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EÖTVÖS LORÁND TUDOMÁNYEGYETEM

Bölcsészettudományi Kar

DIPLOMAMUNKA

Vietnámi tinédzser nyelvtanulók angol nyelvtanuláshoz való

hozzállásának fejlesztése

Improving teenage Vietnamese learners' attitudes towards learning

English

Témavezető:

Christopher Ryan

Lektor

Készítette:

Le Hai Duong

Angol nyelvoktató

mesterképzési szak

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Abstract

This study examines the effectiveness of specific teaching strategies in boosting motivation and alleviating anxiety among teenage Vietnamese learners of English. Employing a qualitative approach, the research involved five high school students from my online classes. The findings indicate that while strategies integrating cultural products and interactive activities like role-playing markedly increased student engagement, the ones relying primarily on one-way communication, such as giving students reassurance on the inevitability of making mistakes, were found less enjoyable. Furthermore, strategies designed to reduce language anxiety, including initiating supportive discussions and teaching communicative tactics, were highly effective in both fostering a safe and comfortable classroom atmosphere and improving the learners' foreign language competence. In contrast, strategies that were unfamiliar to the students, misaligned with their needs, or demanded immediate language production tended to heighten learners' anxiety and be perceived as less useful. The findings suggest that teachers should not only employ but also continuously adapt strategies to match students' needs, balancing strategies that enhance enjoyment and provide "safety" while ensuring their usefulness.

Keywords: motivation, foreign language anxiety, high school students, ELT, Vietnam, teaching strategies

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In the era of globalisation, Vietnam's education has prioritised and laid considerable emphasis on English learning. It has been nearly forty years since English was first taught as the main foreign language at schools in the national education system. Nevertheless, the proficiency levels among Vietnamese learners of English remain notably low and inconsistent (Trinh & Mai, 2018). This discrepancy is arguably attributed to the pervasive issue of low motivation to learn and the anxiety they experience in English classes among these learners (Ngo et al., 2015). These two factors, according to Krashen (1981) in the Affective Filter Hypothesis, are among the pivotal elements influencing second language acquisition. Therefore, improving the attitudes of teenage Vietnamese learners towards learning English is a crucial endeavour with far-reaching implications for their language acquisition. By addressing the motivation and anxiety dimensions in the context of teenage Vietnamese English learners, this research aims to contribute valuable insights into strategies for improving learners' attitudes towards learning English. The findings can inform teaching strategies, fostering an environment that nurtures positive attitudes and, consequently, more effective language learning experiences for this demographic.

I have worked with a variety of student groups over my six years as an English as a foreign language instructor in Vietnam, which has included both private tutoring settings and educational institutions. Throughout my teaching experience, I have observed distinct patterns in learning attitudes among these groups. On the one hand, some students consistently exhibit enthusiasm and a proactive approach to acquiring new knowledge. They demonstrate a willingness to engage in the learning process and fully complete assigned tasks. On the other hand, there exists a substantial number of learners who display a more reserved attitude towards learning, showing a lower level of self-confidence and failing to pinpoint their goals in learning English.

Presently, I am conducting online classes for two groups of students, comprising tenth and eleventh graders, totalling five individuals. Over the course of several years, while their academic performances have witnessed improvement subsequent to their enrolment in my courses, a nuanced observation reveals intermittent instances of reluctance to participate in in-class activities. Additionally, some of them have shown that they are fearful of making mistakes and have a tendency to fall short of assignment completion on time. This situation has put me in a seriously worrying situation where I fear that my students would find the English lessons I deliver dull and gradually lose interest in the English language.

Interestingly, my interest in this topic is not only piqued by the problems emerging in my classes but also intimately tied to my previous personal experience as a language learner. Reflecting on my past experiences, my journey in learning English can be described as a sine wave. In primary school, the enthusiasm to participate in English classes was fuelled by the simplicity of the target knowledge, achievable tasks, and engaging classroom dynamics, fostering a robust degree of motivation and confidence. However, when I entered lower secondary school, my earlier enthusiasm for this subject started to fade. Grammar and vocabulary drills and the lack of a comfortable and enjoyable atmosphere in the classroom destroyed much of my interest in English both as a subject and as a language. I started to get more prone to anxiety during English lessons and found raising my voice and making mistakes the most humiliating experience ever. From then on, I was primarily driven by exam-oriented motivations. During my high school years, I felt left out at times when my classmates were having discussions about diverse topics of US-UK movie series, music, or celebrities. My lack of familiarity with these topics, consequently, impeded meaningful participation in such dialogues. Moreover, against the backdrop of globalisation, I was more aware of the crucial value of English proficiency, knowing that it could provide me with golden opportunities to open up a whole new world in my academic and career pursuits. These occurrences were only two among a wide array of factors that, I would say, acted as catalysts for the changes in my own attitude towards English.

My personal experiences, coupled with the challenges I encountered while teaching, have prompted a pivotal question: How can I enhance my learners' attitudes towards English learning, particularly focusing on boosting their motivation and lowering their anxiety in English classes? In order to investigate this, I will start by going through the literature on language motivations, anxiety, and the Vietnamese educational situation. I will then provide more detailed profiles of my students. On that foundation, I am going to propose possible solutions, try them out with my learners, and evaluate what strategies appear to be effective in improving their attitudes towards learning this language.

To reach this goal, I intend to answer the following questions:

- What types of activities or strategies do my students enjoy the most and least in the classroom?
- What types of activities or strategies do they consider the most and least useful?
- What types of activities or strategies alleviate or heighten their anxiety?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this section of my thesis, I aim to explore decisive elements that shape language learners' attitudes, with a particular focus on motivation and anxiety. The literature review is designed to unpack the fundamental aspects of these affective dimensions within a broad spectrum and subsequently offer an in-depth analysis of these concepts within the Vietnamese English learning and teaching setting.

2.1 Motivation in Language Learning

2.1.1 Definitions and Types of Motivation

Definitions of Motivation

As stated in McDonough's (2007) article, in general, motivation is what drives humans' actions. From an educational perspective, especially in the context of language, it is regarded as the desire to teach, to learn, and to learn how to teach it. On the foundation of this straightforward concept, he introduced four key elements that are connected to motivation, which comprise the rationale behind students' desire to learn, the intensity of this desire, students' personal traits, and the nature of the task coupled with learners' acknowledgement of the task's requirement. In addition, he also mentioned the dynamic and complicated nature of motivation and emphasised its transformation over time within each individual.

Through the lens of socio-psychology, Gardner (1983) and Harmer (1991) situated motivation at the nexus of student effort, desire, and positive learning attitudes, emphasising the reciprocal relationship between learners' internal drives and their behavioural manifestations. This suggested that motivation is a dynamic state, both fuelling and fuelled by the learner's active pursuit of language proficiency. Gardner's (1983) notion underscored an evaluative stance that motivation is not static but is a responsive and evolving construct, shaped by the learner's experiences and interactions within the language learning environment, which concurred with the statement made by Dörnyei and Otto (1998) and McDonough (2007).

Viewing from the standpoint of an English learner, I strongly support these perceptions. Indeed, a sharp fluctuation in the intensity of motivation has been witnessed over the years. In hindsight, on the learning path, I have encountered countless variables that had a hand in my own motivation changes, which might consist of how English was taught, how frequently I was exposed to the language, or how I would want to use it. Therefore, this

experience has further solidified my own beliefs in the rationality of the previous researchers' findings.

Types of Motivation

Scholars have witnessed numerous approaches towards motivation categorisation. However, I am under the impression that there exists a common ground among them regarding this matter. A majority of researchers identified two primary dimensions encompassing *intrinsic/extrinsic* motivation and *integrative/instrumental* motivation.

Gardner and Lambert's pioneering work (1959) laid the foundation for the understanding of *integrative* and *instrumental* motivations within the realm of language acquisition. *Integrative* motivation embodies the learner's aspiration for personal growth and cultural enrichment, a reflection of the desire to assimilate into the language community and appreciate its cultural nuances. *Instrumental* motivation, in contrast, is driven by pragmatic objectives, such as achieving immediate or long-term goals that often have a utilitarian value, like career advancement or educational requirements.

In the same vein, Saville-Troike (2006) further elaborated on *integrative* motivation as a learner's aspiration to join and be recognised by the language-speaking community. This motivation sprang from a keen interest in social integration and the intent to participate in communal activities. *Instrumental* motivation, on the other hand, was described as being driven by more utilitarian goals, such as career enhancement, prestige, or academic achievement, which may not involve affective factors.

The self-determination theory proposed by Deci and Ryan (1985) provided a broader framework, comprising *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* motivations. The former emerges from within the individual, driven by an inherent interest in and enjoyment of the task or the language itself, devoid of external rewards. On the contrary, the latter is oriented toward specific objectives, driven by the pursuit of external incentives or the avoidance of adverse consequences. Deci and Ryan also illustrated subtypes of extrinsic motivation – external regulation, introjected regulation, and identified regulation – which range from compliance with external demands to alignment with personal values, with each subtype representing varying degrees of self-determination.

Offering a different viewpoint, Harmer (1991) employed the term “goal” to classify the motivation in language learning. He argued that the essence of motivation in language learning pivots on the question of why an individual chooses to learn a language. The goals, whether to engage with a language community, secure employment, fulfil academic requirements, or travel, reflect the diversity of motivational drivers. The goals are

categorised into two different types which include: *short-term* and *long-term* goals. *Short-term* goals often revolve around immediate success, such as passing an examination, while *long-term* goals are more aspirational, such as career progression or achieving fluency to enhance social interaction within a language community.

2.1.2 Importance of Motivation in Language Learning

Regardless of how differently the term *motivation* has been defined and categorised by scholars, it would be hard to deny its profound significance in the realm of learning a foreign language. Motivation is not merely an influential factor but a prerequisite in second language acquisition and a driving force behind learner success (Williams & Burden, 1997). It strikes the initial spark to embark on language learning and sustains the often arduous journey that follows. Indeed, the role of motivation is so central that the importance of other factors in second language acquisition, such as cognitive abilities and educational resources, is contingent upon its presence (Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998).

The pursuit of proficiency in EFL is heavily influenced by the construct of motivation, which is widely recognised as a critical determinant of student success. Spolsky (1990, as cited in Nguyen, 2019) was convinced that motivation significantly impacts the pace and efficiency of language learning, with motivated students achieving more rapidly and displaying greater attentiveness and discipline. Notably, various other researchers including Sahril and Weda (2018), Bradford (2007), and Kumari et al. (2020) also arrived at similar conclusions regarding motivation's pivotal role in shaping learners' educational outcomes.

2.1.3 Factors Influencing Motivation

Researchers have discovered multitudinous factors that potentially affect students' motivation levels, ranging from personal attitudes (Oxford & Shearin, 1994; Ersöz, 2004) and physical classroom environments (Haynes, 1996) to educational and social contexts (Rahman et al., 2017; Hamer, 1991). These previous studies have shown the complexity of motivation as a construct, influenced by both intrinsic personal characteristics and extrinsic contextual factors. For the purposes of this study, however, the focus will be narrowed to specific educational aspects that teachers can directly influence and modify. These factors include the learning environment, the role of the foreign language teacher, the pedagogical materials employed, and the influence of peer groups, which play a crucial role in shaping learners' attitudes and engagement in language learning.

Educational Context (The foreign language teacher and English as a foreign language teaching materials)

Harmer (1991) seemed to regard educators as the major determinant when he stated three elements that have effects on students' motivation. The first element is connected with the instructional approach employed by the teacher. If students find the teaching techniques monotonous, they may well lose interest and motivation. In addition, the role of teachers is of paramount importance; while they can significantly boost motivation, they also potentially cause its decline. The final element involves the level of challenge presented in the learning tasks. The author mentioned that tasks that are either too demanding or not challenging enough can result in a lack of motivation, with both extremes having the potential to demotivate students.

In agreement with prior researchers, Luu (2012) delineated that teachers and their pedagogical methods are the chief factors that affect students' learning motivation. Appropriate guidance or advice to students and fully developed learning strategies support learning. Conversely, students are likely to become demotivated if they perceive their teachers' methods as dull, whereas engaging teaching techniques can enhance their motivation, enabling more effective study habits. Besides, teachers' feedback influences students' learning motivation when they realise that their instructor is following their individual development.

Wilkins (1974) further investigated the influence of the stock of resources which teachers are able to exploit. He believed that developing materials in a second or foreign language tailored to learners' needs might spark their intrinsic interest in developing communicative skills, thereby fostering a desire for successful achievement. Tomlinson's (2011) findings were in line with this, stating that materials should take learners' different affective attitudes into account, and suggesting that positive feelings towards the target language, teachers, and the learning materials would enhance the learning situation. Alongside this recognition of the importance of affective factors and the use of authentic texts in learning, Guariento (2001) also argued that there has been a growing awareness of the simplicity of tasks, which helped maintain or increase learners' motivation but does not sacrifice authenticity.

Social Context (Learners' Peer Groups)

The effectiveness of peer-based language learning support has been established across various studies, indicating that learners can indeed thrive in environments where formality is reduced, and shared experiences are valued. Luu (2012) identified peers as a

significant force, second only to teachers, in shaping learners' attitudes and driving their language acquisition efforts. The power of peers has been echoed in preceding research, where the reciprocal nature of peer support, born from a sense of equality, contrasted with the top-down support from teachers (Wentzel, 1994). Concurring with this idea, Olusiji (2016) emphasised the considerable role classmates play in motivating each other, reinforcing the perception that learners often benefit from less formal and more relatable interactions with their peers compared to teacher-led instruction. The concept of peer-assisted learning was also put forward by other scholars such as Topping and Ehly (2001). Interestingly, Murphey (1998) added that peers not only provide mutual instructional support but also can act as role models.

2.1.4 Strategies to Enhance Motivation

“Ten Commandments for Motivating Language Learners” by Dörnyei and Csizér (1998)

Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) explored the driving factors behind language learning motivation through a survey of 200 English as a Foreign Language teachers in Hungary. The study, published in *Language Teaching Research*, asked educators to evaluate the effectiveness of 51 motivational strategies. From their findings, Dörnyei and Csizér formulated the “Ten Commandments for Motivating Language Learners”, encapsulating the most effective methods as reported by the teachers. These commandments serve as a collection of best practices aimed at creating a productive learning atmosphere. They include:

1. **Set a personal example with your own behaviour:** Encouraging teachers to lead by example, with preparedness, dedication, and a responsive attitude towards students.
2. **Create a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere in the classroom:** Introducing humour and interactive activities to foster a light-hearted and engaging learning space.
3. **Present the tasks properly:** Offering clear instructions and explaining the rationale behind each task to ensure students understand their purpose and utility.
4. **Develop a good relationship with the learners:** Building rapport with students to create a supportive and cooperative classroom dynamic.
5. **Increase the learners' linguistic self-confidence:** Providing opportunities for success, affirming student efforts, and framing mistakes as a natural part of the learning process.
6. **Make the language classes interesting:** Diversifying classroom activities to pique interest and cater to students' curiosities and preferences.

7. **Promote learner autonomy:** Inviting students to participate in the learning process, fostering creativity, and involving them in decision-making.
8. **Personalise the learning process:** Adapting teaching content to meet the individual interests and needs of students.
9. **Increase the learners' goal-orientedness:** Assisting learners in setting achievable goals and creating tailored study plans through a collaborative needs analysis.
10. **Familiarise learners with the target language culture:** Utilising authentic materials and resources to immerse students in the target language's culture, including interactions with native speakers.

“Motivational teaching practice” by Dörnyei (2001)

Dörnyei (2001) in his “Motivational Strategies in the Language Classroom” proposed more than one hundred strategies which can be categorised into four key components of motivational teaching practice in the second language classroom, comprising “Creating the basic motivational conditions”, “Generating initial motivation”, “Maintaining and protecting motivation”, and “Rounding off the learning experience: Encouraging positive self-evaluation”. In general, it is clear that the author introduced the pedagogical techniques in a highly logical order, starting with forming the primary elements to foster an engaging and comfortable educational setting and ending with encouraging positive retrospective self-evaluation. As a result, Dörnyei (2001) was able to offer a comprehensive perspective and approach to enhancing students' motivation to learn a foreign language. In particular, for every single suggested item, he put forward specific strategies that language teachers can refer to and utilise in order to further encourage their students' involvement in the learning process.

2.2 Foreign Language Anxiety

2.2.1 Definitions and Types of Foreign Language Anxiety

Definitions of Foreign Language Anxiety

On a broad scale, “anxiety” is referred to as “an uncomfortable feeling of nervousness or worry about something that is happening or might happen in the future” (Cambridge University Press, n.d.).

In the specific context of language learning, this emotional response is specified as “foreign language anxiety.” Horwitz et al. (1986) defined foreign language anxiety as a complex mix of self-beliefs, perceptions, emotions, and behaviours that emerge specifically from the language learning environment. According to Krashen (1981), it acts as a barrier

that can prevent learners from effectively absorbing new language information, thus slowing down the learning process. Similarly, MacIntyre & Gardner (1994) identified language anxiety as the apprehension and fear that learners face when expected to use a second or foreign language, suggesting that it encompasses the learners' distress and negative emotional response when engaging with a new language. This form of anxiety is also supposed to be linked to certain adverse emotional reactions of language learners towards their foreign language learning experience (Horwitz, 2001).

Types of Foreign Language Anxiety

Anxiety in the context of learning a foreign language is frequently classified into three types: trait, state, and situation-specific anxiety. This approach has been extensively acknowledged in scholarly work by authors such as MacIntyre and Gardner (1994).

Trait anxiety is fundamentally a pervasive aspect of an individual's personality. This form of anxiety is not situational but rather a fixed feature of one's character, characterised by a consistent inclination towards experiencing anxiety. It represents a deep-seated tendency to perceive a broad range of situations as potentially threatening, leading to a state of chronic nervousness or tension regardless of specific external circumstances (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989; Scovel, 1978).

State anxiety, on the other hand, is a sort of momentary anxiety that is typically triggered by a brief stimulus, such as apprehension of public speaking or test scenarios. Spielberger and Gorsuch (1983) described state anxiety as an emotional response to perceived threats, which may vary in intensity despite the actual level of risk. It is a fluid feeling that can intensify or diminish over time, exemplified by the anxiety some students feel during exams, which is not a permanent condition but rather one that fluctuates. It corresponds to fear, nervousness, discomfort, and arousal of the autonomic nervous system induced temporarily by situations perceived as dangerous.

Building upon these concepts, MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) discussed situation-specific anxiety, which parallels state anxiety in its link to particular scenarios but persists over time within those contexts. This form of anxiety manifests when learners face tasks in a language where they lack proficiency, encapsulating the nervousness that arises from such challenges (Ellis, 1994). MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) highlight that this type of anxiety is consistent within specific contexts over time, differentiating it from the broader, more general trait anxiety. Language anxiety, in particular, is assumed to be associated with situation-specific anxiety rather than trait anxiety. This is because trait anxiety is unvarying, typically eliciting anxiety in any circumstance, whereas situation-specific anxiety is

connected to distinct situations and is stable over time within those situations (Oxford and Ehrman, 1992). Thus, MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) advocated that research on foreign language anxiety should focus on the situational aspects of anxiety within the language classroom.

2.2.2 Effects of Foreign Language Anxiety

Generally, foreign language anxiety has been assumed to encompass a broad range of debilitating effects on various aspects of language learning and performance. Among scholars, there exists a mutual sentiment that anxiety can severely undermine a student's self-assurance and hence impede their language learning process (Crookall & Oxford, 1991; Krashen, 1981). They observed that this kind of anxiety could affect not only retention but also students' ability to demonstrate their learning, potentially leading to a cycle of failure and heightened anxiety. This idea is also in line with MacIntyre & Gardner's findings (1994), which indicated that not only does foreign language anxiety cause communicative hesitation, but it also impairs learners' cognitive processing, making them less receptive to input and output in language.

MacIntyre (2017) further delved into this domain and provided a more comprehensive viewpoint. Academic effects, cognitive effects, and social effects are the three primary categories into which the researcher divided the consequences of foreign language anxiety. Academic effects include worse performance in learning a second language and over-studying, which can result in more effort and worse marks than anticipated. Concerning cognitive effects, foreign language anxiety is believed to impede tasks that require intense cognitive effort. The fear of failure in language use can pervade every phase of the learning process, comprising input, processing, and output (Krashen, 1981). The researcher mentioned that in the earliest phase, known as input, foreign language anxiety can function as an obstructive filter, preventing language input from successfully reaching and being processed by the learner's cognitive faculties. As the learner attempts to process this information, it may continue to exert a detrimental influence, potentially slowing down the processing speed and compromising the precision with which information is handled. In the final phase of output, where language is actively used, this specific kind of anxiety can create challenges in accessing information previously encoded into both long-term and short-term memory, thereby affecting the learner's ability to communicate effectively. Notably, among various aspects that foreign language anxiety influences, students' academic performance (i.e. a significant part of their output) has been highlighted

as the area most adversely affected. Previous research works by Elkhafaifi (2005) and Yan & Horwitz (2008) underscored and systematically analysed this, articulating that anxiety could deteriorate their performance in language classes, with poor results across language skills such as listening, reading, speaking, and writing further fuelling anxiety levels.

Recently, a case study conducted in Vietnam by Tran et al. (2012) provided a unique insider perspective on foreign language anxiety, uncovering both its negative and, perhaps surprisingly, its positive impacts. While the study predominantly notes negative outcomes such as reduced English as a Foreign Language learning ability and performance, it also highlights instances where foreign language anxiety motivated students to exert greater effort and develop a keener awareness of their learning needs. Nonetheless, considering the substantial number of learners who indicated that the positive effects of anxiety were short-lived, it could be inferred that their learning experiences were more often worsened by foreign language anxiety than enhanced.

2.2.3 Sources of Foreign Language Anxiety

Studies throughout history have discussed various variables concerning foreign language anxiety. Drawing on earlier scholarly contributions, Marnani and Cuocci (2022) proposed three principal clusters of contributors to anxiety in language classrooms: student-related factors, teaching, and instruction-related factors, and societal interactions and context-related factors. This framework reflects a comprehensive and multifaceted approach to understanding the anxiety phenomenon in language learning. However, in view of the aims of the study, only factors that are observable and modifiable within the classroom setting will be discussed.

Student-Related Factors

Anxiety in language learning can stem from intrinsic factors within students, such as distorted or unrealistic self-expectations, low self-esteem, inadequate language skills, and divergent learning styles. As identified by Horwitz (2000), a prevalent source of student anxiety is the misbelief that language learning entails flawless communication without errors. Such misconceptions can lead to frustration and heightened anxiety. Moreover, students may enter the learning process with a predetermined notion of inadequacy or a belief in a lack of innate language ability, which Kitano (2001) suggested contributes to unrealistic standards and expectations.

Teaching and Instruction-Related Factors

Anxiety may also be fuelled by the teachers' pedagogical approaches and attitudes. The nature of feedback, the correction of errors, and the overall demeanour of the teacher can all contribute to a student's anxiety levels (Naser Oteir & Nijr Al-Otaibi, 2019). Young (1991) and Zhang and Zhong (2012) pointed out that a teacher's beliefs about language education and their instructional methods, particularly those that are overly focused on error correction or that neglect student interaction, can significantly influence student anxiety. Evaluative practices, especially when they do not align with taught skills or students' familiarity with assessment methods, can also be a source of distress (Young, 1991).

Other Sources of Foreign Language Anxiety

Beyond the previously discussed classification that encompasses a wide array of anxiety-inducing stimuli, additional sources can be identified through the insights of various scholars. Horwitz et al. (1986) introduce performance-related factors, notably the fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, and test anxiety, which inherently relate to specific activities and moments within the learning process. These factors suggest that anxiety can be episodic and situationally triggered, influenced by the fear of judgment and the pressures of assessment, which again might blur the lines between student-centred and teacher-centred or interaction-centred categories. To be more specific, communication apprehension involves a fear of verbal interaction, which may manifest in a reluctance to speak or participate in class discussions. This type of anxiety likely originates from both individual factors, such as students' traits or situational anxiety, and peer-related factors, such as the fear of peers' critique of their oral skills. It can be particularly impeding in language classes, where oral proficiency and interaction are often key components of the curriculum.

When the aforementioned variables are combined, it becomes clear to me that foreign language anxiety is complex, impacted by a network of interrelated influences that spans from social norms and peer dynamics to individual viewpoints and educational methods. Each of these categories provides a critical lens through which to examine and understand the breadth and depth of the impact of anxiety on language learning.

2.2.4 Strategies to Alleviate Foreign Language Anxiety

Tackling foreign language anxiety necessitates a comprehensive strategy, involving combined efforts of schools, family units, educators, students, and the community at large. Despite the broad scope required for effectively addressing this issue, this study hones in on

the specific strategies that educators can employ within the classroom context to alleviate the anxiety their students may face. While numerous techniques exist for reducing learner anxiety, this review focuses on those most frequently cited across studies for their effectiveness.

Creating A Supportive Learning Environment

Horwitz et al. (1986) advanced the concept of alleviating student anxiety by helping educators foster a less intimidating classroom climate. This perspective aligns with Fujii (2016) and Hu & Wang (2014), who advocated for the creation of a welcoming and supportive educational environment. Central to this approach is the establishment of a strong, positive teacher-student rapport, where teachers are not just instructors but also sources of continuous support and care. In a similar vein, Hyseni & Lundberg (2022) and Tran and Moni (2015) emphasised the significance of nurturing a constructive relationship between educators and learners. They found that such an environment, where students are encouraged to communicate openly and make mistakes without fear of judgment, significantly diminishes language anxiety. This nurturing of a positive learning space can be accomplished by fostering open communication, demonstrating empathy toward the challenges students face, and prioritising constructive feedback that emphasises progress over criticism.

Developing Appropriate and Enjoyable Classroom Activities

Cooperative learning activities stand out as a solution to mitigate foreign language anxiety, particularly by lessening communication apprehension through peer-supported speaking practice (Nagahashi, 2007). The study's outcomes indicate that engaging students in collaborative group work where they can practice and enhance their speaking abilities leads to a decrease in communication-related anxiety. Although incorporating such group-based learning activities into conventional classroom settings might pose challenges to the teachers, the study's findings highlight the clear advantages for students, particularly in terms of active participation and language usage. Aligning with this, Fujii (2016) also advocated for the cooperative dimension, alongside confidence-building and teacher assistance, as essential components for anxiety reduction.

Furthermore, a wide selection of engaging classroom activities has also been proposed and proved to be effective in mitigating anxiety by other researchers. Hyseni and Lundberg (2022) posited that incorporating activities that students find enjoyable, including but not limited to discussions, debates, and role-playing, can significantly reduce students'

reluctance to communicate and lower their performance anxiety. Such interactive exercises offer students valuable practice in using their language skills within a meaningful framework, thereby enhancing the relevance and enjoyment of language learning.

Developing Appropriate Error Correction Techniques

Hu and Wang (2014) emphasised that linguistic precision should not be the sole focus, advocating for an empathetic correction style that fosters students' acceptance of their linguistic imperfections. They proposed corrective methods that students can readily accept, which can prevent unnecessary stress and allow students to complete tasks in a positive state of mind. Tran and Moni (2015) concurred, advising teachers to embrace student diversity and overlook minor errors, promoting a welcoming and supportive classroom atmosphere. Marnani and Cuocci (2022) reinforced this perspective, urging the recognition that errors are inherent to learning and that the fear of judgment should not deter students.

Enhancing Student Confidence

Since low self-esteem has been identified as one of the factors that trigger learners' anxiety, recognising and reinforcing student achievement is pivotal to enhancing their self-worth and assurance. Onwuegbuzie et al. (1999) proposed that educators can significantly amplify this effect by focusing on students' positive personal attributes, thereby aiding them in constructing a robust foundation of self-esteem and self-assurance through affirmative reinforcement. Agreeing with this, Hu and Wang (2014) asserted the power of acknowledgement, noting that when students are appreciated, it not only bolsters their strength but also their academic tenacity. They support an opening educational environment where challenging tasks are balanced with positive reinforcement, fostering an atmosphere where success is celebrated and the discouragement caused by competition is minimised. Echoing this sentiment, Tran and Moni (2015) highlighted the importance of the use of incentives and commendations to spur student enthusiasm and confidence.

Implementing Manageable Challenges and Understandable Lessons

In line with Krashen's (1981) input hypothesis, Marnani and Cuocci (2022) recommended the cautious selection of initial classroom activities to minimise unnecessary stress that might hamper language learning. Similarly, Tran and Moni (2015) stressed the need to make language input comprehensible and offer strategies including giving clear explanations and providing hints.

2.3 English Language Teaching and Learning in Vietnam

2.3.1 Overview of English Language Teaching in Vietnam

English language teaching in Vietnam has witnessed a significant era of globalisation and educational reform within the country since the government embarked on the “open-door” policy (Nguyen et al., 2019). This policy paved the way for the integration of Vietnam into the regional and global playground, necessitating English proficiency as a critical skill for economic and social advancement, especially in international business, cultural exchange, and educational opportunities. The surge in demand for English led to its widespread adoption as the primary foreign language within educational institutions across Vietnam. Additionally, it has been 26 years since the first time English was included as a required subject in the national high school graduation examination, except for only one year, 2014, when English was regarded as optional (Minh Giang, 2023, November 29). This situation underscores English learning’s importance for professional and academic opportunities.

Nevertheless, the burgeoning demand for English education soon outpaced the available teaching resources. Nguyen et al. (2019) pointed out that despite the increased enrolment in English studies, the preference among graduates for careers outside education exacerbated the teacher shortage. This situation results in the proliferation of off-campus English courses, which, due to variable quality, contributes to concerns over the overall proficiency and methodological approaches of English educators in the country. Moreover, regional disparities and institutional differences further complicate the uniformity and effectiveness of English language teaching.

Throughout history, English language teaching in Vietnam has undergone significant pedagogical shifts, moving from traditional, teacher-centred methods to more learner-centred approaches that emphasise communicative competence and interactive learning (Le & Le, 2022). In 2020, The National Foreign Language Project was launched by the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training, exemplifying Vietnam’s vigorous effort to further enhance English proficiency nationwide. However, regardless of substantial investment and the introduction of innovative teaching methods, the project faced hurdles in achieving its objectives (Le & Le, 2022). Phan’s (2017) article proposed several factors influencing the effectiveness of English language teaching reforms in Vietnam including the quality of teacher training, the availability of teaching resources, and the alignment of educational assessments with communicative language teaching goals. For instance, educators and students across educational institutions remain committed to the exam-

oriented scheme of the formal educational system. English teachers aspired to develop students' communicative competence, whereas the component skills including listening or speaking were not reflected in written exams. As a result, the main purpose of English teaching was diverted to preparing students for exams, which made the need to encompass various aspects of English in lessons irrelevant.

In summary, the domain of English language teaching in Vietnam is characterised by dynamic changes, driven by both internal educational reforms and external global influences. While significant progress has been made in revamping English language teaching, ongoing challenges highlight the complexity of fully integrating effective English language teaching practices within the Vietnamese educational system.

2.3.2 Prevalent Teaching Approaches and Methods in Vietnam

In the landscape of English language teaching in Vietnam, the predominant teaching approaches and methods continue to be deeply traditional, characterised by a focus on grammar rules, vocabulary memorisation, and teacher-led instruction. This approach was stated by Phan (2016), who underscored the Vietnamese English language teaching reliance on teacher-centred, book-centred, and grammar-translation methods. Such methods lean heavily on rote learning, with students echoing the linguistic models provided by the teacher and less emphasis on active student participation or communicative competence.

The persistence of this traditional teaching model can be attributed to multiple factors, including teachers' low English proficiency and a reluctance to deviate from the safety of prescribed textbooks and curriculum, as observed by Le (2002). Teachers often operate under the pressure of completing an extensive syllabus within limited classroom time, leading to anxiety about leaving a syllabus unfinished (Le, 2011). This pressure, combined with large classes and inconsistent access to basic teaching facilities, such as reliable audio equipment, restrains the potential for a shift towards more communicative teaching methods. Moreover, through the cultural lens, the Confucian tradition has woven an approach to teaching and learning characterised by teacher-centred pedagogy and the practice of spoon-feeding students, which sustains the dominance of the aforementioned practice inside classrooms (Le & Barnard, 2009; Nguyen et al., 2014).

The introduction of more progressive approaches and methods such as communicative, task-based language teaching or content and language-integrated learning has been met with enthusiasm, but practical implementation remains limited, as detailed by Duong and Nguyen (2021). Take communicative language teaching as an example; it aims

to foster communicative competence through practical language use and engaging students in meaningful tasks. Yet, constraints like class size, examination-focused curricula, and lack of teacher training in task-based language teaching principles have obstructed its widespread application. Paradoxically, teachers, while open to new methods, continue to fall back on traditional methods due to the mismatch between curricular innovation and actual classroom practice.

To address these challenges and transition towards a more communicative approach, significant changes are needed in teacher education, curriculum development, and assessment methods. The Ministry of Education's recent efforts to retrain teachers and revamp the examination system to include all four language skills are steps towards this goal. However, for these changes to translate into effective classroom practice, they must be supported by adequate resources, teacher autonomy, and a cultural shift in attitudes toward language learning and use.

To conclude, while there is an acknowledgement of the need for communicative competence and the benefits of methods consisting of project-based or task-based language teaching within the Vietnamese English teaching context, the deeply ingrained traditional approaches and methods, systemic educational constraints, and cultural factors continue to pose formidable barriers to their successful implementation.

2.3.3 Vietnamese Students' Attitudes Towards Learning English

Vietnamese Students' Motivation for Learning English

Vietnamese students radiate a high degree of motivation towards learning English, which mirrors both the global influence of English and the personal aspirations of the learners. Studies conducted over the years have consistently highlighted two primary types of motivation among Vietnamese learners of English: integrative and instrumental, the pattern that is consistent with foundational theories established by earlier scholars in the field.

Instrumental motivation is particularly prominent, with students linking English proficiency to enhanced job prospects, academic advancement, and meeting university language requirements (Nguyen, 2019; Nguyen, 2022; Dang et al., 2021). This practical orientation reflects the pivotal role English plays in not only employability within Vietnam's dynamic market but also in the broader global economy where English-speaking professionals are in high demand. The integral part of English in Vietnam's education system, from primary education through to university, further underscores the instrumental

motivation for learning the language. English is a compulsory subject in the curriculum alongside being a gateway to academic and professional opportunities, making its mastery a practical necessity for Vietnamese students (Ly, 2022).

While instrumental reasons prevail, integrative motivation, which encompasses the desire to engage with English-speaking cultures and communities, cannot be disregarded. Students exhibit a keen interest in English media and literature, which transcends mere academic requirements, signalling an intrinsic interest in the language and its cultural nuances (Ly, 2022). However, the aspiration to integrate into English-speaking societies is not as pronounced, potentially due to cultural distinctiveness and the minimal use of English in daily interactions outside educational settings.

The existing literature shows that while the research offers invaluable insights into the motivations of Vietnamese learners, it is predominantly skewed towards tertiary-level students. This focus provides a narrowed perspective that may not reflect the entire area of learners' motivation across various educational levels in Vietnam. It is my perspective that this oversight neglects the motivations of younger learners in formative language development stages, who may be shaped by a distinct set of influences such as early English exposure, pedagogical methods, and familial support.

Vietnamese Students' Anxiety in English Classroom

In the Vietnamese context, the phenomenon of language anxiety is a significant hurdle that learners must overcome. This anxiety is multifaceted, with roots in learners' fear of making linguistic mistakes, being negatively evaluated by their peers and instructors, and so on. The collective findings from numerous studies paint a comprehensive picture of the internal and external pressures that contribute to this phenomenon, reflecting a cultural and educational system that inadvertently fuels the flames of apprehension and self-doubt.

As mentioned earlier, at the heart of Vietnam's educational culture lies a Confucian-influenced respect for authority, where students normally defer to teachers, viewing them as the ultimate source of knowledge and guidance. This dynamic fosters an environment where learners might feel inhibited, fearful of making mistakes, and thus, reluctant to engage actively in classroom activities (Tran, 2012). Such an environment, while reinforcing respect and discipline, accidentally exacerbates students' anxiety (Hoang, 2022).

Hoang (2022) approached language anxiety by discussing its multifaceted nature, encompassing test anxiety, communication apprehension, and fear of negative evaluation, with communication apprehension emerging as the most pronounced among these. In spite of the apparent prevalence and intensity of these anxieties, the author brings to attention a

disconnect between students' and teachers' perceptions. Students perceive language anxiety as a significant obstacle to their language learning journey, while teachers tend to underestimate its severity, attributing it to a minority of students and often neglecting to address it in their instructional strategies (Tran et al., 2012).

Specifically, during speaking activities, the hurdles become more obvious. The anxiety associated with speaking includes several dimensions, which can be fear of on-the-spot error correction, concern over negative judgment, and reluctance to communicate in front of peers, particularly when discussing unfamiliar topics. The resulting communication apprehension is so significant that it is often the highest score among the various types of language anxieties reported (Hoang, 2022). Ho & Truong (2022) suggested that students' apprehension about speaking in public can manifest in physical symptoms such as avoiding eye contact and having a confused posture, which further impairs their communicative performance and deters them from engaging in speaking exercises, underscoring the need for a learning environment that fosters risk-taking and views mistakes as natural learning opportunities.

To conclude, the challenge of overcoming language anxiety, especially in speaking, is an urgent concern in the Vietnamese English foreign language teaching and learning context. Despite a consensus on the pervasiveness of foreign language anxiety and its detrimental impact on learners' speaking abilities, there remains a gap in the implementation of pedagogical strategies that address this issue effectively.

This literature review, in general, has meticulously examined the multifaceted dimensions of motivation and anxiety in language learning, particularly within the Vietnamese context. The review has mentioned a diverse range of pedagogical strategies identified by researchers to enhance motivation and mitigate anxiety. Drawing upon these foundational insights, the subsequent section of this thesis will identify specific motivational and anxiety-related challenges encountered by my students. Based on this analysis, I will propose a series of tailored activities and strategies aimed at addressing these problems to enhance educational outcomes and the overall learning experience.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Research Approach

In this study, a mainly qualitative approach was adopted to examine the interplay between teaching strategies and student attitudes in the context of English language learning. This approach involved the simultaneous collection of both quantitative data, through structured questionnaires rating the effectiveness of various classroom activities, and qualitative data, through students' comments on the strategies executed and an observational teacher diary that documents classroom interactions. By utilising this approach, the research sought to garner an extensive understanding of how various teaching strategies or activities influence my Vietnamese teenage students' attitudes towards learning English.

3.2 Context

The study was implemented within the setting of my current online private English classes, which consist of two groups of tenth and eleventh-grade students. They come from different schools in Hanoi, Vietnam but follow the same curriculum system provided by the Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training. These students have been attending my private classes for several years up to the present and are expected to further their studies under my instruction. Given this situation, I decided to carry out this research with a view to enhancing their learning experiences and drawing valuable lessons for my own forthcoming teaching journey.

3.3 Participants

The participants of this study were five Vietnamese students, aged 16-17, who displayed varying attitudes in my private English classes. These participants could represent a range of motivation levels and experiences of anxiety in language learning. Their participation in the research provided valuable insights into the individual and collective impacts of the implemented teaching strategies on their language learning attitudes.

Before I provide each individual's profile, I would like to discuss the overall picture of my private English classes. In the context of Vietnam's exam-oriented English curricula (as mentioned in Section 2.3.1), these students were enrolled in my private classes largely due to their own or their parents' aspirations to enhance school performance and secure admission to prestigious universities. Initially, their motivation appeared to be predominantly instrumental, focused on practical outcomes rather than a genuine passion for the English language or a desire for personal growth.

To preserve anonymity, pseudonyms are used for each participant. Since I am well acquainted with the parents of the students involved, I considered it sufficient to explain the nature of the enquiry to them and ask for their consent to my asking their children for feedback, which they all gave happily. My students' ages, genders, proficiency levels, and distinct learning attitudes and behaviours are detailed below:

3.3.1 Pearl

Age: 16

Gender: Female

Level: B1

Overall, Pearl consistently demonstrates diligence and responsibility, as evidenced by her strong commitment to her studies in my classes. However, she seldom volunteers during lessons and usually shows an extremely high level of anxiety. On occasions, her face turned pale, and she floundered or even stayed silent for a whole minute when she was uncertain about her own answers or required to express herself in English. She herself attributed this issue to her lack of language proficiency, not the fear of being criticised by either her teacher or her classmates.

3.3.2 Kaihn

Age: 16

Gender: Female

Level: B1

Kaihn is an intelligent student with a remarkable ability to grasp new concepts swiftly and apply the knowledge effectively in her assignments. Her dedication and active participation in class activities further highlight her commitment to learning. Despite all of these positive qualities, several problematic areas can be observed. For instance, her attention is occasionally diverted from the lesson, resulting in her engaging in unrelated activities. Besides, when faced with challenging exercises, she sometimes seeks available online solutions instead of turning to me for assistance. The level of language anxiety she has, while not exerting serious influences on her performance, still hampers her willingness to take risks in class.

3.3.3 Sunny

Age: 17

Gender: Female

Level: B1

On the one hand, Sunny has shown notable improvement in English, quickly advancing from struggling with basic concepts to enhancing her school performance. This progress sparked a strong motivation, highlighting her potential and capability for rapid learning. On the other hand, I can pinpoint a few areas that need careful attention. The first one is her language anxiety, which at times causes her discomfort with making mistakes and her inability to express her thoughts in English. The second one is the same behaviour observed in Kaihn's case when she relies on online resources to tackle demanding tasks.

3.3.4 Jack

Age: 17

Gender: Male

Level: B1

Similar to Sunny, Jack follows a comparable path of progress by absorbing new language concepts rapidly. However, in contrast with Sunny's or other peers' self-consciousness about making mistakes, he expresses no fear of being criticised or corrected and always manages to finish his speech. In addition, he is an active participant who never hesitates to discuss any topic with me or other class members. On the flip side, he shows limited commitment to his studies, given his insufficient diligence and superficial task completion. Additionally, maintaining focus during lessons presents a challenge for him, as he often becomes distracted, despite constant reminders to stay focused.

3.3.5 David

Age: 17

Gender: Male

Level: B1

David has a strong foundation and is confident in communicating in English. From my observation, he has consistently presented himself as an energetic and proactive learner. He is not hesitant to make mistakes and is able to promptly learn from them. Despite these strong and favourable characteristics, he repeatedly falls short of finishing the assignments given. Regardless of multiple friendly reminders, he continuously creates excuses for this lack of responsibility, apparently regarding this as normal and acceptable behaviour.

3.4 Instruments

The research utilised two primary instruments to gather data. The first was a structured questionnaire, designed to capture the students' perceptions of the effectiveness and emotional impact of various teaching strategies. The questionnaire assessed activities on

three dimensions: fun, usefulness, and “safety” (comfort level). Students rated each activity on a scale of 1 to 10 and provided further comments, offering both quantitative and qualitative data on their learning experiences.

The second instrument was an observational, reflective teacher diary. I kept a record of classroom dynamics, students’ reactions to activities, and my own reflections on the teaching process. This diary might serve as a qualitative tool to note changes in students’ participation and language anxiety, complementing the structured feedback from the questionnaires. Both instruments enabled a comprehensive analysis of the strategies’ impact on student attitudes towards English learning.

In terms of strategy selection, first, I examined each student’s situation with their diverse positive qualities and more importantly, their problematic areas, which enabled me to identify the following five main aspects where there is room for improvement. Each item was listed, accompanied by a number of teaching strategies that I intended to try out with my students. The decision on what strategies I planned to experiment with was made partly based on the students’ profiles and partly on techniques suggested by former researchers, which I have reviewed in the previous chapter.

Category 1: Strategies to deal with the lack of initial motivation

- (1) Arrange meetings with second language (L2) speakers (not necessarily natives, but high-level).
- (2) Share my own positive L2-related experiences in class.
- (3) Bring various cultural products (e.g. magazines, music, TV recordings, videos) to class.

Category 2: Strategies to deal with the fear of making mistakes

- (4) Reassure students by affirming that making mistakes is an inevitable part of the language-learning process.
- (5) Overlook students’ trivial mistakes.
- (6) Prioritise constructive feedback that emphasises progress over criticism.

Category 3: Strategies to deal with the fear of speaking English

- (7) Initiate discussions about how the students feel and help them overcome their worries.
- (8) Give hints or ready-made “answer templates”.
- (9) Teach learners strategies.

Category 4: Strategies to deal with the lack of attention during lessons

- (10) Conduct role-playing activities.
- (11) Start a lesson with a warmer.

(12) Vary the organisational format (e.g. a whole-class task can be followed by group work or pair work).

Category 5: Strategies to deal with the lack of commitment

(13) Mobilise peer pressure and exploit joint energy by assigning group projects as homework.

3.5 Procedures of Data Collection

Data were collected through two principal means. Firstly, students were asked to complete a structured questionnaire that was specifically designed to evaluate a range of teaching strategies after each class (see Appendix A). These quantitative items could be complemented by open-ended comments that provided deeper insights into their experiences. Students provided comments on the activities, either documented by themselves or noted by me during discussions, to capture immediate and reflective feedback.

Simultaneously, additional qualitative data were collected through a teacher's diary where observations were recorded. In this diary, I documented the unfolding dynamics of the online classroom, noting instances of student engagement and any visible signs of anxiety during language activities. This record not only tracked the immediate responses to instructional methods but also reflected on their progress over time. The teacher's diary was updated regularly to ensure that observations were recorded when they were most fresh and accurate.

3.6 Procedures of Data Analysis

The quantitative data gathered from the questionnaires were analysed to measure the effectiveness of the teaching strategies. The initial analysis involved calculating descriptive statistics, such as mean scores, to summarise the students' ratings across different dimensions – Fun, Usefulness, and Safety. Given the small numbers involved, inferential statistics did not seem appropriate for this study, as they would not provide reliable generalisations due to the small sample size.

For the qualitative data, all of the data obtained from students' feedback and the teacher's diary were transcribed to identify patterns in student attitudes and behaviours related to the English learning activities. Thematic analysis was employed to further explore these patterns, providing insights into how students perceive and react to different teaching strategies. The aim was to correlate these qualitative findings with the quantitative data to

form a holistic understanding of the strategies' impact on enhancing motivation and reducing anxiety among the learners.

Chapter 4: Results and Discussion

In this chapter, I will evaluate my attempts to improve students' attitudes from two angles: first I will consider them by examining the different activities, and then I will look at individual learners.

4.1 Perceived Fun, Usefulness, and Safety of Proposed Strategies

This section examines the proposed teaching strategies across three key dimensions: Fun, Usefulness, and Safety. Instead of being evaluated in isolation, each strategy is analysed based on its associated identified problem as presented in the previous chapter, allowing for a cluster-based comparison (see Appendix B). This approach enables a detailed analysis of each strategy's ranking, both in relation to the overall set and within its specific category, providing a thorough understanding of their relative strengths and weaknesses. For detailed rankings of the strategies in terms of Fun, Usefulness, and Safety, please see Appendices C, D, and E, respectively.

4.1.1 Strategies to Deal with Lack of Initial Motivation

Fun

Within the Fun aspect, the strategies included in this set receive highly distinctive attitudes. Notably, "Bring various cultural products to class" stands out as particularly engaging, scoring 9.6, hence ranking highest in this category and across strategies of all kinds. Indeed, from my observation, my students' curiosity was strongly aroused when they were exposed to authentic cultural materials, for instance, videos of real-life interviews. They appeared to be really eager to know more about the people and their stories, which was shown through their constant inquiries during the discussion. This result is in agreement with Dörnyei and Csizér's (1998) perspective, which considers familiarising students with the target language culture one of the chief strategies to fuel their integrative motivation.

In contrast, "Share my own positive L2-related experiences in class with students" falls to the lower end of the spectrum, suggesting that while the teacher's narratives are appreciated, they do not stimulate interest as much as direct interaction with cultural materials. "Arrange meetings with L2 speakers", although not taking a high position, still scores pretty high in Fun (9.0). According to my teacher's diary, almost all students were engaged in the conversation with the guests and seemingly felt at ease sharing about their motivations or foreign language learning challenges. In addition, the students were paying close attention to the speakers' talks when they were suggesting effective learning techniques or their personal experiences.

Usefulness

All three strategies are perceived as pretty useful for students, given insignificant differences in the scores they receive. Both “Share my own positive L2-related experiences in class with students” and “Bring various cultural products (e.g. magazines, music, TV recordings, videos) to class” have great relatability, which was also mentioned in students’ comments. Both are all rated above 9.0, showing a strong consensus on their effectiveness in inspiring motivation for learning English. Whereas “Arrange meetings with L2 speakers (not necessarily natives, but high-level)” holds a slightly lower rank compared to its counterparts, this activity got a high score of 9.0.

Safety

Students present various opinions about the comfort level they have when these strategies are conducted in class. It is noteworthy that “Arrange meetings with L2 speakers (not necessarily natives, but high-level)” achieves high mean scores in Fun and Usefulness, yet receives a relatively lower mean score of 8.6 in Safety. As noted in my observational diary, whilst the learners were enjoying conversing with the foreign guests, at some points, some of them such as Kaihn and Pearl stayed fairly quiet, necessitating my intervention to keep up the conversation. Kaihn, the one possessing a high level of anxiety, said: “*I felt so shy and was at a loss for words. Super shy.*” The other two activities, on the contrary, receive a more positive attitude, scoring 9.2 and 9, ranked 5th and 7th in this dimension.

To sum up, these findings suggest that incorporating authentic cultural elements and real-life experiences into the classroom is not only able to greatly enhance the fun aspect of learning but also effective in increasing student motivation. However, the notably low safety score given to “Arrange meetings with L2 speakers (not necessarily natives, but high-level)” calls for careful structuring of such interactions to ensure all students feel secure and supported, particularly those prone to anxiety like Kaihn.

4.1.2 Strategies to Deal with The Fear of Making Mistakes

The study’s results show students’ mixed perceptions of the fun, usefulness, and safety degree of the activities.

Fun

“Prioritise constructive feedback that emphasises progress over criticism”, with a score of 9.2 in Fun, much higher compared to its counterparts, demonstrates that students find it really engaging. Reflecting on notes in my teaching diary, I observed that this strategy not only cheered the students up but also actively contributed to a more pleasant and

stimulating learning environment. Each time I acknowledged a student's progress, regardless of how small, it not only resulted in visible happiness, evidenced by beaming smiles, but also seemed to boost their confidence and participation in class activities.

In contrast, "Overlook students' trivial mistakes" and "Reassure students by affirming that making mistakes is an inevitable part of the language-learning process" share the lowest scores for Fun within this group of strategies and across all categories, standing at 7.4 and 7.8 respectively, which may be attributed to the strategies' nature of facilitating only one-way interaction.

Usefulness

"Prioritise constructive feedback that emphasises progress over criticism" once again takes the highest position, topping the Usefulness ranking with a mean score of 9.2, indicating that it is regarded as the most beneficial strategy in this category for addressing concerns about making mistakes. This finding is consistent with that of Tran and Moni (2015), who underlined the significance of appreciation of students' progress, saying that they not only bolster their confidence but also arouse their passion.

Conversely, "Reassure students by affirming that making mistakes is an inevitable part of the language-learning process" and "Overlook students' trivial mistakes" are tied for the lowest ranking in Usefulness with mean values of 8.4 and 7.8, suggesting that these strategies are not quite impactful in easing the learners' worries. Indeed, there were moments when my students went blank and were unable to carry on their speech, I tried to give them as much assurance as I could to assist them in overcoming their difficulty. However, almost nothing changed. They kept on staying silent and their anxiety was visibly shown through their facial expressions. Additionally, the limited usefulness of "Overlook students' trivial mistakes" was also reflected in some of the learners' feedback, which mentioned that although having their minor mistakes ignored can increase their comfort level to some extent, they would prefer their problematic areas to be explicitly pointed out so that they can do further practice and avoid repeating the same mistakes in the future.

Safety

Concerning this aspect, all items tried out in this category earn fairly high mean scores (all above 9.0). Particularly, "Prioritise constructive feedback that emphasises progress over criticism" ranks third across all items. The positive attitudes towards these three strategies prove that they may similarly effectively create a supportive environment without bringing undue stress or fear into classes.

All of these results seem to reveal that the one-way interaction nature of some strategies designated for providing safety may not offer a high level of joy to students in class. They also suggest that if the learners find their progress recognised and valued, they will possibly be more confident and willing to take risks in language classes. Last but not least, reassurance and overlooking mistakes provide comfort but fail to substantially address students' concerns about errors, indicating the need for more direct and corrective feedback to actively aid learning from mistakes.

4.1.3 Strategies to Deal with The Fear of Speaking English

This set of strategies stands out due to its high mean scores across various dimensions, particularly in Usefulness and Safety, where it consistently ranks at the top compared to other groups of activities.

Fun

While these strategies score relatively high in Fun, with mean values ranging from 8.4 to 9, they do not reach the same levels as the other areas. Of the three strategies, "Give hints or ready-made "answer templates" has the highest mean score. This can be explained by the fact that these hints or "templates" lower the barriers to participation in language activities. Providing students with such scaffolding allows them to engage in communication exercises with less stress about making errors or finding the exact words, making the learning process more enjoyable and accessible.

Usefulness

The strategies within this category are particularly potent in alleviating speaking anxiety, as suggested by the results. The items, namely "Initiate discussions about how the students feel and help them overcome their worries," "Teach learners communicative strategies," and "Give hints or ready-made 'answer templates'," rank exceptionally high in terms of usefulness. This underlines their effectiveness in mitigating the fear associated with speaking English, directly addressing the core needs of students struggling with language anxiety. Perhaps, for me, the most striking result to emerge from the data is the top position of the teacher's initiation of discussion about learners' feelings and their useful advice for them. It scores an impressive 9.8, reflecting its key role in increasing comfort and willingness to communicate. This finding was also supported by Fujii (2016), who attached great importance to building a close rapport between teachers and students. Pearl, a highly anxious learner, particularly values this item; as she said, "*It's absolutely wonderful. I've always wished to find a teacher who cares about my feelings, and now I've got you. My spirits are*

somewhat lifted, although I still feel anxious at times and a bit shy about sharing my feelings.”

In addition, “Teach learners communicative strategies” and “Give hints or ready-made ‘answer templates’” also rank highly, each securing top scores, which emphasises their effectiveness in enhancing communicative competence and reducing speaking stress. In their comments, the participants emphasised the effectiveness of this type of instructional support, saying that they could instantly pick up useful words or phrases to better express themselves.

Safety

Two out of three strategies score highest in terms of safety, comprising “Initiate discussions about how the students feel and help them overcome their worries” and “Teach learners communicative strategies”, receiving scores of 9.8 and 9.6 respectively. This aligns with students’ profiles and the observations I recorded. Most of my students have difficulty articulating their thoughts, partly due to the mental impact of language anxiety and partly the lack of available language resources. Given this situation, “Teach learners communicative strategies” possibly comes to mind as both an immediate aid and a long-term solution. I became aware of moments when my students were trying to put their ideas into words, they made use of the previously taught strategies even though still experiencing a certain level of stress. This can be an indicator of a high valuation by students of this activity, highlighting the importance and effectiveness of these methods in addressing language learning anxieties, especially those related to speaking English.

In summary, these results may confirm the essential role of providing scaffolding and open discussion between the teacher and students. These strategies not only help alleviate students’ anxiety but also offer them the necessary tools to cope with the difficulties in expressing their own thoughts. However, these activities still have a limited capacity to cause great excitement among learners during lessons. This can reveal that regardless of students’ acknowledgement of the practicality and comfort level these strategies provide, they may not find them as engaging or enjoyable as other activities that might involve more dynamic or varied interaction.

4.1.4 Strategies to Deal with The Lack of Attention During Lessons

As revealed by the results, the implemented activities belonging to this type of strategy are phenomenally successful in cultivating a motivating and energetic classroom atmosphere. However, these strategies, particularly engaging in the context of fun, descend

to the lower end of the spectrum in terms of usefulness and safety, which is a feature that needs careful attention and investigation.

Fun

“Start a lesson with a warmer” and “Conduct role-playing activities” emerge as the most appealing activities, with rankings at second and third place respectively. This highlights their strong ability to engage students and maintain their participation throughout the lesson. As I observed when the activities were being executed, the students were laughing and chatting freely about a certain area of knowledge or language. For instance, the element of competition in a mini-game at the beginning of a lesson could cheer the learners up, making them feel more comfortable and open to each other and to me – the teacher. Besides, role-plays also did great work in stirring up the atmosphere. Usually, the students were completely immersed in the role of the character they were playing and the scene they were acting out. Unexpected hilarious situations always came up, turning a quiet class into a cheerful one.

“Varying the organisational format”, however, lags far behind in the fun dimension with a lower score in fun (8.4), reflecting a need for these variations to be carefully designed to maintain student engagement.

Usefulness

Interestingly, there is a notable contrast when considering the usefulness of these strategies. “Start a lesson with a warmer” remains highly regarded, with a score of 9.4. Concerning this item, there is a common ground among participants that the short activities at the beginning of the lesson, either to review the previous lesson or to lead them in the new topic, contribute to enhancing their focus in class.

“Conduct role-playing activities” and “Vary the organisational format,” whereas relatively enjoyable, score an 8.4 in Usefulness and fall to the lower ranks at 11th and 12th. To explain this, let’s take David’s case as an example. He mentioned the problem of losing his full attention during the lesson if he has to cooperate with others, especially the ones who are struggling with the assigned task. If this happens, he often needs to find ways to support them, leading to his failure to concentrate completely on the task.

Safety

In the domain of Safety, “Start a lesson with a warmer” maintains a high mean score (9.4), suggesting that students feel comfortable and reassured when lessons begin with a captivating activity. On the other hand, “Vary the organisational format” and “Conduct role-playing activities” show moderate safety scores of 8.6 and 8.0 respectively, having the lowest

safety rankings in all proposed strategies. Indeed, these results are in line with the learners' profiles, their feedback, and my observations. For instance, several participants including Kaihn, Pearl, and Sunny, regardless of their positive perception of the activity's entertainment value and its effectiveness, remained nervous when partaking in role-plays owing to the pressure to quickly produce spoken language. They told me that at times, they could not recall words, which made them silent for a while and even not be able to continue their speech. This result, however, has not previously been described in Hyseni and Lundberg's (2022) research. They argued that role-playing and similar activities can remarkably increase students' willingness to communicate and alleviate their anxiety while speaking. On the contrary, my research's outcome suggests that whilst these activities can be engaging, they might also increase anxiety for some students, challenging the assumption that all interactive exercises uniformly decrease anxiety

The findings, in general, point to the likelihood that activities with fun and interactive natures can be particularly effective in capturing students' attention as they bring energy and excitement to the classroom. Particularly, transitioning students into the learning environment and framing the subsequent lesson content with a mini-activity is highly recommended. Lastly, these strategies are generally secure; however, their reliance on active student participation and the unpredictability they introduce might not resonate well with all students, especially those who are introverted or prone to anxiety. Thus, this heightens the need for the teacher's support and management throughout the activity to prevent students from being faced with challenging and anxiety-provoking situations.

4.1.5 Strategies to Deal with The Lack of Commitment

"Mobilise peer pressure and exploit joint energy by assigning group projects as homework" is the only strategy tested to see its efficacy in encouraging learners to fulfil their home assignments. The study's results show its limitations in creating a cheerful learning atmosphere, motivating learners, and creating a safe place for them.

Fun

Ranked 11th for Fun with a score of 8.0, this strategy is seen as only moderately enjoyable. In fact, the two groups of learners show opposite attitudes towards this form of task. The 10 graders, Kaihn and Pearl, both found it engaging when having a chance to work together on a task, which they have never experienced before. They agreed that this assignment alleviated their anxiety and boosted their confidence; besides, they were also able to freely explore the assigned topics in their own preferred ways. In contrast, the group

of 11 graders hold a less positive view about this. They shared that the process of conducting a cooperative task was difficult and chaotic, probably stemming from their unfamiliarity with this work mode.

Usefulness

This strategy ranks 9 out of 13 strategies in terms of usefulness, with a mean score of 8.6. It is effective to a certain degree, yet it is probably not among the top strategies when considering its impact on improving commitment to learning English. In my teacher's diary, I noted that the process of carrying out a team project among 11-graders was not going smoothly. They started working on the project very late, and their performance during the project presentation evidently revealed their inadequate preparation for it.

Safety

For Safety, this strategy also has a low ranking, although the score it achieves in this domain is higher compared to that in other aspects. Jack, for example, confessed that he was uncertain about how to effectively execute the projects, resulting in a lack of preparation for the project presentation. Despite these challenges, he remained optimistic that, with time and improved teamwork skills, he would be able to undertake the task more confidently and comfortably.

The analysis of "Mobilise peer pressure and exploit joint energy by assigning group projects as homework" reveals its varied effectiveness in enhancing commitment. While some students find these projects engaging and confidence-boosting, others face difficulties, suggesting a need for tailored approaches to group activities. Given its moderate mean scores in Useful and Safe, this strategy shows potential but requires clearer guidelines and preparatory support to improve its effectiveness and the comfort level it provides. Addressing these aspects can help optimise group projects, making them more engaging and beneficial for all students.

4.2 Individual Perceptions of The Effectiveness and Emotional Impact of Proposed Strategies

In this section, I will explore each participant's opinions on how fun, useful, and safe they feel about the activities. The most outstanding and astonishing features of the data results based on the grades the participants gave to the strategies, their further comments, and my observations will be discussed.

4.2.1. Pearl's Evaluation of The Proposed Strategies

As described in the profile, Pearl comes over as a diligent and motivated student; however, her anxiety level is extremely high, which deters her from taking risks and actively participating in certain classroom activities. As a result, the aspect of safety, sometimes coupled with usefulness, will be focused on to see the impact of the executed strategies on her problematic areas.

It is evident from the results that strategies such as “Conduct role-playing activities” and “Arrange meetings with L2 speakers (not necessarily natives, but high-level)” appear to be more anxiety-provoking than the other ones. Pearl might have been under pressure to perform spontaneously, which heightened her anxiety level, leading to her inability to recall her existing language resources. Interestingly, though not feeling completely comfortable, she commented that she felt more confident and could speak more than usual when taking part in these classroom activities. This may be because she was so engaged, for instance, in role-playing scenarios that she could manage to overcome the language barrier. Her comments are also true to what I observed in classes. She actually turned into a different person with a different attitude from her normal self. She was capable of speaking far more fluently and presenting her perspectives more comfortably than she had been before. This might be an explanation for the higher scores these two strategies receive regarding their usefulness.

In addition, speaking of the “Strategies to deal with the fear of making mistakes” – one of the categories that are implemented in view of reducing students’ anxiety, “Overlook students’ trivial mistakes” achieves lower scores in terms of fun and usefulness compared to others of the same group. Pearl said: *“I feel more confident, but if the mistakes are not mentioned, I tend to repeat the same ones in the future, gradually turning them into hard-to-change habits. However, I think my trivial mistakes being corrected may not be a threat to me if the teacher can create a relaxing atmosphere, which makes me more open to corrections and suggestions, helping me to improve.”*

Overall, Pearl’s data reveal that engaging yet challenging activities like “Conduct role-playing activities” and “Arrange meetings with L2 speakers” can enhance confidence and language skills, even among students with high anxiety, when they are fully engaged. Moreover, regarding the “Strategies to deal with the fear of making mistakes”, her insightful feedback suggests that if the rapport and trust between the teacher and the student have been established, learners, even the highly anxious ones, might not see correcting minor mistakes as dangerous as it is commonly perceived.

4.2.2. Kaihn's Evaluation of The Proposed Strategies

Kaihn, who is in the same learning group as Pearl, holds a more complex set of opinions on the strategies, perhaps due to the broader array of problematic areas that she has in learning English, as outlined in her profile.

Firstly, concerning the nervousness she experiences, a similar pattern of results to Pearl's was obtained. The activities with the lowest scores in Safety are "Conduct role-playing activities" and "Arrange meetings with L2 speakers (not necessarily natives, but high-level)", indicating areas where Kaihn felt less secure. In her feedback, she noted an increased communicative ability to participate in role-plays, which aligns with my observations. Yet, when interacting with L2 speakers, her shyness and difficulty in producing language became apparent, suggesting a heightened level of intimidation in these scenarios. This daunting situation could have also influenced the level of joy she had, as evidenced by a score of 7 in Fun.

Secondly, the "Strategies to deal with the lack of attention during lessons" seemingly work fairly well for her in terms of maintaining attention throughout the lesson. Take "Start a lesson with a warmer" as an example. She noted that this activity made her feel more interested in the topic and eager to dive into the lesson. Nevertheless, while similarly perceived as an effective strategy, "Vary the organisational format (e.g. a whole-class task can be followed by group work or pair work)" gets lower scores across all three dimensions compared to others in the same category. Despite acknowledging this strategy's effectiveness in enhancing her attention, she expressed her worry about a specific situation. She reported occurrences when both she and her partner were uncertain about a challenging question's solution. She thereby felt pretty unsafe and worried about being invited to give the explanation for that question.

Finally, within the domain of commitment to assignment completion, Kaihn reported a positive experience in collaborating with a partner. This partnership was found to be both pleasurable and efficacious. She noted an increase in her enthusiasm and dedication to accomplishing the assigned tasks as she and her partner, Pearl, had good times exploring the topics and joining hands to produce their unique products. Besides, her confidence was bolstered, which subsequently improved her English fluency, notwithstanding occasional lapses in word retrieval during her speech. This result ties well with previous studies wherein peers are believed to play a significant role in motivating each other (Olusiji, 2016; Wentzel, 1994).

The findings indicate that even among learners facing similar challenges of language anxiety, in this case, Pearl and Kaihn, individual experiences with the same strategies can vary, stressing the need for personalised approaches in addressing such issues. Besides, Kaihn's response to the strategy of "Arrange meetings with L2 speakers" shows that despite the potential for increased language proficiency, such interactions can heighten anxiety and reduce enjoyment. This, consequently, points to the importance of modifying these strategies to reduce stress, perhaps by incorporating preparatory sessions that build confidence before direct interactions. Furthermore, her experiences with "Vary the organisational format" pose potential challenges in group settings, particularly when complex tasks lead to uncertainty and anxiety. This necessitates the teacher's additional support during group activities, such as more guided instruction or resources that help students feel prepared and secure, even when facing difficult questions. Lastly, her positive feedback on collaboration in assignments indicates that partner work can significantly enhance commitment and learning engagement, provided that the partnerships are well-matched and supported.

4.2.3. Sunny's Evaluation of The Proposed Strategies

Similar to the two previous participants, she gave "Conduct role-playing activities" a quite low score (6) in Safety as her anxiety was raised to a high level due to the undue pressure to give spontaneous oral responses. However, a remarkable difference should be noted. As I observed, whereas Pearl and Kaihn were able to perform better than usual despite the nervousness, Sunny was frequently paralysed and floundered about for even a minute during her speech. Given that I supported her continuously with both ready-made expressions and ideas, she could produce a negligible amount of language. She further commented that "*while the experience is beneficial for my English development, sometimes my lack of confidence affects my enjoyment of it*".

Concerning "Arrange meetings with L2 speakers (not necessarily natives, but high-level)", opposite to Pearl and Kaihn, Sunny felt much more relaxed when communicating with L2 speakers, giving this a Safety score of 9. She mentioned: "*When speaking English with them, I felt less nervous than in normal conversations (with either you or my friends). This activity motivated me to practice communication skills to be able to talk with everyone and expand my relationships*". This strategy appeared to fuel her motivation, encouraging her to set her own practical goals and make progress to achieve them.

Another notable low safety score can be seen in "Share my own positive L2-related experiences in class with students". Generally, this strategy is assumed to pose almost no

risk to students since they need not even perform anything, but listen to their teacher. Notwithstanding this nature, she felt worried because when listening to my sharing, she started contemplating her own goals for learning English and steps to develop and maintain her interest in this language-learning journey, adding that she could see a lack of passion for English in herself.

The last item I would like to elaborate on is “Mobilise peer pressure and exploit joint energy by assigning group projects as homework”, which was given a score of 8 in Safe and 7 in Fun and Useful. She reflected that her anxiety was lessened when she presented the projects with her group members, which is predictable. However, there is one point that needs further analysis, which is the discrepancy between her positive perception of this activity’s effectiveness and the low score she gave to it. She wrote that this activity offered her an opportunity to cooperate with her classmates and listen to varied viewpoints towards a matter. She also asserted that doing these projects was more enjoyable than dealing with worksheets or carrying out tasks on her own.

To sum up, her different attitudes towards the strategies requiring spontaneous speaking suggest that real-world communication might be perceived to be less intimidating. This indicates that strategies incorporating real-life interaction can be particularly motivating and beneficial for students like Sunny, helping them set practical communication goals. Additionally, her concern during “Share my own positive L2-related experiences” highlights the profound personal impact of reflective learning content, which can sometimes unintentionally evoke stress rather than inspiration. Finally, the mixed feedback on group projects points to the need for balancing peer learning dynamics to enhance both the fun and usefulness of collaborative assignments, ensuring that these activities support rather than overwhelm students.

4.2.4. Jack’s Evaluation of The Proposed Strategies

Based on the problems he has which were described in detail previously, I will explore the strategies that are associated with his motivation, attention to the lesson, and his commitment to accomplishing home assignments.

In “Bring various cultural products (e.g. magazines, music, TV recordings, videos) to class”, though giving it a very high score from the usefulness standpoint, Jack pointed out a problem connected with this activity that no other students mentioned. He voiced his concern about the challenges the materials might present, stating that “*sometimes some materials seemed a bit hard to understand (e.g. the speed of the speech was a bit too fast)*”.

Regarding the strategies to deal with the lack of attention during lessons, two of them prove to be brilliantly effective for him. Both “Conduct role-playing activities” and “Start a lesson with a warmer” receive maximum scores across three aspects. He noted that role-plays facilitated verbal interactions among class members, making the atmosphere more comfortable and engaging. In addition, he also laid emphasis on how warmers worked well for him with regard to grabbing more of his attention to the lesson. Jack added that “*jumping straight into homework correction*” at the beginning of the lesson was dull and his concentration would be easily disturbed by something else. For him, “Vary the organisational format (e.g. a whole-class task can be followed by group work or pair work)” is the item that receives the lowest score among the three. However, it is not explicitly reflected in his comments. He appreciated this strategy in terms of creating a collaborative atmosphere among peers, thereby minimising their constant reliance on the teacher. It reveals that while this strategy does not exert as strong an influence as its counterparts, it still has its own value and is appreciated by the learners.

Based on these results, the importance of tailoring cultural materials to ensure they are comprehensible and engaging is stressed. If not, students’ perceived usefulness of the activity might be negatively affected. Moreover, Jack’s high regard for “Conduct role-playing activities”, “Start a lesson with a warmer”, and “Vary the organisational format (e.g. a whole-class task can be followed by group work or pair work)” indicates that these strategies, owing to their interactive nature, might work out well for students with a short attention span like him.

4.2.5 David’s Evaluation of The Proposed Strategies

Given his described qualities, areas encompassing motivation and commitment will be focused on in this section. However, in David’s case, the results reveal many surprising details, allowing me to explore hitherto hidden angles.

One unexpected finding was that for the activities with an intensely interactive nature, which get high scores for Fun and Safe aspects, his perception of their usefulness was not positive. Take “Conduct role-playing activities” and “Arrange meetings with L2 speakers”, which get scores of 5 and 7 respectively in the dimension of Usefulness, as examples. Commenting on the former, he stated: “*This activity was enjoyable but I didn’t see myself learning much from this. It was simply a mini-game and had limited effect on enriching my vocabulary and grammatical knowledge*”. The same went for the latter when he reported that the only aspect that he thought could be improved was grammar. This

phenomenon implies that while students are excited about certain activities, they may need explicit clarification of the task's purposes, including but not limited to what language aspects it helps to enhance or what skills can be harnessed. If the goals are clearly presented, the students will perhaps be more likely to find themselves benefitting from the activity.

In contrast to the attitudes of the majority of participants, he does not hold a positive view towards the strategies aiming to alleviate language anxiety regarding their effectiveness. "Overlook students' trivial mistakes" and "Reassure students by affirming that making mistakes is an inevitable part of the language-learning process" are the ones that were given the lowest scores of Useful. Regarding the first strategy, he has a similar belief to other participants, which is that it might be risky if students are left unaware of their problematic areas, leading to the lack of further practice on them. For the second one, he sees almost no value regarding its usefulness as he considers it an obvious thing that anyone must acknowledge. This, in my opinion, might be attributed to his confident personality and the non-existence of language anxiety. On the contrary, "Initiate discussions about how the students feel and help them overcome their worries" receives a much brighter look compared to the discussed ones. This activity got maximum scores across the three domains, even coupled with the participant's appreciation. He stated: "*This is an extremely helpful and highly recommended activity, for I think few teachers can show such a level of care for their students*".

The last significant finding can be observed in his evaluation of "Vary the organisational format (e.g. a whole-class task can be followed by group work or pair work)". Unlike other participants, he expresses a preference for one-on-one engagement with the teacher over pair or group activities. A possible explanation for this result is the predominant use of the traditional teaching model in the Vietnamese context, which he might have been used to (see Section 2.3.2). He articulated concerns about potential distractions and inefficiencies in group dynamics, which he believed could negatively impact his focus and the group's overall progress. This perspective, simultaneously, sheds light on the moderate usefulness score for the strategy "Mobilise peer pressure and exploit joint energy by assigning group projects as homework". Nevertheless, he still saw the motivational aspect of peer pressure in driving his commitment to task completion.

David's evaluation placed emphasis on aligning interactive activities with clear educational objectives, suggesting that to enhance their perceived usefulness, the learning goals should be explicitly mentioned before the activity takes place. Additionally, his critiques of strategies aiming at reducing language anxiety reveal a preference for direct

feedback over more general reassurances about making mistakes. This compels the adoption of personalised anxiety alleviation strategies that cater to individual levels of confidence and anxiety. Finally, his preference for one-on-one interactions over group activities calls for a careful balance in group tasks to ensure they are structured to minimise distractions and maximise individual contributions, thereby enhancing both the motivation and effectiveness of collaborative learning environments.

Chapter 5: Conclusions And Final Reflections

In the context of Vietnam's English learning, this research aimed to address the pervasive issues of low motivation and high anxiety among Vietnamese teenage English learners. Through the implementation and evaluation of various teaching strategies in my private classes, this research has uncovered valuable insights into the activities that not only enhance motivation and engagement but also reduce the anxiety associated with learning English. In this chapter, I will first synthesise the key findings that were thoroughly examined in Chapter 4 in response to the three central research questions. Following this synthesis, I will discuss the further implications of these findings and outline potential directions for future research.

5.1 Synthesis of Key Findings

Research question 1: What types of activities or strategies do students enjoy the most and least in the classroom?

“Bring various cultural products (e.g. magazines, music, TV recordings, videos) to class” was the most enjoyable activity for my teenage students. Designed to promote integrative motivation, this approach significantly raised their curiosity and engagement levels when such authentic cultural products were incorporated into lessons. Additionally, “Start a lesson with a warmer” and “Conduct role-playing activities”, both part of the “Strategies to deal with the lack of attention during lessons”, also scored extremely highly. These activities, known for their playful and interactive nature, injected a cheerful vibe into the classroom environment.

In contrast, “Overlook students' trivial mistakes” and “Reassure students by affirming that making mistakes is an inevitable part of the language-learning process” were less favoured. Their characteristics which encompass facilitating only one-way interaction and focusing primarily on providing comfort, did not substantially engage students.

Research question 2: What types of activities or strategies do they consider the most and least useful?

The activities regarded as the most enjoyable ones do not find themselves as top-ranked items in the “Useful” aspect. Instead, all three items in the category “Strategies to deal with the fear of speaking English” reach the highest positions in the ranking board. These strategies provide students with either instant language resources to aid their speaking or mental support to help them overcome their own “invisible” challenges – anxiety.

“Overlook students’ trivial mistakes” and “Reassure students by affirming that making mistakes is an inevitable part of the language-learning process” once again found themselves at the lower end of the spectrum. These two activities did not effectively address my students’ concerns about their mistakes. Instead, these teenagers advocated for more direct and corrective feedback, believing it would reinforce their learning and prevent the repetition of mistakes. Moreover, “Conduct role-playing activities” and “Vary the organisational format (e.g. a whole-class task can be followed by group work or pair work)” also received low rankings. This was attributed to the lack of clear task objectives, the desire for more direct interaction with the teacher, and the obstacles encountered during pair and group tasks.

Research question 3: What types of activities or strategies alleviate or heighten their anxiety?

On the one hand, “Initiate discussions about how the students feel and help them overcome their worries” and “Teach learners communicative strategies” proved to be the most effective in transforming the classroom into a “safe haven”. Students did feel comfortable when they had opportunities to share their worries with the teacher. Their greatest apprehension – communicative apprehension – was also substantially reduced when the learners were equipped with practical speaking strategies.

On the other hand, my students tended to be placed in daunting and high-pressure situations when taking part in activities including “Arrange meetings with L2 speakers (not necessarily natives, but high-level)” and “Conduct role-playing activities”, which likely explains why they received the lowest ratings in terms of “Safety” compared to the others.

5.2 Pedagogical Implications

5.2.1 Significance of Promoting Integrative Values

Integrating diverse cultural elements into language classrooms appears to be highly recommended due to its perceived capacity to lighten up the classroom atmosphere and assist language learning. The foreign language-related components, for example, conversations with people speaking the target language and frequent exposure to authentic materials, not only enhance the learning environment by making lessons more enjoyable but also serve to increase student engagement through the integration of real-world contexts that students find relatable and stimulating. Hence, to maximise the effectiveness of this type of strategy in increasing student motivation, especially in the Vietnamese context, where the prevalence of

instrumental motivation is recorded, teachers should consider carefully designing activities that utilise these resources and regularly updating them to align with students' evolving interests and the changing cultural landscape.

5.2.2 Appropriate Use of Error Correction Techniques

All the experimented strategies to minimise students' fear of making mistakes proved their ability to bring comfort to the classroom; however, the substantial discrepancy in their perceived usefulness raises a question regarding how to optimise them. Teachers should take into account their learners' preferences to tailor the most appropriate error correction techniques. For example, while some might favour discretion over directness in correcting mistakes, others may benefit from the opposite approach. I recommend that such a direct approach be employed only after the teacher has acknowledged their students' preferences and established a strong rapport and trust with them, ensuring a relaxed learning environment and the constructive nature of feedback.

5.2.3 Significance of Mental Support and Provision of Language Resources

The research findings indicate that even the least anxious students showed a deep appreciation for the teacher's attention to their students' feelings. Although this strategy may not significantly enhance the joy students experience in class, it is believed to work out exceptionally well in fostering a close-knit relationship between teacher and students, thereby enhancing the perceived "safety" in the classroom. Therefore, it remains advisable for teachers to provide mental support and show care even to learners who appear to be unaffected by foreign language anxiety.

Addressing the widespread issue of communicative apprehension among Vietnamese students, the strategic use of language prompts, frames, and general speaking strategies has proven effective. Teachers may consider modelling and demonstrating language "templates" both orally and in written form. These "templates" and strategies can serve as helpful guides for students, providing them with a structured approach to language use. Teachers can introduce these strategies before the onset of speaking activities or introduce them reactively when they observe students grappling with specific linguistic challenges. Implementing these practices not only boosts students' confidence but also enhances their ability to express themselves more fluently and accurately in speaking tasks.

5.2.4 Refining Interactive Activities for Better Relevance

Interactive activities have proven to significantly enhance classroom energy and student participation, which in turn perhaps increase their level of motivation. To make the best use of these activities, it is essential that teachers clearly communicate their educational objectives. This can be achieved through various methods, such as explicitly stating the objectives at the start of the activity, utilising engaging lead-in tasks, or integrating brief explanatory sessions that link the activity to broader learning goals. Additionally, teachers might consider soliciting feedback after the activities to assess understanding and reinforce the learning objectives. Such feedback can help refine future activities and ensure that they continue to meet educational goals while maintaining high levels of student engagement.

5.2.5 Adapting to Diverse Student Needs in Collaborative Settings

Given the mixed responses to group and pair work, teachers need to be mindful of individual student preferences and challenges. While collaborative work is beneficial, it is important to balance group tasks with individual or one-on-one interactions to cater to different learning styles and comfort levels. This might involve more personalised attention during group activities or adjusting the complexity of tasks to ensure that all students can contribute effectively without feeling overwhelmed.

5.3 Limitations

First, the duration of the study in my private classes was relatively brief, which may have limited our ability to observe the long-term effects of the strategies on students' motivation and anxiety. Changes in these affective factors might evolve over a longer period, and thus, the short timeframe of this study could potentially overlook delayed or cumulative effects.

Second, the variety of activities tested under the category "Strategies to deal with the lack of commitment" was limited, with only one specific strategy evaluated. This narrow scope may have hindered the exploration of a wider range of potential strategies that could address commitment issues more effectively.

Third, some of the activities introduced were quite unfamiliar to the students, leading to confusion and potential misinterpretation of their purpose and benefits. This lack of familiarity could have skewed the students' perceptions of the activities' effectiveness and their overall impact on emotional and learning outcomes.

5.4 Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the limitations of this study mentioned in Section 5.3, future research should consider extending the duration of the study to better assess the long-term effects of the teaching strategies on student motivation and anxiety. By extending the study period, data on how changes in student motivation and anxiety evolve over time can be gathered, providing a clearer picture of the enduring effects, or potential fading, of the strategies implemented.

To mitigate the challenges posed by introducing unfamiliar activities, future studies should incorporate preliminary sessions to familiarise students with new strategies before their official implementation. Providing students with background information, context, and clear explanations of the activities' objectives and expected benefits could enhance their comfort level and/or engagement. This preparatory step would help ensure that students fully comprehend the purpose and potential benefits of each activity, thereby aligning their expectations and responses more closely with the research aims. This not only enriches the student experience but also bolsters the validity of the data collected, providing a clearer insight into the effectiveness of the strategies tested.

The insights obtained from this research could serve as the foundation for a larger-scale study, acting as a pilot that informs broader applications and refinements of the teaching strategies tested. Future research may include different proficiency levels, age groups, strategies to tackle other observed problems, and potentially different cultural contexts, which would allow the researchers to examine the adaptability and effectiveness of the strategies in varied environments. This would not only validate the initial findings but also enhance the generalisability of the results across more diverse educational settings.

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Appendix A

Teaching Strategies Evaluation Questionnaire: Learner Perspectives

Dear Participant,

As part of my ongoing research for my thesis, I am conducting a study to better understand the effectiveness of various educational activities implemented in our classes. Your participation in this survey will provide invaluable insights into how these activities are perceived and experienced by learners like yourself.

This questionnaire aims to gather your feedback on different teaching strategies used in our classes. The primary goal is to evaluate each activity on three main aspects:

1. **Fun:** How enjoyable you find the activity
2. **Useful:** The usefulness of the activity in aiding your learning process
3. **Safe:** Your comfort level while participating in the activity

Instructions:

- For each activity listed, please rate its Fun, Usefulness, and Safety on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is the lowest and 10 is the highest.
- If you have any additional comments or detailed feedback about any specific activity, there is a section at the end of each item where you can write your thoughts.

Please be assured that your responses will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous. They will only be used for the purpose of this study and will not be disclosed in any form that could be used to identify you.

Your feedback is crucial for improving the quality and effectiveness of our educational strategies. Thank you in advance for your time and honest input.

Warm regards,

Duong

| No. | Strategies | Fun | Useful | Safe | Comments |
|-----|--|-----|--------|------|----------|
| 1 | Arrange meetings with L2 speakers (not necessarily natives, but high-level) | | | | |
| 2 | Share my own positive L2-related experiences in class with students | | | | |
| 3 | Bring various cultural products (e.g. magazines, music, TV recordings, videos) to class | | | | |
| 4 | Reassure students by affirming that making mistakes is an inevitable part of the language-learning process | | | | |
| 5 | Overlook students' trivial mistakes | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|----|---|--|--|--|--|
| 6 | Prioritise constructive feedback that emphasises progress over criticism | | | | |
| 7 | Initiate discussions about how the students feel and help them overcome their worries | | | | |
| 8 | Give hints or ready-made “answer templates” | | | | |
| 9 | Teach learners communicative strategies | | | | |
| 10 | Conduct role-playing activities | | | | |
| 11 | Start a lesson with a warmer | | | | |
| 12 | Vary the organisational format (e.g. a whole-class task can be followed by group work or pair work) | | | | |
| 13 | Mobilise peer pressure and exploit joint energy by assigning group projects as homework | | | | |

Appendix B

Mean Scores of Strategies by Fun, Usefulness, and Safety Criteria

| Categories | Activities | Mean scores | | |
|--|--|-------------|--------|------|
| | | Fun | Useful | Safe |
| Strategies to deal with the lack of initial motivation | Arrange meetings with L2 speakers (not necessarily natives, but high-level) | 9.0 | 9.0 | 8.6 |
| | Share my own positive L2-related experiences in class with students | 8.0 | 9.2 | 9.0 |
| | Bring various cultural products (e.g. magazines, music, TV recordings, videos) to class | 9.6 | 9.2 | 9.2 |
| Strategies to deal with the fear of making mistakes | Reassure students by affirming that making mistakes is an inevitable part of the language-learning process | 7.4 | 8.4 | 9.0 |
| | Overlook students' trivial mistakes | 7.8 | 7.8 | 9.2 |
| | Prioritise constructive feedback that emphasises progress over criticism | 9.2 | 9.2 | 9.4 |
| Strategies to deal with the fear of speaking English | Initiate discussions about how the students feel and help them overcome their worries | 8.4 | 9.8 | 9.8 |
| | Give hints or ready-made "answer templates" | 9.0 | 9.4 | 9.0 |
| | Teach learners communicative strategies | 8.6 | 9.6 | 9.6 |
| Strategies to deal with the lack of attention during lessons | Conduct role-playing activities | 9.4 | 8.4 | 8.0 |
| | Start a lesson with a warmer | 9.6 | 9.4 | 9.4 |
| | Vary the organisational format (e.g. a whole-class task can be followed by group work or pair work) | 8.4 | 8.4 | 8.6 |
| Strategies to deal with the lack of commitment | Mobilise peer pressure and exploit joint energy by assigning group projects as homework | 8.0 | 8.6 | 8.8 |

Appendix C

Mean Scores of Strategies in the “Fun” Aspect

| Ranking | Activities | Mean scores |
|---------|--|-------------|
| 1 | Bring various cultural products (e.g. magazines, music, TV recordings, videos) to class | 9.6 |
| 2 | Start a lesson with a warmer | 9.6 |
| 3 | Conduct role-playing activities | 9.4 |
| 4 | Prioritise constructive feedback that emphasises progress over criticism | 9.2 |
| 5 | Arrange meetings with L2 speakers (not necessarily natives, but high-level) | 9 |
| 6 | Give hints or ready-made “answer templates” | 9 |
| 7 | Teach learners communicative strategies | 8.6 |
| 8 | Initiate discussions about how the students feel and help them overcome their worries | 8.4 |
| 9 | Vary the organisational format (e.g. a whole-class task can be followed by group work or pair work) | 8.4 |
| 10 | Share my own positive L2-related experiences in class with students | 8 |
| 11 | Mobilise peer pressure and exploit joint energy by assigning group projects as homework | 8 |
| 12 | Overlook students’ trivial mistakes | 7.8 |
| 13 | Reassure students by affirming that making mistakes is an inevitable part of the language-learning process | 7.4 |

Appendix D

Mean Scores of Strategies in the “Useful” Aspect

| Ranking | Activities | Mean scores |
|---------|--|-------------|
| 1 | Initiate discussions about how the students feel and help them overcome their worries | 9.8 |
| 2 | Teach learners communicative strategies | 9.6 |
| 3 | Give hints or ready-made “answer templates” | 9.4 |
| 4 | Start a lesson with a warmer | 9.4 |
| 5 | Share my own positive L2-related experiences in class with students | 9.2 |
| 6 | Bring various cultural products (e.g. magazines, music, TV recordings, videos) to class | 9.2 |
| 7 | Prioritise constructive feedback that emphasises progress over criticism | 9.2 |
| 8 | Arrange meetings with L2 speakers (not necessarily natives, but high-level) | 9 |
| 9 | Mobilise peer pressure and exploit joint energy by assigning group projects as homework | 8.6 |
| 10 | Reassure students by affirming that making mistakes is an inevitable part of the language-learning process | 8.4 |
| 11 | Conduct role-playing activities | 8.4 |
| 12 | Vary the organisational format (e.g. a whole-class task can be followed by group work or pair work) | 8.4 |
| 13 | Overlook students’ trivial mistakes | 7.8 |

Appendix E

Mean Scores of Strategies in the “Safe” Aspect

| Ranking | Activities | Mean scores |
|---------|--|-------------|
| 1 | Initiate discussions about how the students feel and help them overcome their worries | 9.8 |
| 2 | Teach learners communicative strategies | 9.6 |
| 3 | Prioritise constructive feedback that emphasises progress over criticism | 9.4 |
| 4 | Start a lesson with a warmer | 9.4 |
| 5 | Bring various cultural products (e.g. magazines, music, TV recordings, videos) to class | 9.2 |
| 6 | Overlook students’ trivial mistakes | 9.2 |
| 7 | Share my own positive L2-related experiences in class with students | 9 |
| 8 | Reassure students by affirming that making mistakes is an inevitable part of the language-learning process | 9 |
| 9 | Give hints or ready-made “answer templates” | 9 |
| 10 | Mobilise peer pressure and exploit joint energy by assigning group projects as homework | 8.8 |
| 11 | Arrange meetings with L2 speakers (not necessarily natives, but high-level) | 8.6 |
| 12 | Vary the organisational format (e.g. a whole-class task can be followed by group work or pair work) | 8.6 |
| 13 | Conduct role-playing activities | 8 |