

MỘT SỐ YẾU TỐ TÁC ĐỘNG ĐẾN THÁI ĐỘ CỦA SINH VIÊN TIẾNG ANH ĐỐI VỚI VIỆC SỬ DỤNG TIẾNG MẸ ĐỂ TRONG LỚP HỌC: MỘT NGHIÊN CỨU TRƯỜNG HỢP

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Nghiên cứu này cung cấp một bức tranh toàn cảnh về thái độ của sinh viên năm thứ nhất đối với việc sử dụng tiếng Việt (L1) trong các lớp học tiếng Anh (L2) cho sinh viên chuyên ngữ, đồng thời xem xét liệu các yếu tố như vị trí địa lý và loại hình của các trường phổ thông, có ảnh hưởng đến thái độ của họ hay không. Nghiên cứu sử dụng phương pháp định lượng, trong đó 107 sinh viên năm 1 tại một trường đại học ở Việt Nam đã tham gia khảo sát qua bảng hỏi. Kết quả cho thấy sinh viên có thái độ tương đối tích cực đối với việc sử dụng L1 mặc dù vẫn nhận thức được cả lợi ích và hạn chế của việc này trong lớp học L2. Tuy nhiên, không có sự khác biệt đáng kể về thái độ giữa các nhóm sinh viên theo địa phương hay loại hình trường phổ thông. Điều này cho thấy yếu tố nêu trên không tác động đến thái độ đối với việc sử dụng L1 ở bậc đại học.

Từ khóa: thái độ, sử dụng L1, trường chuyên, vị trí địa lý của trường phổ thông.

This study aims to provide a holistic picture of first-year students' attitudes towards the use of Vietnamese (L1) in English (L2) classrooms and examines whether background factors such as geographical locations and types of high school influence their attitudes. A quantitative research approach was employed, involving a questionnaire survey of 107 first-year students at a university in Vietnam. The findings reveal that the students hold relatively positive attitude towards the use of L1, while acknowledging both its advantages and limitations in L2 classrooms. However, no significant differences in attitudes were found among students from different regions or high school types, suggesting that these factors do not significantly impact university students' attitudes towards the use of L1 in English learning contexts.

Keywords: attitude, L1 use, schools for the gifted, geographical locations of high school.

FACTORS AFFECTING ENGLISH MAJORS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS L1 IN L2 CLASSROOMS: A CASE STUDY

Introduction

In recent years, the accessibility of foreign language learning, particularly

English, has expanded significantly with the widespread availability of resources and opportunities for language immersion.

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While extensive research has examined the effectiveness of various teaching methodologies and instructors' skills in enhancing English majors' proficiency (L2), the impact of high school locations and whether a school is designated for gifted students on students' attitudes towards the use of their first language (L1), Vietnamese in this situation, remains a topic of ongoing discussion.

However, due to differences in educational systems between Vietnam and other areas worldwide, very few international studies directly examine the impact of school location and gifted status on students' attitudes of L1 use in L2 learning. While scholars such as Darling-Hammond (2013) and Jovinius (2015) have provided evidence that external factors, to some extent, influence English majors' attitudes toward L1 integration in L2 classrooms, their studies do not specifically address high school-related factors. Conversely, research addressing the significance of these factors has remained rare, leading to the need for further investigation.

In Vietnam, research on the influence of high school locations and schools for the gifted on English majors' attitudes towards L1 use in L2 learning remains limited. This may be due to the perception that the topic is less pressing than other social and practical issues. Moreover, a common assumption persists that those from urban areas and schools for the gifted naturally and by default hold more positive attitudes towards English learning than their

counterparts. Underlying as it may sound, this assumption requires empirical validation.

This study aimed to address the research gap by exploring the attitudes of students from diverse geographical and academic backgrounds towards L1 use in English classes for English majors at a university in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. By examining this issue, the study was expected to determine whether high school experiences continue to shape students' attitudes towards L1 use and how school curricula can be adapted to better support learners from varied academic and socio-economic backgrounds.

In summary, the effects of certain factors, e.g. high school locations and gifted status, on students' attitudes towards L1 use in L2 classrooms remains an open question, both in Vietnam and in a global setting. Given the limited research on this topic in Vietnam, the study highlighted the need for further exploration to provide new insights and to contribute to a more in-depth understanding of L1 integration in programs for English majors.

The study explored these attitudes across various student groups. To be more specific, it sought to show (1) an overall picture of freshmen's attitudes towards the use of their L1 in English class and (2) the influence of students' backgrounds (school locations, types of class, social economic status, etc) on their attitudes towards the use of L1 in English lessons.

Literature review

Environmental factors as a condition for learning

Environmental factors, in this research's context, are conditions in the learning environment that affect the student's academic performance. This definition is drawn from Gagné's (1985) idea of internal and external factors of "learning conditions" and Spolsky's (1989) concept of conditions related to the "social context of L2 learning". Examples of such environmental factors include the socioeconomic situation, deep-rooted pedagogical beliefs, and official language policies.

Haugen's (1972) *Ecology of Language* theory explains how language development and use are shaped by environmental settings, both natural and social. He argued that language is inherently complex and deeply connected to the speakers' surroundings, and in L2 classrooms, factors such as linguistic landscapes, cultural norms, and social interactions significantly influence learning. Haugen's theory, therefore, highlights the importance of considering environmental influences when studying language acquisition and instructional strategies in L2 education.

Much research has examined the impact of external factors on academic performance. Studies conducted in Tanzania (Jovinius, 2015) and America (Linda Darling-Hammond, 2013) have

explored this across groups ranging from primary schoolchildren to high school students. Some focus on specific influences such as socioeconomic status (Pinilla-Portiño, 2018) or language exposure outside class (Sewbihon, 2020). Collectively, these studies indicate that the presence or absence of environmental factors significantly affects student achievement, establishing them as a key learning condition.

However, a lack of certain environmental elements does not hinder learning; instead, these factors shape the learning process rather than being essential to it. Hattie (2009) argued that environmental influences are intertwined with internal factors such as students' determination and deliberate practice or teacher's teaching capability and self-regulation skills. However, since environmental factors are more observable, educators and policymakers can assess and improve them more easily than altering students' thoughts and emotions. Therefore, this study focuses on how environmental factors shape students' learning experiences.

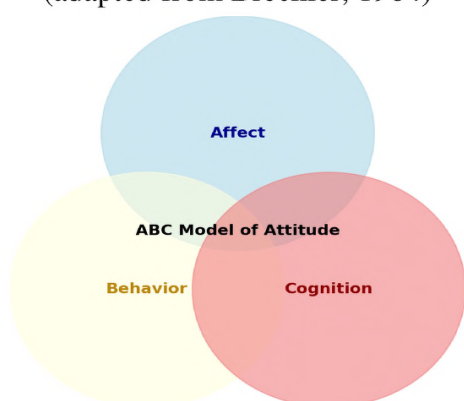
Attitudes as a condition for learning

Attitude itself is a complex and multifaceted concept.

It generally reflects an individual's emotional, behavioral, and cognitive stance towards a specific object or situation. It can be positive or negative, conscious or unconscious, and strongly influences decisions and actions. As attitudes are

dynamic and difficult to measure, this study adopts the ABC model (see Figure 1) adapted from Breckler (1984), a widely used framework known for its clarity and generalizability. Its well-defined, quantifiable components facilitate effective attitude measurement and aid in designing questionnaires with clear indicators. With the potential impact of attitudes on student success, the current study further explores their connection to environmental factors in learning.

Figure 1. The ABC Model of Attitude (adapted from Breckler, 1984)



A description of Vietnam's formal education system in relation to environmental factors and attitudes

Vietnam's formal education system follows a traditional, teacher-centered approach, similar to other Southeast Asian countries. With class sizes reaching up to 40 students and a strong focus on exams, teachers have limited flexibility to address individual and professional needs. Many high school teachers report burnout owing to the gap between pedagogical theory and practice (Vu, 2021), while students struggle with extra classes and intense academic pressure. As of 2024, three years

after the education reform, such challenges remain under-addressed. This study showed how students experience the transition from high school to college, often seen as a more flexible and liberating environment.

Gifted high school and gifted classes stand out in Vietnam's highly competitive educational landscape. These institutions and programs cater to selected individuals with outstanding academic aptitude (43/2019/QH14). In Vietnam, "gifted" extends beyond specialized schools to include English classes using pilot textbooks and extra courses preparing students for competitions. With university admission advantages tied to these contests, many students compete for a spot marked as "gifted". This study explored whether the experience of being in gifted English classes, e.g., increased exposure to the English language, influences students' attitudes towards English.

The disparity in socioeconomic conditions between localities can also affect learning. The economic gap between different areas in Viet Nam as of today remains a challenge, with over 54 in 64 localities having at least one area eligible for investment incentives due to their economically disadvantaged status (Appendix III, 31/2021/ND-CP). Research has suggested a link between economic conditions and learning experiences. For example, Pang's (2022) study indicates that economic hardships are among a list of several difficulties that freshmen from rural areas may face in transitioning to

college life. However, it has yet been explored in depth whether students' attitudes towards the target language is affected by socioeconomic conditions. For this reason, we are interested in finding out whether students from different localities would foster different attitudes towards the English language.

Research gaps

Several previous studies by Godfroid and Andringa (2023) or Plonsky (2023) have been limited in their research subjects, which often focus on a specific group rather than a broader range of participants. Most research on L1 use has examined secondary and high school contexts, with little focus on university students. To address this gap, the current study explores first-year students' attitudes toward L1 use in L2 classrooms.

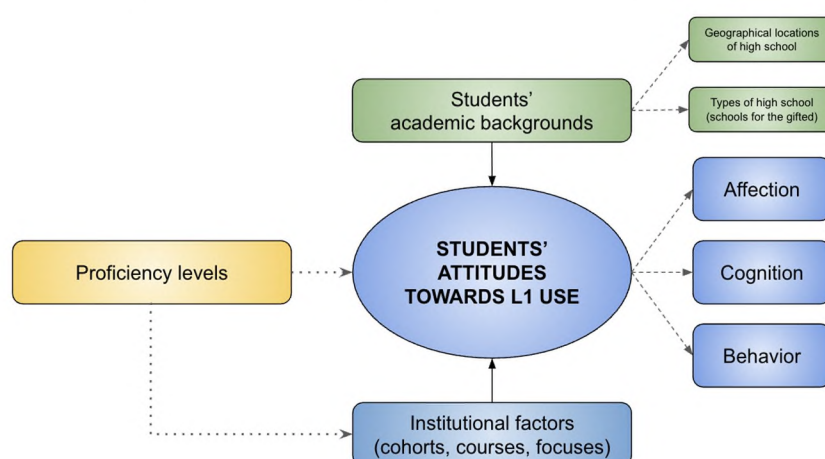
In addition, geographical locations of

high school, despite their significant influence on language development and preference, are rarely studied. A holistic approach to addressing educational disparities should consider different regional contexts to ensure equitable access to resources. However, these aspects remain underexplored in Vietnam, particularly in university settings.

Considering Vietnam's unique educational and economic landscape, together with the under-examined issues of education for the gifted, this study sought to determine whether specific high school experiences, e.g. receiving gifted education and living in different economic regions, affect students' attitudes towards English. Findings may offer practical insights in understanding how freshmen perceive English-focused programs.

Conceptual framework

Figure 2. The conceptual framework of the research



It can be seen that the dependent variable is first-year students' attitudes towards L1 use in L2 classrooms, while the independent variable is the institutional factors across different academic settings.

It is noted that students' proficiency levels, serving as a confounding factor, may also influence their attitudes towards using the native language (Alshehri, 2017). Apart from those aforementioned variables,

students' academic backgrounds are deemed as an intervening variable, which might account for the differences in their attitudes towards L1 in L2 classrooms at university. This framework structures the comprehensive examination of freshmen's attitudes towards the use of Vietnamese in English classrooms; however, the current study focused on the impact of students' academic backgrounds only.

Methods

Pedagogical Setting and Participants

The study focused on first-year English-major students at a Vietnamese university, whose language competency levels were at CEFR B1 and B2. These students were selected as they come from diverse regions across Vietnam, ranging from megacities to remote areas, which may influence their attitudes towards using Vietnamese in L2 classrooms. The yearly estimated total population of first-year students is 250. Based on the Yamane formula for sampling, the ideal sample size was determined to be 152. However, due to time constraints, the sample was limited to 107 participants from the total population of 250. Finally, the selection of participants was non-random.

Although the sample size is smaller than the standard, the results still yield valuable preliminary insights. As DeVellis (2016) noted, well-designed and validated questionnaires can generate reliable patterns even from small datasets. Moreover, small samples remain appropriate for descriptive or correlational

research, which is typical in questionnaire-based studies (Bryman, 2016). Such studies can produce meaningful descriptive statistics (e.g., means, medians, frequencies) that highlight general trends. Additionally, findings that align with or meaningfully differ from existing literature can still offer significant contributions despite the limited sample.

Design of the Study

This study adopted a quantitative, non-experimental research design to examine first-year university students' attitudes toward the use of their L1 in L2 classrooms. Specifically, a cross-sectional survey design was employed, which collected data at a single point in time from a sample of students who met the study's inclusion criteria. This design allowed the researchers to capture a snapshot of students' perceptions and experiences with L1 use in L2 settings. In terms of temporal orientation, the study followed a retrospective approach, as participants were asked to reflect on their past learning experiences related to L1 use in the classroom. In addition, a non-experimental design was implemented, as the study aimed to investigate students' attitudes and identify emerging patterns rather than manipulate variables or establish causal relationships. Overall, the quantitative and descriptive nature of the study facilitated statistical analysis of attitude trends across different demographic and educational backgrounds.

Data collection and analysis

The study employed questionnaires to collect quantitative data. An eight-step process was adapted, developed from Artino Jr et al. (2014)'s research and strictly followed: (1) conducting a literature review, (2) selecting relevant questions, (3) refining question wording, (4) incorporating contextualized questions, (5) conducting a pilot test, (6) obtaining expert feedback, (7) administering a pre-test, and (8) ensuring validation. The questionnaires were distributed through both online and offline channels using Google Forms and QR codes.

One questionnaire (created using Google Form) for freshmen, distributed both online via email and offline directly in classrooms, were divided into four sections. Section A collected demographic data, including university cohort, years of English learning, hometown, and participation in gifted English classes. Hometowns were classified into four categories based on government classifications: (1) remote and economically disadvantaged communes, (2) rural areas outside designated regions, (3) towns and suburban districts, and (4) inner-city districts of major cities. Section B explored students' experiences with Vietnamese use in class. Section C examined attitudes through affective, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions, strictly following the conceptual

framework. Section D gathered preferences on the frequency and appropriate contexts for Vietnamese use by lecturers and students.

The data analysis process involves two key stages, which are data cleaning and statistical analysis. During data cleaning, outliers were addressed, and incomplete or ineligible responses were excluded. Quantitative data were numerically coded and analyzed using SPSS version 27. Descriptive statistics examine variations in participants' attitudes and relationships between variables, summarizing questionnaire responses to interpret preferences and perceptions of L1 usage.

Results and Discussion

The data of this study aims to answer 03 research questions:

1. What are the attitudes of first-year students towards the use of L1 in English-major classes?
2. Is there any statistically significant association between first-year students' high school backgrounds, i.e. geographical locations and enrollment in English classes for the gifted, and their attitudes towards L1 use in English-major classes?

Research question 1: What are the attitudes of first-year students from language skills courses towards the use of L1 in English-major classes?

Results of research question 1

Table 1. Details in Freshmen's Affection, Cognition, and Behavior Toward L1 Use in L2 class

	Statements		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Affection	C.1.7 I feel it is easier to communicate. (when allowed to use L1)	Count	1	3	43	46	14
		%	0.9	2.8	40.2	43.0	13.1
	C.1.1 I feel comfortable. (when lecturers use L1)	Count	1	8	38	39	21
		%	0.9	7.5	35.5	36.4	19.6
Cognition	C.2.1 I follow what the lecturer is conveying. (when lecturers use L1)	Count	0	1	38	53	15
		%	0	0.9	35.5	49.5	14.0
	C.2.3 I understand the content being taught more thoroughly. (e.g. difficult concepts) (when lecturers use L1)	Count	1	3	29	52	22
		%	0.9	2.8	27.1	48.6	20.6
	C.2.4 I understand the instructions for class activities more clearly. (when lecturers use L1)	Count	1	2	26	60	18
		%	0.9	1.9	24.3	56.1	16.8
	C.2.8 I find it difficult to concentrate on the lessons. (when lecturers use L1)	Count	4	40	31	14	18
		%	3.7	37.4	29.0	13.1	16.8
Behavior	C.3.3 I actively volunteer to speak up in class. (when lecturers use L1)	Count	3	15	49	30	10
		%	2.8	14.0	45.8	28.0	9.3
	C.3.5 I note down more easily. (when lecturers use L1)	Count	3	11	35	41	17
		%	2.8	10.3	32.7	38.3	15.9
	C.3.8 I communicate more with my friends. (when they use L1)	Count	0	10	42	37	18
		%	0	9.3	39.3	34.6	16.8

Regarding affection, results suggest that the use of L1 may benefit students' well-being. More than half of the respondents felt more comfortable when their lecturers used L1 in class (item C.1.1) (56%). The ease of communicating in classes which permitted the use of L1 (item C.1.7) is also

reported by roughly the same figure (56.1%). These results suggest the potential of L1 in creating a more positive learning environment, partly by reducing anxiety and fostering a sense of security, which facilitates learning.

Regarding cognition, respondents generally viewed L1 use by lecturers in English-major classes positively. A majority agreed that L1 improved their understanding of explanations (63.5%, item C.2.1), course content (69.2%, item C.2.3), and instructions (72.9%, item C.2.4). These findings suggest that L1 helps simplify L2 complexities by connecting new concepts to students' prior knowledge, thereby enhancing comprehension. However, nearly 30% felt that L1 use disrupted their concentration (item C.2.8), highlighting a point of contention that warrants further research.

Regarding behavior, the impact of L1 is more nuanced. Over half (51.4%) of students reported increased communication with peers in classes where L1 was permitted (item C.3.8), fostering collaboration but potentially causing distractions. Similarly, 54.2% found note-taking easier when lecturers used L1 (item C.3.5). Interestingly, nearly half (45.8%) remained neutral on whether L1 encouraged class participation (item C.3.3). This suggests that L1 use alone might not be sufficient to overcome students' anxieties about speaking in the L2. In conclusion, L1 use and students' attitudes towards English seem to bear no distinct connection with each other.

Discussion on research question 1

The use of the mother tongue in foreign language classes has long been debatable. Our results support the idea that the

preference of one language of instruction over another could be independent from external factors of the learning environment. Besides, the results also suggest that the mother tongue could be a complement, rather than an obstruction, to the learning process. We propose 03 reasons to account for the mildly positive attitude:

The sense of security and comfort from L1 use

Using mother tongue in foreign language classes can provide freshmen with a sense of security and comfort, hence the positive attitudes towards its use. The transition from high school to college can be overwhelming, with new academic and social pressures affecting students' mental well-being. While prior high school experience and family background may have little influence on their adaptation, the desire for familiarity, such as using L1, can serve as a coping strategy to reduce anxiety. This aligns with Auerbach (1993), who argued that L1 use lowers psychological barriers and facilitates language acquisition. A third-year student in our study shared that using L1 eased their fear of judgment when speaking English.

Moreover, simultaneous use of L1 and L2 can help maintain a sense of identity and preserve cultural connection. Regardless of the high school locations, both urban and rural areas are still in Vietnam, a country where the amount of English learned in school is, without a doubt, "not widely used in the community"

(Lightbown & Spada, 2013, p. 217). In other words, the lack of opportunities to use English in real-world situations means that a familiar element (i.e., the mother tongue) can be used to mitigate the challenges of learning a “foreign” language that does not find much use in the learner’s everyday life.

L1 as an effective learning tool

Explanations in L1 offer an alternative to relying solely on L2 for understanding complex concepts. It aids note-taking by helping learners identify areas needing clarification, reinforcing comprehension, and building a foundation for L2 proficiency. This approach is particularly beneficial in technical language-skills courses such as grammar. In addition, cultural and literary concepts are often more effectively explained in L1, allowing students to compare linguistic aspects between their native and target languages. Some even view L1 as a supportive tool for L2 acquisition rather than a hindrance. This lends support to Beka’s (2016) study, who stressed the advantages of learning in a familiar language, with evidence from various countries, including Vietnam.

Furthermore, using L1 sometimes can enhance brainstorming and collaboration in group projects and discussions. It allows for a more open exchange of ideas and ensures everyone can contribute meaningfully to the group’s work. Furthermore, students also have a tendency to give feedback to their peers in their

mother tongue rather than English. Forman (2010) also highlights that when students possess a shared first language (and culture) with both their peers and instructors, it is reasonable that when a student makes a mistake, another student might instinctively use their native language to correct it.

Balancing L1 and L2 in language skills courses for freshmen

Nonetheless, the results revealed that students just have mildly positive attitudes, not completely positive towards the use of L1, meaning that freshmen, besides the benefits of L1 use, can discern the disadvantages of using too much L1 in class. As the name suggests, language skills courses prioritize the development of L2 proficiency, and excessive L1 use could potentially impede this objective, particularly in speaking and listening activities. This is in alignment with Nguyen’s (2021) findings at Can Tho University, where English majors advocated for a stronger focus on English in language skills courses, especially listening and speaking. In addition, the overuse of L1 can also limit students’ opportunities to be exposed to and practice English, which may deprive them of valuable L2 target-language input. From that, it is clearly seen that L2 is more utilized in language skills classes, with the possible exception of Grammar courses where L1 should be used to explain complicated structures or abstracts grammatical concepts. Some surveyed

freshmen also demonstrated a favorable disposition towards employing their native language when receiving grammar instruction.

Research question 2: Is there any statistically significant association between

first-year university students' high school backgrounds, i.e. geographical locations and enrollment in English classes for the gifted, and their attitudes towards L1 use in English-major classes?

Results of research question 2

Table 2. Kruskal-Wallis Test Mean Rank Among First-year Students' by High-school Location Summary: Attitudes Towards the Use of L1 in L2 Classrooms

Ranks			
	Location	N	Mean Rank
Average	Area 1 ¹	15	53.37
	Rural area 2 ²	29	51.26
	Area 2 ³	34	54.41
	Area 3 ⁴	29	56.59
	Total	107	

The data were analyzed using the Kruskal-Wallis H test, a non-parametric statistical test suitable for comparing groups when the assumptions of normality and equal variances are not met. Overall,

the findings indicate no statistically significant difference among students across different geographical areas towards L1 use in L2 classes.

¹Area 1 (Communes in regions 1, 2, 3 and communes with extremely difficult villages in ethnic and mountainous regions; communes with special difficulties in coastal regions and islands; extremely difficult communes, border communes, and safe zone communes are eligible for investment under Program 135 according to the Prime Minister's regulations.)

² Rural area 2 (Localities not in regions I, II, III.)

³Area 2 (Towns and cities under the province; towns and suburban districts of centrally run cities (except communes in region I).)

⁴ Area 3 (Inner city districts of centrally run cities.)

*Referred and translated from <https://thuvienphapluat.vn/chinh-sach-phap-luat-moi/vn/thoi-su-phap-luat/tu-van-phap-luat/52591/khu-vuc-cong-diem-uu-tien-2023-kv1-kv2-kv3-duoc-cong-may-diem>

Table 3. Hypothesis Summary Test

Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig	Decision
The distribution of Average is the same across categories of Location.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.932	Retain the null hypothesis
a. The significance level is .050 b. Asymptotic significance is displayed.			

The results of Kruskal-Wallis H test (Table 3) indicate that there is no statistically significant difference in whether students from different geographical areas will form different attitudes towards the use of L1 in English-major classes. With $\chi^2(2) = 0.440$ and $p = 0.932$, there is no significant evidence to reject the null hypothesis. This suggests that the observed differences in attitudes

are not influenced by different geographical areas, but rather by chance. Furthermore, the mean rank score for each of the four geographical areas does not change significantly, drawing support for the conclusion that there are inconsiderable differences in attitude towards L1 use among students from the four geographical areas.

Table 4. Tests of Normality for Freshmen's Experience in English Classes for the Gifted and their Attitudes towards the Use of L1 at University

		Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Attending specialized classes	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Average	1	.120	34	.200*	.928	34	.28
	2	.096	73	.089	.979	73	.260

* This is a lower bound of the true significance.

Table 5. Non-parametric Test of Pearson (Spearman) for Correlations

			Gifted
Spearman's rho	Average	Correlation Coefficient	-.090
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.355
		N	107

As displayed in Table 4, the Shapiro-Wilk Test yielded a Sig.value below 0.05, indicating a significant deviation of the collected data from a normal distribution,

and for the normality assumption of the Point-Biserial Correlation Coefficient was not satisfied, the non-parametric test of Pearson, which is Spearman test, shown in Table 5, was applied as an alternative. From Table 5, as the Sig.value exceeds 0.05, it is concluded that there is no association between first-year students' prior attendance of specialized English classes in high school and their attitudes towards the use of Vietnamese in university-level English classes for English majors.

Discussion on research question 2

Students' attitudes toward the use of their native language in English classrooms are often shaped by a combination of academic expectations at the university level and their previous learning experiences. In the Vietnamese context, both careful preparation for tertiary education and limited English exposure earlier play a role in shaping these perceptions.

Careful preparation for university

University freshmen in English-oriented majors are expected to be well-prepared academically and mentally for their studies. The rigorous demands of English majors foster a strong academic identity and commitment, leading students to prioritize mastering English language skills regardless of their prior education. Confidence is also crucial for effective language acquisition, as it enables students to articulate, communicate, and express personal viewpoints. Indeed, confident individuals show resilience in problem-solving and readiness in communication, which enhances their language skills.

Prior experience in learning English in a Vietnamese-predominant environment

Most Vietnamese students, regardless of their school locations, have prior experience learning English since secondary or primary school, where teachers, most of the time, use Vietnamese, resulting in limited English exposure. To strengthen this point, Bui and Nguyen (2016) noted that English language instruction in Vietnam remains largely grammar-translation oriented, with Vietnamese frequently used as the primary medium, especially at secondary levels. Teachers generally rely on L1 to manage large classes, explain grammar, and prepare for exams, leading to limiting authentic English exposure.

One of the most notable findings from the data was the absence of a correlation between first-year students' previous enrollment in English specialized classes and their attitudes towards the use of L1 in English classes for English majors. While gifted high schools are often assumed to offer superior academic environments, their actual impact on students' language development can be more complex than commonly perceived.

The study environment of schools for the gifted itself

Not every high school for the gifted is accredited or recognized as specialized schools by standards. This aligns with Genesee et al. (2005), who emphasizes how inconsistencies in labeling mainstream English classrooms can lead to misconceptions. More importantly, the

intense focus on academic competitions and achievements further reinforces the false assumption that specialized classes, particularly English-specialized ones, exist solely to nurture exceptionally talented students. In reality, the notion that attending such classes guarantees a highly competitive learning experience remains a common misconception.

Despite the marked improvement in the quality of education in specialized schools, some limitations have yet to be transcended. It is generally assumed that there has been insufficient emphasis on equipping specialized students with practical skills, conducting experiments, and engaging in scientific research. Furthermore, many specialized schools fail to meet national standards, lacking modern teaching equipment, or having invested in modern equipment but not utilizing it effectively. Additionally, there remains a shortage of teachers with profound professional expertise and practical teaching skills as required. In other words, to some extent, various students could be seen to be identical to those previously going to schools for the ungifted and unspecialized with the label of “gifted students”.

A predominantly monolingual environment in high schools for the gifted may limit students' exposure to English language and culture, which might potentially affect their proficiency, even for those in English-specialized classes. Unlike international schools, where English holds a dominant role, Vietnamese remains the primary medium of instruction and communication, with English treated

as a subject rather than a communicative tool. This could explain the lack of a clear link between freshmen's prior educational experiences and their attitudes toward L1 use in university English-major classes. Consequently, students' perspectives on L1 usage may be shaped more by their overall English proficiency and comfort level than by their high school background.

Conclusion and Recommendations for Further Studies

The findings generally indicated that English-major freshmen hold a slightly positive attitude towards using Vietnamese in their L2 classrooms. Their attitudes reflect an awareness of both the benefits and drawbacks of L1 use in English-major courses. Despite coming from diverse geographical backgrounds, they show similar perspectives on the use of Vietnamese in English classes. Besides, no significant correlation was found between prior enrollment in English programs for the gifted in high school and attitudes towards L1 incorporation at the university level. This suggests that students' perspectives on language use are influenced by a range of factors beyond their academic background, highlighting the complexity of language learning environments.

Although the data revealed certain conflicting insights, several recommendations were identified for the use of native language in university-level English classrooms. First, L1 may be used to explain grammar and complex concepts, where detailed clarification is necessary for student understanding. Second, teachers

should adopt a balanced use of both languages, which adjusts L1 proportion based on different course types. For language skills courses, particularly speaking and listening, L2 should be prioritized, and students are encouraged to actively develop their communication abilities to meet real-world demands. Lastly, also in communicative classes, the use of L1 should be minimized to create an immersive environment and allow students to develop natural L2 reflexes through consistent exposure and practice.

According to the comparative analysis of the current research and relevant previous works, the study suggested strategic use of L1 in English-major classes to support a more effective and engaging learning environment. In addition, the findings showed that integrating L1 in specific contexts can enhance comprehension, foster student confidence, and create a more inclusive classroom atmosphere. More importantly, effective integration of L1 in English Language Teaching (ELT) also associates with contemporary educational trends in student-centered learning and social-emotional learning (SEL) where meeting students' individual needs, promoting their emotional well-being, and encouraging a supportive and empathetic classroom environment have become the main concerns.

On the other hand, several limitations should be acknowledged. The study includes only 107 participants, falling short of the original estimated sample size of 152, highlighting the need for larger-scale

studies. Furthermore, as the research was conducted in an EFL context in Vietnam, its findings may not be generalizable to other educational settings. Future studies should consider conducting similar research in different countries to validate these findings within varied linguistic and cultural contexts. In the end, as data collection relies solely on questionnaires, future research should incorporate interviews or even observation to gain deeper insights into students' responses and enhance the study's comprehensiveness.

Should the current study be further developed, qualitative interview data could be thematically analyzed through coding and classification, with peer review enhancing reliability and validity. The interview questions would address three main areas: (1) the current use of Vietnamese in language classes, (2) appropriate and inappropriate contexts for its use, and (3) personal attitudes toward using Vietnamese in English classrooms. Based on these themes, tailored question sets would be designed for both lecturers and students. A semi-structured interview format would be employed, allowing flexibility in the order of questions to adapt to the interview context—an approach commonly used in qualitative research to facilitate open dialogue and a comfortable interview environment.

Acknowledgments

This paper is funded by the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University - Ho Chi Minh City under grant number 1301/TB-XHNV-ĐN&QLKH.

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(Ngày nhận bài: 20/3/2025; ngày duyệt đăng: 30/9/2025)