and engaging methods in English communication that Vietnamese Generation Z tertiary students apply to address their concerns. Just like Project-Based Learning and Design Thinking, these strategies are based on engaging in authentic, enjoyable experiences of learning that take place out in the real world. It is based on two specific themes viz. **Game-Based** and **Interactive Learning Strategies** and **Social and Experiential Communication Strategies.**

Game-Based and Interactive Learning Strategies

Game-Based and Interactive Learning Strategies help students in dealing with the challenges they face in their English communication skills by making language like an interesting activity so university students can participate more.

 In-depth interviews with students revealed:

> *"The foreign teacher made more games, like bingo, to make me feel happy and comfortable." (IDI, Student 2)*
> *"I think that I should speak with tourists." (IDI, Student 2)*
> *"Speaking skills, like presentation, teamwork. Because it helps us learn together and be happy." (IDI, Student 2)*
> *"If I can learn English more early, I hope I can do more things. Practice speaking, learn some new vocab." (IDI, Student 3)*
> *"Everyone tries to speak, tries to explain." (IDI, Student 4)*
> *"Pronunciation and speaking, and I became more confident to talk with the strangers." (IDI, Student 5)*
> *"I think I should read more, read more books or novels written in English." (IDI, Student 5)*
> *"I think I should talk to them more." (IDI, Student 5)*
> *"I'm listening to English songs… I try to focus on what the teacher teaches." (IDI, Student 6)*
> *"I usually play a game... I can learn more vocabulary by games." (IDI, Student 7)*
> *"Teachers should take speaking more with students... use easy words... make learning fun." (IDI, Student 7)*

In a supportive setting, strategies such as incorporating games into the classroom, mandating English-only communication at tourist markets, facilitating group presentations, and engaging students in simple, interactive activities contribute to alleviating anxiety while enhancing confidence, vocabulary, and pronunciation. When viewed through the lens of effectiveness, students reinforce the above with one clear message: to make activities or learning fun, reduce stress, and encourage real language use. The rise in positive feelings, participation, and clear English-based improvement shows that using game-based, interactive strategies to help kids with their learning problems and strengthen their language skills works. The goal of English lessons that use these methods is to make students more interested in learning, help them improve their speaking skills or confidence, and provide them a chance to practice talking in a low-pressure setting.

Teachers stated,

> *"Script game… they have to cooperate… forced under the circumstances." (IDI, Teacher 2)*
> *"More games… take the phones away… have to talk to other people." (IDI, Teacher 2)*
> *"Interactive activities such as role play, speaking games, and real-life simulations… help gain confidence." (IDI, Teacher 3)*
> *"With interactive activities and encouragement, many gradually improve their communication skills." (IDI, Teacher 3)*

A widespread belief in the value of engaging interactive learning for promoting the development of English communication skills is confirmed by the teachers' responses, which largely reflect the experiences of the students. Incorporating game-based and interactive techniques into English language courses is strongly encouraged by the alignment of student and teacher perspectives. In addition to

fulfilling communication requirements, this approach boosts self-assurance and cultivates genuine learning opportunities.

Social and Experiential Communication Strategies

Social and Experiential Communication Strategies refers to how university students cope with English communication strategies through self-directed learning, digital tools and media, or conversation in real life.

Students revealed the following in the in-depth interview:

> *"I think it's very perfect if our school...can let the foreigner teachers to spend more time with our students." (IDI, Student 1)*
> *"I use YouTube and Duolingo app. I think it helps me learn vocabulary, grammar." (IDI, Student 2)*
> *"Don't focus on the vocabulary. We need to focus on listening." (IDI, Student 2)*
> *"We learn by ourselves. I am happy to hear that from you. That's the true meaning of learning." (IDI, Student 3)*
> *"I think to learn English better, we need good methods, useful materials, and a fun environment." (IDI, Student 4)*
> *"Everyone learns in different way... Technology can help them but should be used widely." (IDI, Student 4)*
> *"Confidence is key. They need to be confident to speak… just try." (IDI, Student 4)*
> *"You have to find the right way to learn it correctly." (IDI, Student 4)*
> *"I always learn by myself. I go to the website and read some novels..." (IDI, Student 5)*
> *"I think that teachers can use more technologies to make them more interesting or do more activities." (IDI, Student 5)*
> *"I love to talk with the foreigners… I can improve my speaking." (IDI, Student 6)*
> *"They have to practice it… absorb the knowledge and speak more." (IDI, Student 6)*
> *"Teachers should help students use tools right… to find the main information." (IDI, Student 6)*
> *"I use English when I talk to foreigners in the city..." (IDI, Student 7)*

Strategies include talking to native English speakers through apps like Duolingo, watching YouTube videos, reading anything in English, and making personalized learning plans that fit their interests and provide them the time they need. Experiential learning is the best way for students to learn, not only because they are able to experience reality for themselves, but also because it builds their confidence in ways that go far beyond traditional classroom settings. The evidence *indicate*s that we need more flexible, real, and tech-based ways to improve our language skills. Teachers can help students achieve these goals by encouraging them to do self-directed and real-world technology-enhanced communication activities. This will help them take charge of their English learning, which will lead to more natural and lasting improvements in their English skills.

Teachers discussed,

> *"Students are excited... to really practice speaking fluent English with a foreign teacher." (IDI, Teacher 1)*
> *"If they are friends… then they can do quite well… they support each other." (IDI, Teacher 2)*
> *"I provide real-life experience, real-life role-playing or conversations… related to them and they know about it." (IDI, Teacher 2)*
> *"Call them up randomly to present…" (IDI, Teacher 2)*
> *"English clubs… communication projects… interview some foreigners…" (IDI, Teacher 3)*

Both the student stories and the teacher perspectives strongly substantiate the category, suggesting a shared belief in meaningful, real-world/situated, socially interactive learning environments. The triangulated perspectives as described above lend credence to the efficacy of social and experiential approaches as they capacitate learners' independence, contextuality, and authenticity in using English for more effective and lifelong communication.

Theme 3: Learner Autonomy and Technology-Enhanced Practices
Learner Autonomy and Technology-Enhanced Practices describe how university students from Vietnam's Generation Z responsibly work to improve their English communication skills by using digital tools, forming self-regulated habits, and putting reflective practices into place to take charge of their own education. Three interconnected categories—self-directed and reflective language learning, technology-facilitated language learning strategies, and assessment of learning resources and constraints—led to the development of this theme.

Evaluation of Learning Resources and Limitations
Evaluation of Learning Resources and Limitations assesses how university students perceive the efficiency and drawbacks of the learning aids and methods used to communicate in English better. Students shared,

> *"I need someone to speak English with me. But this app...didn't have a speaking function." (IDI, Student 1)*
> *"When I arrived at the airport...hotel, I had to use English too...important skill...travel or study abroad." (IDI, Student 1)*
> *"I just use it like an emergency when I don't know what to say." (IDI, Student 5)*
> *"Quizlet... Because it's theories, not practice." (IDI, Student 7)*

The students said that translation tools, Quizlet, and language-learning platforms are valuable, but they also brought up some uses that aren't as beneficial. For example, there are no speaking features, too much focus on theory, and not enough real-life examples that you can use right away. Evaluating with reflection This discovery of reflection shows that students are becoming more aware of the difference between passive learning tools and the skills needed to use them actively in real-life situations. Because of this, language teaching needs to change so that it encourages students to use digital tools more critically and effectively so that they can identify resources that will help them use language in a more active, communicative, and useful way.
    Teachers shared,

> *"I taught my students to also [summarize]... but nobody's doing it." (IDI, Teacher 1)*
> *"About 15 to 20% of the students… interested in listening to you and do all the work." (IDI, Teacher 2)*
> *"Students perform better in structured activities like presentations… struggle in spontaneous discussions." (IDI, Teacher 3)*

Evaluation of Learning Resources and Limitations reflects both students' and teachers' critical observations on the efficacy of various tools used for English communication development. These aligned perspectives suggest a shared need for more purposeful integration of tools that bridge the gap between theory and practice and for guided evaluation to help students make informed, strategic choices in their learning.

Self-Directed and Reflective Language Learning
Self-Directed and Reflective Language Learning denotes that both teachers and students have been criticizing some of the tools that are used for developing English communication through online learning resources. Both sets of views suggest a need for greater intentionality using tools that connect theory and practice, as well as guide evaluation to help students make informed, strategic decisions about their learning. Students mentioned,

> *"I'm going to learn English better because I practice every day." (IDI, Student 1)*
> *"I will focus on speaking. If I have good speaking, I can come to another country and speak like them." (Idi, Student 3)*
> *"Two months ago, I used the Duolingo app to learn English." (IDI, Student 3)*
> *"If they want to play games in the class, they should prepare the lesson before...check some new vocab..." (IDI, Student 3)*
> *"Maybe I will try to join activities." (IDI, Student 4)*
> *"I use Duolingo, like Elsa speaking, and Google Translate." (IDI, Student 4)*

"If you have enough knowledge, you can help other people." (IDI, Student 4)
"Sometimes, I use Duolingo." (IDI, Student 5)
"Luckily, my mom took me to an English center… with Vietnamese and foreign teachers." (IDI, Student 6)
"We have to review and practice things… absorb the knowledge every day." (IDI, Student 6)
"Before you start the class, you have to let them research the meaning…" (IDI, Student 6)
"My sister helps me to use dictionary… we can study more on vocab." (IDI, Student 6)
"I use Chat GPT… fix the paragraph I'm writing." (IDI, Student 6)
"Then, over time, I practiced more and now I feel more confident." (IDI, Student 7)
"I want to improve my vocabulary and speaking because I think it's very important to my future." (IDI, Student 7)

Students create specific learning routines, such as studying 5 vocabulary words each day, speaking the language daily, and using applications (such as Duolingo or ChatGPT) and pre-class practice to improve their ability. They reflect on their progress, identify areas for development, and seek resources and support from peers or family members, demonstrating amazing ownership and long-term commitment to their learning path. Introducing such approaches to develop reflective habits and learner autonomy has also been demonstrated to improve learners' motivation, study patterns, and overall performance in English communication.

Teachers triangulated,
"Don't be shy... Practice and practice and practice. You will get there." (IDI, Teacher 1)
"Students who work hard… make an effort… improve tremendously." (IDI, Teacher 2)
"Encourage them not to rely solely on AI… but on their own ideas." (IDI, Teacher 3)
"After a few months, they start to open up… they can talk more." (IDI, Teacher 2)

This category is substantiated by students' reflections and the teacher's observations, indicating that the students are intentionally and purposefully engaged in enhancing their English language communication skills. A consistent theme in this triangulation is that these elements foster student independence, promote reflection on their work, and instruct them in strategic language use, all contributing to long-term proficiency.

Technology-Facilitated Language Learning Strategies
Technology-Facilitated Language Learning Strategies focus on the use of digital tools, multimedia platforms, and online resources to support English communication skills. Student shared,

"I find some tools like Duolingo is not helpful...they just learn about grammar and pronunciation." (IDI, Student 1)
"We can play games to make English not boring." (IDI, Student 2)
"I translate in the web." (IDI, Student 2)
"I think I can learn in music, English movies. And we can improve skills about listening, speaking..." (IDI, Student 2)
"Vocabulary game... Like the team, you can play a single or games with vocabulary." (IDI, Student 2)
"I usually listen to music...Foreign music, of course." (IDI, Student 3)
"I used to play games with foreign language...this game has a button...I will say, run away, run away..." (IDI, Student 3)
"Elsa speaking helps you improve your pronunciation… Duolingo helps you learn new vocabulary, complete a sentence, and many basic skills." (IDI, Student 4)
"This experience made me more confident in talking English." (IDI, Student 4)
"Teacher should… focus on speaking skill and technology as a tool and create a friendly learning space." (IDI, Student 4)
"Duolingo can improve vocabulary and pronunciation." (IDI, Student 5)
"I sometimes use Google Translate or Chat GPT." (IDI, Student 5)

"Because it can help me use the right words and write something that I like." (IDI, Student 5)
"I think it's just like a temporary solution." (on Google Translate) (IDI, Student 5)
"I feel more confident. More confident, and I can learn more new words and communication skills by them." (on gaming) (IDI, Student 5)
"I wish that educators can be more focused on our speaking skills." (IDI, Student 5)
"I listen and I take notes… I research the meaning and learn it." (IDI, Student 6)
"You are wrong? Just call your teacher. Your teacher will fix for you." (IDI, Student 6)
"Duolingo... to improve my vocabulary and writing. Because Duolingo makes me good, very good." (IDI, Student 7)
"The coach... has many tests... to learn more about speaking." (IDI, Student 7)

These strategies include using applications such as Duolingo, Elsa, or ChatGPT, as well as immersing oneself in English-language music, films, and games. Additionally, the strategies emphasize the use of translation tools and various online activities that can help enhance vocabulary, pronunciation, and listening skills. Although students recognize both the advantages and disadvantages of technology, they value how it makes learning more accessible, interactive, and confidence-building, particularly when combined with a supportive classroom environment and personal commitment. This study demonstrates the ability of technology to augment learning opportunities in English as long as it is purposefully integrated and used critically, with communicative and pedagogical activities accompanying digital tools.

Teachers mentioned,
"They like it. They want to use their phone. Always on their phone, right?" (IDI, Teacher 1)
"They are fond of using AI, specifically ChatGPT... we have to embrace that." (IDI, Teacher 1)
"I teach the student on how to properly use prompt to help them with their studies... to get ideas from AI..." (IDI, Teacher 1)
"Some students actually use [ChatGPT]… to do research on grammar and vocabulary… not just copying." (IDI, Teacher 2)
"They use Duolingo… online dictionary… Google Translate… to support their own study." (IDI, Teacher 2)
"Students use online resources such as YouTube, Kahoot… expose them to English content…" (IDI, Teacher 3)
"Students now use ChatGPT or AI… but need proper guidance." (IDI, Teacher 3)
"Play music too on YouTube… mimic… shadowing." (IDI, Teacher 3)

The category illustrates how Vietnamese Generation Z university students experiment with digital tools and media platforms to level up on their English communication skills. This triangulation illustrates that the significant role of technology in language learning hinges on its strategic implementation, which requires both teacher support and student capacity.

Discussion with Literature
Vietnamese Generation Z university students tackle their English learning challenges through diverse instructional engagement strategies, interactive and experiential methodologies, self-directed learning, and discerning utilization of digital tools. Their strategies may be more focused on learner autonomy and contextualized communication, but they also use technology to make learning more fun, boost confidence, and apply what they've learned to real life.

Theme 1: Instructional Support and Classroom Climate
Vietnamese Generation Z university students encounter numerous challenges in learning English and regard interactive teaching methods as a crucial strategy to surmount obstacles to effective language acquisition. This result shows that being sensitive to students' needs and putting them first is vital when teaching a language. It was also clear that the students liked these activities (like games, music, multimedia tools, and talking to native speakers) more and that they made them feel motivated and confident about using English. These preferences are very much in line with the principles of Communicative Language

Teaching (CLT), which stresses real communication, student interaction, and language in context (Prasetya, 2021; Sharma et al., 2024). Furthermore, students emphasized the importance of receiving prompt and personalized feedback from their instructors, which facilitated their understanding of areas for improvement in their strategic adjustments (Jimenez-Gomez et al., 2021).

Two studies (Zhang et al., 2020; Barros et al., 2020) identified that stimulating environments are crucial for language acquisition, offering a foundation for enhancing students' motivation and emotional health, which are essential factors in the progressive development of communication skills. Achievement is contingent upon the evaluations made by Vietnamese Gen Z students regarding their learning, specifically in relation to the appropriateness of classroom strategies and the opportunities for meaningful and enjoyable communication with peers.

Theme 2: Interactive, Game-Based, and Real-Life Communication

Vietnamese Generation Z university students indicated that engaging in interactive games, conversing with individuals in real life, and utilizing technology for self-directed activities positively impacted their challenges in English communication. This level of engagement shows that students have made a big change from traditional, passive learning to social, active experiences that mix live interaction with digital application. A lot of them were stressed out when they spoke English, so using games and fun activities in the classroom was a great way to help them relax and practice vocabulary and join other conversations with confidence (Saroinsong et al., 2024; Li et al., 2024). The communicative pedagogy promotes low-pressure, socially pertinent contexts for English usage, while ETP employs engaging yet intentional, interactive learning strategies that are both relevant and enjoyable, thereby sustaining learner motivation (Taraldsen et al., 2020; Bisanti et al., 2022).

Students demonstrated leadership beyond the classroom by utilizing diverse real-world and technology-facilitated communication methods. They spoke with people from other countries, listened to English-language news, and used apps like Duolingo to practice. These methods promote student independence and immersion in English. These tools are very effective at getting students more interested in learning and getting them more involved (Permatasari & Aryani, 2023; Wei, 2023). The real world and digital platforms are working together here to provide the student more control over their learning in ways that are more flexible, fun, and relevant to their lives. These strategies will help them become more confident and better at communicating. The study makes it clear that to keep that passenger interested and navigate around all the obstacles, they need to learn English through activities, games, and technology.

Theme 3: Learner Autonomy and Technology-Enhanced Practices

To overcome their English communication problems, Vietnamese Generation Z university students worked on self-directed skills, used digital tools to seek help, and thought about the technology-enhanced strategies they used to improve their language skills. To address these problems, they made regular, self-directed routines, and most importantly, they practiced reflective learning. These routines included reviewing vocabulary every day, getting ready for class, and doing focused speaking exercises. Students said that these activities made them feel better about learning a new language and more in control. This backs up what Jin (2021) and Phan (2021) found: that self-assessment and setting personal goals made students more independent and motivated in the long term. The students' ability to identify their strengths and weaknesses, along with their effort, helped them learn more and navigate through tough times. Reflective tools also helped them stay on task, which made their language learning process more intentional and tailored to them.

Students also used different e-tools like Duolingo, ELSA, ChatGPT, and others to become better at speaking and writing in English. These technologies were popular among students due to their easy accessibility, engaging gameplay, and ability to facilitate speaking practice. ChatGPT is one such example. It is a platform for having daily conversations and giving immediate feedback to encourage informal but regular language use (Nugroho et al., 2023). English songs, movies, and games were also mentioned as beneficial ways to practice listening and vocabulary. However, students expressed that the most effective use of these tools was in conjunction with authentic teaching and their assignments. Jurado et al. (2023) and Leshchenko et al. (2023) make this assertion.

Technology shouldn't take the place of teaching; instead, it should be part of a well-designed system that lets students use what they've learned in real life. There were still some problems with the apps that students used, like Quizlet, Google Translate, and a few language-learning platforms. The most common complaints were that there wasn't enough speaking practice, the material was too theoretical, or there wasn't any real-life interaction. These reflections indicate that students are not merely passive consumers; rather, they actively contemplate their learning processes. Annamalai and colleagues conducted a study. Digital tools also frequently fail to facilitate spontaneous communication (Kazu and Kuvvetli, 2023). Students wanted more than just vocabulary drills; they wanted resources that would help them communicate in real life. This kind of behavior shows that the person is aware of effective language learning strategies and shows that teachers need to supply more organized help in picking and using the right digital resources (Ismail, 2023; Cao et al., 2023).

Vietnamese Gen Z university students address their English language issues through the implementation of student-centered tasks in communicative contexts, interactive and real-world communication practices, and technologically supported learner autonomy. They assess the effectiveness of such tactics in terms of increased fluency, confidence, and motivation, as well as how closely practice tools correspond to their unique goals and real-world communicative needs. Because students are not passive consumers of educational resources, they will examine what works and what does not to promote an instructional technique and instrument that is meaningful, manageable, and engaging. The evolving learner profile emphasizes the need for education that balances independence and support, preparing students to be skilled and self-sufficient English language communicators in an increasingly linked world.

Discussion with Theoretical Lens
Vietnamese Generation Z university students focus on the interaction of classroom dynamics, technology, and individual agency to address their communication issues in English. Utilizing the Sociocultural Theory (SCT), the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), and Self-Determination Theory (SDT), the study emphasizes how students construct their learning environments and active learning activities, as well as how they effectively establish diachronic routines that enhance their abilities, confidence, and self-efficacy.

Sociocultural Theory (SCT). According to SCT (Vygotsky, 1978), social interaction and cultural tools play a key role in how learning develops. Playing games, working in groups, and getting feedback in class are all very beneficial to students, and they are all in line with ZPD principles (Lantolf et al., 2020). Furthermore, cultural products such as movies and music are useful resources for language practice (Duff, 2007). Peer actions, speaking responsibilities in authentic contexts, and the involvement of foreign trainers create socially relevant scenarios that effectively scaffold language development (Zhou, 2024).

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). TPB (Ajzen 1991) explains how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control affect how students act. Students think that interactive and technology-enhanced learning is one of the best ways to learn (Kim & Jeong, 2021). Peers and educators provide timely assistance in cinema to enhance their planned participation in communication activities (Wan et al., 2017). Idiolect In part 2, the young woman seems to have a lot of confidence in her ability to use tools like Duolingo and ChatGPT. These features could help her feel more in control of her actions and keep her learning longer (Navabi et al., 2020).

Self-Determination Theory (SDT). Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) asserts that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are essential for motivation and learning. Students demonstrate autonomy by establishing their schedules, utilizing applications, and engaging in independent practice to enhance motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Ng et al. (2012) say that giving students regular feedback, breaking lessons up into smaller parts, and having effective practice sessions all help them feel capable and boost their self-esteem. Furthermore, a positive classroom environment and encouragement for students to work together with their peers help them feel like they are part of a social network and increase their interest in learning (Fortier et al., 2012).

Reflexive Positioning. The researcher maintains a reflexive stance; however, he integrates the perspectives of teachers to facilitate triangulation with student viewpoints. Theoretical frameworks guided the interpretation of data without limiting the participants' voices. A culturally congruent analysis was

performed to guarantee that the results accurately represented the genuine experiences of learners and were aligned with relevant theoretical frameworks.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATONS

Summary

This study examined the experiences of Vietnamese Generation Z university students in learning English and enhancing their communication skills, focusing on the obstacles they encounter and their strategies for overcoming these challenges. The study, guided by two research questions— (1) the challenges faced or hurdled by students in acquiring English communication skills and (2) their responses to these challenges and the assessment of their techniques' efficacy—employed a case study methodology involving seven freshmen and three foreign language instructors from designated universities in Ho Chi Minh City.

The research was grounded in three principal theoretical frameworks: Sociocultural Theory (SCT), Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), and Self-determination Theory (SDT), which collectively offer a holistic perspective for examining the linguistic, emotional, instructional, and sociocultural aspects of second language acquisition. In-depth, open-ended interviews, field notes, and teacher triangulation were all used to gather data. The thematic analysis pinpointed the challenges and coping strategies discussed.

Four major themes emerged regarding challenges: (1) *Linguistic Competency Challenges*, (2) *Emotional and Motivational Barriers*, (3) *Instructional and Practice Gaps*, and (4) *Sociocultural Exposure Limitations*. Three major themes emerged for strategies: (1) *Instructional Support and Classroom Climate*, (2) *Interactive, Game-Based, and Real-Life Communication*, and (3) *Learner Autonomy and Technology-Enhanced Practices*.

Key Findings and Analysis

This article delineates and examines the four challenges encountered by Vietnamese Generation Z university students regarding proficiency, formality, interactional etiquette, and modes of engagement in English practice. Students' poor language skills in basic grammar, vocabulary, listening, and speaking posed the first set of problems. This issue primarily stemmed from traditional, grammar-heavy, teacher-centered teaching methods that did not provide sufficient opportunities for interactive and communicative practice. The second has to do with emotional and motivational barriers, such as anxiety, low self-esteem, and fear of being judged, as well as a lack of motivation that made them not want to participate in any speaking activities. During the processes, gaps in instruction and practice were found because curricula and teaching methods didn't often reflect the real-life communication needs of students through voice work, which didn't afford them many chances to speak. Sociocultural exposure restrictions made it harder to use real language by limiting exposure to native speakers in immediate social situations. Peer environments were also passive (not active), and people relied too much on translation tools to understand and express themselves.

Students used a mix of methods and resources to navigate around these problems. The instruction and climate in the classroom were crucial. For example, the students liked that the lessons were interactive and focused on them, that they got quick feedback, and that the classroom was a safe place for them to speak without worrying about making mistakes. Practice: Using games, role plays, and skits, and having tourists or foreign teachers as guests to practice what they learn in class helped them feel less anxious about speaking and more confident in their ability to communicate orally. Furthermore, learner autonomy and technology-enhanced methodologies have been demonstrated, with students adopting self-directed learning habits and reflective practices, utilizing digital platforms such as Duolingo, ELSA, and ChatGPT to facilitate their continued advancement, while maintaining awareness of the limitations of certain applications.

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that systemic educational practices, sociocultural norms and habits, intrinsic motivation to learn English, and the use of technology significantly influence how Gen Z students acquire English communication skills. From an SCT perspective, interactional impoverishment and the absence of ZPD-guided scaffolding hinder language acquisition. When looked at through the lens of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), adverse attitudes, weak subjective norms, and low perceived

behavioral control made it harder for people to compete. As anticipated by Self-Determination Theory (SDT), unmet psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness diminished intrinsic motivation; conversely, supportive learning environments enhanced persistence and performance.

Contributions to the Existing Body of Knowledge
This study contributes to the existing literature on EFL learning in Southeast Asia. It contextualizes the English communication challenges encountered by Generation Z university students in Vietnam, extending beyond the limitations of English majors. It also demonstrates the complex relationship between traditional teaching methods, emotional factors, and cyber norms. Second, it utilizes three theoretical frameworks (Sociocultural Theory, Theory of Planned Behavior, and Self-Determination Theory) to contextualize the systemic and individual factors influencing English communication competence. Third, it demonstrates evidence of a triangulated perspective between students and teachers to support the idea that supportive learning environments, active learning strategies, and reflective digital tool use can help make communication easier. This paper ends by stressing two things that put pressure on language learning in Southeast Asian EFL settings: the exposure to and use of sociocultural contexts, which is favorable for holistic learning but undesirable because this exposure often leads to meaningless discourse and sometimes even rote learning without understanding, and a generation that is more likely to engage in superficial behaviors. These are both threats that may be even worse than English's colonial legacy.

Recommendations
Some recommendations are suggested for various stakeholders based on the findings.This paper contends that educators should transition from "grammar-based" methodologies to authentic communication in the instruction of speaking and listening across diverse contexts. Teachers should supply feedback that is timely and focused on the process to help students become more competent and confident. This setting is different from what I would call a "culturally safe" classroom, which makes students less afraid of making mistakes and more willing to take risks in language use.

Even with all of this, curriculum developers should be cautious and critical about what they want students to learn in relation to the real communicative needs of TL use and, when appropriate, intercultural competence. Blended learning models should balance face-to-face practice with moderate use of digital tools.

Universities can establish language clubs, guest lectures, and exchange programs to facilitate students' interaction with native or near-native speakers. They also need to help teachers keep learning new things, focusing on emotional intelligence, communicative methods, and how to use technology well.

Students in high school are encouraged to do things like review vocabulary, practice reflecting, and have real conversations on their own. Furthermore, instead of just using translations and AI tools to copy things directly, they should be used to help people understand and use what they know better. This will help people avoid understanding the subject only on the surface or not being able to communicate well.

Limitations of the Present Study
The research sample was limited, comprising only seven students and three teachers from universities in Ho Chi Minh City; consequently, the participants may not accurately reflect the diverse perspectives on Vietnamese Generation Z learners across various locations nationwide. The data primarily relied on self-reports and perceptions, which may be influenced by recall bias or social desirability effects, thereby compromising the validity of the responses. This limitation may be attributable to the qualitative nature of the study, which offers a comprehensive and nuanced understanding, yet lacks statistical generalizability to a wider population.

Future Scope of the Study
Diverse avenues for future research could augment the present work. Future long-term research should investigate the impact of interactive, learner-centered, and technology-enhanced strategies on the development of English communication skills over time. Incorporating additional areas and academic disciplines in Vietnam is essential for better understanding the disparities in learning experiences across cultures and institutions.

Future studies may evaluate the impact of specific digital tool interventions, such as AI-assisted discussion platforms, using experimental or alternative research methodologies, thus enhancing evidence synthesis on this topic in a practical manner. Further investigation into the effectiveness of emotional intelligence training related to health communication anxiety could be beneficial for promoting increased learner reliability and motivation in performing communicative activities.

Final Thoughts

For Vietnamese Generation Z students learning English, becoming proficient requires more than just learning grammar. It requires emotional strength, effective teaching methods, real-world experience, and smart use of technology. This study indicates that we need to respond to students in a way that is centered on them, interactive, and respectful of the cultures of other speakers, especially in social situations. This will help these students be able to communicate actively in school and work settings. It calls for a change to English as both a skill and a way of thinking, since it is easy for both students and teachers to learn and use. This encourages a more humanistic approach that helps them become confident global citizens.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Certificate of Audit Trail

CERTIFICATE OF AUDIT TRAIL

This is to certify that I, OLIVER NAPILA GOMEZ, PhD, have conducted an audit trail review exclusively on the thematic analysis process and outputs for the study titled:

UNDERSTANDING ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACQUISITION HURDLES AMONG VIETNAMESE GEN Z IN HIGHER EDUCATION

by Mr. Johnrey Limpag Piad

Audit Trail Checklist for Thematic Analysis

☐ Verified that all coded excerpts were directly taken from the verified interview transcripts and field notes.
☐ Ensured participant identifiers matched between raw data and coded segments.
☐ Checked the consistency of the initial codes with the raw data meanings.
☐ Verified alignment of code labels with the content and context of excerpts.
☐ Ensured each category and theme logically emerged from clustered codes.
☐ Confirmed accurate representation of participant voices and triangulated teacher inputs.
☐ Verified that all identified themes and categories directly addressed the two central research questions.
☐ Reviewed codebooks, thematic maps, and matrices for completeness and accuracy.
☐ Confirmed that revisions in themes were justified and documented from the initial to the final versions.

The thematic analysis process and outputs have been found to be transparent, systematically documented, and consistent with qualitative research standards, thereby supporting the trustworthiness of the study's findings.

Issued this 13th day of August 2025.

Reviewed and verified by:
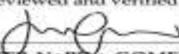
OLIVER NAPILA GOMEZ, PhD
Chief Editor, Lampos Publishing OPC
Cagayan de Oro City, Philippines

Appendix 2: Interview Schedule

Students and Teachers	Dates
Student 1	February 26, 2025
Student 2	February 26, 2025
Student 3	March 01, 2025
Student 4	March 03, 2025
Student 5	March 03, 2025
Student 6	March 05, 2025
Student 7	March 05, 2025
Teacher 1	Feb 28, 2025
Teacher 2	March 03, 2025
Teacher 3	March 06, 2025

Appendix 3: Interview Guide

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JOHNREY LIMPAG PIAD
SELINUS UNIVERSITY
Italy: Via Roma, 200 - 97100 - Ragusa - Tel. +39 0932 518985
www.uniselinus.education / info@selinusuniversity.it

Dear **Student and Teachers,**

I trust that this message finds you well.

My name is **Johnrey Limpag Piad**, and I am a PhD in English Language Teaching at Selinus University, currently under the supervision of Dr. Salvatore Fava. I am conducting a study entitled *"Understanding English Language Acquisition Hurdles Among Vietnamese Gen Z Students in Higher Education,"* which seeks to analyze the experiences and challenges Vietnamese Gen Z university students face in learning English as a foreign language.

The goal of this research **is to understand the specific challenges and obstacles you may encounter as you develop your English communication skills**. The findings from this study will help educators and curriculum developers design more effective English language programs that cater to the needs of students like yourself.

Your participation is crucial, as it will provide valuable insights into the real experiences and perspectives of Generation Z students learning English in Vietnam. Your input will significantly contribute to the understanding of language learning processes and help suggest practical improvements.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to engage in a **60-minute interview**, during which you will be invited to share your experiences and thoughts on learning English. The interview will be at your convenience and in a place you prefer. All information you provide will be confidential, and your identity will be anonymized in any publications or presentations resulting from this study.

Your Rights as a Participant:
  - Participation is entirely **voluntary**. You can opt out of the study at any time without losing benefits.
    - Your responses will be kept confidential and will only be used for research purposes.
    -You will have the right to ask questions about the study both before and during the interview process.

If you are interested in participating or have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact me at jlpiad28@gmail.com or my mobile phone number, 0768968258. I am happy to provide more information and discuss any concerns you may have.

Thank you for considering this opportunity to contribute to our understanding of English language learning among Vietnamese Gen Z students. I look forward to possibly working with you and appreciate your time and consideration.

Warm regards,

JOHNREY LIMPAG PIAD
English Lecturer jlpiad28@gmail.com (0768968258)

Appendix 4: Survey Questionnaire (Interview)

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INTERVIEW SCRIPT FOR STUDENTS

Introduction
[Note that this is important on the record]

"Hello, thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. My name is **JOHNREY LIMPAG PIAD**, and I am a PhD in English Language Teaching candidate researching the **challenges Vietnamese Gen Z students like yourself hurdle or face in learning English.** Your insights are invaluable and will help us understand how to support students in their language learning journeys better."

"The purpose of today's interview is to gather detailed information about your personal experiences with learning English, including any challenges you've encountered and strategies you've found helpful or not."

"Please remember that your responses will be kept confidential and used solely for research purposes. Feel free to speak openly; your identity will not be connected to any of the information you provide."

"Before we start, can you confirm that you have read the consent form, understand the information provided, and agree to participate?"

Main Interview

1. Please share a little about your background and your journey with the English language so far.

   Probing: *What were your initial thoughts when you started learning English? How have those thoughts evolved?*

   [Note: Simultaneously, while you are listening to the interviewee, observe and describe their facial expressions, mannerisms, and other inputs that the recorder cannot capture. Write them in your interviewer's field notes.]

2. Tell me about your current experience with learning English at university."

   Probing: *What specific instances stand out as particularly challenging or rewarding?*

3. How do you think cultural or educational factors in Vietnam affect your learning of English?"

   Probing: *Can you give examples of how these factors have directly impacted your language learning?*

4. What digital tools do you use in learning English, and how do they help you?

   Probing: *Have you encountered any tools that were not helpful? What made them ineffective?*

5. Could you describe times when you've had to use your English skills outside the classroom?

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Probing: *How did those experiences go? What would have made them better?*

6. What changes or support do you think would better help you and others learn English?

    Probing: *Are there teaching methods or resources you've seen in other contexts that you wish were used in your classes?*

7. Is there anything else you'd like to add that we haven't discussed?

    Probing: *What advice would you offer to educators based on your experiences?*

"Thank you so much for your insights today. Your input is invaluable and will help shape effective English language teaching strategies. Please feel free to reach out if you have more to share. I will send you a summary of our discussion to review. Let me know if you think something needs to be adjusted or added."

Notes:

If your interviewee provides short answers, encourage them to provide more information by engaging them with prompts such as:

> "What do you mean by…"
> "Can you explain more about…"
> "Why do you think …"
> "Can you give me an example of…"

You need to listen to the interviewee's response and build from there.

Do not lead the interviewees to an answer. If they cannot think of an answer, do not suggest an answer. Write it in your notes as an observation instead. You may rephrase the question, create a more straightforward probing question on the spot, or proceed to the next question.

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INTERVIEW SCRIPT FOR ENGLISH TEACHERS

Introduction

[Note that this is important on the record]

"Hello, thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. My name is **JOHNREY LIMPAG PIAD**, and I am a PhD in English Language Teaching candidate researching the **challenges Vietnamese Gen Z students like yourself hurdle or face in learning English.** Your insights are invaluable and will help us understand how to support students in their language learning journeys better."

"The purpose of today's interview is to gather your insights on the challenges students face, the impact of cultural and educational factors on learning, and the role of digital tools in enhancing or hindering the process. Additionally, we aim to discuss strategies that could help students develop their English proficiency for real-life use."

"Please know that your responses will be kept confidential and used solely for research purposes. Feel free to speak openly; your identity will not be connected to any of the information you provide."

"Before we start, can you confirm that you have read the consent form, understand the information provided, and agree to participate?"

Main Interview

1. **Background and Experience**
   - Can you share your background in teaching English and your experience working with Gen Z university students in Vietnam?
   - **Probing**: What have you observed about their attitude and approach to learning English over time?
2. **Challenges Faced or Hurdled by Students**
   - From your perspective, what are the main challenges Vietnamese Gen Z students face in learning English?
   - **Probing**: Are there specific language skills (e.g., speaking, listening, reading, writing) where they struggle more? Why do you think that is?
3. **Cultural and Educational Factors**
   - How do you think cultural and educational factors in Vietnam influence students' English learning process?
   - **Probing**: Can you share examples of how traditional educational practices or cultural norms have shaped their approach to learning?
4. **Digital Tools and Platforms**
   - What digital tools, social media platforms, or online resources do your students typically use for learning English?
   - **Probing**: Have you observed students facing challenges with these tools? If so, what made them ineffective or less useful?
5. **Application of English Skills**
   - Based on your observations, how proficient are students at using English in real-life situations, such as conversations or professional settings?
   - **Probing**: Are there specific scenarios where they perform better or worse? What factors might contribute to these outcomes?

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6. **Teacher's Perspective on Improvements**
   - What strategies or changes do you think could help students overcome their difficulties in learning English?
   - **Probing**: Are there teaching methods, tools, or resources you've found particularly effective in addressing their challenges?
7. **Recommendations for Educators and Institutions**
   - What advice would you give to educators or educational institutions in Vietnam to better support Gen Z students in learning English?
   - **Probing**: Are there specific policy changes or institutional support systems that you think would make a significant difference?
8. **Additional Insights**
   - Is there anything else you would like to add that we haven't discussed?
   - **Probing**: Are there any notable success stories or examples of effective teaching practices you'd like to share?

Closing

"Thank you so much for sharing your insights and experiences today. Your input is incredibly valuable and will help shape strategies to better support students in their English language learning journey. If you think of anything else you'd like to share, please feel free to reach out. I will send you a summary of our discussion to review—please let me know if there are any adjustments or additions you'd like to make."

Additional Notes for the Interviewer

- If the interviewee provides brief responses, encourage elaboration using prompts like:
  - "What do you mean by…?"
  - "Can you explain more about…?"
  - "Why do you think…?"
  - "Can you give me an example of…?"
- Document observations on non-verbal cues, classroom anecdotes, and any significant insights in your field notes.
- Avoid leading questions; adapt your approach based on their responses to encourage organic sharing of ideas and experiences.

Appendix 4: Consent Form (*Students and Teachers*)

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INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH STUDY PARTICIPATION

Study Title: Understanding English Language Acquisition Hurdles Among Vietnamese Gen Z Students in Higher Education
Researcher: Johnrey Limpag Piad, PhD in English Language Teaching
Supervisor: Dr. Salvatore Fava
Institution: Selinus University, Italy: Via Roma, 200 - 97100 - Ragusa - Tel. +39 0932 518985
www.uniselinus.education / info@selinusuniversity.it
Contact: jlpiad28@gmail.com (0768968258)

Purpose of the Study:
This research aims to explore the challenges faced by **Generation Z university students in Vietnam** when acquiring **English as a foreign language**. The study seeks to understand your experiences and challenges to improve English language teaching methodologies.

What Will Happen:
If you agree to participate, you will be asked to take part in an interview lasting approximately **60 minutes**. During the interview, you will be asked questions about your experiences learning English, including any challenges you have faced and strategies you have found helpful or ineffective.

Voluntary Participation:
Your participation in this study is entirely **voluntary**. You may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Confidentiality:
Your responses will be **confidential**. The data collected will only be reported in an aggregated format (by reporting only combined results and never reporting individual ones). Audio recordings and transcripts will be securely stored and only accessible to the research team. Identifiable information, such as your name, will be replaced with a pseudonym in any report, publication, or presentation resulting from this study.

Risks and Benefits:
There are no known risks associated with this study. However, if you feel uncomfortable during the interview, you may withdraw at any time. Participating may also contribute to improvements in English language education for future students.

Incentives:
Participants will receive an incentive, such as a small gift, voucher, etc., as a token of appreciation for their time and involvement in the study.

Right to Ask Questions:
You have the right to ask questions about this study at any time. To do so, you can contact the researcher jlpiad28@gmail.com or my mobile phone number, **0768968258**.

Consent to Participate:
By signing this form, I confirm that I have read and understand the information provided above. I have been informed about the study's purpose, the interview process, my rights as a participant, and the confidentiality of the data collected. I hereby agree to participate in this study.

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I understand that my participation is **voluntary** and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time without any consequences.

Participant's Name (Printed): _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher's Signature (if required): _____

Date: _____

Copy of Form:
A copy of this signed consent form will be provided to you for your records.

Student Number 1

I understand that my participation is **voluntary** and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time without any consequences.

Participant's Name (Printed): _____

Participant's Signature: Nguyen _____

Date: 26 /03/ 2025

Researcher's Signature (if required): _____

Date: 26/02/2025

Copy of Form:
A copy of this signed consent form will be provided to you for your records.

Student Number

Student Number 3

I understand that my participation is **voluntary** and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time without any consequences.

Participant's Name (Printed): _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: 1/3/2025

Researcher's Signature (if required): _____

Date: 1/3/2025

Copy of Form:
A copy of this signed consent form will be provided to you for your records.

Student Number 4

I understand that my participation is **voluntary** and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time without any consequences.

Participant's Name (Printed): _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: 3/3/2025

Researcher's Signature (if required): _____

Date: 3/3/2025

Copy of Form:
A copy of this signed consent form will be _____ r records.

Student Number 5

I understand that my participation is **voluntary** and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time without any consequences.

Participant's Name (Printed): _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _3 / 3 / 2025_

Researcher's Signature (if required): _____

Date: _3/3/2025_

Copy of Form:
A copy of this signed consent form will be provided to you for your records.

Student Number 6

I understand that my participation is **voluntary** and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time without any consequences.

Participant's Name (Printed): _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: 5 / 3 / 2025

Researcher's Signature (if required): _____

Date: 5/3/2025

Copy of Form:
A copy of this signed consent form will be provided to you for your records.

Student Number 7

I understand that my participation is **voluntary** and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time without any consequences.

Participant's Name (Printed): _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: 05 /03 / 2025

Researcher's Signature (if required): _____

Date: 05/03/2025

Copy of Form:
A copy of this signed consent form will be provided to you for your records.

Teacher Number 1

I understand that my participation is **voluntary** and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time without any consequences.

Participant's Name (Printed): _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _Feb. 28th, 2025_

Researcher's Signature (if required): _____

Date: _February 28, 2025_

Copy of Form:
A copy of this signed consent form will be provided to you for your records.

Teacher Number 2

I understand that my participation is **voluntary** and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time without any consequences.

Participant's Name (Printed): _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _03/03/2025_

Researcher's Signature (if required): _____

Date: _07/03/2025_

Copy of Form:
A copy of this signed consent form will be provided to you for your records.

Teacher Number 3

I understand that my participation is **voluntary** and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time without any consequences.

Participant's Name (Printed): _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____March 06, 2025_____

Researcher's Signature (if required): _____

Date: _____March 06, 2025_____

Copy of Form:
A copy of this signed consent form will be provided to you for your records.

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