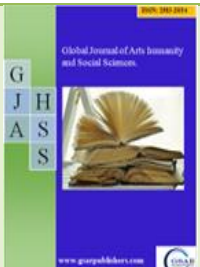
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## A Mixed-Methods Study on Students' Perceptions of English as a Global Language in Vietnamese Context

By

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### Abstract

*This mixed-methods study investigates Vietnamese students' perceptions of English as a global language (EGL). With English occupying a pivotal role in global communication, commerce, and education, understanding its perceived value among non-native speakers is crucial. This study explores how Vietnamese high school and university students conceptualize English in terms of its global functions and personal relevance. The research integrates qualitative data from semi-structured interviews and quantitative data from surveys. The qualitative strand identifies themes regarding students' motivations, aspirations, and cultural perspectives related to EGL. The quantitative component statistically analyzes responses concerning students' attitudes, proficiency levels, and usage of English in various contexts. Findings indicate that most participants view English as essential for global mobility and career development. However, cultural identity and local language pride also influence these perceptions. The study underscores the interplay between global trends and local contexts in shaping language attitudes. Implications are offered for curriculum development, policy-making, and English language pedagogy in Vietnam. This research contributes to the broader discourse on English globalization by highlighting localized perspectives and motivations in a rapidly globalizing Southeast Asian nation.*

**Keywords:** English as a Global Language, student perception, Vietnamese context, language attitudes

### Introduction

The ascendancy of English as a global language is a phenomenon intricately tied to historical, political, economic, and technological developments. It functions as the primary lingua franca in a multitude of spheres including international diplomacy, scientific publication, global business, digital media, and higher education (Crystal, 2003; Jenkins, 2015). Its dominance is not merely quantitative but also symbolic, representing access to global mobility, modernity, and socio-economic advancement. In Southeast Asian nations like Vietnam, English has transitioned from a foreign language to a strategic asset. It is embedded in national educational reforms and is often framed as a critical tool for achieving socio-economic development and global integration (Nguyen, 2011; Hoang, 2020).

In the Vietnamese context, English language learning is introduced at early educational levels and reinforced through national curricula, extracurricular courses, and standardized testing (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021). The government's commitment to fostering English proficiency reflects a broader aspiration to participate more fully in the global economy and international academic community. However, language policy and educational implementation do not always align with learners' lived experiences. Students' perceptions of English as a global language (EGL) are shaped by a range of socio-cultural factors including identity negotiation, personal aspirations, economic pressures, and media influence (Phan, 2021; Norton, 2013).

While there is a growing body of research on English language motivation (Dörnyei, 2009), linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 2009), and World Englishes (Kachru, 1992), there remains a



critical gap in understanding how learners in specific national and cultural contexts internalize and respond to the global status of English. Particularly in Vietnam, where the language is both embraced and contested, a nuanced understanding of learners' perspectives is essential for informing responsive and culturally sensitive language education policies.

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach to examine Vietnamese students' perceptions of EGL. Through the integration of qualitative and quantitative data, this research provides a comprehensive account of how young Vietnamese navigate the global and local dimensions of English. In doing so, it contributes to broader discussions on language globalization, learner identity, and context-sensitive language pedagogy.

## Research Questions

1. How do Vietnamese students perceive the role of English as a global language in relation to their personal and cultural identity?
2. What are the general attitudes of Vietnamese students toward English as a global language, as measured through quantitative survey data?

## Literature Review

### *Theoretical Framework: English as a Global Language (EGL)*

The theoretical basis for understanding EGL centers on its historical spread and its current functionality across diverse linguistic and socio-political contexts. Crystal (2003) posits that a language achieves global status not only through the number of its speakers but also through the recognition of its utilitarian value across international domains. English, by this measure, has become deeply embedded in global governance, commerce, education, science, and popular culture. Jenkins (2015) further explains that this global status is reinforced by digital communication and transnational mobility, which intensify the demand for a common linguistic medium.

Kachru's (1985) Three Circles Model remains influential in categorizing the different functions of English worldwide: the Inner Circle (e.g., the United States, the United Kingdom), the Outer Circle (e.g., India, Nigeria), and the Expanding Circle (e.g., Vietnam, Japan), where English functions as a foreign language and a tool for accessing global networks. In Expanding Circle countries, English is often perceived as a marker of development, modernity, and cosmopolitanism (Galloway & Rose, 2015). This model provides a framework for analyzing how Vietnamese learners conceptualize English within their national and global aspirations.

### *Motivation and Language Learning*

Motivation is a key variable in second language acquisition (SLA), and Dörnyei's (2009) L2 Motivational Self System offers a nuanced understanding of its components. The model comprises three dimensions: the Ideal L2 Self (reflecting learners' aspirations), the Ought-to L2 Self (representing perceived obligations), and the Learning Experience. Vietnamese learners often perceive English as vital to securing scholarships, studying

abroad, and improving job prospects, hence displaying strong instrumental motivation (Nguyen, 2013; Taguchi et al., 2009). Integrative motivation is also present, as many learners express a desire to connect with global cultures through media and interpersonal communication.

Recent studies by Lamb (2017) and Papi et al. (2019) suggest that motivation among EFL learners is increasingly dynamic and shaped by evolving digital, social, and educational environments. In Vietnam, technological access and online exposure to English-language content significantly impact learners' motivational orientations, promoting greater autonomy and goal-setting behaviors (Nguyen & Habók, 2021).

### *Identity and English Learning*

Language learning is inherently tied to processes of identity construction. Norton (2013) conceptualizes language investment as a framework through which learners negotiate access to symbolic and material resources. This investment is mediated by learners' perceptions of whether the target language will enhance their social mobility and cultural capital. In the Vietnamese context, English is often viewed as a means of upward mobility, but it can also engender tensions regarding cultural displacement (Phan, 2021).

Le (2011) observed that some students experience identity conflicts when their improved English proficiency distances them from their Vietnamese linguistic and cultural heritage. This resonates with the findings of Higgins (2011), who highlighted the complexities of hybrid identities in multilingual societies. English learners in Vietnam often navigate dual identities: one grounded in local traditions and another aligned with global cultural practices. These hybrid identities reveal the need for language pedagogies that respect local cultural affiliations while promoting intercultural competence.

### *World Englishes and Localization*

The World Englishes paradigm, as articulated by Kachru (1992), posits that English has been indigenized across diverse contexts, leading to the development of localized varieties that reflect local norms and communicative needs. Jenkins (2015) and Seidlhofer (2011) argue for the legitimacy of these varieties, especially in Expanding Circle contexts where English is used primarily for international rather than native-speaker interaction.

Vietnamese English, or "Vinglish," exhibits phonological, syntactic, and lexical features shaped by L1 transfer and local socio-cultural practices (Nguyen & Hamid, 2018). Bui and Nguyen (2018) highlight that Vietnamese students are increasingly exposed to both native-speaker models and localized varieties, often switching between them depending on context. This strategic code-switching reflects pragmatic language use and the rise of English as a flexible, adaptable resource rather than a rigid system tied to native norms.

### *Empirical Studies in Vietnamese Context*

Empirical research specific to Vietnam provides important insights into learners' evolving attitudes toward EGL. Nguyen and Balakrishnan (2020) conducted a mixed-methods study showing

that Vietnamese students generally perceive English as instrumental to achieving personal and national development goals. However, they also report ambivalence, particularly concerning the perceived marginalization of Vietnamese language and culture.

Phan (2021) found that English proficiency is often associated with social prestige, yet learners express discomfort with its perceived dominance and the pressure to adopt Western communicative styles. Similarly, Le and Do (2022) explored how students in urban centers articulate both pride in their bilingual competence and anxiety over losing traditional cultural values.

Tran and Duong (2022) employed a mixed-methods design to explore learner identity and EGL perceptions among university students. They found that while learners generally embraced English for career and educational advancement, they simultaneously resisted notions of Western cultural superiority. Instead, students advocated for a balanced identity that integrates global language skills with a strong Vietnamese cultural core. These findings underscore the importance of context-sensitive, identity-aware English pedagogy that empowers learners to engage with global discourses while affirming their local heritage.

## Research Methodology

This study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, aligning with Creswell and Plano Clark's (2018) model that advocates for the simultaneous but separate collection and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data to provide a more comprehensive perspective. The rationale for adopting this design lies in the complementary strengths of both methods, enabling triangulation and validation of findings from different lenses. Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 15 students (eight university-level and seven high school students) from three major regions in Vietnam: the North, Central, and South. Purposeful sampling was used to ensure diversity in gender, academic background, and English proficiency. The interviews explored learners' motivations, emotional responses, identity negotiation, and experiences in using English across different contexts. Each interview lasted between 30 to 45 minutes and was conducted in either Vietnamese or English, depending on participant comfort, and later transcribed and translated for thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines.

Quantitative data were obtained through an online survey administered to 120 participants from four Vietnamese universities and secondary schools. The survey instrument included Likert-scale items and demographic questions, adapted from validated scales in prior EGL research (e.g., Taguchi et al., 2009; Papi et al., 2019). Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) and inferential analysis (ANOVA and correlation tests) were conducted using SPSS version 26 to identify trends and relationships in students' attitudes and self-reported English usage. Ethical protocols were strictly followed: participants provided informed consent, data confidentiality was maintained, and the study received institutional ethical approval.

## Findings and Discussion

### Findings and Discussion for Research Question 1

Thematic analysis of interview data with Vietnamese high school and university students revealed three salient themes: (1) English as a gateway to opportunities; (2) English and identity negotiation; and (3) the tension between global integration and cultural preservation. Participants overwhelmingly viewed English as an indispensable tool for academic success, international travel, and professional advancement. Many students referred to English as a "passport" to global citizenship and access to prestigious educational institutions abroad. A university participant remarked, "Without English, I feel like I can't access the world," encapsulating the aspirational role English plays in shaping students' academic and career trajectories. This perception aligns with earlier studies emphasizing the instrumental value of English in globalizing economies (Lamb, 2017; Nguyen & Balakrishnan, 2020).

However, the pursuit of English proficiency was also accompanied by identity-related concerns. Several students expressed feelings of cultural alienation, noting that the dominance of English in their academic and digital lives often led to diminished use of Vietnamese in formal and informal settings. One high school student shared, "I love English, but sometimes I feel I'm forgetting how to speak proper Vietnamese." This reflects what Norton (2013) describes as identity negotiation, where learners strive to balance global linguistic aspirations with local cultural affiliations. Many participants acknowledged the emergence of a hybrid identity—simultaneously embracing English as a tool of global engagement and maintaining pride in Vietnamese heritage. This finding supports Tran and Duong's (2022) conclusion that Vietnamese learners often experience a dynamic interplay between local and global identities in the process of English acquisition.

These insights reveal that English learning in Vietnam extends beyond functional language use to involve deeper socio-cultural and emotional dimensions. The findings suggest the need for pedagogical approaches that validate students' cultural backgrounds while fostering critical engagement with global English norms (Le & Do, 2022; Higgins, 2011).

### Findings and Discussion for Research Question 2

To explore the general attitudes of Vietnamese students toward English as a global language, quantitative data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 120 high school and university students. The findings were categorized into two domains: student motivation and learning outcomes.

**Table 1: Student Motivation Toward English**

Survey Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
English improves my future job prospects	4.61	0.52
English helps me study abroad	4.48	0.64

English increases my social status	4.02	0.78
English connects me with global cultures	4.35	0.59

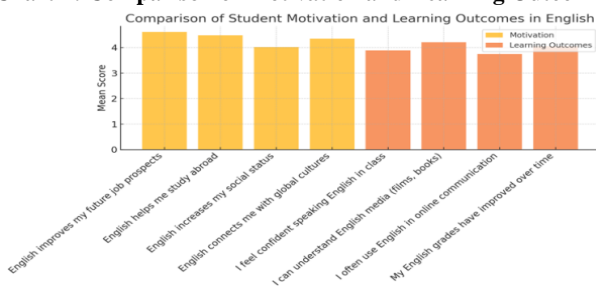
The data indicate strong instrumental and integrative motivation among Vietnamese students. The highest mean score was for future job prospects ( $M = 4.61$ ), reflecting widespread recognition of English as a gateway to professional advancement. Studying abroad ( $M = 4.48$ ) and cultural connection ( $M = 4.35$ ) also scored highly, aligning with global trends in English as a vehicle for international mobility and intercultural communication (Dörnyei, 2009; Lamb, 2017). The slightly lower score for social status ( $M = 4.02$ ) and its relatively higher standard deviation ( $SD = 0.78$ ) suggest mixed perceptions on the symbolic prestige of English, possibly influenced by regional and socio-economic diversity among participants.

**Table 2: Self-Perceived Learning Outcomes in English**

Survey Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
I feel confident speaking English in class	3.89	0.68
I can understand English media (films, books)	4.21	0.61
I often use English in online communication	3.75	0.81
My English grades have improved over time	4.05	0.73

While the mean scores show generally positive learning outcomes, confidence in speaking English ( $M = 3.89$ ) and online usage ( $M = 3.75$ ) lag behind receptive skills such as media comprehension ( $M = 4.21$ ). This suggests a gap between input and output proficiency, possibly due to limited authentic communication practice in classroom settings or a focus on test-based curricula. These findings resonate with Nguyen and Habók (2021), who emphasize the need for more communicative teaching practices in Vietnamese English classrooms. Notably, the relatively high standard deviations (e.g.,  $SD = 0.81$  for online communication) suggest variability in access to English-speaking environments and digital literacy.

**Chart 1: Comparison of Motivation and Learning Outcomes**



The chart provides a visual comparison between the mean scores of student motivation and self-perceived learning outcomes, revealing a consistent pattern: motivation levels among Vietnamese students toward English are notably higher than their reported learning outcomes, particularly in productive skills such as speaking and interactive language use. This discrepancy suggests a motivational-learning gap, where strong enthusiasm and aspirational goals do not always translate into equivalent linguistic competence. This gap may stem from a number of systemic and pedagogical factors. For instance, the Vietnamese English language curriculum has historically prioritized grammar and reading comprehension, often neglecting communicative competence and spoken fluency (Nguyen & Hamid, 2018).

Moreover, the prevalence of exam-oriented teaching methods may lead students to focus on passive learning strategies, limiting opportunities to apply English in authentic, real-world contexts (Nguyen & Habók, 2021). Despite increased exposure to English through digital media and technology-enhanced learning environments, there appears to be insufficient scaffolding and institutional support to transform this exposure into communicative ability (Tran & Duong, 2022). This is especially true for students in rural or under-resourced areas, where access to English-speaking environments and qualified instructors may be limited.

To address this gap, educational stakeholders should consider implementing communicative language teaching (CLT) strategies, integrating technology-enhanced language learning (TELL), and fostering learner autonomy through task-based and experiential learning approaches (Richards, 2015). Personalized learning plans, peer collaboration, and formative feedback loops could also enhance student engagement and provide pathways to bridge motivation with measurable outcomes. Ultimately, a shift toward a learner-centered, context-sensitive pedagogy is essential to capitalize on students' strong motivational foundations and elevate their overall English language proficiency.

## Conclusion

This study offers a comprehensive insight into how Vietnamese students perceive English as a global language, revealing a complex interplay between strong motivation, identity negotiation, and educational outcomes. While students widely recognize English as essential for accessing global opportunities and advancing socio-economic status, their learning experiences, particularly in developing communicative competence, remain inconsistent. The findings suggest a need for pedagogical reforms that move beyond exam-focused instruction to embrace communicative, culturally responsive, and technology-enhanced approaches. These reforms should aim to bridge the gap between learners' aspirations and their actual language use, especially in speaking and interactive contexts. Moreover, educational policies should be tailored to acknowledge the cultural identities of learners and provide equitable access to quality English education across diverse regions. Ultimately, by centering students' voices and local realities, Vietnam can cultivate a more inclusive and globally connected English language education system.



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