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The Pause Before the Answer: Psychological Safety as the Missing Condition Between Visionary Leadership and Genuine Teacher Voice

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Abstract

Visionary and transformational leadership research has long assumed that when leaders create inclusive participation structures and communicate a compelling shared vision, genuine teacher voice will follow. This paper argues that this assumption is incomplete. Drawing on an observation that remained unexplained after an earlier study on visionary leadership and team performance in educational institutions (Chin, 2024), it proposes that one stage is missing from existing models of leadership and engagement: the moment of decision in which a teacher determines, rapidly and often without conscious deliberation, whether speaking is safe. That determination is not shaped by the quality of the invitation to contribute. It is shaped by psychological safety, defined by Edmondson (1999) as a shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking. This construct has been extensively validated in organisational research. Its absence from the visionary leadership literature is the gap this paper seeks to address. Drawing on Edmondson (1999), Edmondson and Lei (2014), Frazier et al. (2017), Morrison (2014), Detert and Edmondson (2011), and Milliken, Morrison and Hewlin (2003), this paper develops a four-stage conceptual model in which psychological safety sits between the leadership invitation and genuine teacher voice as the condition that determines which way the decision goes. The model distinguishes between genuine voice, which is substantive and generative, and performed participation, which occupies the same structural space without producing the same effect. The two are invisible to any measure that counts only whether teachers spoke. They become visible only when one asks what determined whether teachers spoke freely. The paper further argues that the same condition governs the research encounter itself, where a participant's willingness to speak is shaped by the same interpersonal assessment that governs voice in any encounter where speaking carries a risk that silence does not. This is a secondary implication of the main argument rather than a parallel claim. The conceptual model proposed here sheds new light on why participation structures that are formally inclusive do not always produce genuine voice, and identifies the empirical questions that future research in this area will need to address. For school leaders, the model suggests that participation structures which look inclusive may not be releasing the genuine teacher voice they are designed to produce.

Keywords: Psychological Safety, Teacher Voice, Visionary Leadership, Performed Participation, Employee Silence, Conceptual Model, Educational Leadership, Interpersonal Risk.

A Note to the Reader

This paper is about a moment that most teachers will have experienced. A question is asked and the answer that follows is not quite the one that was there. It is careful, appropriate, and stays on the surface. The fuller thought does not make it out. That moment is small and passes quickly. This paper argues that what it contains matters enormously.

1. Introduction

During the data collection for an earlier study on visionary leadership and team performance in educational institutions (Chin, 2024), one moment stayed with the researcher long after the interview had ended. A teacher paused before answering a question about leadership and shared vision. The pause was not long. It was enough. What followed was careful: the words measured, the response general, the answer shaped more by what was appropriate to say than by what the teacher might have genuinely thought. It was not what she said but what she did not say that lingered. It did not feel as though she had nothing to offer. It felt more like she did not feel safe to say it.

The 2024 study had been designed to examine how visionary leadership fosters shared vision and teamwork, and how these contribute to team performance in educational settings. Its findings were clear on what leaders did and what teachers experienced. Participation structures were present. The invitation to contribute was genuine. Leadership aimed, sincerely, for inclusivity and collaboration. What the study could not explain was why some teachers held back their views even when the opportunity to share them had been formally given. It could describe the space. It could not explain what determined whether a teacher felt able to inhabit it. This was not merely a limitation of one study. It pointed towards a question that the visionary leadership literature, for all its insight into what leaders do, had not yet asked with sufficient precision.

This was not a question of leadership. The leader had created the conditions. It was not a question of structure. The mechanisms for participation were in place. It was not, primarily, a question of teamwork. Colleagues were present and the culture was described as collaborative. The unresolved question sat elsewhere, in the distance between the opportunity that had been offered and the voice that had not fully arrived. What people say is only part of the data. What they hold back is also part of it. The 2024 study had no means of capturing the second part.

This paper argues that what was missing from that study, and from the visionary leadership literature more broadly, was not a structure, a strategy, or a leadership behaviour. It was a condition: the felt sense of safety that determines whether participation becomes a genuine voice, or remains, as this paper's title suggests, present but withheld. That condition is psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999), and its absence from the visionary leadership literature is the gap this paper seeks to address. Specifically, this paper proposes that psychological safety is the missing condition between the participation structures that visionary leaders create and the genuine teacher voice that those structures are designed to release.

The argument proceeds in six sections. Section 2 examines what the visionary and transformational leadership literature has assumed about the relationship between participation and voice, and where that assumption fails. Section 3 introduces psychological safety as the construct that was present, though unnamed, in the 2024 findings. Section 4 draws on the literature on employee voice and silence to argue that withholding is not absence but choice, made in the presence of perceived risk. Section 5 proposes the conceptual model that places psychological safety between shared vision and genuine teacher voice. Section 6 extends the argument to the conditions of the research encounter itself, where the same human assessment applies. The paper concludes by setting out the implications for school leadership practice and the empirical questions that the conceptual model generates for future research.

2. What the Literature Assumed

Transformational and visionary leadership research has, for several decades, offered a compelling and internally coherent account of how leaders produce genuine engagement among their teams. Bass (1985) established the foundational premise that transformational leaders inspire followers, communicate a compelling vision, and lift individuals beyond their immediate self-interest toward collective goals. The process is motivational at its core. When a leader articulates a direction clearly and sincerely, the assumption is that followers will orient themselves towards it. Sashkin and Sashkin (2003), extending this framework, argued that visionary leaders do not merely state a vision. They model it, embody it, and foster the conditions under which others commit to it. Taylor, Cornelius and Colvin (2014) reinforced the same logic: that effective leaders define purpose, align members, and unify effort toward shared goals. The language of alignment, commitment, and unity runs through this literature like a current. Strong leadership, clear vision, genuine inclusion: these three elements, in combination, were understood to produce engagement.

It is a persuasive account. It is also, in important ways, incomplete.

The incompleteness is not in what these scholars argued. Each made a defensible and well-evidenced claim within the terms of their own frameworks. The incompleteness lies in what the framework did not ask. Transformational and visionary leadership research focused its attention on what leaders do. It examined how vision is communicated, how inclusion is structured, and how participation is invited. What it did not examine, at least not systematically, was what happens inside the person who receives that invitation. Specifically, it did not ask whether the teacher sitting across from a leader who has shared a vision sincerely and with genuine intent feels safe enough to respond to that vision fully and without reservation.

This limitation is one of application rather than original intent. Bass (1985), Sashkin and Sashkin (2003), and Taylor, Cornelius and Colvin (2014) were not arguing that participation alone guarantees voice. The field, in applying their frameworks, quietly assumed it did. This gap has not gone entirely unnoticed within the transformational leadership tradition itself. Scholars working on teacher emotions and the internal conditions of followers have pointed towards this dimension as an important but underexplored aspect of leadership effectiveness, though it has yet to be connected systematically to the question of psychological safety.

The assumption embedded in the literature was this: if you invite people to speak, they will speak. The invitation was treated as sufficient. The willingness to respond was treated as a natural consequence of the quality of the leadership behaviour that preceded it. This study's 2024 findings did not contradict that assumption directly. The leaders in that study were inclusive. The structures for participation were present. The invitation to contribute was genuine. And yet something in the data resisted the clean sequence the literature had predicted. Some teachers contributed fully. Others offered answers that stayed on the surface. A few reduced their participation over time, not because the invitation was withdrawn, but for reasons the study's design could not reach.

The missing question did not become visible during the study. It became visible afterward, in the quiet work of sitting with what the data could not explain. Leadership research had asked one question: Does the leader share the vision? It had not asked the question that sits just beneath it: does the teacher feel safe enough to respond to that vision fully and without reservation? Bass's (1985) own framework included individualised consideration, which attends to followers' individual needs and development. Yet individualised consideration addresses growth and support rather than the specific interpersonal safety assessment that precedes voice, and it does not resolve the question of whether a teacher feels safe enough to speak freely in a given moment. The question of whether the leader shares the vision and the question of whether the teacher feels safe enough to respond are not the same question. That conflation is where the framework assumes more than the evidence supports.

Two recent empirical studies encountered the same gap from different directions. Awodiji and Oluwalola (2025), examining distributed leadership and school goal achievement in Nigeria, found that inspiring a shared vision did not significantly predict outcomes, a result that sits uncomfortably alongside the confidence of the transformational leadership tradition. The authors did not dismiss the finding. They absorbed it and noted that whilst distributed

leadership relies heavily on vision-sharing, the relationship between vision and achievement is not always direct. Di-at and Abaya (2026), studying school leadership practices and teacher organisational commitment in the Philippines, reached a related conclusion by a different route. Leadership practices across six domains, including vision, mission and goals, rated very highly among teachers, yet the strongest effects were on affective and normative commitment rather than on active voice or substantive engagement. Teachers felt attached. They did not necessarily speak freely. Di-at and Abaya (2026) did not examine voice directly. Their study was designed to measure commitment, not participation. But the pattern in their data points towards exactly the gap this paper seeks to explain: that structural attachment and genuine voice are not the same condition, and that leadership practices, however strong, do not automatically produce one from the other.

What neither study could explain was why. The present paper proposes that the explanation lies not in the quality of the vision, nor in the sincerity of its communication, but in the presence or absence of the condition that determines whether teachers engage with a shared vision genuinely or perform engagement carefully. That condition is examined in the section that follows.

3. Psychological Safety: Recognition, Not Discovery

When the researcher returned to the literature after collecting the 2024 data, the encounter with Edmondson's work did not feel like discovering something new. It felt like recognition. The moment with the teacher who had paused, who had given a careful and general answer where something fuller had seemed possible, had remained unexplained. Not wrong. Not dishonest. Simply held back. Reading Edmondson's account of how people assess interpersonal risk before deciding whether to speak, the response was less one of surprise and more one of quiet arrival. This, it turned out, was what that had been.

Edmondson (1999) defined psychological safety as a shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking. The definition is precise in what it includes and, equally, in what it does not. Psychological safety is not confidence. It is not personality. It is not the absence of disagreement or the presence of warmth. It is a shared belief, held collectively, about the consequences of speaking. When that belief is present, people do not need to weigh whether their words will be taken well before offering them. When it is absent, that weighing begins. And once begun, it tends towards caution. Psychological safety is not the same as trust (Edmondson and Lei, 2014). Trust is an individual's assessment of another person's intentions, whilst psychological safety is a shared group-level belief about the consequences of speaking (Edmondson and Lei, 2014). The two are related but not identical, and conflating them risks obscuring what makes psychological safety distinctive as a condition of voice.

In plain terms, psychological safety is not about being allowed to speak. It is about not needing to hold yourself back when you do. That distinction matters because the leadership literature examined in Section 2 had attended carefully to the first condition and overlooked the second entirely. Participation structures create permission. They do not create the felt sense of safety that permission requires in order to become genuine voice. A teacher can be formally invited to contribute to a shared vision, can sit where the conversation is happening, can even add her name to the list of those who attended, and still hold back the thought that matters most. Confidentiality was assured. The pause remained.

Edmondson and Lei (2014) traced this construct across five decades of organisational research, showing that psychological safety operates at the individual, group, and organisational levels simultaneously. At the group level, which is most directly relevant to the present argument, psychological safety describes the climate within which team members decide, moment by moment, whether speaking is worth the risk. Frazier, Fainshmidt, Klinger, Pezeshkan and Vacheva (2017), drawing on 136 independent samples representing over 22,000 individuals and nearly 5,000 groups, confirmed that psychological safety is among the most robust predictors of voice behaviour, learning, and performance in team settings, and that its relationship to performance operates primarily through voice rather than as a direct effect. The empirical weight behind the construct is, by now, considerable. A recent evidence review confirmed that psychological safety remains one of the most actively researched constructs in

organisational behaviour, with implications extending across leadership, voice, learning, and performance (Capezio, Barends, Rousseau and Wietrak, 2023).

What is striking, however, is that this weight has not been brought to bear on the visionary leadership literature in any sustained way. The two bodies of scholarship have developed largely in parallel. Leadership research has examined what leaders do. Psychological safety research has examined the conditions under which people respond. The connection between them, the question of whether the conditions a leader creates actually produce the felt safety that genuine voice requires, has remained largely unasked. This paper asks it.

The reason it matters for the 2024 findings is this. The themes that emerged from that study, belonging, commitment, open communication, inclusivity, and empowerment, are not causes of team performance. They are descriptions of what a psychologically safe environment produces. The 2024 paper described the outcomes of psychological safety without naming the condition beneath them. Edmondson named the condition. The present paper connects the two. What the 2024 data observed was the presence of psychological safety in some teacher relationships and its absence, or its fragility, in others. What the study could not do was explain why some teachers felt it and others did not, or why the same leadership context produced both responses. That explanation requires a closer examination of what makes people choose silence over voice, and that is the subject of the section that follows.

4. What the Pause Contained

The teacher who paused before answering was not pausing because she had nothing to say. The pause was not confusion and it was not emptiness. What looked, on the surface, like a brief hesitation was, in that moment, a moment of weighing: a rapid and quiet assessment of whether what she actually thought was safe to say. The safer answer that followed was shaped by that assessment. The silence was not empty. It was chosen.

This distinction matters enormously for how qualitative data from leadership studies should be read. If silence is treated as absence, as the neutral space between one answer and the next, then what a participant does not say simply does not register. It falls outside the data. But if silence is understood as a choice, shaped by the participant's assessment of risk, then what is not said becomes as meaningful as what is. The data collected in the 2024 study included what teachers said. It did not, and perhaps could not, include what they had decided not to say. That is the gap this section addresses.

Morrison (2014), reviewing two decades of research on employee voice and silence, established that silence in organisational settings is rarely passive. When employees withhold information, concerns, or genuine views from those in positions of authority, they are not simply failing to contribute. They are making a choice, shaped by their assessment of what speaking will cost them. Morrison identified the conditions that make silence more likely: perceived risk of negative evaluation, uncertainty about how responses will be received, and the absence of a felt sense that speaking will make any difference. These conditions do not require a hostile environment to operate. They function just as effectively in settings that are formally inclusive, formally collaborative, and formally safe. The form does not dissolve the fear.

Detert and Edmondson (2011) went further, identifying what they called implicit voice theories: taken-for-granted beliefs about when and why speaking up at work is risky or inappropriate. These beliefs are not always conscious. They do not always present themselves as fear. They manifest more quietly, as an instinct to wait, to observe how others respond before deciding one's own position, to hold back the clear thought that is already fully formed. Detert and Edmondson (2011) found that in formal settings, these implicit theories become stronger, more automatic, and more difficult to override. There is a shared understanding, felt rather than stated, that one assesses the situation before speaking. The distance between what one thinks and what one says is measured carefully, and adjusted accordingly.

This is not, it should be noted, irrational behaviour. It is learned behaviour (Detert and Edmondson, 2011; Milliken, Morrison and Hewlin, 2003). The assessment of interpersonal risk is shaped by experience: by previous moments

when speaking freely produced consequences, by observations of what happened to others who did not hold back (Milliken, Morrison and Hewlin, 2003), by the accumulated evidence of how a particular environment responds to speaking freely. Over time, that assessment becomes a habit. One filters more. One speaks less. Not because there is less to say, but because the habit of protection has become more automatic than the impulse to contribute. Detert and Edmondson (2011) found these implicit voice theories to be widely held and significantly predictive of workplace silence, even after accounting for individual personality and organisational context.

What this means for the 2024 findings is this. The teachers who gave careful, general answers were not disengaged. They were not indifferent to the shared vision their leaders had articulated. They were, in all probability, engaged enough to have a view, and uncertain enough about the consequences of expressing it to keep that view contained. The invitation to speak had been extended. The safety to accept that invitation fully had not been established. And without that safety, the invitation produced performed participation rather than genuine voice. The structures were present. The conditions were not.

Silence, then, is not the absence of something to say. It is the presence of a decision not to say it. And that decision, quiet and often invisible to the researcher collecting the data, is where the gap between participation and genuine voice actually lives.

5. The Missing Stage

Existing models of visionary and transformational leadership represent the relationship between leadership and team performance as a direct sequence. The leader communicates a vision, structures participation, and invites contribution. The team engages. Performance follows. Provided the leadership is clear and inclusive, the steps between invitation and outcome are treated as largely unproblematic.

This paper proposes that one stage is missing. Between the invitation and the response, a person decides. That decision determines whether the invitation produces genuine voice or performed participation. The model proposed here places that moment of decision at the centre, and identifies psychological safety as the condition that shapes which way it goes.

The model operates in four stages.

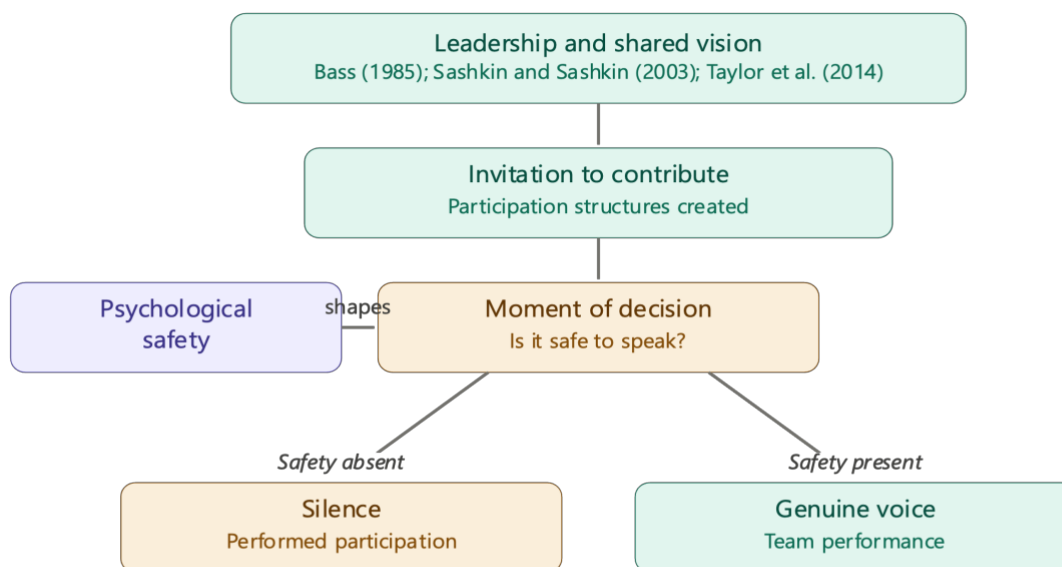


Figure 1. Psychological safety as the missing stage between invitation and genuine voice
Chin (2024), extended from Edmondson (1999)

The first is leadership and shared vision. The leader articulates a direction, communicates a purpose, and creates the conditions for participation. Bass (1985), Sashkin and Sashkin (2003), and Taylor, Cornelius and Colvin (2014) mapped this stage with considerable precision. It is necessary. It is not sufficient.

The second is the invitation to contribute. Teachers are asked to share views, contribute ideas, and engage with the vision that has been offered. This is where most models locate the mechanism of engagement. This is also where most models stop asking questions.

The third is the moment of decision. Before responding, a person makes an assessment, rapid, largely automatic, and shaped by accumulated experience, of whether speaking is safe. Detert and Edmondson (2011) identified this as the operation of implicit voice theories: taken-for-granted beliefs about when and why speaking up carries risk. Morrison (2014) established that this assessment operates in formally inclusive settings as readily as in hostile ones. The quality of the invitation does not dissolve it. What determines its outcome is the felt condition that surrounds the invitation, not the invitation itself. Morrison (2014) further noted that leaders are often entirely unaware of this tendency, assuming that employees feel free to speak and that the absence of dissent signals agreement. The silence is invisible to the person in authority precisely because it is performing the appearance of participation. Motivation describes how much a person wants to contribute (Bass, 1985). The moment of decision is different. It is not about wanting. It is about whether, in this encounter, at this moment, speaking feels safe.

That felt condition is the fourth stage: psychological safety. Edmondson (1999) defined it as a shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking. Frazier et al. (2017), drawing on 136 independent samples representing over 22,000 individuals, confirmed its robust relationship with voice behaviour, learning, and performance. In the model proposed here, psychological safety does not sit alongside the decision point. It shapes it. When it is present, the decision tends towards voice. When it is absent, the decision tends towards self-safety, the quiet preference for giving the answer that risks the least. A response was given. The contribution was recorded. Whether it reflected what the teacher genuinely thought is what the model cannot confirm, and what the interview alone could not reveal.

The distinction this model draws is between genuine voice and performed participation. Genuine voice is substantive, honest, and generative. It contributes to team performance not by adding numbers to a participation count but by bringing real thinking into a shared process. Performed participation occupies the same structural space without producing the same effect. It satisfies the form of inclusion whilst leaving its substance unrealised. The two are invisible to any measure that counts only whether people spoke. They become visible only when one asks what determined whether people spoke freely. Most models of visionary leadership stop at leadership and engagement. This model says: leadership invites voice, but psychological safety determines whether voice actually happens. That addition, one stage between the invitation and the outcome, is what the 2024 data pointed towards without being able to name.

Psychological safety does not arise from nothing. Research has identified leadership behaviour as its primary antecedent, with leader inclusiveness, modelling of fallibility, and responsiveness to voice all contributing to whether safety develops within a team (Edmondson and Lei, 2014; Frazier et al., 2017). The antecedents of psychological safety are well documented elsewhere. The contribution of this paper is to show where safety sits in the leadership-to-voice sequence. The moment of decision as proposed here draws on the antecedent literature on voice behaviour, especially Detert and Edmondson (2011) and Morrison (2014), and applies that body of work to the visionary leadership sequence where it has not previously been located. The empirical question of what produces or inhibits psychological safety in specific school contexts remains an important direction for future research.

It is what the pause contained.

6. The Same Condition in the Research Encounter

The argument this paper has made about teacher voice in schools applies with equal force to the conditions under which teachers speak to researchers. It is the same condition appearing in a different encounter.

When the researcher sat across from the teacher who paused, every procedural requirement had been met. Ethical clearance obtained. Consent given. Confidentiality assured. The process was proper. What the process could not do was change the felt reality of the encounter: that one person was asking and another was responding, and that the document on the table could not guarantee how safe the teacher felt in that moment.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) described the fundamental ethical tension in social research as a costs and benefits ratio. The participant makes the same assessment from the other side of the table. The teacher who gave a careful answer was not being uncooperative. She was being cautious, as any person might be when asked to speak in an unfamiliar encounter.

Milliken, Morrison and Hewlin (2003), in their study of employee silence, found that 85 per cent of respondents had been in situations where they felt unable to raise an issue even when they considered it important. The most frequently cited reasons were not indifference. They were the fear of being labelled negatively and the fear of damaging valued relationships. That fear does not disappear when the conversation moves from a workplace to a research interview. It follows the person into the encounter.

Formal procedures address this asymmetry structurally. They do not dissolve it experientially. Strip away every procedural assurance and ask what remains that no document can guarantee. What remains is the participant's felt sense of safety. That feeling cannot be administered. It can only be earned through the quality of the human relationship the researcher builds before, during, and after the interview.

In both cases, the same mechanism governs the response: a quieter voice makes an assessment about whether speaking freely is safe. Kawabata and Gastaldo (2015) argued precisely this point in the context of qualitative

research: that silence is not an absence of communication but a communication strategy, and that researchers who treat hesitation and withholding as empty space in the data miss what those moments actually contain. Participants' meaning-making, they noted, is often embedded in what is left unsaid. Their argument was developed in a culturally specific setting, drawing on interviews with marginalised workers in Japan. The principle, however, extends beyond that context to any research encounter in which the felt sense of safety shapes what a participant chooses to say and what they choose to withhold.

The British Educational Research Association (BERA) inquiry into research and teacher education is instructive here. Beauchamp, Clarke, Hulme and Murray (2013) argued that teachers are intellectual professionals whose knowledge and judgement carry weight. When a teacher chooses not to speak freely, she is not failing the research. She is exercising professional judgement. The researcher's task is not to overcome that judgement but to create conditions safe enough that she might choose differently.

This is, in the end, the same task that visionary leaders face in their schools. Whether a teacher is speaking to a principal about a shared vision, or to a researcher about her experience of leadership, psychological safety, the felt sense that speaking is safe, shapes what is said and what is left unsaid (Edmondson, 1999). Leadership cannot create that felt sense by designing structures alone. Research cannot create it by completing forms alone. Both require something no document can verify: the felt sense that this situation, this person, this moment, is safe enough to speak in. This paper does not attempt a full treatment of research ethics. It notes one specific implication of the psychological safety argument: that qualitative data on voice and participation may be shaped by the very condition the research is designed to examine.

7. Conclusion: What the Pause Contained

This paper began in a room, with a teacher who paused.

The pause was brief. What followed was careful: an answer that stayed on the surface, that offered what was appropriate rather than what was real. The researcher moved on, as the study required. But the moment did not move on. It stayed, unresolved, at the edge of the data, pointing towards something the 2024 study could describe but not explain.

What it pointed towards was this. A question the study had not been designed to ask. Why did the teacher hold back when the invitation to speak had been genuinely given?

That observation, held for long enough, became the argument of this paper. Visionary and transformational leadership research has attended carefully to what leaders do: how they communicate a vision, how they structure participation, how they invite contribution. What it has not attended to, with the same care, is the condition that determines whether the invitation is accepted genuinely or performed carefully. That condition is psychological safety. Its absence is not visible in the structures of participation. It is visible only in the pause before the answer, in the careful phrasing that follows, in the gradual withdrawal of a voice that was never fully given.

The model proposed here places psychological safety between the invitation and the response. It does not replace the existing literature on visionary leadership. It extends it, by naming the stage that existing models skipped over: the moment of decision, shaped by the felt sense of safety, that determines whether participation becomes genuine voice or remains present but withheld.

That model now requires empirical validation. The questions it generates are not abstract. They are the questions this paper could not ask in 2024, because the study that prompted it was not designed for them. What does it feel like to be invited to contribute to a shared vision? What determines whether a teacher speaks freely or holds back? What would make a teacher feel safe enough to say what is genuinely meant?

These are the questions that the present paper cannot answer, and that future empirical work in this area will need to pursue.

Psychological safety is not a fixed attribute of a leadership context. It is a relational and dynamic condition, one that can vary across individual teacher-leader relationships even within the same school and under the same leadership.

What this paper can offer, in the meantime, is a reframing. Creating conditions for genuine contribution is not the same as guaranteeing it. Procedural conditions can be designed and documented. The felt sense of safety that genuine voice requires cannot be designed or documented. It can only be earned through the quality of the human relationship that surrounds the conversation, whether that conversation is an interview or a group session. The condition is the same in each case. What changes is only who is in the conversation and what each person brings to it.

No procedure can guarantee that feeling. No assurance, however sincerely made, can substitute for it. Safety is not something that can be declared. It is something that has to be felt.

The condition this paper has sought to name is not new. It has been present in every room where one person asked and another decided, in the space of a pause, whether to answer honestly. Safety, when it is genuine, does not depend on being needed. That is precisely what makes it rare. What is new, perhaps, is the willingness to ask what the pause contains, and to take the answer seriously. The pause has always been there. The question is whether it has been heard.

Acknowledgement: This paper began over coffee, when a friend asked a simple question: what is the point of asking, if people do not want to speak up? The question landed because the author had seen something similar in the data from an earlier study on visionary leadership and team performance (Chin, 2024), where a teacher had paused before answering in a way the study could observe but not explain. The question asked over coffee and the pause observed in the data were, it turned out, two versions of the same silence, and this paper is the attempt to name it. The author is grateful to the teachers whose participation in the 2024 study made this paper possible. Their voices, spoken and withheld, are what it is about.

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Interventions in the Written Expression of Students with Specific Learning Difficulties

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Abstract

Written expression represents one of the most demanding academic skills, as it integrates linguistic, cognitive, metacognitive, and affective processes. Students with Specific Learning Difficulties (SLD) frequently experience persistent challenges in written language production, including deficits in spelling accuracy, limited syntactic complexity, difficulties in text organization, and reduced use of writing strategies. These difficulties often lead to lower writing quality, decreased self-efficacy, and avoidance of writing tasks. The present study provides a narrative review of theoretical models of written composition and research-based interventions designed to support the written expression of students with SLD. The review synthesizes findings from research in cognitive psychology, literacy education, and special education in order to examine the mechanisms underlying writing difficulties and identify instructional approaches that demonstrate empirical effectiveness. Particular emphasis is placed on explicit strategy instruction, the development of self-regulation skills, structured teaching of text organization, differentiated instructional practices, and the use of educational technology to reduce transcription barriers. Evidence from the literature suggests that systematic, structured, and metacognitively oriented instructional interventions can significantly improve the quality, coherence, and length of written texts produced by students with SLD. In addition, these interventions contribute to the development of writing self-efficacy and greater engagement in writing activities. The findings highlight the importance of integrating cognitive and pedagogical approaches in order to design effective instructional practices that support struggling writers in inclusive educational environments.

Keywords: Written Expression, Specific Learning Difficulties, Writing Instruction, Self-Regulation, Writing Interventions, Differentiated Instruction

1. Introduction

Written expression constitutes a fundamental pillar of school learning and academic success. The ability to produce coherent, organized, and functional written discourse is not limited to linguistic accuracy, but also includes the

capacity to plan, organize, revise, and adapt text to a specific communicative purpose. Writing functions as a tool for thinking, a means of representing knowledge, and a mechanism for constructing meaning. However, for students with Specific Learning Difficulties (SLD), written production often constitutes an area of systematic failure. Students with SLD display difficulties that go beyond simple spelling accuracy. Deficits are observed in text planning, limited development of ideas, simplified syntactic structures, weak cohesion, and reduced revision ability. The increased cognitive load resulting from non-automated lower-level skills, such as spelling and graphomotor execution, limits the cognitive resources available for higher-order processes of organization and argumentation (Berninger & Winn, 2006). At the same time, repeated experiences of failure negatively affect students' self-perception and self-efficacy, leading to avoidance of writing activities (Pajares, 2003). Within this context, the search for effective interventions to enhance the written production of students with SLD becomes particularly important. The present article attempts to synthesize the main theoretical and research data concerning intervention in written expression, with the aim of highlighting practical directions for educational practice.

1.1 Theoretical Models of Written Production

Written production has been approached theoretically as a complex, multilayered, and dynamic process in which cognitive resources, linguistic skills, metacognitive self-regulatory mechanisms, and contextual factors interact. The evolution of theoretical models of writing reflects precisely this broadening: from early cognitive-processing descriptions of the composing process toward more comprehensive integrative approaches that incorporate developmental, sociocultural, and dynamic-systems parameters.

A starting point for the modern study of writing was the “Cognitive Process Theory of Writing” proposed by Flower and Hayes, which described writing as a set of overlapping processes—planning, translating, and reviewing—that are activated recursively rather than linearly. A central element of the model was its emphasis on goal regulation and the continuous monitoring of the process within a “task environment” and the writer's long-term memory (Flower & Hayes, 1981). For special education, and particularly for students with Specific Learning Difficulties, the value of this approach lies in shifting attention from the final product to the component processes, thus making it possible to pedagogically target dysfunctional stages, such as inadequate planning or limited revision. At the same time, the model highlighted that writing quality is influenced by the way the writer allocates limited cognitive resources across competing processes, something directly related to the profiles of students with SLD. The later revision and “remodeling” of writing models by Hayes contributed decisively to broadening the cognitive perspective. In the article *Modeling and Remodeling Writing*, Hayes describes the historical development of writing approaches and documents the shift toward models that incorporate factors such as motivation, emotion, attention, and the influence of the social and communicative context, as well as differences depending on genre and developmental stage (Hayes, 2012). In developmental education, the incorporation of motivation and emotion is not a secondary addition but a central factor, since low writing self-efficacy and evaluation anxiety often accelerate avoidance and superficial engagement, especially among students with SLD.

Closely related to this development, the model of Chenoweth and Hayes for written language production offered a more detailed deconstruction of the “internal mechanisms” of writing, introducing distinct functional units such as the proposer (idea generation), the translator (linguistic encoding), the transcriber (conversion into written or typed text), and the reviser/evaluator (evaluation and revision). Empirical investigation into the role of working memory and the “inner voice” demonstrated that writing presupposes constant shifts between idea production and linguistic encoding, with significant costs for cognitive processing (Chenoweth & Hayes, 2003). For students with SLD, this deconstruction is particularly useful because it makes visible why reduced automatization in lower-level skills, such as spelling or graphomotor execution, can “block” higher-order processes: when the transcription stage places disproportionate demands on cognitive capacity, the proposer and reviser operate under constraints, resulting in weaker organization, less revision, and often shorter texts.

Alongside cognitive process models, developmental and pedagogical research highlighted theories focusing on qualitative differences in strategy and cognitive maturation. The distinction drawn by Bereiter and Scardamalia between “knowledge-telling” and “knowledge-transforming” has been highly influential, as it describes the transition from simple reproduction of information to more complex forms of writing that require reflection,

transformation of knowledge, adaptation to purpose and audience, and the management of contradictions and argumentation (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987). This framework is particularly significant for students with SLD, because many remain confined to “knowledge-telling” strategies not due to lack of ideas, but because the burden of the writing process, low self-regulation, and limitations in linguistic competence hinder the transformation and reorganization of content.

In recent years, the literature has attempted to connect the processing view of writing with developmental and componential models, in order to explain more precisely the “pathways of influence” from specific skills to writing quality. Within this framework, the Direct and Indirect Effects Model of Writing (DIEW) has gained particular prominence, as it seeks to go beyond generalized statements of simplified models and identify direct and indirect pathways of influence among working memory, linguistic skills such as vocabulary and grammar, higher-order cognitive skills such as inference and theory of mind, transcription skills such as spelling and writing fluency, and the final written product. The empirical investigation of Kim and Schatschneider demonstrated that discourse-level oral language and transcription skills function as critical mediating variables through which other cognitive and linguistic factors influence writing quality (Kim & Schatschneider, 2017). This approach is especially useful for intervention with students with SLD, because it demonstrates that improvement in writing does not result merely from “general practice,” but requires targeted intervention at key points in the system, such as transcription fluency and discourse-level language skills, in order to free cognitive resources and strengthen higher-order processes.

Similarly, more recent research expands developmental models by emphasizing the co-occurrence of reading and writing difficulties and their dynamic interdependence. Kim’s Interactive Dynamic Literacy Model (IDL) introduces a unified perspective according to which reading and writing constitute interrelated systems within a broader communicative act, with hierarchical and dynamic relationships among shared and specific skills (Kim, 2020). The application of this model to cases of learning difficulties suggests that the co-occurrence of reading and writing problems can be interpreted as the result of interaction between common foundational mechanisms, such as language skills and executive functions, as well as specific mechanisms that affect reading and writing differently (Kim, 2022). Within the context of SLD, this perspective has practical value: assessment and intervention in writing are often ineffective when they ignore the level of language comprehension, reading experience, and text comprehension skills that feed written production.

In the same spirit of refining developmental theories, recent empirical work surrounding the Not-so-Simple View of Writing (NSVW) attempts to organize the components of writing into a structure that clearly distinguishes general-domain resources, such as executive functions and motivation, from writing-specific skills, such as handwriting, spelling, planning, editing, and revision, and examines how these relationships differ in students who struggle with writing. This approach underlines that “narrow” models, which explain difficulties mainly as a result of transcription deficits, underestimate the role of self-regulation and executive resources in real classroom conditions, where the student is required to plan, maintain goals, and revise under time constraints (Ahmed et al., 2022).

Finally, writing process theory has been enriched by dynamic-systems and functional approaches that highlight the interdependence among cognitive activities, the task environment, and the temporal evolution of the writing act. The “functional dynamic approach” proposes that writing cannot be understood as a fixed sequence of stages, but rather as a system in which component activities—such as idea generation, formulation, monitoring, and revision—change functionally depending on the task, time, requirements, and available means. This perspective leads to interpretive frameworks that avoid oversimplifications and are particularly compatible with the heterogeneity of the profiles of students with SLD, since they allow us to understand why the same student may display different performance depending on the text genre, production conditions, or support provided (van den Bergh et al., 2016).

In summary, contemporary theoretical models of written production converge on the assumption that writing is a multidimensional and dynamic phenomenon. The shift from general cognitive descriptions toward more specialized, developmental, integrative, and socio-communicative models allows for a more precise interpretation

of the difficulties experienced by students with SLD and, most importantly, for better intervention design targeting critical mechanisms—transcription, text organization, self-regulation, discourse-level language skills, and reading foundations—rather than merely superficial aspects of the final product.

1.2 Characteristics of Writing Difficulties in Students with SLD

The difficulties experienced by students with Specific Learning Difficulties in written language production are multilayered and extend across all stages of the writing process, from initial planning to final revision. International literature indicates that these problems are not limited to spelling accuracy or graphomotor fluency, but extend to macrostructural organization, metacognitive regulation, and the emotional dimension of writing (Graham et al., 2012; Berninger & Winn, 2006).

At the level of lower-order skills, students with SLD frequently display deficits in spelling, punctuation, and graphomotor flow. The lack of automatization in transcription has significant effects on the quality of written discourse. As Berninger and Winn (2006) argue, when basic skills have not been automated, they consume a disproportionate share of working memory, thereby limiting engagement in higher-order cognitive processes. Students often write slowly, interrupt their train of thought in order to retrieve spelling forms, and produce an increased number of errors. Sentences tend to be short and display limited syntactic variety, which affects the overall quality of the text (Graham & Harris, 2000). In addition, difficulties in managing punctuation negatively affect clarity and readability.

Beyond technical skills, students with SLD exhibit significant deficits in higher-order writing processes. According to the cognitive model of Flower and Hayes (1981), writing includes planning, translating, and reviewing. Students with learning difficulties often show limited planning ability prior to writing. They frequently begin writing without a clear goal, without organizing their ideas, or without considering the audience they are addressing. Text organization constitutes a particularly challenging area. One often observes the absence of a clear introduction, insufficient development of main ideas, and weak connections between paragraphs. The use of cohesive devices is limited or non-functional, which affects cohesion and coherence. Students often remain at the level of “knowledge-telling” rather than “knowledge-transforming,” as described by Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987), that is, they record information without substantial processing or argumentative restructuring. Metacognitive awareness is a critical factor in successful written production. Students with SLD often show limited ability for self-monitoring and self-evaluation. They do not systematically check whether their text responds to the goal of the task, nor do they revise content and structure effectively (Graham et al., 2012). Revision, in particular, constitutes a problematic stage. Many students restrict themselves to surface-level corrections, such as spelling mistakes, without making substantial changes to structure or content. This is linked to deficits in executive functions such as planning, cognitive flexibility, and inhibition (Graham et al., 2013). The macrostructural organization of text constitutes one of the most stable indicators distinguishing students with and without learning difficulties. Students with SLD struggle to develop coherent argumentation, prioritize ideas, and maintain thematic coherence. Paragraphs often lack a clear topic sentence, while ideas are presented discontinuously. Research has shown that the texts of students with learning difficulties are characterized by lower organizational quality, shorter length, and limited lexical variety (Graham & Perin, 2007). In addition, the inability to integrate examples or evidence affects the persuasiveness and functionality of the discourse. Writing is not only a cognitive but also an emotional activity. Students with SLD often develop negative self-perceptions regarding their writing abilities. Low self-efficacy has been shown to negatively affect both the quality of writing and persistence in the writing process (Pajares, 2003). Students avoid demanding writing tasks and show reduced engagement. At the same time, the increased effort required for writing may lead to fatigue and frustration. Slow text production intensifies time-related anxiety, particularly in evaluative environments.

2. Method

The present study employed a narrative review methodology in order to synthesize theoretical and empirical research concerning written language production and evidence-based interventions for students with Specific Learning Difficulties (SLD). Narrative reviews are particularly suitable when the objective is to integrate findings

from different research traditions and methodological approaches in order to develop a comprehensive conceptual understanding of a complex educational phenomenon. Research on writing development and writing instruction intersects several disciplinary domains, including cognitive psychology, literacy education, special education, and educational intervention research. Consequently, the integration of theoretical models together with empirical findings provides a broader perspective on the mechanisms underlying writing difficulties and the instructional practices that can effectively support struggling writers. The literature search was conducted through major academic databases commonly used in education and psychology research, including Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar. These databases were selected because they offer extensive coverage of peer-reviewed research related to literacy development, special education, and educational psychology. The search strategy involved combinations of keywords associated with written language production and learning difficulties, including terms such as written expression, writing development, writing difficulties, writing intervention, learning disabilities, specific learning difficulties, writing strategies, self-regulated writing, and writing instruction. Boolean operators were used to combine these keywords in order to ensure broad and systematic coverage of the relevant literature. The selection of studies followed a multi-stage screening process aimed at ensuring the relevance and quality of the included publications. Initially, titles and abstracts were examined to identify studies that addressed writing development, writing instruction, or writing interventions in educational contexts. Studies were retained when they focused on written language production or instructional practices relevant to students with Specific Learning Difficulties or learning disabilities, when they presented empirical findings or theoretical frameworks related to writing processes, and when they were published in peer-reviewed journals or academic books. Studies were excluded when they focused exclusively on reading without reference to writing, when they addressed writing in non-educational contexts, or when they did not contribute theoretically or empirically to the understanding of writing development and intervention.

Following the initial screening stage, the full texts of the remaining studies were examined in order to determine their relevance to the objectives of the present review. Particular emphasis was placed on influential theoretical models of writing, meta-analyses of writing instruction, and empirical studies investigating interventions designed to support students with learning difficulties. Foundational theoretical contributions were included regardless of publication year when they represented key conceptual developments in the field, whereas more recent empirical studies were prioritized in order to reflect contemporary research developments. The analysis of the selected literature was conducted through thematic synthesis. Key concepts, theoretical perspectives, and empirical findings were identified and organized into broader thematic categories in order to facilitate interpretation of the research evidence. The synthesis focused on four interrelated dimensions: theoretical models explaining writing development, the characteristics of writing difficulties observed among students with Specific Learning Difficulties, instructional interventions that have demonstrated empirical effectiveness, and the pedagogical implications of these findings for inclusive educational practice. Through this analytical process, recurring patterns across the literature were identified and instructional approaches with strong empirical support were highlighted, particularly those emphasizing explicit strategy instruction, structured writing instruction, and the development of self-regulation in writing.

3. Results & Discussion: Interventions for Students with Specific Learning Difficulties

3.1 Explicit Instruction in Writing Strategies

Explicit instruction in writing strategies constitutes the most well-documented axis of intervention. According to the meta-analysis by Graham and Harris (2018), strategies that are taught systematically and include clear modeling, guided practice, and gradual release toward independence show high effect sizes, especially for students with learning difficulties. The Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) model remains the most extensively studied approach, as it combines cognitive strategies with techniques of self-regulation and self-reinforcement (Harris et al., 2012). The effectiveness of SRSD has been confirmed across different age levels and cultural contexts (Graham et al., 2012; Harris et al., 2012). Students who participate in such interventions show improvement in the quality of arguments, structural organization, and text length. In addition, enhancement is observed in self-efficacy and positive attitudes toward writing.

3.2 Teaching Text Structure and Genre

Instruction in the macrostructural organization of text has emerged as particularly important for students with SLD. Research shows that explicit teaching of the structure of narrative and argumentative texts leads to significant improvements in coherence and the use of cohesive devices (Graham & Perin, 2007). Furthermore, Andrews et al. (2006) emphasize that the teaching of argumentative writing through explicit analysis of structural elements enhances the quality of written texts. The use of graphic organizers and concept maps functions supportively, as it reduces cognitive load and facilitates strategic planning (Kim et al., 2021). Visual representation of structure contributes to transforming writing from a spontaneous process into a conscious and controlled activity.

3.3 Interventions in Lower-Level Skills

Although contemporary interventions emphasize higher-order cognitive processes, the strengthening of basic skills remains critical. Automatization of spelling and graphomotor skills reduces cognitive load and frees resources for macrostructural organization (Berninger & Winn, 2006). Graham et al. (2000) found that systematic instruction in spelling patterns improves not only accuracy but also text quality. The link between reading and writing is also decisive. Students with learning difficulties benefit from interventions that combine text comprehension and written production, as the two skills reinforce one another (Shanahan, 2006).

3.4 Self-Regulation and Executive Functions

The development of self-regulation skills constitutes a crucial factor for success. Students with SLD often show deficits in executive functions, such as planning, time management, and progress monitoring (Graham et al., 2013). The incorporation of goal-setting and self-monitoring techniques has been shown to be effective in enhancing the quality of written discourse. Self-efficacy, as Pajares (2003) underlines, functions as a critical mediating factor between skills and performance. Interventions that strengthen students' sense of capability lead to greater persistence and more strategic engagement.

3.5 Collaborative and Dialogic Writing

Collaborative writing has emerged as an effective practice, especially when structured through clear roles and strategies (Graham et al., 2007). Interaction among peers strengthens metacognitive awareness and facilitates the negotiation of meaning. Students with SLD benefit from the collective processing of ideas, as individual cognitive load is reduced.

3.6 Technology-Supported Interventions

The use of digital tools has increased significantly in recent years. According to Peterson-Karlan (2011), speech-to-text tools and digital idea organizers reduce barriers related to graphomotor execution. At the same time, MacArthur and Graham (2016) point out that technology is effective when combined with explicit strategy instruction.

3.7 Multi-Tiered Models of Intervention

The implementation of models such as Response to Intervention (RTI) allows for early identification and intervention. Al Otaiba et al. (2012) argue that students with persistent difficulties benefit from more intensive and individualized instruction in small groups. Systematic progress monitoring ensures the adjustment of the intervention.

4. Conclusion

The synthesis of the theoretical and research data presented above clearly demonstrates that the written production of students with Specific Learning Difficulties cannot be treated simply as a matter of linguistic competence or

spelling accuracy. On the contrary, it is a multifactorial phenomenon involving cognitive, metacognitive, executive, and emotional dimensions. International literature converges on the conclusion that writing difficulties are linked both to the lack of automatization of basic skills and to deficits in strategic planning and self-regulatory management of the writing process (Berninger & Winn, 2006; Graham et al., 2012). First, it is confirmed that cognitive load constitutes a central mechanism explaining the difficulties of students with SLD. When spelling, graphomotor execution, or morphosyntactic processing has not been automated, a significant portion of working memory is consumed by lower-level processes, thereby limiting the ability to engage in higher-order processes of organization and argumentation. This finding is consistent with both the cognitive model of Flower and Hayes (1981) and the neurocognitive framework of Berninger and Winn (2006), both of which emphasize the ongoing interaction between lower-level and higher-level processing. Second, research evidence supports the view that explicit and systematic instruction in writing strategies constitutes the most effective intervention axis. The meta-analysis by Graham and colleagues (2012) demonstrated that interventions focusing on the teaching of planning and revision strategies show high effect sizes, especially for students with learning difficulties. Likewise, the report by Graham and Perin (2007) documented that interventions combining text structure instruction, strategic planning, and guided practice lead to statistically and educationally significant improvements in writing quality.

Particular importance is attributed to linking cognitive strategies with self-regulatory processes. The Self-Regulated Strategy Development approach does not merely transmit writing techniques, but also integrates training in goal setting, self-monitoring, and self-reinforcement (Graham & Harris, 2000). The strengthening of self-regulation appears to function as a catalyst in transforming the writing process from a mechanical task into a conscious and strategic activity. Furthermore, the development of writing self-efficacy, as argued by Pajares (2003), is directly associated with text quality and persistence in effort, underlining the importance of the emotional dimension of interventions.

Third, the need for a multi-level approach to intervention is emphasized. Effective practices do not operate in isolation, but are embedded within a coherent instructional framework that combines explicit teaching, repeated practice, feedback, and gradual release toward independence. Formative assessment, when it focuses on text structure and strategic organization rather than exclusively on surface errors, contributes substantially to metacognitive development (Graham et al., 2012). The active involvement of students in the process of self-assessment strengthens responsibility and conscious management of written production. Fourth, technological support appears to play an important role as a compensatory mechanism. The use of digital tools that reduce lower-level barriers allows students to focus on macrostructure and content (Berninger & Winn, 2006). However, technology does not substitute for strategy instruction; it functions effectively only when integrated into a pedagogically sound framework. Fifth, the literature indicates that interventions must begin early and be sustained over time. Students with SLD do not benefit from short-term or occasional interventions. Systematicity and repetition are critical conditions for the stabilization of skills and their transfer to new learning environments (Graham & Perin, 2007).

At the level of pedagogical implications, the conclusions of the present analysis lead to several guiding principles. First, written production should be taught explicitly rather than treated as a natural consequence of reading. Second, instruction should combine cognitive and metacognitive strategies while simultaneously strengthening students' self-efficacy. Third, assessment should function formatively, providing targeted feedback that supports improvement rather than merely pointing out errors. Fourth, teacher training in evidence-based writing practices constitutes a necessary condition for the systematic implementation of interventions. Overall, research documents that writing is not a static skill but a dynamic process that can be improved through appropriate intervention. Students with Specific Learning Difficulties are capable of achieving substantial progress when instruction is structured, strategically organized, and metacognitively oriented. The shift from viewing writing as an innate ability to understanding it as a teachable and developable skill constitutes a critical pedagogical and research conclusion. Future research should further examine how evidence-based writing interventions can be adapted to diverse educational contexts and how technology-supported instruction can complement strategy-based writing instruction for students with Specific Learning Difficulties.

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Experiential Teaching Method in the Training of Future Teachers: A Case Study Using Three Teaching Scenarios

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Abstract

This case study presents three teaching scenarios using the experiential teaching method, which were created by future teacher-students in a one-year pedagogical training program. After learning the theoretical framework of experiential teaching, the future teachers, working in specialty-based groups, were tasked with designing a teaching scenario for a lesson of their choice. This was followed by a discussion in class, where participants shared their opinions on the advantages of experiential teaching and potential challenges in its implementation, which were later recorded in a questionnaire. The research reflects that the most significant advantages of experiential teaching include student engagement, the linking of theory and practice, the development of critical thinking, social and communication skills, and empathy development. Possible difficulties in implementing experiential teaching focus on inadequate teacher training, insufficient material and technical resources, limited instructional time, potential noise disruptions that may occur during implementation, and potential challenges with assessment.

Keywords: Experiential Teaching, Future Teachers Training, Teaching Scenarios

1. Introduction

It is a fact that teaching achieves more comprehensive learning outcomes when it incorporates students' prior life experiences and utilizes active and participatory teaching techniques (Bradberry & De Maio, 2019). In this context, the experiential teaching method emphasizes experience, emotion, activities, interaction, and reflection at the core of learning. Therefore, during experiential teaching, students engage all their senses and actively participate, both intellectually and emotionally, in the educational process (Voukelatou, 2019).

The experiential teaching method, as a pedagogical approach, has been advocated by many scholars in their work, including John Dewey, David Kolb, and William Kilpatrick, who laid the theoretical foundation for its development (Yardley, Teunissen & Dornan, 2012). Dewey, with his central philosophy of "learning by doing,"

stressed the importance of connecting teaching to real life, as learning emerges through experience and action (Reese, 2011). In doing so, students are not passive recipients of knowledge and information but active participants in the educational process, discovering new knowledge through experience, reflection, and self-reflection. Kolb also highlighted the essential role of experiential teaching and learning by developing a 4-stage circular model (Kolb & Kolb, 2017).

According to this view, learning is a process that begins with a specific experience a student undergoes, followed by reflective observation of that experience, then abstract conceptualization—where concepts, and conclusions are drawn, and finally, active experimentation, where the student attempts to apply these conclusions to new situations (Kolb & Kolb, 2017). Kilpatrick followed a similar line of thought by developing the project method, a teaching approach that connects experiential teaching and learning with real life and students' interests, aiming at the design and implementation of a specific project through group work and teacher-student interaction.

To summarize the advantages of the experiential teaching method, they focus on learning through specific experiences, engaging students through participatory teaching techniques, linking theory, experience, and practice, reflecting through discussion and analysis of experiences to draw useful conclusions, and developing social and communication skills. These advantages, when utilized in the learning process, can lead to a more comprehensive fulfillment of instructional objectives, always depending on the specific design of the course in question.

On the other hand, in some cases, specific difficulties and limitations arise when implementing experiential learning. Some teachers may not be familiar with or may not have received specialized training in the design and implementation of experiential activities. Furthermore, in terms of classroom management, individual experiential learning activities may generate increased levels of noise and disorder and make classroom management more challenging. Furthermore, the implementation of experiential activities often requires appropriate equipment, logistical infrastructure, space, or visual aids that are not always available (Yao, 2023). At times, there may also be difficulties in assessing the outcomes of experiential teaching, as traditional assessment tests do not always reflect learning outcomes. Finally, the experiential method generally requires more time than traditional teaching, which may make it difficult for some teachers to cover the course curriculum.

Comprehensive training and professional development for teachers on experiential teaching and learning can help mitigate or even eliminate the difficulties mentioned above. By understanding the theoretical foundation of experiential teaching and engaging in experiential activities themselves during professional development, teachers gain personal experience with the method. This personal experience provides them with greater confidence in applying experiential teaching with their students later on (Girvan, Conneely & Bangney, 2016). Furthermore, through their training, teachers gain practical experience with active techniques such as working groups, role-playing, discussion, simulations, and case studies. Indeed, they learn how to integrate these techniques into specific lesson plans, which solidifies experiential teaching as a comprehensive and creative learning process rather than just a theoretical approach. Additionally, through the design and implementation of teaching scenarios, future teachers practice specific skills like effective use of class time, classroom management, and the selection, preparation, and use of teaching materials.

2. Method

For this article's purpose, a case study of future teachers who as students, attended the Annual Pedagogical Training Program of the Higher School of Pedagogical and Technological Education (ASPETE) in Thessaloniki was utilized. This program is designed for higher education graduates seeking to acquire teaching proficiency and includes courses in Pedagogy and Didactics.

More specifically, as part of the course "Teaching of Specialized Subjects," students were first introduced to the theoretical background and fundamental principles of the experiential teaching method. Then, during a two-hour workshop, the students were divided into working groups by subject area and, with the instructors' guidance, were asked to collaborate to design a 40-minute teaching scenario for a thematic lesson unit within their subject area. Three of the generated lesson plans are summarized in this article. Subsequently, each group presented its teaching

scenario to the department's plenary session, followed by a constructive discussion in which, among other things, the advantages of experiential teaching as well as potential difficulties in its implementation were noted.

2.1 Teaching Scenarios

1st Teaching Scenario

Course: Food Technology

Unit: Plant-Based Milks

Learning Objectives: Upon completion of the lesson, students will be able to: a) name the various plant-based milks (e.g., almond milk, oat milk, rice milk, etc.), b) identify the specific characteristics of each plant-based milk, c) distinguish the differences and similarities among plant-based milk beverages, d) assess the nutritional value of plant-based milk beverages

Lesson Plan: During the initial phase of the lesson, the teacher starts by showing the students a short 2.5-minute video about plant-based milks and the increasing demand for them in today's food market. This video stimulates the students' interest and encourages critical thinking. Students are then asked if they have ever tried a plant-based milk beverage, such as almond milk or oat milk, and to share any relevant personal experiences they may have had. Following this, students are divided into two groups and provided with three different plant-based milk drinks (almond, oat, and rice) along with disposable cups. Each student tastes all three beverages as part of experiential learning. In their groups, a discussion takes place where the teacher asks relevant questions to help students identify the specific characteristics of each beverage, such as taste, texture, and sweetness, based on their tasting experience.

To further build on the students' previous tasting experience, they are provided with a worksheet to record the distinctive characteristics of each beverage on a table. A PowerPoint slide is also shown to summarize these characteristics. The working groups are then provided with a fourth sample of plant-based milk (coconut milk) to taste and reflect on, comparing its characteristics with those of the three previously mentioned beverages. Students are asked to record any differences and similarities they notice on the worksheet. By engaging in this hands-on activity, students are able to deepen their understanding of plant-based milks and develop their ability to compare and contrast different beverages based on taste, texture, and sweetness. Next, students are asked to complete an assessment sheet that includes true-false, multiple-choice, and short-answer questions. Once completed, the sheets are collected by the instructor. Once this is done, the correct answers will be presented to the students, who will then be asked to evaluate their own performance (self-assessment), express their opinions, and reflect on the lesson and their learning process (reflection). To conclude, students will be required to summarize the key points of the lesson. Furthermore, an information sheet on plant-based milks will be distributed, along with a homework assignment sheet to enhance student engagement in this topic.

2nd Teaching Scenario

Course: Special Dietary

Unit: Dietary supplements

Learning objectives: Upon completion of the lesson, students will be able to a) define dietary supplements, b) give specific examples of dietary supplements, c) identify the population groups that need dietary supplements, and d) recommend the appropriate dietary supplement for each case.

Lesson Plan: During the first phase of the lesson, the teacher shows the students a short 2-minute, 34-second video and two images related to dietary supplements. This serves to stimulate the students' interest and activate their critical thinking. Next, students are asked whether they themselves or people in their immediate circle have taken a dietary supplement in the past or recently, recalling a relevant experience and sharing it with the entire class.

Based on everything that was shown and discussed, the teacher asks the students to define dietary supplements and then hands out several packages of dietary supplements. The teacher divides the students into two groups, and

each group is given a worksheet with case studies of clients/patients. Drawing on their experiences and evaluating the dietary supplement packages in their hands, students are asked to select and record which one is the best choice based on the specific characteristics of each case. Answers are shared with the class using the role-playing technique: some students play the role of the patient/customer, and others play the role of the healthcare professional/pharmacy assistant who will recommend the appropriate dietary supplement. In this way, the learning process becomes more vivid, experiential, and enjoyable for the students.

Building on the students' experiences, the next step is to synthesize and categorize the content of the lesson unit. More specifically, students are asked through a guided discussion to identify population groups that may need dietary supplements, to recognize the factors that influence the potential onset of toxicity, and to name common adverse interactions. The instructor will supplement the lesson by showing relevant slides. Then, the concepts from the unit are tested and applied to new situations. Students are asked to work in pairs to complete a worksheet presenting two new client/patient cases for whom the appropriate dietary supplement must be selected. The answers to the worksheet are presented through role-playing, as before.

Next, students are provided with an individual assessment sheet containing true/false questions, multiple-choice questions, and fill-in-the-blank sentences. For two minutes, each student works on the questions independently, and then the sheets are collected by the teacher, followed by a presentation of the correct answers to the entire class with active student participation, to provide feedback and reflection on the lesson. At the end of the lesson, the students summarize the lesson, as they are asked to highlight the lesson's key points, building a conceptual map.

3rd Teaching Scenario

Course: Principles of Economic Theory

Unit: Inflation

Learning objectives: Upon completion of the lesson, students will be able to a) define the concept of inflation, b) list the causes of inflation, c) distinguish between the different types of inflation, and d) describe the effects of inflation on household purchasing power and, more broadly, on a country's economy.

Lesson plan: Initially, the teacher uses the brainstorming technique and asks students to list concepts related to the term "inflation". This helps students engage their creative and critical thinking skills as the teacher records the concepts on the board. By synthesizing these concepts through discussion, an attempt is made to clarify the term "inflation". Next, the teacher shows the students a short 1-minute, 48-second video clip from a current affairs news broadcast discussing rising food prices. Students are then asked to recall a recent experience they had while shopping at the supermarket and noticing price increases on certain products. This further stimulates the students' interest and encourages critical thinking.

Following this, the students are divided into two groups and given an article from a financial newspaper that compares the prices of basic consumer goods from five years ago and two years ago to their current prices using tables. The students discuss among themselves to identify both the causes and types of inflation. Once the groups have completed their work, the teacher shows relevant slides to support the students' findings.

Following that activity, there is a role-playing game in which the teacher divides the students into two groups: "buyers" and "sellers." "Buyers" are handed play money, while "sellers" receive cards depicting specific products with their corresponding prices. First, the students playing the role of buyers determine which products they can purchase with the money they have. Then, the teacher gives the students playing the role of sellers new cards featuring the same products but with higher selling prices. The student-buyers point out the price increase and realize that they can no longer buy the same quantities of products with the same amount of money.

Then, the teacher distributes more money to the student-buyers, who can now generate "effective demand" and purchase some products. However, the increased demand leads the student-sellers to raise the prices of the products, causing inflation to occur again. This serves as a starting point for discussion and reflection. Students

are then given an individual assessment sheet containing five short-answer questions and three multiple-choice questions, which must be answered within two minutes. Once the students have answered the questions, the correct answers are presented to the entire class, and any questions regarding the answers are addressed. To summarize the lesson, the students, with the teacher's encouragement, highlight the key points of the lesson, thereby providing feedback and concluding with a final reflection on the concept of inflation.

3. Results

After designing teaching scenarios, the groups of future teachers engaged in a class-wide discussion to receive feedback on their process. It was noted that working in groups encouraged participants to actively explore the concept of experiential teaching, bridging the gap between theory and practice. Additionally, this collaborative approach helped develop social and communication skills, fostering a spirit of cooperation among students and creating a positive learning environment.

Next, the future teachers were given a short questionnaire to record their views on the advantages and challenges of implementing experiential teaching. To begin with, regarding the participants' profiles in this case study, of the 39 future teachers, 23 were women (59%) and 16 were men (41%). Regarding their age distribution, of the 39, 16 were between 21 and 30 years old (41.1%), 14 were between 31 and 40 years old (35.9%), 7 were between 41 and 50 years old (17.9%), and only 2 were 50 years old or older (5.1%). Furthermore, 18 of the participants (46.1%) reported holding a master's degree, while 21 of them did not have a master's degree at the time of the survey (Table 1).

Table 1: Participating future teachers' profile

Sex	Men: 16 (41%) Women: 23 (59%)				Total: 39
Age (years)	21-30 16 (41.1%)	31-40 14 (35.9%)	41-50 7 (17.9%)	>50 2 (5.1%)	Total: 39
Postgraduate Studies	Yes: 18 (46.1%) No: 21 (53.8%)				Total: 39

Next, taking into account the relevant literature (Raja & Najmonnisa, 2018; Breunig, 2017; Hawtrey, 2007) as well as the discussion that followed the design and presentation of the teaching scenarios, the participants in the case study were asked to rate the importance of each advantage of experiential teaching on a five-point Likert scale (5 = very important, 4 = important, 3 = moderately important, 2 = somewhat important, 1 = not at all important). As shown by their responses (Table 2), the five most important advantages according to the future teachers are: active student participation (4.98), the linking of theory and practice (4.91), the development of critical thinking (4.87), the development of social and communication skills (4.76), and the development of empathy (4.64).

Table 2: Significance of the advantages of experiential teaching

Advantage	Degree of significance
Active student participation	4.98
Linking theory and practice	4.91
Development of critical thinking	4.87
Development of social and communication skills	4.76
Empathy development	4.64

Finally, participants were asked to rank the challenges they believed were likely to arise during the implementation of experiential teaching. The discussion in the department's plenary session identified five potential difficulties, which participants were asked to evaluate on a five-point Likert scale (5 = very significant, 4 = significant, 3 = moderately significant, 2 = somewhat significant, 1 = not at all significant). As shown in Table 3, the most significant challenges according to the respondents are the teachers' own insufficient training in the specific

characteristics of experiential teaching (4.12), inadequate resources and technical infrastructure (3.97), insufficient teaching time (3.56), the increased noise disruption that may occur during the implementation of experiential teaching (3.45), and the potential difficulty in assessment (3.43).

Table 3: Potential difficulties in implementing the experiential teaching method

Possible difficulty	Degree of importance
Insufficient teachers' training	4.12
Inadequate resources- infrastructure	3.97
Insufficient teaching time	3.56
Increased noise disruption	3.45
Difficulty in assessment	3.43

4. Discussion

One of the greatest challenges facing teachers in today's schools is ensuring their students' active participation in the learning process. In this context, the application of the experiential teaching method through the use of active teaching techniques can contribute to the fuller activation of students' potential (Maji, Saha & Kaibarta, 2026). It is a fact that when students are not merely passive recipients of knowledge but actively participate in the learning process, they connect knowledge to realistic conditions and real-life situations through experiences (Bradberry & De Maio, 2019). In this way, learning becomes more effective as students realize that theoretical knowledge can be applied to real life. Furthermore, experiential learning facilitates the development of critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills related to everyday life (Baker & Robinson, 2016).

The experiential teaching method is not only an active pedagogical approach but also a process of professional development for future teachers, as they crystallize their pedagogical attitudes, perceptions, and skills through experience, action, and reflection. As noted by the future teachers who participated in the study, a key factor in the effective implementation of the experiential teaching method is their own professional development. The more teachers practice using experiential teaching, the more familiar they will be with its subsequent effective implementation and utilization. Thus, the development of lesson plans for specific teaching units within their fields helps future teachers understand in practice the context for applying experiential teaching and develop pedagogical skills, such as teaching flexibility, adaptability, and the ability to provide guidance. Furthermore, through the design and practical implementation of these scenarios, they can reflect on teaching methodology and improve their teaching style.

This case study discusses an issue highly relevant to contemporary pedagogy, thereby enriching the relevant literature. The teaching scenarios developed by the participants were original and specifically designed for the particular context, which reinforces the case study's originality. Regarding the generalizability of the research findings, while there are limitations stemming from the use of a purposive sample, the careful selection of the sample makes the results applicable to a broader population. Regarding suggestions for further research, it would be interesting to conduct similar studies examining other samples, possibly from different institutions of education and training for future teachers, by developing teaching scenarios in different subject areas.

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An Evaluation of a 2017 Summer Institute on Social Justice in Ahmedabad, India

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Abstract

Short-term training programs have emerged as a common strategy for building research capacity among early-career scholars in low- and middle-income countries. This study evaluates a 2017 Summer Institute on Social Justice held in Ahmedabad, India, designed to enhance participants' methodological skills and theoretical engagement with social justice. Thirty-nine participants completed a mixed-methods survey. This analysis focuses on qualitative responses using a thematic-phenomenological approach. Findings revealed a predominantly positive reception, with participants emphasizing gains in research skills, confidence, and professional networking. The institute was also perceived as fostering collaborative learning and contributing to the early formation of scholarly identity. However, participants identified several areas for improvement, including variability in teaching effectiveness, the need for stronger thematic integration, and a preference for more applied, skills-based instruction. Logistical concerns were also noted. Overall, the institute appears to be an effective model for capacity building, though refinements in pedagogical coherence and delivery may enhance its impact in future iterations.

Keywords: Research Capacity Development, Communities of Practice, Qualitative Evaluation, Health Workforce Development, India

1. Introduction

The global demand for rigorous, equity-oriented social science research has grown considerably in recent decades, driven in part by the recognition that sustainable development and effective policy-making require robust empirical foundations and a strong cadre of locally trained scholars. (Naal et al., 2020) In low- and middle-income countries, intensive, short-term programs designed to equip emerging scholars with the skills necessary for independent scholarly work have emerged as a popular and promising educational venture. (Ojifinni et al., 2024)

In the summer of 2017, scholars from the University of Ottawa and the University of Saskatchewan offered an 11-day institute in Ahmedabad, India, to graduate and post-graduate scholars across multiple domains. The focus of the institute was social justice, both its theoretical frameworks and the research methodologies that scholars could

apply within this subject area. Specific topics included geographic information systems, methods for measuring poverty, survey design, quantitative analysis, theories of social justice, social network analysis, mixed methods, systematic literature reviews, writing workshops, interview techniques, and discussion of multiple case studies. The breadth of this curriculum reflected an intentional effort to expose participants not only to technical skills but to the conceptual and ethical dimensions of socially engaged research.

The intent of the institute was to improve the capacity of the new generation of India's professional social science scholars to produce independent, high-quality scholarly work. Evaluating such programs is methodologically challenging: outcome measures that rely solely on post-program knowledge assessments may miss important dimensions of participant experience, including perceived relevance and motivational impact. Qualitative approaches, by contrast, can surface nuanced participant perspectives and reveal unanticipated program effects that quantitative measures may obscure. This study presents a qualitative analysis of participants' impressions of the institute, with the dual aim of assessing the program's perceived value and providing actionable evidence to guide future iterations of similar capacity-building initiatives.

2. Method

The 39 participants in the workshop completed a 19-question survey: six open-ended, eight multiple-choice, four short-answer, and one Likert-type scale. Questions concerned participant demographics, initial and concluding skills and capacities, and perceived relevance of workshops' content. Responses were analyzed using a mixed methods approach. Textual survey responses were analyzed using thematic phenomenological analysis, while quantitative survey data were analyzed using descriptive and bivariate analyses in SPSS version 20. Only the qualitative results are reported in this paper.

3. Results

Analysis of participant comments from open-ended improvement questions and testimonial responses revealed seven major themes.

3.1 Overall positive experience and perceived value

Participants overwhelmingly described the summer institute as a valuable and impactful experience, particularly for those attending their first formal research training program. Testimonials frequently emphasized the program as "very good," "productive," and "an amazing experience," suggesting strong overall satisfaction.

Participants also highlighted the institute as a formative academic experience, with several noting its importance in shaping their research trajectories and professional development.

3.2 Skill development and research capacity gains

A dominant theme was the institute's role in enhancing research-related competencies. Participants reported gains in academic writing and publishing, exposure to research methodologies (e.g., systematic reviews, GIS, social network analysis), and quantitative and analytical skills. Many comments framed the program as an opportunity to "explore abilities" and develop confidence in conducting research. This aligns strongly with the intended goal of capacity building, particularly among early-career scholars.

3.3 Networking and collaborative learning environment

Participants frequently emphasized the value of peer interaction and networking opportunities. The institute was described as useful in fostering connections with "fellow researchers and young faculties" and in providing a supportive and approachable learning environment. This suggests that, beyond formal instruction, the program contributed to community-building and professional identity formation, key outcomes of successful capacity-building initiatives.

3.4 Importance of teaching quality and relational engagement

A recurring critical theme concerned variation in teaching effectiveness. While some instructors were praised for being engaging and approachable, others were perceived as less effective in connecting with participants. Participants emphasized that effective learning depended on strong instructor-participant relationships and that teaching needed to be contextually grounded, particularly in the Indian social justice context. This reflects a broader insight that delivery style and relational pedagogy are as important as content in short-term intensive training programs.

3.5. Need for clearer thematic focus and conceptual coherence

Several participants expressed difficulty grasping the central theme of social justice, noting that the “gist of the theme” was sometimes unclear and that the sessions lacked sufficient integration or an explicit rationale. This suggests a need for stronger conceptual scaffolding and a clearer articulation of how individual sessions connect to overarching program goals. The issue appears to be not content insufficiency but integration and framing.

3.6. Demand for more structured and applied training

Participants expressed a desire for more training-oriented and practical sessions and a greater emphasis on applied research skills. This aligns with comments requesting more “training-based lectures” and indicates a preference for hands-on, skills-focused pedagogy over purely conceptual instruction.

3.7 Logistical and environmental considerations

A smaller but notable theme concerned logistical issues, including accommodation conditions (e.g., cleanliness concerns) and general physical infrastructure. While not central to learning outcomes, these factors were perceived as affecting the overall participant experience.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the summer institute was broadly successful in achieving its primary aim of enhancing research capacity and fostering engagement with social justice concepts. Participants particularly valued the opportunity to develop skills and network. However, the program's effectiveness was moderated by variability in instructional delivery, the need for clearer thematic integration, and a preference for more applied, skills-based learning. Addressing these areas may enhance the impact and coherence of future iterations of the institute.

4. Discussion

The findings from this qualitative analysis illuminate both the promise and the limitations of short-term intensive research training institutes as a model for capacity building among early-career social science scholars. The themes identified suggest that the institute succeeded in its core objective of introducing scholars to a broad range of research methods and theoretical frameworks, while also revealing important areas for pedagogical refinement.

The strong positive reception reported by participants (in particular the emphasis on skill development and professional network formation) is consistent with findings from evaluations of comparable short-term training programs in global health and development research contexts. (Gao et al., 2020) Such programs appear to offer particular value to scholars who have had limited prior access to formal methodological instruction and for whom concentrated exposure to diverse tools and frameworks constitutes a genuinely transformative academic experience. The frequency with which participants cited networking and peer learning as outcomes of the institute aligns with a growing body of literature emphasizing the role of communities of practice as informal, ongoing networks that facilitate knowledge sharing, collaboration, and sustained professional development. (James-McAlpine et al., 2023; Silverstein et al., 2022; Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015)

However, the critical themes emerging from participant responses warrant attention. The breadth of content that makes such institutes attractive to a diverse cohort of scholars can simultaneously undermine the thematic

integration that gives that content meaning. For future iterations of this institute, dedicating time at the outset and close of each session to connecting the day's content to the overarching social justice framework may substantially improve participants' sense of coherence.

Participants clearly distinguished between instructors who were perceived as contextually sensitive and relationally engaged and those who were not, suggesting that disciplinary expertise alone is an insufficient qualification for teaching in cross-cultural, applied settings

Participants' preference for applied, skills-based learning over purely conceptual instruction reflects a pragmatic orientation that is common among early-career researchers who are simultaneously navigating thesis completion, academic job markets, and publication pressures. Practical workshops, structured peer feedback sessions, and case studies drawn from the Indian social science context could effectively serve this purpose.

This study has several limitations. The data are drawn from a single cohort at a single institute, limiting the generalizability of the findings. The exclusive reliance on participant self-report introduces the possibility of social desirability bias, and the absence of longitudinal follow-up prevents assessing whether the skills and networks participants described have translated into sustained changes in scholarly productivity or research practice.

4. Conclusion

This study evaluated participants' experiences with a short-term, intensive research capacity-building institute offered to graduate and postgraduate scholars in Ahmedabad, India. Qualitative analysis of participant survey responses identified seven major themes, reflecting a predominantly positive reception, along with specific and actionable areas for improvement.

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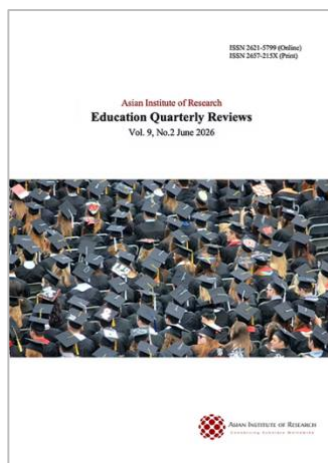
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A Pragmatic Analysis of the (Im)politeness Strategies Used in Online Customer Reviews across Different Satisfaction Levels

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Abstract

This study examined the use of politeness and impoliteness in Trustpilot customer reviews. Drawing on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory and Culpeper's (1996, 2011) impoliteness framework, the research analyzed strategies employed across varying levels of customer satisfaction. A mixed-method approach was adopted, grouping reviews into five satisfaction levels from one to five stars. Quantitative analysis measured the frequency of each strategy, while qualitative analysis explored the selection of strategies at different satisfaction levels. Findings indicate that direct, bald-on-record impoliteness predominated in lower-rated reviews, whereas higher-rated reviews used more positive politeness and mitigation. Reviews at the intermediate level often combined politeness with indirect criticism. These results demonstrate that (im)politeness lies on a continuum rather than in a binary, thereby enhancing understanding of digital consumer discourse.

Keywords: Pragmatics, (Im)politeness Strategies, Online Customer Reviews, Satisfaction Levels

1. Introduction

1.1 Rationale of the Study

Online reviews are clearly ubiquitous, serving as online discourse for the partially covered categories of digital discourse (Barton & Lee, 2013), computer-mediated communication (Herring et al., 2013), and social media platforms (Hoffmann & Bubltz, 2017). This communication is interactive, either directly or indirectly, and serves a variety of functions, such as personal and social ones. People who post reviews on online platforms about products and services may influence service providers. Both positive and negative reviews appear to affect service providers differently.

Reviews may contain either compliments or criticism. Reviewers are free to use both polite and impolite language in their reviews. Politeness strategies differ from impoliteness strategies in that the former aim to save the other

person's face. Brown and Levinson (1987) note that politeness theory focuses on ways to protect the addressee's public self-image. On the other hand, "communicative strategies designed to attack faces and cause social conflict and disharmony" is how Culpeper (2003) describes impoliteness. These two strategies work with people's goals, situations, and cultures.

Trustpilot (<https://www.trustpilot.com>) is a free online service anyone worldwide can use. When experiences are shared, people can make better choices, and companies can improve their products and services. This platform suggests real-world reviews. People often write online evaluations using politeness and impoliteness strategies, rating their satisfaction from one to five stars. Therefore, it is intriguing to see which politeness and impoliteness strategies are used in composing those reviews at each level of satisfaction.

Previous studies on reviews (e.g., Trosborg, 1995; Geluykens and Kraft, 2003; Feng and Ren, 2020; Wu and Yang, 2024) utilized a taxonomy to analyze negative reviews. Olshtain and Weinbach (1987) originally developed this kind of taxonomy, which subdivides complaints or negative reviews into sub-strategies. Some of these studies have analyzed variables such as gender (Geluykens and Kraft, 2003), social status (Boxer, 1993), cultural and ethnic differences (Cohen and Olshtain, 1993), and cross-linguistic differences (Feng and Ren, 2020; Wu and Yang, 2024). Generally, these studies presume that negative reviews typically target the person accountable for a particular offense or situation. Consequently, a significant portion of this research also explores linguistic strategies for mitigating negative reviews. On the other hand, reviewers also offer positive comments or report satisfying experiences with products or services. Customers or consumers may use politeness strategies to offer compliments as a sign of solidarity or to preserve social ties (Alqarni, 2017).

The current study applies the ideas and elements of earlier studies to gather and evaluate data from Trustpilot (<https://www.trustpilot.com>). The methodology for this study differs in its data categorization. Previous research may fail to identify the combination of politeness coupled with impoliteness strategies among online reviewers. As a result, this study attempts to provide insight into how online reviewers use politeness and impoliteness strategies through different levels of satisfaction when composing online reviews.

1.2 Literature Review

This section covers the theoretical and empirical foundations for researching (im)politeness. Section 1.2.1 provides a summary of the key concepts of politeness and impoliteness, and Section 1.2.2 addresses three key factors that influence (im)politeness in social situations.

1.2.1 Perspectives on (im)politeness

Brown and Levinson (1987) defined face as "a public self-image that every member wants to claim for oneself". They proposed the concept of courtesy to preserve the interlocutor's face during discourse, recognizing its potential to maintain face. They also asserted that politeness is a universal norm in language use and classified politeness strategies into five categories as detailed below.

- 1) **Bald-on record** is defined as an activity in which a speaker talks directly or without redressive actions of demonstrating their direct intentions.
- 2) **Positive politeness** is used to tailor words to the hearer's preferences in order to be liked, accepted, or appreciated.
- 3) **Negative politeness** refers to a speaker's actions that modify their words to provide the hearer with freedom by trying not to impose on the hearer's face.
- 4) **Off-record** refers to behaviors in which a speaker speaks indirectly to a hearer by employing words with multiple meanings or leaves implicature to be interpreted.
- 5) **Don't do the FTA (face-threatening act)** refers to any action that does not endanger the hearer's face by saying nothing.

In contrast to the concept of face-saving politeness, face-threatening acts (FTAs) are deliberate actions intended to affect the addressee through verbal or nonverbal communication. Brown and Levinson (1987) noted that

individuals may engage in acts that jeopardize others' wants. Consequently, these acts are considered impolite and can disrupt social harmony, potentially leading to conflict. O'Keeffe *et al.* (2011) defined FTAs as "a communicative act performed by the speaker that does not respect either the hearer's need for space (negative face) or their desire for their self-image to be upheld (positive face) or both." While politeness focuses on preserving interactants' faces, impoliteness attacks the hearer's face, which may cause the hearer to lose face.

Besides O'Keeffe's definition of FTA, Huang (2015) defined impoliteness as "any face-aggravating behavior, including verbal behavior relevant to a particular context." Culpeper (1996) introduced a model of impoliteness as a counterpart to Brown and Levinson's (1987) model of politeness. He characterized impoliteness as the parasitic counterpart of politeness, differing in terms of orientation to face. Impoliteness serves as a means of attacking faces, disregarding the interlocutor's humanity. Culpeper's framework provides a comprehensive understanding of the various strategies employed in impoliteness, each serving as a distinct approach to threaten or attack face in communication. Culpeper identified five super strategies of impoliteness as follows:

- 1) **Bald-on-record impoliteness** is when someone performs a face-threatening act (FTA) in a direct, straightforward, and unambiguous manner while disregarding their facial appearance.
- 2) **Positive impoliteness** seeks to undermine the addressee's favorable image, such as by ignoring, excluding, exhibiting disinterest, and using inappropriate language.
- 3) **Negative impoliteness** seeks to undermine the addressee's unpleasant manners. Examples include being threatening, condescending, scornful, failing to take things seriously, or violating personal space.
- 4) **Sarcasm, or mock politeness** involves performing an FTA using politeness strategies that are insincere, leaving some inferences to be uncovered.
- 5) **Withholding politeness** is the absence of required politeness expressions, resulting in a void where politeness would normally be expected.

1.2.2 Three Contributing Factors to (Im)politeness

Brown and Levinson (1987) explain that politeness strategies depend on three key factors: the social distance between the speaker and the listener (D), the listener's power over the speaker (P), and the degree of imposition of the act (R). These factors combine to determine how polite a speaker needs to be. For instance, greater imposition or greater social distance generally calls for more politeness, while less distance or greater power on the speaker's side may lead to less formal language. Unless urgency outweighs these factors, speakers possibly try to minimize threats to the listener's "face."

Brown and Levinson assert a direct link between social distance (D) and politeness. The greater the distance between the two speakers, the more polite they should be. Leech (2007, p. 189) supports their argument, stating that "when horizontal distance is reduced (e.g., in communication with familiars or intimates), the need for politeness is also reduced until we move into the zone of non-politeness or impoliteness." However, Spencer-Oatey (2005) paints a more nuanced picture of D's impact on politeness. Politeness is associated with interactional objectives and rapport management. A speaker can have many goals in an interaction depending on how she wishes to affect the long-term rapport level between herself and the listener. Spencer-Oatey (2005, p. 96) proposes that a speaker may have multiple rapport orientations within a relationship. Interlocutors may have a rapport-enhancement orientation (a desire to strengthen or enhance harmonious relations between the interlocutors), a rapport-maintenance orientation (a desire to maintain or protect harmonious relations), a rapport-neglect orientation (a lack of concern or interest in the quality of relations, possibly due to a focus on themselves), or a rapport-challenge orientation.

In terms of power (P), Brown and Levinson identify the players' relative power as the third determinant component of politeness. According to Brown and Levinson, P is culture-specific and difficult to correlate with specific social elements, as each connection has multiple layers that contribute to the perceived power imbalance between two people. P is a complex variable that encompasses several socially and individually influenced elements. According

to Van Dijk (1989), when evaluating P, interlocutors must be aware of the power difference between them. Power might be domain-specific, such as teacher-student in a school environment or seller-buyer in a commercial setting.

The rank of imposition (R) refers to the level of threat associated with a given FTA in the appropriate culture. Brown and Levinson provide examples of intrinsic FTAs that demonstrate the speaker's (S) disregard for the hearer's (H) favorable facial expression. Those FTAs include "mentioning (of) taboo topics, including those that are inappropriate to the context," as well as "raising of dangerously emotional or divisive topics, e.g., politics, race, religion, women's liberation" (Brown and Levinson 1987, p. 67). Many politeness studies have found that the level of imposition, social power, and social distance all influence politeness and mitigation (Leech, 1983; Brown and Levinson, 1987). Briz (2003) uses the example of lending a car versus lending a book to demonstrate the impact of imposition on mitigation. He stated that lending a car is a more challenging circumstance in which to reach an agreement than lending a book, and that mitigation is more likely in the car situation.

Politeness varies depending on the context. The seriousness of face-threatening acts is determined by the speaker's and hearer's social distance (D), the level of familiarity and solidarity between two people, the speaker's and hearer's relative power (P), the power that the hearer has over the speaker, and the ranking (R) of imposition in the culture related to the speaker's desire to impose on the hearer and the hearer's acceptance of the imposition (Brown and Levinson, 1987). All three criteria (D, P, and R) influence the seriousness of an FTA, and the speaker will determine which politeness strategy to employ to reduce the danger. Brown and Levinson's findings have provided a theoretical framework for studying speaker-to-speaker face connections as grounded in underlying assumptions about the relationship encoded in polite deference and solidarity.

1.3 Previous Studies

(Im)politeness in online discourse is shaped by both platform norms and cultural background (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Kádár & Haugh, 2013). While different digital environments influence how online reviewers express criticism, cultural values affect preferences for direct or indirect strategies (Wu & Yang, 2024; Zhao, 2024; Zhao & Wahid, 2024). Accordingly, this section reviews studies on platform-based differences and cultural variations in (im)politeness.

1.3.1 Comparison of Impoliteness in Online Reviews and Social Media Discourse

Research on impoliteness on online platforms was conducted by Wu and Yang (2024) and Pasana et al. (2023). While Pasana et al. (2023) investigated Facebook comments disparaging a government agency, Wu and Yang (2024) examined consumer evaluations on Amazon and Douban despite their different settings. These two studies disagreed on one thing. The main strategy was to be impolite on record, as user comments often included direct criticism, ridicule, and claims of incompetence. Chinese reviews tended to favor single-strategy phrases, suggesting a cultural preference for indirect confrontation in Chinese discourse compared to the more direct style of English-language speech, while Wu and Yang (2024) noted that English-language reviews often combined many impoliteness strategies.

Zhao (2022) investigated politeness on TikTok where people responded to video content with both on-record and off-record impoliteness. Unlike the methodical assessments examined by Wu and Yang (2024), impoliteness on TikTok seemed more natural and engaging, often serving purposes such as humor, social connection, or criticism of a creator's reputation. Pasana et al. (2023) also noted humor-based impoliteness in a different form, as sarcasm and ironic ridicule were used in Facebook comments to express discontent toward institutions rather than individual content providers or commercial products.

Vásquez (2011) examined complaints in TripAdvisor hotel evaluations and found that many negative reviews, coupled with recommendations or advice, indicated a speech act set in which users criticized and provided assistance to potential clients. Unlike the overt hostility seen on social networking sites, TripAdvisor reviews often mixed harsh criticism with positive comments. This shows that platform rules influence how people express

rudeness. In other words, social media is more direct and dramatic, while review sites combine feedback with advice.

These results suggest that internet platforms shape impoliteness strategies in line with their communication norms. Customer reviews on e-commerce and travel sites focus on products and services, Facebook comments often target organizations, and TikTok interactions revolve around entertainment and social identity. This evidence seems to indicate that the (im)politeness strategies users use to express dissatisfaction depend on the interaction styles of each platform.

1.3.2 Cultural Variations in Politeness and Impoliteness Strategies

Cultural variation plays an important role in shaping how politeness and impoliteness are expressed, particularly in online discourse. A large body of research suggests that linguistic behavior is closely tied to cultural expectations, values, and norms regarding appropriate communication. Drawing on pragmatics and intercultural communication, scholars have frequently demonstrated that speakers from different cultural backgrounds employ distinct ways to manage face, express evaluation, and negotiate interpersonal relationships.

Studies comparing Eastern and Western communication styles commonly highlight differences in directness and indirectness. For instance, Wu and Yang (2024) and Zhao (2022) found that English-language reviewers tend to employ more direct, bald-on-record impoliteness, explicitly stating dissatisfaction or criticism. In contrast, Chinese reviewers rely on off-record strategies such as implication, metaphor, or sarcasm to convey negative evaluations indirectly. These findings correspond with Zhou (2024), whose analysis of movie reviews revealed that English reviewers prefer clear, explicit complaints, whereas Chinese reviewers soften criticism through indirect language or rhetorical devices.

Such patterns can be interpreted within broader cultural frameworks, particularly high- and low-context cultures (Hall, 1976). In high-context cultures (e.g., China, Japan, Thailand), meaning is often conveyed implicitly, and preserving social harmony is preferred. As a result, speakers may avoid direct confrontation and instead use indirect or mitigated forms of criticism. In contrast, low-context cultures (e.g., the United States, the United Kingdom) favor explicitness, making direct expressions of dissatisfaction more acceptable.

Similarly, politeness theory yields a useful framework for understanding these differences. Brown and Levinson (1987) argue that speakers use politeness strategies to manage face-threatening acts (FTAs). In collectivist cultures, where social unity and face-saving are highly valued, speakers are more likely to employ negative politeness and off-record strategies to minimize imposition. In contrast, individualist cultures may tolerate more bald-on-record expressions, specifically in contexts such as online reviews where individual viewpoints are expected.

Empirical studies of online reviews additionally support these cultural attributes. Vásquez (2011), in the analysis of TripAdvisor reviews, found that many reviewers adopt hybrid strategies, combining positive politeness (e.g., compliments, appreciation) with indirect criticism. This suggests that even within English-language contexts, there is a tendency to soften negative evaluations to maintain a socially acceptable tone. Likewise, Terkourafi (2008) emphasizes that politeness is not only culturally bound but also context-dependent, determined by genre conventions and expectations. In customer reviews, for example, balancing praise and criticism may be seen as a normative practice.

Another work highlights the role of discursive norms in digital environments. Kádár and Haugh (2013) argue that politeness and impoliteness are co-constructed through interaction and influenced by shared cultural understandings. In online contexts, where anonymity prevails and social constraints are reduced, speakers may deviate from traditional norms, yet cultural tendencies persist. Grainger (2020) further notes that indirectness, silence, or minimal responses can function as subtle forms of impoliteness, particularly when they violate expectations of engagement.

Overall, previous research indicates that cultural background greatly impacts the choice of politeness and impoliteness strategies. However, these strategies are not fixed and interact dynamically with contextual variables such as genre, power relations, and communicative intent. Consequently, understanding online review discourse requires an integrated approach that examines both cultural standards and situational factors in forming language use.

2. Method

This study utilized a mixed-methods approach to analyze politeness and impoliteness strategies in online reviews. The quantitative analysis investigated the occurrence and frequency of these strategies across five levels of satisfaction, while the qualitative analysis examined selected examples to provide deeper insights into how these strategies are pragmatically realized in context. The research instrument used in this study was a collection of online customer reviews obtained from Trustpilot (<https://www.trustpilot.com>).

2.1 Samples

Samples for the study were selected using stratified random selection to ensure representation across different levels of customer satisfaction. A total of 250 customer reviews were collected from Trustpilot.com. Each degree of satisfaction is represented by 1 star (lowest) to 5 stars (highest), and 50 reviews were selected from each level. This stratification guaranteed that all segments of consumer experience were equally represented. The sample size of 250 reviews was considered sufficient for qualitative content analysis, as previous research in discourse analysis has shown that datasets of 200 to 300 units can yield reliable and significant patterns (e.g., Krippendorff, 2018; Guest et al., 2006). Online reviews were chosen as the primary data source because they provide authentic, spontaneous language from consumers in real-life situations. Thus, the chosen samples provide a full account of the language aspects of the different levels of consumer satisfaction.

2.2 Data Collection

In this study, data were collected from five distinct sample groups based on customer satisfaction levels: one-star, two-star, three-star, four-star, and five-star reviews. All data were obtained from Trustpilot.com using the same data collection method to ensure consistency across groups. Specifically, a stratified random sampling technique was used to select 50 reviews from each satisfaction level, yielding a total of 250. The data were collected within the specified period of March 2026. Each review was extracted manually and recorded in a structured dataset, including relevant information such as star ratings and symbolic and textual content. Although the sample groups differ in satisfaction levels, the data collection procedure remains consistent across all groups to ensure comparability and the reliability of the analysis.

2.3 Data Analysis

The analysis of politeness and impoliteness strategies was based on the theoretical frameworks of Brown and Levinson (1987) and Jonathan Culpeper (1996, 2005, 2011). These frameworks provide a foundation for identifying how reviewers use face-saving (politeness) and face-threatening (impoliteness) strategies in their evaluations.

The analytical procedure consisted of both quantitative and qualitative components. First, each review was carefully examined to identify instances of politeness and impoliteness strategies. These instances were coded according to four main categories: bald on record, positive, negative, and off-record, along with their corresponding sub-strategies. The coding process focused on observable linguistic features, including directness, hedging, mitigation, sarcasm, and implicit meaning.

For the quantitative analysis, all identified instances were systematically counted, and the frequencies were converted to percentages to facilitate comparison across the five satisfaction levels. This allowed for the

identification of dominant patterns and variations in strategy use at each level. The results were then presented in tables to provide a clear overview of distributional trends.

For the qualitative analysis, selected examples from each satisfaction level were examined in detail to explore how these strategies function in context. Particular attention was given to the reviewers' (im)politeness strategy choices and the pragmatic effects of specific linguistic choices. This step was vital for understanding how strategies may serve different functions depending on context, thereby distinguishing between surface-level forms and underlying intentions.

3. Results

In line with the research objective, this section analyzes politeness and impoliteness strategies across five satisfaction levels in Trustpilot reviews, presenting their frequency, percentage, and examples.

3.1 Level of satisfaction: one star

Table 1 presents the distribution of politeness and impoliteness strategies employed in one-star customer reviews. The strategies are divided into four main types: bald on record, positive, negative, and off-record, along with their specific sub-types. The frequencies and percentages are calculated to illustrate how often each strategy is used within both politeness and impoliteness frameworks.

Table 1: Frequency of (Im)politeness Strategies in One-Star Reviews

Politeness Strategies	Sub- strategies	Frequency	Impoliteness Strategies	Sub- strategies	Frequency
Bald on record	Be direct without redressing action to show politeness	158 (88.76%)	Bald on record	Be direct without redressing action to show impoliteness	33 (20%)
Positive	-	0%	Positive	- Ignore - Be disinterested or unsympathetic - Use inappropriate identity markers - Use obscure or secretive language - Use taboo language - Make others feel uncomfortable or humiliated	69 (41.82%)
Negative	- Give deference - Be conventionally indirect	5 (2.81%)	Negative	Condescend, scorn or ridicule	44 (26.67%)
Off-record	- Be vague - Be incomplete or use ellipsis - Use metaphor	15 (8.43%)	Off-record	- Use impolite implicature - Use emojis - Give hints	19 (11.52%)
Total		178 (100%)			165 (100%)

The results show a clear difference between how politeness and impoliteness are used in one-star reviews. Within the politeness framework, bald-on-record strategies overwhelmingly dominated, indicating that even when politeness is present, it tends to be expressed in a highly direct, unmitigated manner. This suggests that dissatisfied customers prioritize clarity and intensity over maintaining social harmony.

On the other hand, impoliteness strategies were more varied. The most common impoliteness strategy was positive, where reviewers attacked the person's self-esteem by ignoring them, acting uninterested, or using offensive language. Other impoliteness strategies, such as negative and off-record strategies, were frequently used, indicating that harsh criticism is common.

Those who rated one star showed deep discontent and rage, often expressing their frustration directly and sometimes in an impolite way. The following are the instances.



Figure 1: Customer review (A frustrating experience with a sneaker website)

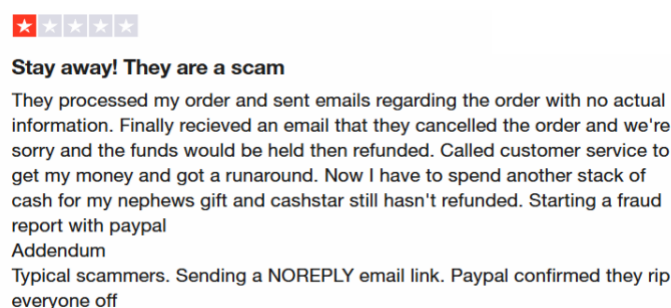


Figure 2: Customer review (Canceled order and scam experience)

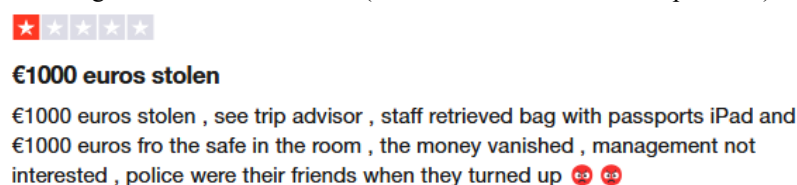


Figure 3: Customer review (Lack of support from management and unresponsive staff)

One-star reviews stand out significantly because reviewers use strong, emotional language to express their dissatisfaction, making the difference in review ratings even more noticeable. In Figure 1, "This is the worst site to buy sneakers..." was a clear, face attack that showed frustration. Likewise, the review in Figure 2, "Stay away! They are a scam" was a warning meant to damage the business's reputation. Another remark in Figure 3, "€1000 euros stolen... management not interested," criticized employees for carelessness without any effort at courtesy. These instances show that, whereas bald-on-record statements may seem structurally similar, their pragmatic purpose differs greatly depending on whether they aim to convey effectively or cause reputational harm.

It is crucial to note that customer evaluations that include the frustrated-face emoji in Figure 3 serve a significant practical and emotional purpose, amplifying the expressive power of the complaint. Although the linguistic material such as "police were their friends when they turned up," already conveyed annoyance, the emojis 🤔 🤔 graphically exaggerated the feeling, conveying a significant amount of emotion and moral outrage that written language alone may not fully capture. Emojis, according to Dresner and Herring (2010), are paralinguistic signals that help explain or emphasize emotional meaning, much like the tone of voice in verbal communication. In this situation, the emojis serve as visual indicators of severity, underscoring the seriousness of the accusations, including theft, mismanagement, and potential corruption. Furthermore, from a pragmatic viewpoint, the use of

emojis in this situation supported bald-on-record impoliteness (Culpeper, 1996), in which the reviewer skipped softeners and directly threatened the company's face. The emojis increased the face-threatening nature of the criticism by adding visual cues of rage to the criticism, thereby making the evaluation more forceful and emotionally loaded (Derks, Fischer, & Bos, 2008). Therefore, emojis work rhetorically to highlight discontent and guarantee the clear communication of the reviewer's emotional position.

3.2 Level of satisfaction: two stars

The findings reveal that in two-star reviews, politeness strategies are primarily characterized by a balance between bald on record and negative politeness, indicating that reviewers tend to combine direct expressions with mitigating elements such as explanations or reasons. This suggests a shift from purely direct criticism toward a more elaborated and rationalized form of complaint. In contrast, impoliteness strategies remain dominated by bald-on-record forms although their overall frequency is lower and less diverse than in one-star reviews. Positive and negative impoliteness are present but less prominent, while off-record impoliteness is minimal, indicating a reduced reliance on indirect or implied attacks.

Table 2: Frequency of (Im)politeness Strategies in Two-Star Reviews

Politeness Strategies	Sub- strategies	Frequency	Impoliteness Strategies	Sub- strategies	Frequency
Bald on record	Be direct without redressing action to show politeness	125 (43.40%)	Bald on record	Be direct without redressing action to show impoliteness	15 (46.88%)
Positive	- Be optimistic	3 (1.04%)	Positive	- Ignore - Be disinterested or unsympathetic - Make others feel uncomfortable or humiliated	7 (21.88%)
Negative	- Be conventionally indirect - Give reasons - Use hedges	150 (52.08%)	Negative	- Condescend, scorn or ridicule - Put others' indebtedness on record	5 (15.63%)
Off-record	- Use rhetorical questions to be polite - Use implicature	10 (3.47%)	Off-record	- Use rhetorical questions to mock - Use sarcasm or irony	5 (15.63%)
Total		288 (100%)			32 (100%)

One-star reviews express dissatisfaction, often using strong emotional language and claiming a scam, whereas two-star reviews still reflect disappointment but may mention positives, like eventual resolution or partial service, as illustrated below.

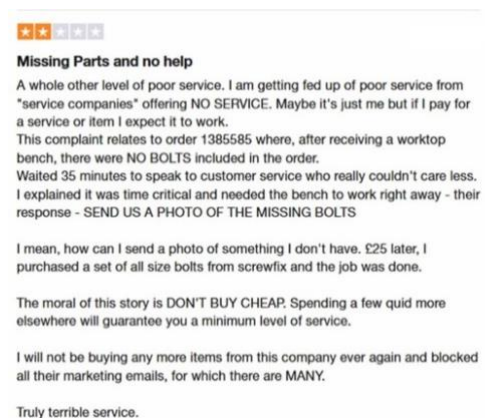


Figure 4: Customer review (Missing parts and unhelpful support)

In Figure 4, this two-star review expressed disappointment not only with a defective item but also with the caliber of customer care. The reviewer's dissatisfaction stemmed from an inadequate customer service response to an incomplete item, which was a countertop bench lacking bolts. By saying things like "NO SERVICE" and "Truly awful service," the reviewer used a bald-on-record politeness strategy (Brown & Levinson, 1987) to openly voice discontent without any effort to soften the complaint. These statements immediately called into question the company's competence and concern, resulting in unmitigated face-threatening activities (FTAs). Additionally, the sarcastic rhetorical question in "How can I send a photo of something I don't have?" was also an off-record strategy, especially a rhetorical use meant to mock rather than ask. Culpeper (1996) claimed that such use of rhetorical questions is a subtype of impoliteness, falling under both off-record and positive impoliteness strategies, since it indirectly criticizes and therefore disturbs or mocks the hearer. The tone of the two-star review was more negative and impolite, as the reviewer claimed they had to purchase the bolts themselves, so linking the business to a negative quality was useless and untrustworthy. This action records the company's debt, which is a sign of negative impoliteness (Culpeper, 1996). Furthermore, all-capitalized phrases like "SEND US A PHOTO OF THE MISSING BOLTS" underlined mocking and skepticism, hence strengthening the face-threatening tone. Recent studies by Zhang and Vásquez (2014) supported the idea that consumers frequently used sarcasm, rhetorical questions, and exaggeration in online complaints to express strong criticisms, especially in low-star ratings. Similarly, Chen et al. (2011) emphasized that digital reviewers might alternate between direct and indirect approaches to express rage while preserving some level of social etiquette.

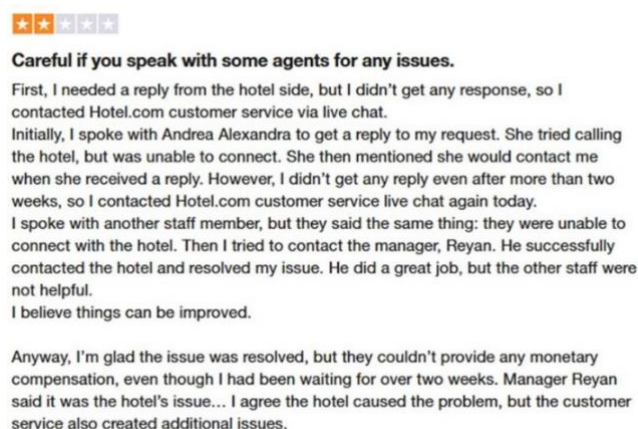


Figure 5: Customer review (Inconsistent customer support delays issue resolution)

In Figure 5, the complaint was about slow replies and inadequate communication from several hotel agents. Although the reviewer was clearly annoyed, a combination of politeness and impoliteness strategies was employed to express criticism. Hedging statements like "I believe things can be improved" exhibited optimistic conventional indirectness and helped reduce imposition, therefore reflecting negative politeness according to Brown and Levinson's (1987) approach. Acknowledging the manager's usefulness: "He did a great job." The customer also used positive politeness to preserve group affiliation and soften the tone of the complaint. However, Culpeper's (1996) classification clearly identifies some impolite traits. The reviewer mocked the company's ongoing failure to address the problem in "They said the same thing: they were unable to connect," highlighting the company's repeated inability to fix the issue. Moreover, the utterance "the other staff were not helpful" directly linked the hearers to a negative quality; "they couldn't provide compensation..." put the company's debt on record, therefore raising the face risk. Chen et al. (2011) asserted that these strategies typically emerge during prolonged delays, leading consumers to perceive their time as undervalued. Vásquez (2011) also observed that online reviews often need to balance politeness and criticism to appear fair and maintain credibility in public debate. Thus, this review showed the utilization of both politeness and impoliteness to convey discontent while maintaining the reviewer's own optimistic face.



Rates are ridiculously high!

Rates are ridiculously high!

Figure 6: Customer review (Expensive rates)

The brief critique "Rates are ridiculously high!" in figure 6 used bald-on-record impoliteness to confront the addressee's positive face without softening or correcting the message. The word "ridiculously" heightened the judgment by implying intense emotional displeasure and possibly irony. Regarding cultural views, recent research has found that negative online customer reviews are full of direct, emotionally charged language. For example, Feng and Ren (2020) found that English-language evaluations often employ more favorable impoliteness strategies, such as sarcasm and direct criticism. This implies a cultural tendency in English evaluations toward clear statements of discontent. Moreover, Wei (2024) found that unfavorable online evaluations often use bald-on-record strategies to show extreme disapproval, particularly when consumers believe their expectations have not been met. Emphatic evaluative words like "ridiculously" worked as mock impoliteness, insulting the reader's competence or judgment. The review's lack of mitigating language in this context seems to intensify the face-threatening nature of the feedback, consistent with findings from recent studies on impoliteness in online consumer reviews.

3.3 Level of satisfaction: three stars

The results indicate that three-star reviews exhibit a more balanced distribution of politeness strategies compared to lower-rated reviews. While bald-on-record strategies remain the most frequent, their dominance is reduced, and positive politeness strategies increase notably. This suggests that reviewers at this level tend to combine direct expressions with supportive or cooperative elements, such as providing understanding, justification, or constructive feedback. Negative politeness and off-record strategies are also present but play a less prominent role.

Table 3: Frequency of (Im)politeness Strategies in Three-Star Reviews

Politeness Strategies	Sub- strategies	Frequency	Impoliteness Strategies	Sub- strategies	Frequency
Bald on record	Be direct without redressing action to show politeness	102 (59.65%)	Bald on record	Be direct without redressing action to show impoliteness	10 (45.45%)
Positive	- Be optimistic - Give reasons in a positive way - Give understanding	45 (26.32%)	Positive	Make others feel uncomfortable or humiliated	5 (25.73%)
Negative	- Be conventionally indirect - Use hedges -Minimizing the imposition -Give deference -Give reasons to be polite	17 (9.94%)	Negative	- Condescend, scorn or ridicule -Explicitly associate the hearer with a negative aspect (personalize, use the pronoun 'I' and 'you')	5 (22.73%)
Off-record	- Be incomplete or use ellipsis - Use metaphor	7 (4.09%)	Off-record	Use implicature (idioms)	2 (9.09%)
Total		171 (100%)			22 (100%)

In contrast, impoliteness strategies occur less frequently. This indicates a reduced reliance on overt face-threatening acts and a shift toward more moderate forms of evaluation. Overall, three-star reviews reflect a communicative style that balances criticism with politeness, signaling a more neutral or mixed evaluation.

Reviews scored at the three-star level usually show moderate discontent rather than severe rage. Reviewers in this category frequently use fewer harsh words, and some try to offset their grievances with neutral or somewhat positive comments. These are the examples.

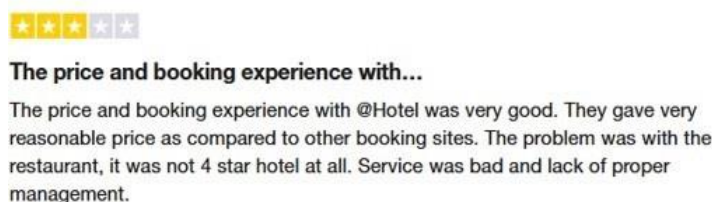


Figure 7: Customer review (Good booking, but poor hotel service)

In Figure 7, the use of ellipsis in the review (e.g., “The price and booking experience with...”) can be interpreted as an off-record strategy, in which the reviewer intentionally left the statement incomplete. This indirectness allows the reader to infer the full meaning without explicitly stating it, thereby softening the critique and reducing potential imposition. Then, the reviewer used a combination of positive politeness, bald-on-record, and negative politeness strategies. The review began on a polite note, acknowledging the hotel’s reasonable pricing and easy booking process, which aligns with positive politeness, particularly the strategies of attending to the hearer’s wants and showing optimism. This served to soften the criticism that follows. However, the tone quickly shifted to a bald-on-record approach, with direct statements such as “It was not a 4-star hotel at all” and “Service was bad and a lack of proper management.” These utterances reflected unmitigated criticism, consistent with Brown and Levinson’s description of face-threatening acts (FTAs) performed without redressive action. Additionally, the reviewer offered justification for their dissatisfactory politeness strategy used to provide and maintain a sense of rationality and fairness. This tendency is often observed in moderate-star reviews, where reviewers aim to combine straightforward strategies with a degree of courtesy (Chen & Lv, 2025; Wu & Yang, 2024).

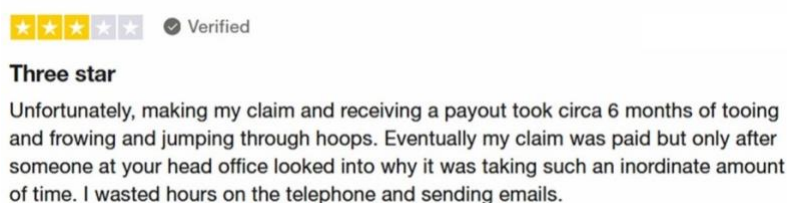


Figure 8: Customer review (Slow process despite resolution)

In Figure 8, the reviewer expressed justified dissatisfaction with a claim process that lasted approximately six months. They lamented the prolonged delays, poor communication, and the significant amount of time wasted on phone calls and emails. Although compensation was eventually received, it only occurred after the head office intervened. The reviewer’s overt frustration was evident in comments such as “I wasted hours,” which exemplifies a bald-on-record strategy, while the expression “jumping through hoops” demonstrates an off-record strategy by indirectly alluding to the difficulties experienced. However, the reviewer also justified their complaints by contextualizing them within a sequence of events. For example, the statement “Eventually my claim was paid, but only after...” illustrates Brown and Levinson’s (1987) negative politeness through justification, legitimizing the complaint and maintaining the speaker’s credibility. Chen and Lv (2025) argued that consumer reviews expressing reasonable dissatisfaction often combine narrative structure with direct complaint to enhance the persuasiveness of criticism.



I went through the intro videos. Interested. Need contact details

I went through the intro videos. I am interested in joining and become an affiliate.

I wish to speak with the program owner, before joining the program to get my some doubts solved.

But, on the website, there are no contact details like phone number, email address

or the company's registered location address. This creates some doubt.

I expect to receive an email from the office of modernwealthy company , if they read this review. Plz provide your phone number where I can call. Waiting for the reply.

Figure 9: Customer review (Expression of interest hindered by lack of contact information)

In Figure 9, the reviewer viewed the introductory videos and expressed a desire to participate in the program as an affiliate. Their website, however, lacked any contact details, such as a phone number or email, which left them doubtful. The reviewer requested that the business provide contact information and was expecting a response. Then dissatisfaction was expressed through negative politeness and bald-on-record techniques, while maintaining formal respect. The reviewer first employed positive politeness to indicate interest and common objectives, in line with Brown and Levinson's (1987) concept of attending to the hearer's needs. The change to unhappiness, however, showed hedging and indirectness, which were characteristic of negative politeness, as it read, "This raises some doubt." A bald-on-record strategy emphasizing clarity over face-saving was the direct order, "Plz provide your phone number". Often, internet evaluations use this method, in which the reviewer combined civility with aggressiveness. On digital platforms, such hybrid strategies usually reflect a compromise between face-threatening actions (FTAs) and the reviewer's aim of eliciting a response from businesses (Zhao, 2022, p. 125). Pasana et al. (2023) found that, similarly, even three-star-rated online reviews often use bald-on-record actions when reviewers feel overlooked or need follow-up.

3.4 Level of satisfaction: four stars

The findings show that four-star reviews are strongly characterized by the use of politeness strategies, with bald on record remaining the most frequent, primarily used to express sincerity and straightforward positive evaluation. Positive politeness strategies are also evident, including expressions of appreciation, optimism, and supportive reasoning, indicating a cooperative and affiliative communicative style. Negative politeness appears to a limited extent, mainly through the use of hedges to soften minor criticisms. Off-record strategies are not evident, suggesting that reviewers prefer clarity and directness even in relatively positive evaluations.

In contrast, impoliteness strategies are used only sparingly in the four-star reviews. While some instances of bald-on-record, positive, and negative impoliteness are present, off-record impoliteness strategies are absent. This suggests that reviewers generally prefer relatively direct yet restrained expressions when conveying mild dissatisfaction or criticism. Overall, the reviews maintain a largely positive, respectful tone, emphasizing appreciation and balanced evaluation rather than strong, face-threatening attacks.

Table 4: Frequency of (Im)politeness Strategies in Four-Star Reviews

Politeness Strategies	Sub- strategies	Frequency	Impoliteness Strategies	Sub- strategies	Frequency
Bald on record	- Tell the truth and be sincere	82 (75.93%)	Bald on record	Be direct without redressing action to show impoliteness	3 (100%)
Positive	- Give reasons in a positive way - Be optimistic - Thank	15 (13.89%)	Positive	Make the hearer/reader feel uncomfortable	2% (28.57%)

- Give compliments					
Negative	- Use hedges	9 (8.33%)	Negative	Associate the hearer with a negative aspect	2% (28.57%)
Off-record	- Use ellipsis	2 (1.85%)	Off-record	-	0%
Total		108 (100%)			7 (100%)

While the three-star rating reflects indifference and vague dissatisfaction, the four-star review contains engaged and positive comments that clearly express a desire to improve the service. The examples are as follows:

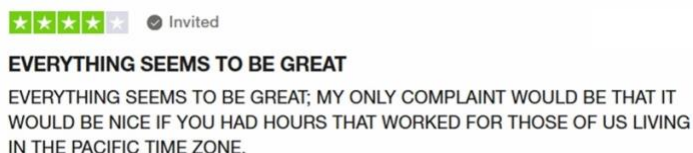


Figure 10: Customer review (Positive experience with a recommendation for improved time zone accessibility)

In Figure 10, the reviewer started by stating they felt great, then repeated it to emphasize approval. This aligned with positive politeness strategies, especially the actions of increasing interest and demonstrating approval (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Using hedging and a conditional statement, the reviewer expressed concern about the limited service hours for individuals in the Pacific Time Zone, which reflected poor politeness and off-record strategies.

These options let the reviewer voice a worry indirectly, therefore avoiding imposition and keeping a respectful tone. Although it still expressed discontent, the use of inference aimed to encourage the business to consider a time zone change without directly requesting it, thereby demonstrating courtesy. Overall, the review was well-organized, balanced praise with a gentle suggestion, and was a great example of offering thoughtful, respectful criticism.



Figure 11: Customer review (Effective customer support with minor communication barriers due to noise)

In Figure 11, the customer began with thanks to a helpful staff member, demonstrating high positive politeness through compliments and thanks (Brown & Levinson, 1987). But the reviewer quickly brought up a problem with the call quality, saying, "It would have been a 5, but..." which may be seen as a typical example of hedged criticism. This is in line with Chen et al.'s (2011) study of how customers often use polite language to mask complaints so they do not seem harsh. The reviewer attempts to be fair, but the usage of contrastive structures ("but") and the fact that the agent has to repeat herself over and over again show that she is still unhappy. Culpeper (2011) calls this "impoliteness behind a polite front," meaning relationship tension, but it is deliberate to avoid open conflict.



Figure 12: Customer review (A positive review)

The review in Figure 12 was very short and appeared incomplete, consisting only of "what I was looking for." This brevity, especially when thorough reviews are expected, can be interpreted as an ellipsis, suggesting more is left unsaid. Terkourafi (2008) notes that breaking genre rules, such as not explaining the 4-star rating, implies something beyond neutrality. Here, the shortness may signal emotional detachment or hidden dissatisfaction. Locher and Watts (2005) assert that even brief answers carry social significance. In this case, the restrained politeness hinders genuine engagement or connection.

Overall, the analysis of 4-star reviews shows that people are mostly polite, but there are also hints of tension in their words. While reviewers often use polite language, such as thanking and praising, they also include criticism in an indirect or softened way, often mixed with their positive comments. Additionally, Figure 12 demonstrates a more implicit form of resistance. Such strategies may not appear overtly impolite but can still disrupt expected interactional norms, functioning as covert expressions of dissatisfaction (Culpeper, 2011; Locher & Watts, 2005).

3.5 Level of satisfaction: five stars

The findings demonstrate that five-star reviews are overwhelmingly characterized by the use of politeness strategies, particularly bald-on-record and positive politeness. While bald-on-record strategies remain highly frequent, they are primarily used to express sincerity, honesty, and a clear positive evaluation rather than criticism. Positive politeness strategies also play a significant role, reflecting expressions of appreciation, gratitude, optimism, and compliments, which contribute to a highly supportive and affiliative tone. Off-record strategies, such as emoticons and ellipses, further enhance the friendly, expressive nature of these reviews, while negative politeness appears only minimally. In contrast, impoliteness strategies are almost entirely absent, with only a few instances observed. This indicates avoidance of face-threatening acts and highlights the predominance of respectful, positive communication.

Table 5: Frequency of (Im)politeness Strategies in Five-Star Reviews

Politeness Strategies	Sub- strategies	Frequency	Impoliteness Strategies	Sub- strategies	Frequency
Bald on record	- Tell the truth and be sincere	99 (45.41%)	Bald on record	Be direct without redressing action to show impoliteness	1 (33.33%)
Positive	- Give reasons in a positive way - Be optimistic - Thank - Give compliments - Promise	89 (40.83%)	Positive	Make others feel uncomfortable	1 (33.33%)
Negative	- Use hedges	5 (2.29%)	Negative	Associate the hearer with a negative aspect	1 (33.33%)
Off-record	- Use emoticons - Use ellipsis	25 (11.47%)	Off-record	-	0%
Total		218 100%			3 (100%)

Five-star reviews show that the customer is completely happy and uses polite, thankful, and emotional words (Brown & Levinson, 1987). These reviews often use emoticons, intensifiers, and personal compliments to show that they really like something and to connect with the person who wrote it. They do not usually have complaints or threats of violence, which makes it ideal for studying how language strengthens social bonds (Locher & Watts, 2005). Here are some examples:

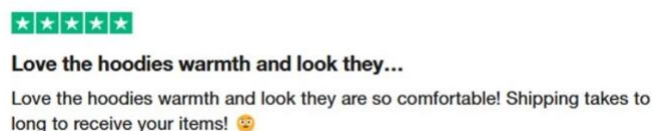


Figure 13: Customer review (Positive feedback on comfort and design, with concerns about shipping delays)

The above review started with a clear positive tone, using utterances like "Love the hoodies' warmth and look they...." and "They are so comfortable!" These statements strengthened the bond and shared appreciation among people in the same group. The tone was friendly and excited, and positive adjectives like "love" and "comfortable" were used to make people feel more connected. The reviewer is probably trying to praise and confirm the good quality of the provider's product.

However, the second part of the review, "Shipping takes too long to get your items!" introduced a slight shift in tone. The expression indicated a potential threat to someone's face, but it was less severe because it did not involve direct guilt or accusation. Instead, the issue was made in a straightforward way, and then a face-saving emoji (😞) was added to lighten the tone. Chen et al. (2011) proposed that these kinds of indirect complaints in service feedback are a way for the speaker to be polite, as the reviewer would rather not confront the person but still wants to show that they are unhappy. Culpeper's (2011) theory of "politeness-impoliteness hybridity," which entails wrapping criticism in praise to maintain balance, reinforces this idea.

The reviewer followed the usual genre rule for a 5-star rating, which is to praise the work, but they also included a marker of displeasure. It is noticeable that this goes against the usual style of five-star reviews and may suggest hidden conflict. Even though the review has a five-star rating, the minor criticism introduces a polite form of resistance. Locher and Watts (2005) call this "relational work," in which disagreement is framed harmoniously.

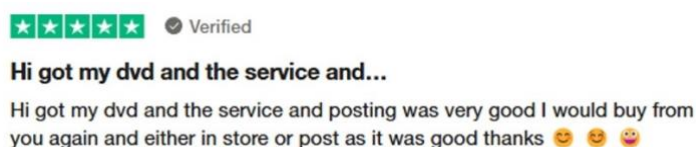


Figure 14: Customer review (Positive evaluation of product delivery and service experience)

In Figure 14, the reviewer praised the delivery and service ("the service and posting were excellent") and said they would buy from the company again ("I would buy from you again..."), which is a polite way to express their satisfaction. The use of positive strategies displays approval, builds solidarity, and shows friendliness (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The constant use of emojis (😊😊😊) and the casual "Hi" at the beginning are examples of digital-era politeness that is expressive, pleasant, and relational (Locher & Graham, 2010). The last "thanks" restored a tone of thankfulness and friendliness, helping keep relationships strong (Locher & Watts, 2005).

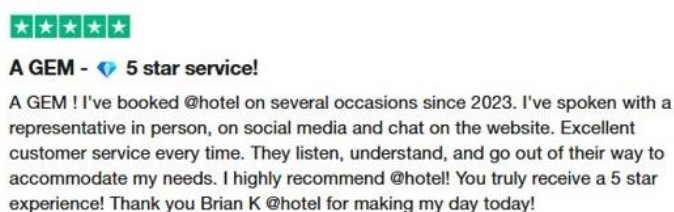


Figure 15: Customer review (Outstanding customer service experience)

This review is a wonderful example of positive politeness, as it is enthusiastic and emotionally honest. The reviewer stressed that they would use the service again ("on several occasions"), that they interacted directly with workers, and that the service was excellent. These strategies reflected a desire to become closer to others, make

friends, and show gratitude (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The approbation maxim (Leech, 2007) says to use phrases like "They listen, understand," and "go out of their way" to give the hearer as much praise as possible and make their positive face even better.

The reviewer made the compliments more personal by mentioning a staff member ("Brian K.") and thanking him directly. This made the relationship even closer. Locher and Watts (2005) argue that this form of language is relational work, in which positive feedback helps maintain and strengthen social ties. Using strong modifiers like "truly" and "highly recommend" shows that the reviewer is very emotionally involved, which makes politeness more emotive (Kádár & Haugh, 2013).

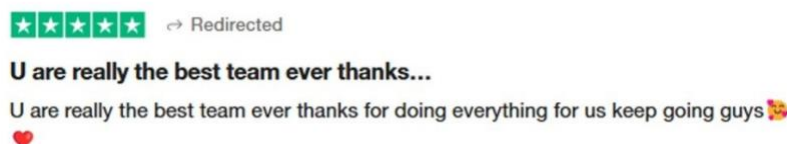


Figure 16: Customer review (Exceptional service quality and customer satisfaction)

This review in Figure 16 shows how to be nice in a digital setting. The reviewer used positive politeness to offer express praise ("you are really the best team ever") and to express thanks ("thanks for doing everything for us"). These actions bolstered the hearer's self-esteem and fueled their desire for love, acknowledgment, and recognition (Brown & Levinson, 1987). "Keep going, guys 🍷❤️" was a mix of emotional support and digital signals (emojis) in the off-record strategy that show unity, warmth, and community alignment.

The use of casual words like "U" and "guys" and the lack of punctuation may seem informal, but they actually add a tone of spontaneous affection rather than carelessness. Locher and Graham (2010) suggested that digital relational labor commonly uses informal syntax and emojis to convey civility and emotional support without words. The repeated praise and encouragement demonstrated strong emotional commitment, which aligns with Kádár and Haugh's (2013) focus on emotional etiquette in public digital praise.

The five-star reviews consistently express high levels of satisfaction through polite expressions such as praise, gratitude, emotional intensity, and supportive language (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Reviewers used emojis, a casual tone, and personal compliments to make people feel part of a community and feel kind. There were no direct complaints or threats, and any minor issues, if present, appear significantly less serious. These reviews aligned with what people want from the genre: strengthening social ties and keeping customers coming back (Locher & Watts, 2005; Kádár & Haugh, 2013). Overall, five-star reviews are more than just evaluations; they help establish relationships by showing significant emotional involvement without any tension.

4. Discussion

The results of this study contribute to the continuing academic discussion regarding rudeness in digital communication by redefining politeness and impoliteness as strategies that are not adversarial but rather integrated and sensitive to context. Past studies, such as those by Pasana et al. (2023) and Wu and Yang (2024), mostly examined the importance of on-record rudeness in political and consumer commentary. This study reveals that online reviews, especially those with three or four stars, often employ mixed strategies that combine politeness and impoliteness within the same text. This result aligns with Vásquez's (2011) study of TripAdvisor reviews, in which users downplayed complaints by placing them alongside recommendations and praise, thereby matching user expectations and the platform's requirements.

This study also supports the findings of Wu and Yang (2024) and Zhao (2022), which show that platform conventions and cultural discourse norms shape how people behave politely or rudely. This study does not directly examine cross-cultural data, but the presence of indirect complaints, softened FTAs, and emotionally motivated praise suggests that people are more likely to negotiate in a practical way than to face each other directly. This style differs from the more direct, confrontational tone common in Facebook political discussion (Pasana et al.,

2023) or on fast-paced, socially performative sites like TikTok (Zhao, 2022), where being rude can be a way to fit in or have fun.

In short, this study adds to our understanding of digital pragmatics by showing that it is not always evident what (im)politeness means in online evaluations. Instead, user strategies are influenced by factors such as how seriously they perceive the situation, platform conventions, cultural expectations, and their own goals for the encounter. More research should examine how these hybrid expressions function across different types of user-generated content, especially in contexts where people leave both positive and negative reviews.

4.1 Severity of the situation and utilization of (im)politeness strategies

The different ways of being polite and impolite in one- to five-star evaluations are due to the interaction of three contextual characteristics that Brown and Levinson (1987) found: social distance (D), relative power (P), and ranking of imposition (R). Customers who give one-star reviews, who are the most unhappy, tend to be less courteous. If they feel they do not know the firm well or do not have any control over it, they may complain, criticize, or be rude. The perceived high imposition, which expects redress, refunds, or apologies, often justifies a more confrontational tone. On the other hand, five-star reviews, which indicate low imposition and high pleasure, favor positive politeness strategies such as praise, solidarity cues, and emotive language. This is because the connection is friendly, and the reviewer does not have to make any demands. Customers who leave four- and three-star reviews prefer a middle ground. They are courteous but use hedges or indirectness to temper their criticisms, showing they know they might hurt someone's feelings while still expressing their dissatisfaction. Customers often behave as both critics and supporters in these reviews, which shows a negotiation of power. As the scenario worsens (from five to one star), reviewers switch from methods that improve the situation to ones that worsen it. The effects of D, P, and R become increasingly clear in how they affect the language used to express (im)politeness.

The study also supports Brown and Levinson's (1987) assertion that the choice of politeness strategy is influenced by the balance of social distance (D), relative power (P), and the ranking of imposition (R). When reviews get one or two stars, people tend to feel a lot of pressure and distance from the reviewer, which makes them more likely to give direct or harsh feedback. On the other hand, 5-star reviews usually indicate that the service provider was not very demanding and more in line with the customer, leading to very positive, solidarity-based politeness. But the middle-range evaluations (three to four stars) make things more complicated: users regularly mix strategies, such as combining complaints with compliments or softening harsh comments with emojis. These evaluations show the situational ambiguity that Zhao (2022) and Locher and Watts (2005) discuss when users encounter mixed intentions such as praise, displeasure, solidarity, and criticism within the same contact.

4.2 Reconceptualizing Politeness and Impoliteness as Contextually Fluid

Brown and Levinson's (1987) traditional theories of politeness have generally seen politeness and impoliteness as separate and opposing groups. However, looking at real-world conversations, such as customer reviews, shows that this binary framing does not always capture the complexity of interactional purpose. Hybrid strategies are prevalent in numerous three- and four-star reviews. These occur when positive politeness, including praise or thanks, accompanies indirect or muted criticism, or when face-threatening activities are softened with emotional language or emojis. These instances show that reviewers often balance conflicting goals, such as expressing displeasure while still fitting in with others or giving praise while still making it clear that their expectations were not met. These mixed strategies cannot be fully understood without considering the context, including the seriousness of the issue, the social distance between the reviewer and the business (D), the perceived power relationship between them (P), and the perceived ranking of imposition of the complaint (R) (Brown & Levinson, 1987). As argued by Culpeper (2011) and Locher and Watts (2005), politeness and impoliteness should not be viewed as fixed characteristics of speech, but rather as contextually fluid and dynamically interpreted in interaction. They are evaluative and emergent. Therefore, it might be better to consider (im)politeness as a continuum, with methods changing according to intent, relationship goals, and contextual inferences, rather than

putting reviews into strict categories. This new way of thinking enables a more practical, context-sensitive analysis that considers the strategic and social complexity of everyday digital conversations.

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies: During the preparation of this work, the author utilized ChatGPT and Grammarly to enhance language clarity, readability, grammatical accuracy, and consistency through proofreading. After using this tool/service, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and took full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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Analysis of Oral Argumentation: Bridging Curriculum and Reality in Science Classrooms

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Abstract

Oral argumentation skills are crucial for 21st-century scientific literacy, yet they are inadequately developed in numerous educational environments. This study examines the oral argumentation skills of students in biology classes at Level A accredited junior and senior high schools in Lampung Province, Indonesia. Using a descriptive qualitative survey design with 132 participants, data were gathered through audio-visual recordings of classroom discourse and examined using a systematic coding framework. The results show that students' skills are very weak, with average scores below 12% for both levels of education. Most of the arguments were only at Level 1 or Level 2 of the Toulmin Argument Pattern, using simple claims without strong evidence or counterarguments. Even though the schools had a high level of accreditation, they had a teacher-centered focus and didn't have any interactive media, which made it hard for students to think critically. These results show that there is a big difference between what the national curriculum says should happen in the classroom and what actually happens. To help students develop higher-order thinking skills, we need to move toward a student-centered, inquiry-based way of teaching.

Keywords: Oral Argumentation Skills, Biology Learning, Accredited Schools, Discourse Analysis

1. Introduction

In the 21st century, education must provide students with the skills, knowledge, and competencies essential for adapting to swiftly evolving environments and achieving success in personal and professional spheres (Dishon & Gilead, 2021). The paradigm of contemporary learning underscores the cultivation of holistic competencies that encompass cognitive understanding, character development, creativity, and innovation, thereby creating a comprehensive educational experience that meets global standards (Aithal & Srinivasan, 2025). This educational vision promotes skills like critical thinking, problem-solving, working together, and talking to others. Critical thinking is considered a fundamental component of effective learning and can be developed through strong argumentation skills (Sellars et al., 2018).

Argumentation is the mental and verbal process by which people think about information about a certain topic and share their well-thought-out conclusions with others (Bathgate et al., 2015; Mercier, 2016). It helps people find and put together facts, procedures, and ideas, which leads to reasoning that makes sense and is based on evidence. Strong argumentation skills are very helpful when people have to solve problems in context, where they have to use logical evidence to back up their points of view (Belland et al., 2008). In schools, one of the main goals is to teach students how to argue well. Teachers are supposed to create learning experiences that help students improve these skills (Kim et al., 2019). However, research has shown that high school students in Lampung Province, Indonesia, are very bad at making arguments. A study conducted in 12 schools with different levels of accreditation found that students did poorly on tasks that required them to make arguments that went beyond just making claims. Instead, they often didn't back up their claims with the right reasoning, warrants, or evidence (Maulina et al., 2023). Oral communication skills, which are the basis for making arguments, are also important for working together well and being engaged in the classroom (Hill, 2021). Teachers who are good at speaking can clearly explain things and keep the class running smoothly. They can also build relationships that encourage students to participate more (Xie & Derakhshan, 2021). These skills go beyond teaching and help teachers, students, parents, and other people involved in education talk to each other (Luginbühl & Müller-Feldmeth, 2022). Oral argumentation, unlike its written form, facilitates dynamic and interactive exchanges that allow participants to directly respond to each other's arguments (D. Kuhn et al., 2013). Research indicates that components like rebuttals are more common in oral contexts, underscoring the immediacy and responsiveness of spoken debate (Huangfu et al., 2023). To effectively justify their positions, participants must not only apply their knowledge but also employ rhetorical strategies, adopt suitable stances, and discern weaknesses in opposing arguments (Newell et al., 2011).

Research conducted by Evagorou et al., (2023) corroborates this observation, indicating that while students frequently formulate claims in argumentative tasks, they infrequently provide supporting data, warrants, or rebuttals. For instance, 86% of students could make a claim, but only 28% gave data, and only 5% used qualifiers. Almost no students gave warrants or rebuttals. These results indicate that students' argumentative skills are superficial and lack depth, highlighting the consequences of learning loss. The restricted capacity to formulate comprehensive arguments indicates significant educational deficiencies arising from inequities in technological access, instructional quality, and extended school closures (Harmey & Moss, 2023).

Interviews with science teachers in junior and senior high schools in Lampung support these findings. Teachers said that students are usually reluctant to talk about things and don't often share their thoughts or make arguments. Students don't often use scientific facts in their arguments, and their discussions are often shallow and disconnected, probably because the prompts aren't clear or there isn't enough support (Reiser, 2013). Students can't make good arguments or improve their critical thinking skills when they aren't involved (Sulung & Erman, 2022). Argumentation is an important part of biology education because it helps students connect what they learn in class to things that happen in the real world. Biology is based on things that can be seen and experienced in nature, which makes it a great subject for teaching people how to argue (Hasnunidah et al., 2023). However, a lot of students have trouble connecting biological concepts to their everyday lives, which shows that the curriculum doesn't match up with what students actually do (Webster et al., 2022). So, good teaching must stress argumentative ways of learning science so that students can explain what they know using evidence-based reasoning (Kuhn & Reiser, 2005).

Biology lessons always have something to do with real life because students have probably come across biological ideas in their daily lives (Tsui & Treagust, 2013). Ideally, this experiential background should give them the tools they need to make arguments based on what they see and how they think (Jiménez-Aleixandre & Erduran, 2007). Students should become more confident and better at making arguments as they participate in biology classes more and more. There is evidence that students become more involved over time, but their arguments are still not very deep or critical (Auerbach & Andrews, 2018). Observations indicate that the majority of high school students present personal opinions devoid of supporting evidence, factual data, or counterarguments. It seems that most students are only able to make basic arguments, making claims with simple reasoning but not the level of sophistication that is expected in higher-level thinking (Miralda-Banda et al., 2021).

These observations underscore a notable discrepancy between the government's vision for 21st-century education, which prioritizes critical, creative, and communicative skills, and the existing practices within classrooms. Learning loss, whether due to ineffective online instruction or limited in-person learning environments, has hindered the advancement of argumentation skills (Bozkurt et al., 2020). To solve this problem, we need to look into how well educational strategies work in junior and senior high schools in a systematic way. Oral argumentation, an inadequately examined yet illuminating indicator of 21st-century learning success, necessitates further scrutiny. This study aims to analyze the oral argumentation skills of students enrolled in biology classes at junior and senior high schools with accreditation level A in Lampung Province.

The main goal of this study is to look into how well students can argue orally in biology classes, with a focus on accredited junior and senior high schools in Lampung. This study's originality resides in its focus on oral argumentation as a metric of 21st-century competencies, rather than written argumentation. Numerous studies have investigated written argumentation; however, there is a scarcity of systematic research on students' verbal reasoning in science education (Bogar, 2019; Jiménez-Aleixandre & Erduran, 2007; Kelly et al., 2007; Morris et al., 2024). This gap is especially important because spoken language is interactive and happens right away, which is very similar to how people talk in real life. This study enhances understanding of students' capacity to formulate, articulate, and justify their ideas within scientific frameworks by emphasizing oral argumentation. This research encompasses an evaluation of students' argumentation frameworks, including claims, data, warrants, and rebuttals, alongside the pedagogical ramifications for cultivating these competencies in the biology classroom. The results are anticipated to guide educators and policymakers aiming to reconcile curricular objectives with actual learning outcomes in Indonesian secondary education.

2. Literature Review

2.1 *Argumentation in Science Learning*

Argumentation in science education is based on a constructivist perspective, positing that knowledge is actively generated through social interaction and negotiation (DeVries, 2000). From this viewpoint, science transcends a mere collection of facts; it constitutes a social endeavor focused on the formation, evaluation, and justification of knowledge claims (Longino, 2020). Argumentation, consequently, reflects the genuine methodologies of scientists, who participate in discourse to propose, evaluate, and enhance ideas grounded in facts (Tippett, 2009). Many studies show that bringing argumentation into scientific courses has many benefits. Arguing forces students to explain their thinking, deal with misunderstandings, and improve their grasp of scientific ideas (Venville & Dawson, 2010; Sampson & Clark, 2008). Defending a claim and reacting to counterarguments makes them think more deeply and helps them learn more. Argumentation helps people develop higher-order thinking skills, such as being able to look at evidence, judge assertions, spot logical fallacies, and make arguments that make sense (Erduran et al., 2004) learn how to tell the difference between strong and weak evidence and how to back up their opinions with scientific facts.

Students learn that science is not just a set of facts, but a process of asking questions and debating them (Osborne & Patterson, 2011). They learn to value the fact that scientific knowledge is always changing and that evidence is important for making scientific explanations. This greatly improves their scientific literacy, which helps them make smart choices about science-related issues. Communication and working together are always a part of argumentation. Students learn how to clearly express their thoughts, listen to others, have respectful arguments, and work together to build a shared understanding (Chin & Osborne, 2010). These skills are very important for doing well in school and in your future job. Argument-rich environments can boost student interest and motivation by making science learning more interesting, useful, and personally relevant (Ludwig et al., 2021). Students are more likely to care about what they're learning when they have a say in how they learn it.

2.2 *The Role of Instructional Strategies in Training Argumentation Skills*

Constructivist and socio-cultural theories of learning (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978) have a big impact on how to teach people how to argue. Social constructivism underscores the significance of social interaction and discourse in

cognitive development. From this point of view, argumentation is not just something that happens in a person's mind; it's also something that happens in society, where learners build knowledge through interaction, negotiation, and the internalization of discursive practices. Argument Pattern (TAP) is a popular way to break down arguments into claims, data, warrants, backings, rebuttals, and qualifiers (Toulmin, 2003). This framework is not only a way to analyze things, but it also helps with designing lessons by showing what makes up a strong and complete argument. In terms of teaching, this means going beyond just saying what you think to giving proof, explaining how the proof supports your claim, and thinking about other points of view.

Even though there is evidence that these strategies work, it is hard to put them into practice because of things like teachers not being ready, not having enough time, the demands of the curriculum, students not wanting to do them, and problems with assessments. Many teachers don't know enough about how to help students argue or may not like how student-led discussions can be unpredictable and changeable (Osborne et al., 2013). A big change in how teachers teach is often needed. Adding strong argumentation activities can take a lot of time, which is hard for teachers who already have full schedules and are under pressure to cover all the material (Baram-Tsabari & Osborne, 2015). Students who are used to more traditional, teacher-centered instruction may not want to take part in open-ended argumentation at first because they are not used to sharing their opinions or challenging ideas (Crowell & Kuhn, 2014). Evaluating the quality of argumentation is difficult. It goes beyond just checking for right answers; it also requires a careful look at reasoning, use of evidence, and communication skills (Sampson & Clark, 2008).

2.3 Accreditation Level Determining Learning Quality

There is a lot of interest and debate in higher education about how institutional accreditation affects the quality of learning. The process of getting accreditation can help an organization learn and get better (Ewell, 2013). Accreditation is a way to hold institutions accountable by making sure they meet certain minimum standards. This is more about inputs and processes, but it is assumed that meeting these basic standards will stop things that make learning less effective (Ulmer, 2015). In the end, an accreditation level doesn't directly guarantee better learning quality, but it does show a commitment to established standards and a framework for ongoing improvement, both of which are necessary for creating and maintaining high-quality learning environments. The hard part is still making sure that these promises and frameworks always lead to better learning experiences for all students.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

This study is based on the idea that oral argumentation is an important skill for the 21st century that is important for teaching science because it helps students learn how to think critically, communicate, and solve problems. It utilizes established theories of argumentation, highlighting the dynamic and interactive characteristics of verbal discourse in promoting enhanced cognitive engagement. Argumentation is not simply the articulation of claims; it encompasses a multifaceted cognitive and communicative process of evaluating information and formulating substantiated conclusions backed by evidence. Based on the work of Osborne et al. (2004) and Jiménez-Aleixandre & Erduran (2007), the study uses a discourse coding framework that finds indicators like information seeking, exposition, opposition, explanation, and clarification. This framework enables a comprehensive evaluation of the distinct elements in students' oral arguments, thereby indicating their degree of sophistication.

The theoretical framework recognizes the crucial function of instructional strategies in developing argumentation skills. It agrees with the idea that teacher-centered methods can limit students' ability to think critically and argue, and instead supports student-centered learning and structured conversation that give students a lot of chances to talk to each other and improve their argumentation skills. The framework also emphasizes the importance of using instructional media to keep students interested and motivated, which are both important for improving their argumentation skills (Putri & Solfema, 2019).

The theoretical framework also includes the effects of outside factors, like learning loss caused by interruptions in education like the COVID-19 pandemic (Bozkurt et al., 2020). This recognizes that things other than how teachers

teach in the classroom, like limited access to technology and inconsistent teaching quality during remote learning, can make it much harder to develop higher-order argumentation skills.

Lastly, the framework critically analyzes the presumption that elevated accreditation levels automatically ensure enhanced educational outcomes across all domains. The study aims to determine if attending highly accredited schools actually leads to the development of important 21st-century skills, such as oral argumentation, or if systemic gaps continue to exist despite perceived quality indicators. The theoretical foundations indicate that accreditation may indicate compliance with specific standards; however, it does not inherently guarantee the application of effective pedagogical practices essential for cultivating complex skills such as argumentation. This study aims to reconcile the disparity between curriculum objectives and classroom realities by methodically examining students' oral argumentation skills in these settings and suggesting pedagogical reforms informed by the results.

3. Method

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative survey design to examine the intricacies of students' oral argumentation in the context of biology education. In accordance with the methodologies delineated by (Connelly, 2016), the survey was utilized to elucidate the communicative behaviours and argumentative traits of the participants. A cross-sectional survey method was employed to gather comprehensive data within a specified timeframe, offering a snapshot of contemporary classroom discursive practices.

3.2 Participants and Sampling

The people who took part in the study were chosen using purposive sampling based on criteria that were meant to look into the "Accreditation Paradox." Schools had to have a "A" accreditation status and show that they had used the Scientific Approach in their teaching in order to be included. The sample included 132 students from two well-known schools in Lampung Province: Yuniar High Scholl in Natar (65 students from Grade VIII) and Senior High School in Bandar Lampung (67 students from Grade XI).

3.3 Data Collection Instruments

Information was collected from two main sources: the structural elements of verbal argumentation in biology classes and the contextual factors that affect these skills. A multi-method approach was utilized audio-visual recording, structured observation, and questionnaires. High-definition cameras and audio recorders were used to record what was said in the classroom. These recordings were carefully transcribed into written discourse scripts to make sure that all argumentative events were accurately recorded. Observers used a special coding sheet to record the rise of argumentative discourse as they happened. This method made sure the data was correct and gave us a second layer of data to check the video transcripts. Google Forms were used to send out digital questionnaires to both students and teachers. These tools gathered information about learning materials, how often teachers led discussions, and any technological problems that came up during the lessons.

3.4 Discourse Coding Framework

The Toulmin Argument Pattern (TAP) was used as the basis for the analysis of verbal reasoning, along with a discourse coding framework created by Osborne et al. (2004). Ten specific indicators were used to look at the arguments: information seeking, exposition, opposition, support, explanation, clarification, open-ended questioning, closed-ended questioning, concise responses, and directive instructions (see Table 1). This framework made it possible to sort arguments into levels of sophistication. Levels 1 and 2 are for basic claims and data, while Levels 3 to 5 show that there are warrants, backings, and rebuttals.

Table 1: Refined Argumentative Discourse Indicators

No	Argumentative Discourse	Indicator Description
1	Information Seeking	Requests for data, clarification of tasks, or sharing viewpoints.
2	Exposition	Articulating personal ideas in response to others' comments.
3	Opposition	Expressing disagreement or offering alternative criticisms.
4	Peer Support & Elaboration	Elaborating, justifying, or modifying ideas presented by others.
5	Scientific Explanation	Providing causal links between system features and structural roles.
6	Clarification	Providing purposeful explanations to aid understanding of core material.
7	Open-Ended Questioning	Inquiries requiring extensive explanation or returning to core realities.
8	Closed-Ended Questioning	Questions with limited, specific, or predetermined answers.
9	Concise Responses	Direct answers (yes/no, agree/disagree) or simple factual recall.
10	Directive Instruction	Short verbal cues, names, symbols, or scripted sentences.

3.5 Data Analysis

There were four steps in the qualitative analysis for this study: transcription, data reduction, quantification, and synthesis. The first step was to turn all of the audio and video recordings of classroom interactions into detailed written scripts so that the discourse could be thoroughly reviewed. After this, the data was reduced, which meant that only the parts that were relevant were chosen and streamlined to focus only on argumentative content. During the quantification phase, a standard formula was used to figure out the frequency and percentage of each discourse indicator. This made it possible to do a strict comparison of how good people were at arguing at different levels of education. Finally, during the synthesis stage, we looked at these results to figure out what the systemic gaps are between the goals of the national curriculum and what actually happens in the classroom.

4. Results

This section shows what the study found about students' oral argumentation skills. It does this by looking at how discourse coding indicators came up during biology lessons. It also includes an analysis of the factors that affect how well students can argue orally, based on answers from teacher and student questionnaires. Tables 2 and 3 show a summary of the descriptive data.

4.1 Profile of Students' Oral Argumentation Skills

The comparative analysis of oral argumentation indicates distinct discourse patterns between educational levels, although both groups consistently exhibited performance within the "Very Low" proficiency range, with average scores remaining below (12% as in Table 2). Junior high school students were mainly defined by their information-seeking discourse, which made up 36.63% of their interactions. They did not show any signs of clarification, though, at 0%. On the other hand, 46.4% of senior high school students were better at explaining science, but none of them were looking for information or getting help from their peers. Ultimately, students at both levels remained predominantly restricted to Level 1 and Level 2 of the Toulmin Argument Pattern (TAP), characterized by straightforward assertions supported by basic data, lacking the critical engagement or counterarguments requisite for advanced reasoning.

Table 2: Coding argumentation

No	Argumentative Discourse	Senior High School (%)	Junior High School (%)
1	Information Seeking	0.00	36.63
2	Exposition	1.40	18.62
3	Opposition	1.40	7.35
4	Support	0.00	3.15
5	Scientific Explanation	46.40	0.25
6	Clarification	0.00	0.00
7	Open-Ended Questioning	38.00	10.88
8	Closed-Ended Questioning	0.00	16.75
9	Concise Responses	0.00	25.37
10	Directive Instruction	0.00	0.30
Average		8.72	11.93

4.2 Refined Descriptors for Influencing Factors

The factors influencing the development of students' oral argumentation skills are summarized in Table 3 and categorized into three primary domains: learning resources, teacher influence, and student characteristics. All students at both levels said that their teachers used learning media, but this widespread access did not lead to better argumentation skills. This suggests that just having resources is not enough; they need to be integrated into the classroom in a way that makes them useful. Also, even though a lot of students were independent (44.6% of junior high and 88.7% of senior high students looked for extra learning materials on their own), their argumentative skills were still very weak. This shows that there is a gap between the availability of resources and their use in the classroom.

One major problem was that teachers didn't lead discussions. Only 22.7% of junior high students said that teachers led class discussions, which is probably why students' verbal reasoning skills are so weak. Lastly, socio-technical issues made it very hard for students to get involved. About 70% of students had problems with their internet quota, and more than 45% had problems with their signal. These technological limitations made it very hard for students to stay interested and take part in complicated discussions during remote or hybrid learning settings.

Table 3: Analysis of Influencing Factors

Descriptor	Indicators of Influence	Junior (Yes %)	High Senior High (Yes %)
Learning Resources	Teachers utilize learning media during instruction	100	100
	Students seek additional learning resources independently	44.60	88.70
Teacher	Teachers facilitate class discussions	22.70	67.60
	Teachers provide opportunities for verbal expression	63.60	63.30
Student	Students experience difficulties in understanding material	60.00	39.50
	Students face internet signal/quota disruptions	70.00	70.00

5. Discussion

5.1 Analysis of Argumentation Levels through TAP

The results show a big difference in how argumentation indicators are spread out between the two levels of education. Senior high school students showed only four different signs, while junior high school students showed eight, though all of them were in the low-proficiency range. A comprehensive examination of classroom discourse structures through the Toulmin Argument Pattern (TAP) framework indicates that student interactions are primarily governed by fundamental elements at Level 1 and Level 2. The TAP model says that a strong argument must have at least three parts: a claim, data, and a warrant. However, observations at Junior High School and

Senior High School indicate that the majority of interactions terminate at the point of articulating basic claims devoid of credible supporting data or theoretical justifications linking the data to the claim.

The "Information Seeking" indicator had the highest percentage at 36.63% in junior high school. This was very clear during food testing practicums, when students asked questions about how things worked or asked for more information about their tasks. This activity demonstrates participation; however, it is cognitively procedural and does not facilitate argument construction. Students could see that food samples changed color (data), but they often didn't know how to explain why these changes happened (warrant) or how to apply these findings to bigger ideas about metabolism.

On the other hand, senior high school students were more cognitively independent, with the "Scientific Explanation" indicator reaching 46.4%. At this level, students could make claims that were related to what they were learning, like talking about how uric acid is excreted through the kidneys. But this strength did not come with the rise of Rebuttals or Qualifiers. Rebuttals are the best signs of how good an argument is (Levels 3–5) because they show that a student can find flaws in the other side's arguments and back up their own with counter-evidence. The consistent lack of rebuttals suggests that a culture of "scientific critique" has not been cultivated in the classroom setting.

5.2 Pedagogy vs. Accreditation Realities

This research reveals the "Accreditation Paradox," indicating that a high level of institutional accreditation (Level A) does not necessarily equate to enhanced student argumentation skills. People often think that accreditation is a sign of good teaching, but in reality, this process tends to focus more on following rules and having the right materials than on how well students talk to each other in class.

The schools examined have sufficient facilities and educators who employ instructional media (100% at both levels). But the effectiveness of these kinds of media is still a problem. Teachers often use passive media like PowerPoint and YouTube videos, which only send information one way. These types of media do not provide enough support to encourage students to ask questions or make them argue. Students are not very interested in debating science unless they have access to interactive media or problem-based modules. This underscores that access to educational resources is inadequate without effective pedagogical integration.

5.3 Pedagogical Inertia and Teacher-Centered Models

One of the main things that keeps oral argumentation from growing is that most teaching models are centered on the teacher. Teachers give students chances to ask questions about 63% of the time, but real discussions led by the teacher in a dialogic way are still very rare, especially in junior high schools, where they happen only 22.7% of the time. Students become passive and don't want to share their scientific opinions when they don't get enough verbal stimulation.

Argumentation is a socially mediated process; knowledge is not simply transmitted but constructed through the negotiation of meaning. Students won't be able to practice using the language of science if teachers keep controlling the flow of information. When there aren't clear ways to talk about things in class, conversations tend to be shallow and disconnected. A teaching style that encourages argumentation requires teachers to ask not only "what," but also "why" and "how do you know," which means that students have to provide evidence and reasons within their TAP structures.

5.4 Socio-Technical Barriers and Learning Loss

The COVID-19 pandemic caused disruptions in education that will last forever, and this study shows that discursive skills have not improved. Teachers and students didn't talk to each other as much during the time of remote learning, which made it harder for students to work together and talk to each other.

Students in Lampung faced even more problems because of socio-technical barriers. Even though most people (over 95%) own smartphones, there were real problems with infrastructure, like unstable signals (45.5%–54.9%) and limited internet data (69%–69.7%). These technical problems are more than just small annoyances; they keep students from being able to join in on the real-time discussions that are needed to improve their oral argumentation skills. Limiting face-to-face interaction takes away the emotional and social cues that usually help ideas flow in scientific debates.

5.5 Transformative Solutions: Moving Toward Argument-Driven Inquiry

Radical changes to teaching methods are needed to close the gap between what students are supposed to learn and what they actually learn in class. Biology education needs to change from "learning about science" to "learning to argue in science." The Argument-Driven Inquiry (ADI) model is one suggested solution. It clearly plans classroom activities to include steps for collecting data, building arguments, and peer review sessions.

To use this strategy, teachers need special training so they can be more than just sources of information; they need to be able to help students talk about what they learn. Also, it is important to create comprehensive assessment tools like the 7C Instrument Guide (Critical Thinking, Creativity, Communication, Collaboration, Computational Thinking, Compassion, and Connectivity) in order to measure the overall growth of a student's skills. These tools will help teachers find specific flaws in the way students make their arguments and give them the help they need. In conclusion, the fact that Level A accredited schools in Lampung have poor oral argumentation skills is a warning sign for our education system. Not only should the completeness of administrative accreditation documents be used to judge the quality of education, but so should the students' ability to think critically, communicate clearly, and defend evidence-based arguments in a world that is getting more complicated every day.

6. Conclusion

This study shows that having a high level of institutional accreditation does not automatically mean that students will learn 21st-century skills, such as how to argue orally. Students in both junior and senior high schools demonstrated a significant deficiency in formulating complex arguments, particularly in offering justifications, elucidations, and proficient counterarguments. The study identifies three limiting factors: the inadequate use of interactive instructional media, the continuation of teacher-led models that stifle verbal discourse, and ongoing barriers to student comprehension. These results indicate that the existing educational framework in these institutions emphasizes administrative compliance rather than the effective application of scientific inquiry. To address this deficiency, pedagogical reforms must transition from "learning about science" to "learning to argue in science" via structured discussions and inquiry-based modules. Future interventions should concentrate on equipping teachers with specialized training in argumentation-driven strategies to prepare students for the communicative requirements of a globalized world.

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Informed Consent Statement/Ethics approval: All participants provided informed consent prior to their inclusion in this study, with specific consent for participants under the age of 18 obtained through their parents or legal guardians. The study was conducted in accordance with the research protocol received formal approval from the Ethics Committee of the University of Lampung. As a non-interventional study encompassing digital surveys, classroom observations, and audio-visual recordings, all participants were fully informed regarding the research objectives to analyze oral argumentation skills within the context of biology learning. Participants were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity throughout the transcription and reporting process, with an assurance that all video recordings and questionnaire responses would be used exclusively for academic research purposes, ensuring no physical or psychological risks were associated with their participation.

Data Availability Statement: The qualitative data supporting the findings of this study, including anonymized discourse transcripts and questionnaire responses, are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. The raw audio-visual recordings are not publicly available due to ethical restrictions and the need to protect the privacy of the participants.

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Communicative Challenges and Fear of Performance among Pre-service English Teachers: The Role of Preparation *

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Abstract

In schools, it is usual for universities to send some of their students from different pedagogical fields to different schools to provide their support and services. However, when these pre-service teachers are required to perform in front of an audience, some communication gaps might arise due to unpreparedness. The present goal of the major in Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages at Universidad Laica Eloy Alfaro de Manabí is to provide the community with well-prepared teachers able to boldly cope with communication barriers in mainstream education. The current research aims to analyze the factors that generate fear of performance and communicative challenges in pre-service teachers and explore their perceptions of these factors related to their teacher training through a mixed approach selected through inclusion criteria focused on the communicative competence as a message deliverer, message receiver, teacher, and university student. Two instruments were applied to collect information: a questionnaire and an interview. The study sample consisted of 40 students from the Pedagogy of the National and Foreign Languages program at Universidad Laica Eloy Alfaro de Manabí. The results identified many communicative challenges faced by students during their practicum, such as feeling nervous when interacting with or having their classes observed by authorities without getting enough feedback, as well as the lack of training for dealing with parents.

Keywords: Communicative Challenges, Pre-Service, English Teacher, Preparation

1. Introduction

In the current context of English Language Teacher Education, communicative skills are essential, as they are evident across both academic and professional life. As Fatimayin (2018) emphasized, communication is the ability to use language effectively to express ideas. Still, it also involves conveying messages through various means such as speech, signals, signs, writing, or behavior. In educational contexts, this ability becomes especially important for teachers as effective communication is necessary not only when teaching classes but also when interacting with parents, other teachers, students during individual tutoring, and giving conferences or presentations. Proficiency in communication is essential for achieving mutual understanding, cooperation, and positive outcomes

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in both professional and personal contexts (Estelito J., 2025). However, many pre-service teachers face difficulties when expressing themselves in public. This may be due to different factors, such as fear of making mistakes or being judged (for example, for their pronunciation, lack of fluency, or insecurity when speaking). This problem may be intensified in the context of a second language, since it combines the anxiety of public speaking with the fear of making mistakes in a language that is still being learned.

The premise of this study is that the lack of preparation and learning of appropriate techniques contributes to communicative challenges and fear of performance among pre-service teachers. Yimer (2016) emphasizes the impact of opportunities to have contact with students in real teaching scenarios during teacher training to help them analyze and understand what teaching implies. He mentions that it is essential to assess the likelihood of practicing in real-life scenarios provided to teachers during their training. This assumption is aligned with the Experiential Learning Theory by David Kolb, which describes learning as a cyclical process of learning experiences. It states that there is a cycle that the learner must go through for learning to be effective. This cycle includes two opposing dimensions of grasping experience (concrete experience and abstract conceptualization) and two opposing dimensions of transforming experience (reflective observation and active experimentation) (McCarthy, 2016).

Previous studies have shown that communicative challenges and fear of performance among pre-service teachers are common problems. To cite one example, educators often must interact with parents; these interactions are among the most challenging aspects; however, they play a key role in a child's educational life. Interaction between educators and parents often happens during parent-teacher conferences or office hours (Major, 2023); many future teachers may not feel ready to deal with parents, since during their teaching practice, they have little practical experience engaging with them (Mehlig, 2013). Another challenge faced by pre-service teachers is intercultural communication. A study conducted in Türkiye and the USA highlights the importance of paying attention to the word choices when communicating, particularly the use of pronouns, since these can include or exclude individuals in intercultural contexts. Subsequently, it is vital to prepare students to adopt and practice language choices (Uzum B, 2024). Moreover, most pre-service teachers have little or non-existent exposure to urban areas and culturally diverse communities, which requires them to change the way they talk and think about urban education (Pink, 2004). A very common issue is second language management. Many students experience difficulties using the language effectively, which ultimately affects their teaching performance. Due to a lack of fluency in the language, pre-service teachers tend to make long pauses, which causes the listener to lose interest in the message (Muñoz, 2018). Furthermore, it is mentioned by Christan (2015) that pre-service teachers require continuous feedback to improve their classroom interaction skills as they demonstrate limited use of communication strategies during their training. This suggests that communicative challenges are recurring difficulties that affect pre-service teachers' classroom performance. Considering these factors, it is important to address this issue, since according to the curricular plan, the objective of the Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages program at Universidad Laica Eloy Alfaro de Manabí (2023) is to train third-level professionals who carry the responsibility of improving English Language learning for future generations of students in the general education system. Therefore, preparing teachers who can face communicative challenges with confidence is of great importance.

After reviewing the curriculum of the Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages program in the Universidad Laica Eloy Alfaro; which was updated in 2023, it was observed that the professional training of students is structured around four specific areas: (1) language proficiency, (2) mastery of methodologies and strategies for teaching English, (3) knowledge and understanding of linguistic components and branches, and (4) the ability to develop research projects and their corresponding publication. Within these training areas, although there are courses in which teachers can focus on improving oral skills, such as English levels and those related to teaching methodologies, there are no subjects specifically focused on overcoming communicative challenges, such as those mentioned before. However, the main intention of this study is not to propose creating a whole subject focused on this, but to analyze the factors that generate fear of performance in pre-service teachers, while identifying the communicative challenges they face, describing the extent to which preparation affects their confidence and performance, and exploring their perceptions of the communicative challenges related to their teacher training at Universidad Laica Eloy Alfaro de Manabí in 2025.

To that extent, we can develop strategies that can be implemented within the program and existing courses to help address this need. This study aims to answer these three specific questions: (1) What are the communicative challenges faced by pre-service teachers? (2) To what extent does preparation affect pre-service teachers' confidence and performance? and (3) How do students perceive communicative challenges related to their teaching training? These research questions are central because they are directly related to the objective and guide the analysis of the factors affecting pre-service teachers' performance. To answer these questions, this study applies a mixed-method approach by applying questionnaires and interviews. This approach allows the analysis of key variables while also helping with a deeper exploration of students' perceptions of communicative challenges. The findings of this study are expected to help the language program of ULEAM University understand which challenges their students are facing and apply new strategies to overcome these obstacles.

2. Method

The conceptual and operational definitions of the variables used in this study were selected through inclusion criteria, such as the analysis of the studies published between 2015 and 2025 to guarantee updated data. Furthermore, any kind of academic literature reviewed by peers was accepted. Additionally, the selected research was focused on communicative competence as a message deliverer, message receiver, teacher, and university student. Regarding the language, only those conducted in English and Spanish were allowed.

2.1 Participants

This study was done in Manta, Ecuador. The inclusion criteria for participants were: (1) being a student in the sixth or seventh semester of the Language Teaching program; (2) having completed the coursework corresponding to the first through fourth semesters; (3) having participated in the teaching practicum; and (4) being willing to participate voluntarily in this study. A total of 40 students aged 20 to 38 participated in the study, including 31 females and 9 males.

2.2 Sampling Procedures

A combination of convenience and purposive sampling methods was used to select the participants. The convenience sampling method is a technique where participants are selected based on how easy it is to gather them (Golzar, 2022). On the other hand, purposive sampling involves selecting participants based on inclusion criteria relevant to the study objectives (Prita S. Nurcandrani, 2026). The participants were selected from the Language Teaching program (Pedagogy of the National and Foreign Languages) at Universidad Laica Eloy Alfaro de Manabí. The data were collected in the classrooms where the students of the sixth and seventh semesters received regular classes. No teachers were present during interviews or questionnaires, as some of them act as supervisors of the practicum. Consequently, 100% of the sample participated.

2.2.1 Sample size, power, and precision

The instruments were applied to 40 students from different classrooms, 25 students from the sixth semester, and 15 students from the seventh semester. Although they were applied to different groups, participants were selected under the same inclusion criteria.

2.2.2 Measures and Data Collection

There were two instruments to collect information: a questionnaire and an interview. Both instruments were reviewed and revised by a specialist in the language program. Subsequently, the instruments were approved. The first data collection tool employed in this study was a questionnaire adapted from the instrument previously published in "*Design of a Questionnaire to Assess Oral Communication Competence in Pre-service Teachers*" (Bandrés, 2021). The adapted version differs from the original in that it includes two additional indicators within the Likert scale (1-7), as well as a contextualized modification for Ecuadorian students. This adaptation

incorporates additional variables, such as ethnicity, CEFR level, and type of institution, with particular emphasis on oral communication.

The instrument is designed to assess pre-service teachers' self-perceived oral communication competence (27 items) and their evaluation of the training received in this domain during their university studies (4 items). The original questionnaire demonstrates a very high level of internal consistency for the overall oral communication scale ($\alpha = .913$). Its subdimensions exhibit good to excellent reliability coefficients (a range from .78 to .91), while the scale measuring perceived training shows exceptional reliability ($\alpha = .941$).

Additionally, a second instrument was applied for data collection: a semi-structured interview adapted from the instrument used in *"Assessing Participants' Experiences in a Service-Learning Programme: A Psychometric Evaluation"* (Colman, 2018). This adapted version reduces the number of questions from 22 to 7 and is contextualized to the pre-professional teaching practicum of students enrolled in the National and Foreign Language Pedagogy program. The purpose of the interview is to explore pre-service teachers' perceptions of the communicative challenges encountered during their practicum, with particular emphasis on the development of communication skills, communication anxiety, the professional roles assumed when interacting with parents, and the institutional support received throughout their university education.

2.3 Research design and data analysis

Questionnaires were applied during the first term of the 2025(2) academic period. First, participants were informed about the purpose of the study. Second, the questionnaire was applied during class hours with the permission of the professors. It was not applied to both semesters jointly, but rather separately. The questionnaire was distributed in printed format to all students, who were given approximately 30 minutes to complete it. The interview was conducted under the same conditions as the questionnaire, during the second term of the 2025 (2) period. The instructions and questions of the interview were projected onto the screen, and the questions were read aloud one by one. Students were invited to answer voluntarily. The interview was recorded for subsequent analysis.

3. Results

3.1 Recruitment

The search, adaptation, and validation of the instruments started in July 2025, followed by the application of the first instrument, the questionnaire. Subsequently, the recruitment process was conducted on November 26, 2025, at Universidad Laica Eloy Alfaro de Manabí. Participants were selected following the inclusion criteria mentioned above. After receiving the necessary information about the study, a total of 40 students were willing to participate. The questionnaire was applied face-to-face during the class hours. The second instrument applied was the interview, whose recruitment process was conducted on January 28, 2026. It was applied to the same participants and under the same conditions: face-to-face, during class hours, and both semesters separately.

3.2 Statistics and Data Analysis

To carry out the analysis of the questionnaire, an Excel file was created, including all the 29 questions. Subsequently, the questions in which the number of low responses was 10 or higher were identified. Different variables were considered, such as age and gender; however, the variable that stood out the most and was the most suitable for addressing the hypothesis was employment status: *20 were the students who worked, and 20 were the ones who did not*. Of the 29 questions, 9 were selected for analysis, namely, questions 1, 10, 12, 13, 17, 19, 21, 22, and 27.

Regarding Question 1, 25% of the participants reported low levels of confidence when taking the floor. When divided by the employment variable, a marked difference can be observed: of that 25%, 20% of the low responses correspond to students who work, while 80% correspond to students who do not work. Similarly, in Question 10, a significant difference can be observed. In this item, 27,5% of the students expressed low confidence when participating in class, of whom 27,27% were working students and 72,73% were non-working students.

Question 12 was the item that registered the highest number of low responses, as 52,5% of the students indicated feeling unprepared to defend a project before a panel. Of this group, 28,57% correspond to students who work, while 71,43% do not. In Question 13, 30% of the participants indicated difficulties communicating in academic situations as university students, with 33,33% being working students and 66,67% non-working students.

Regarding teaching-related communicative skills, in Question 17, 30% of the students showed difficulties in maintaining students' attention; of these, 41,67% work and 58,33% do not. In Question 19, 27,5% showed low confidence in carrying out a class without assistance, of whom 27,27% correspond to working students and 72,73% to non-working students. In relation to professional communication contexts, Question 21 shows that 25% of the students feel insecure in meeting with parents; 40% of these students work, while 60% do not. Likewise, Question 22 indicated that 30% feel insecure in meeting with other teachers, with 25% being working students and 75% non-working students.

Finally, regarding students' perceptions of their academic training, Question 27 shows that 32,5% are not satisfied with the training received and do not consider that the courses in the program have helped them develop the oral communicative skills required of a teacher. In this case, the difference between groups is not as marked, as 46,15% corresponds to working students and 53,85% to non-working students.

Additionally, to address the objective and research questions outlined in the introduction, and to gain a deeper understanding of students' perceptions, an interview was conducted. The interview was recorded with the participants' consent for subsequent analysis. Questions 1 and 2 explore the communicative challenges that students experienced during their practicum. In Question 1.1, emphasis is placed on communication challenges with both the university mentor and the school mentor. Several students mentioned feeling nervous when communicating with the university mentor. They also indicated that it was sometimes difficult to locate them, which made processes such as signing practicum documents or discussing practicum-related issues more difficult. Other students mentioned a lack of consideration on the part of the school mentor, who assigned too many tasks without considering the students' university responsibilities. Another issue mentioned repeatedly was the lack of communication between the university mentor and the school mentor during the practicum, which resulted in insufficient feedback. Finally, another recurring theme was that some school mentors were very close-minded, which hindered open communication and collaboration.

Question 1.2 is related to the previous one but focuses on communicative difficulties when interacting with parents. In this question, few responses were obtained as most students mentioned that they did not have the opportunity to interact with parents. However, it was noted that communicating problems related to their children was difficult, and that interaction was easier when dealing with parents they already knew. From the communicative challenges mentioned above, in Question 2, students concluded that the greatest difficulties occurred with mentors, both from the university and the school.

In relation to fear of performance and communicative anxiety, Question 3 explores the situations in which fear of performance was most evident. The responses can be divided into two groups: demonstrative classes and interaction in English. In the first group, situations were mentioned such as when students were not paying attention, when students had a low level of English, when they showed little interest, when another teacher, such as the mentor, was observing the class, and when the pre-service teacher had little control of the classroom. In the second group, some students reported feeling nervous when interacting with teachers in bilingual schools, when interacting with students in English, and when speaking only in English while teaching a class.

In Question 4, students were asked which roles they considered necessary when interacting with parents. Since most did not have the opportunity to do so, they were asked to provide their opinion. The question included options such as educator, advisor, mediator, authority figure, and institutional representative. Several students stated that all of them were necessary, but with balance. Those who had the opportunity to interact with parents during their practicum mentioned that, as students, it was difficult to assume the role of an authority figure. In Question 4.2, students were asked what type of communicative style they used and whether it was effective. Those who had

interacted with parents, both during the practicum and those who were already working, responded. One participant mentioned trying to explain what the child had done wrong, although they indicated that it was not very effective. Another mentioned that being direct, without being too harsh, had worked, although this could be because it was someone they already knew.

In Question 5, students were asked which specific communicative skills they consider necessary to perform those roles when interacting with parents effectively. This question included several options, such as clear and accessible language, active listening, emotional intelligence and empathy, assertive and respectful communication, and problem-solving skills. After a brief explanation of each, students concluded that all these skills were necessary. During the interview, an additional question of great importance emerged: whether they believed that the university had helped them develop all the communicative skills required in school contexts. After reflecting, students concluded that the university had not sufficiently supported this development, and the program focuses more on academic aspects (such as lesson planning).

In relation to development and preparation, Question 6 explores the communication skills that students developed or strengthened during their practicum. Several skills were mentioned, for instance, classroom management, organizational skills, and confidence when interacting with students, active listening, with teachers and students; problem solving, emotional intelligence, and the ability to recognize emotions, especially with children.

Question 7 is divided into two parts. In Question 7.1, students were asked to mention what type of support they received from the university to deal with communicative challenges. The responses are varied. Some students reported that they did not receive support and that they were not provided with sufficient feedback. Others indicated that, in some schools, mentors did not have a strong level of English, which limited the support they could offer. On the other hand, a few students mentioned that the school mentor provided advice and helped them with the necessary materials. Question 7.2 addressed performance anxiety. The responses were similar, as most students reported not receiving support, and only in certain private schools did students receive assistance with materials and some activities.

Finally, in Question 8, students mentioned the support they would have liked to receive, such as weekly feedback, more guidance, and greater involvement from the university in monitoring what mentors do, as well as being more present during the practicum.

4. Discussion

The results obtained from both the questionnaire and the interview made it possible to meet the research objectives focused on the factors that generate fear of performance in pre-service teachers and the identification of the communicative challenges they face. Regarding the research questions, these were also addressed and allowed the development of several discussion points, particularly in relation to the extent to which preparation affects pre-service teachers' confidence and performance as well as how students perceive communicative challenges related to their teaching training. These findings also appear to align with the experiential learning theory, which emphasizes the importance of experience, practice, and active participation in the learning process, as mentioned in the introduction section. In this sense, the results suggest that the lack of preparation and learning of appropriate techniques contributes to communicative challenges and fear of performance among pre-service teachers.

The analysis of the questionnaire shows that, in relation to communicative challenges, there is a marked difference: most of the low scores correspond to non-working students, while only a few working students reported low responses. However, in Question 27, the difference is minimal, indicating that both working and non-working students feel dissatisfied with university courses. Similarly, when considering the interview responses, in which students reported not receiving sufficient support and emphasized that the university has not helped them develop the necessary skills for teaching, it can be concluded that oral communicative skills do not appear to be significantly developed within the program. The questionnaire results show that students who perform better are those who work. This suggests that work experience functions as a more effective learning environment. It is important to consider that these are university students and not all of them have access to employment

opportunities; therefore, it is concerning that communicative competence is primarily developed in workplace contexts.

Furthermore, a gap can be identified between theoretical training and the real demands of the educational context. Students mentioned in the interview that the university tends to focus more on academic aspects. The curriculum includes subjects focused on lesson planning based on English skills. However, students indicated that, although they are taught how to design classes, they are not sufficiently prepared for interaction in real contexts.

When focusing on the practicum, the interview data shows that students are not fully included in all aspects of teaching practice. Although schools allow them to teach classes, they are not involved in meetings with parents or other teachers, which are essential components of the teaching profession. A significant issue in teaching training programs is the lack of preparation in relation to communication with families. Several pre-service teachers begin their practicum with limited knowledge and confidence to engage with parents in discussions about students' academic progress. Besides, during their teaching training process, students do not have enough opportunities to practice interaction with parents, especially in situations related to assessment (Mehlig, 2013) limits the development of confidence and oral performance in professional contexts. Another issue that could be identified was the lack of communication between pre-service teachers and school mentors. Students mentioned that some mentors were inflexible, making collaboration difficult, while others were not considerate of students' time, ignoring other responsibilities that they may have. In both cases, it is evident that there was no effective communication between students and school mentors; this can directly affect students' workflow and confidence during the practicum (Karunagaran, 2019). Additionally, students do not receive sufficient feedback, neither from the university nor from the school, which is essential for pre-service teachers. While students may recognize some of their own mistakes, this does not replace the guidance of a professional. It can be observed that it is more effectively developed through constant exposure to real communicative environments. The results show that students who work report lower levels of insecurity, suggesting that continuous exposure to the workplace is a key factor in the development of communicative self-efficacy. Self-efficacy theory by Albert Bandura suggests that for effective performance, possessing the necessary skills is not enough; individuals must also believe in their capacity to use those skills, particularly in challenging situations (Bhati, 2022). In this sense, the findings of this study support the idea that the lack of preparation and the absence of appropriate training techniques contribute to communicative challenges and fear of performance among pre-service teachers, as students who are exposed to real workplace environments not only develop communicative skills but also strengthen their confidence in using them. Therefore, the program must incorporate strategies that provide students with greater exposure to real contexts.

Concerning the limitations of this study, one of them was that, due to time and management constraints, the research could not be extended to students from other universities nationwide, which would have allowed a comparison between public and private institutions in the region. Thus, the analysis of the results of this study focused on comparing students who work and those who do not; however, it would have been interesting to include other questions in the interview related to, previous teaching experience or the number of practicum hours. In addition, the research mainly focused on students' perceptions and did not include direct classroom observations or mentor evaluations, which could have provided a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Finally, future research could analyze and compare different practicum instructor curricula to further examine this issue.

Overall, many factors related to fear of performance, along with several communicative challenges faced by pre-service teachers during their teacher training, were identified. Addressing this issue is essential for not interfering with the achievement of the program's objectives. To prepare educators qualified to carry the responsibility of improving English language learning for upcoming generations, students should be led to face communicative challenges confidently by developing effective strategies within the program and current courses.

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies: This study has not used any generative AI tools or technologies in the preparation of this manuscript.

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Appendix A: Questionnaire on Pre-Service Teachers' Self-Perceived Oral Communicative Competence, Confidence, and Performance Challenges

Age	Sex				Ethnicity								Semester			
	Male		Female		Mestizo		Afro		Mulatto		Montubio		Sixth		Seventh	

Do you work and study at the same time?	yes		No		What is your institution dedicated to?	Education	Administrative tasks
Do you have contact with the public?	yes		No		What type of institution do you work in?	Public	Private

What CEFR level do you think you are at?	A1		A2		B1		B2		C1		C2	
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	Assessment of current verbal communicative competence in everyday life. competence as a sender of spoken messages. (1: Never – 7: Always)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	I feel confident when I have to speak.							
2	I express my ideas clearly and in an organized way.							
3	In general, I communicate well when speaking with other people.							
	Assessment of current verbal communicative competence in everyday life. competence as a receiver of spoken messages. (1: Never – 7: Always)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4	I easily understand the main idea of what someone tells me.							
5	I take the context into account to better understand what I hear.							
6	I make sure I understand what I hear before giving my opinion.							
7	In general, I understand well when someone speaks to me.							

	Assessment of current verbal communicative competence as an Education student. competence in academic situations as a student. (1: Never – 7: Always)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	I apply strategies, such as avoiding excessive wording when designing a presentation.							
9	During a presentation, I express myself naturally through gestures and movements.							
10	I speak confidently when I need to participate in class.							
11	I know how to use formal language when speaking in academic situations.							
12	I am prepared to defend a Project before a committee, feeling confident when speaking.							
13	In general, I communicate well in academic situations as a university student.							
	Assessment of current verbal communicative competence when interacting with students (during practicum). (1: Little – 7: A lot)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14	I speak clearly when I am in classes with my students.							
15	I organize well what I explain.							
16	I use examples that children can understand.							
17	I know how to maintain students' attention.							
18	I know how to motivate students to participate.							
19	I feel confident conducting a class without the help of another teacher or classmate.							
20	When explaining something in class, I use gestures and body language to communicate better.							
	Assessment of current verbal communicative competence in other school-related situations. (1: Little – 7: A lot)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21	I communicate well (or I could do so) in meetings with parents.							
22	I communicate well (or I could do so) in meetings with other teachers.							
23	I communicate well (or I could do so) with a child during an individual tutoring session.							
	Assessment of the training received during university studies in the degree program. (The courses taken in the degree program have helped you develop) (1: Little – 7: A lot)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
24	I consider that I know how to listen to spoken messages.							
25	I know how to communicate in a formal academic situation related to the degree program (oral presentations, thesis defenses, meetings with professors, etc)							

26	I know how to communicate orally in an examination setting before a committee or during a job interview.							
27	I believe that the courses I have taken so far in the degree program have helped me develop the oral communication skills required of a teacher.							
	Impact of IA/technology (1: Never – 7: Always)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
28	I feel more confident when AI helps me organize my speech (e.g., with a script)							
29	I feel more confident when AI helps me with the design of my presentations.							

Appendix B: Interview of Communicative Abilities during the Teaching Practicum

Objective: The interview aims to explore pre-service TEFL teachers' perceptions of the communicative challenges they experienced during their teaching practice, with particular emphasis on fear of performance, the development of communicative skills, the professional roles assumed when interacting with parents, and the institutional support received throughout their university training.

Edad	Semestre			
	Séptimo		Sexto	

Communicative Challenges

1.1 What communicative challenges did you experience when interacting with university and school mentor teachers and academic staff during your teaching practice?

1.2 What communicative difficulties did you face when interacting with parents, school academic staff or caregivers?

2. Which of the communicative challenges previously mentioned did you find most difficult to manage, and why?

Fear of Performance and Communication Anxiety

3. In which situations was fear of performance most evident (for example, being observed, speaking in English, communicating with parents, being evaluated, etc.)?

Professional Roles in Communication with Parents

4.1 When communicating with parents, which professional roles did you feel you needed to assume (e.g., educator, advisor, mediator, authority figure, or institutional representative)?

4.2 What kind of communication style did you use? Was it effective?

5. What specific communicative skills do you consider necessary to effectively perform these roles when interacting with parents?

1. Clear and Accessible Language

- Ability to explain academic, behavioral, or administrative information in simple, non-technical language.

2. Active Listening

- Ability to genuinely understand parents' concerns, emotions, and perspectives

3. Emotional Intelligence & Empathy

- Ability to recognize emotions and respond respectfully and sensitively. 4. Assertive and Respectful Communication
 - Ability to express professional boundaries, expectations, and decisions respectfully.
5. Problem-Solving and Negotiation Skills
- Ability to collaboratively find solutions with parents.

Development and Preparation

6. What communicative skills did you develop or strengthen during your teaching practice that helped you communicate more effectively in academic and school contexts?

Institutional Support

7.1 What type of support did you receive from mentor teachers, university supervisors, or the institution to cope with communicative challenges?

7.2 What type of support did you receive from mentor teachers, university supervisors, or the institution to cope with performance anxiety?

8. What types of support or preparation do you believe were insufficient or missing during your training?

Evaluating Collaborative Teaching under Taiwan Foreign English Teacher Program

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Abstract

The Taiwan Foreign English Teacher Program (TFETP), launched in 2004 and significantly expanded in 2021 under the national Bilingual 2030 policy, mandates collaborative teaching between foreign English teachers (FETs) and local English teachers (LETs) in primary and junior high schools. Despite the program's scale and financial investment, empirical research on how this collaborative teaching model is enacted in practice remains sparse. This study addresses that gap by evaluating the TFETP collaborative teaching model through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis across five junior high schools in a city in central Taiwan. Findings reveal that all participating schools adopted a localized variation of the "One Teaching, One Assisting" model, driven by the institutional positioning of collaborative sessions within Flexible Learning Periods, exam-driven scheduling pressure, and a one-to-many staffing structure. Local English teachers functioned primarily as classroom manager, linguistic mediators, and technical support facilitators rather than as co-instructional partners. Structural barriers—including limited co-planning time, administrative workload, and institutionalized role identity—systematically constrained the adoption of more integrated co-teaching configurations. The study concludes with evidence-based recommendations for strengthening collaborative teaching within TFETP, including structured co-planning time, role recalibration, and targeted professional development.

Keywords: Bilingual Education, Collaborative Teaching, Co-Teaching Models, Professional Development, TFETP, Taiwan

1. Introduction

Taiwan's ongoing commitment to English language education has produced one of Asia's most extensive foreign teacher recruitment programs. The Taiwan Foreign English Teacher Program (TFETP), originally launched by the Ministry of Education in 2004 as the Foreign English Teacher (FET) program, was substantially expanded in 2021 in alignment with the Bilingual 2030 national policy—a government initiative seeking to establish a bilingual Chinese-English environment in education, government, and public life by the year 2030 (National Development Council, n.d.). By 2024, the program employed 1,096 foreign English teachers and teacher assistants across the country, representing a growth of over 500 percent since its inception (TFETP, n.d.-a).

The program represents a significant public investment. Foreign English teachers under TFETP receive competitive salary packages, housing allowances, flight reimbursements, and health insurance (TFETP, n.d.-b), making the program's cost-effectiveness an important policy consideration. Central to the program's design is a

mandated collaborative teaching requirement: FETs are placed in elementary and junior high schools where they are required to co-teach with local English teachers for up to 20 periods per week (TFETP, n.d.-c). This collaborative teaching arrangement is conceived not merely as an administrative convenience but as the primary mechanism through which TFETP seeks to elevate students' communicative English proficiency, enrich instructional practice, and support the professional development of local teachers.

Despite the program's scale and the centrality of collaborative teaching to its stated goals, empirical research on how this model is enacted in everyday classroom practice remains limited. Most existing studies have focused on bilingual education recruitment, teacher identity, and program implementation rather than the lived dynamics of FET-LET collaboration (Lin & Wu, 2021; Wang & Lin, 2013; Yeh, 2024). This study responds to that gap by conducting a qualitative evaluation of the TFETP collaborative teaching model across five junior high schools in central Taiwan. The evaluation is guided by three research objectives: (1) to examine the patterns and influencing factors of the collaborative teaching model; (2) to identify the benefits and challenges to teachers' professional development; and (3) to generate evidence-based recommendations.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Defining Collaborative Teaching

Collaborative teaching refers broadly to a pedagogical arrangement in which two or more educators work together to deliver instruction to a diverse group of students in a shared educational space (Cook & Friend, 1995). Within this framework, Friend and Cook (2020) described co-teaching as a service delivery approach define collaborative teaching as an instructional arrangement in which specialized support is provided to students with disabilities or other special needs within the general education classroom, rather than through separate settings. While these definitions originated in special education contexts, their core elements—shared planning, joint instruction, and mutual professional responsibility—have been extended to bilingual and EFL settings, including programs like TFETP (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2018, as cited in Friend & Cook, 2020).

Friend and Cook (2020) identify six principal co-teaching configurations: One Teaching, One Observing; Station Teaching; Parallel Teaching; Alternative Teaching; Teaming, and One Teaching, One Assisting. Each model distributes instructional roles and responsibilities differently, carrying distinct implications for teacher parity, planning requirements, and student grouping and instructional outcomes. The “One Teaching, One Assisting” model, wherein one teacher leads instruction, and the other provides in-class support, requires minimal joint planning and is commonly adopted when preparation time is scarce or when one teacher is less confident in delivering the subject content (Friend & Cook, 2020). More integrated models such as Teaming and Parallel Teaching require greater relational familiarity, shared planning, and negotiated role boundaries.

2.1. Taiwan-Specific Frameworks

Building on international co-teaching literature, Luo (2007, 2010, 2014) developed a contextually grounded model for collaborative EFL teaching between native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) and local teachers in Taiwan. Luo's framework identifies four core components—lesson planning, collaborative teaching, monitoring, and reflective dialogue—and emphasizes eight relational and professional conditions for effective collaboration, which she terms R.E.F.L.E.C.T. Knowledge: respect, equality, flexibility, language sensitivity, empathy, collaborative culture, time allocation, and professional knowledge. Crucially, Luo (2014) described the framework as intentionally non-prescriptive, emphasizing that teachers should adapt it according to their professional contexts and needs.

Subsequent research confirmed the relevance of this framework while also exposing persistent implementation challenges. Teachers praised the model's structure but consistently cited time constraints as a barrier to full enactment (Luo, 2014). Wang (2022) similarly found that co-teachers in Taiwanese bilingual schools struggled to coordinate lesson planning across demanding schedules, with local English teachers reporting that the additional responsibilities of bilingual curriculum development and co-teaching significantly increased their overall workload.

2.3. Key Conditions for Successful Collaborative Teaching

Research identified several conditions as fundamental to effective collaborative teaching partnership. Structured co-planning time is widely recognized as essential (Friend & Cook, 2020; Honigsfeld & Dove, 2010; Luo, 2014), as it enables the negotiation of roles, alignment of pedagogical goals, and integration of instructional styles. Equally important are mutual respect and professional trust, particularly in intercultural settings where differences in educational background, communication norms, and classroom expectations may generate misunderstanding or hierarchy (Carless & Walker, 2006; Luo, 2007). Research has shown that ambiguous role distribution frequently leads to marginalization of one co-teacher, with local teachers often reduced to assistants or translators rather than equal instructional partners (Kim & Moodie, 2023), underscoring the importance of clear and equitable role negotiation. Therefore, ongoing communication and flexibility are critical conditions for co-teachers to adapt instructionally and sustain collaboration (Honigsfeld & Dove, 2019; Simmons, 2018).

2.4. Challenges in Cross-Cultural Teaching

Research consistently documents significant challenges in cross-cultural co-teaching arrangements. Role ambiguity and power imbalance are particularly prevalent, with local teachers frequently cast in administrative or supportive functions while foreign teachers assume instructional leadership (Kim & Moodie, 2023; Luo, 2013). In Taiwan, Luo (2013) found through classroom discourse analysis that the NEST consistently assumed the role of primary initiator in co-taught lessons, while local English teachers largely took on responding and supporting functions, with little substantive interaction between the two teachers observed during instructional activities. Wang (2022) further documented how administrative downsizing and the lack of dedicated support structures increased the workload of local English teachers, who were expected to simultaneously manage co-teaching, curriculum design, and foreign teacher administration, while schools frequently leveraged foreign teacher recruitment as a strategy to attract student enrollment rather than to advance pedagogical goals.

Despite this body of research, empirical studies specifically examining how collaborative teaching is enacted under the current TFETP framework—launched in 2021 with significantly expanded scope—remain scarce. This study addresses that gap by offering a grounded, context-specific analysis of collaborative teaching as experienced by TFETP participants in junior high school settings.

3. Method

3.1. Research Approach

This study adopts a qualitative evaluation research approach, which is particularly suited to understanding complex educational programs through the lived experiences and contextual narratives of participants (Patton, 2015). Rather than measuring program outcomes through numerical indicators, qualitative evaluation seeks to illuminate the processes, dynamics, and contextual realities that shape implementation. This orientation is well-suited to the study of TFETP collaborative teaching, where interpersonal relationship, institutional structures, and cultural negotiation significantly influence how the program unfolds in practice.

Within this primary qualitative evaluation framework, the study incorporates Krueger's (2015) using stories in evaluation as a supplementary interpretive tool. Using stories in evaluation (Krueger, 2015) captures the emotional dimensions, values, and meaning-making processes embedded in participants' accounts—elements that systematic coding alone may not fully surface. As Krueger observed, stories gathered across multiple participants allow patterns to emerge that reveal how individuals evaluate and make sense of their shared experiences (Krueger, 2015). In this study, representative narrative episodes from interview data are used to illustrate and deepen the interpretation of identified patterns.

3.2. Research Sites and Participants

Data were collected at five junior high schools ---pseudonymized as School A through E---all located within a single city in central Taiwan. At the time of data collection, nine junior high schools in this city were participating in TFETP during the 2021-2025 period. All nine were invited to participate in the study; five agreed and constitute the sample for this research. Limiting the study to one city controlled for regional policy variation while still allowing comparison across diverse institutional contexts, including schools of different sizes and urban-rural profiles.

Participants were selected through purposeful sampling and included: four to six foreign English teachers (FETs); four to six local English teachers (LETs); and four to six school administrators, each with direct oversight responsibilities for the TFETP. Selection criteria required FETs and LETs to have at least one year of experience within the TFETP collaborative teaching model, and administrators to have direct involvement in the program's coordination. To protect participant confidentiality, all interview data were attributed using a school-based identification system. Participants are identified by their professional role — foreign English teacher (FET), local English teacher (LET), or administrator — and their school affiliation, designated School A through School E (e.g., FET interview, School A; Administrator interview, School C).

3.3. Data Collection

Three complementary data collection methods were employed. Semi-structured interviews served as the primary method, combining predetermined guiding questions with the flexibility to explore emerging themes (Galletta, 2013). Interview protocols were tailored to each participant group, covering collaborative teaching experiences, role perceptions, challenges, professional development impacts, and recommendations for improvement. All interviews were recorded and transcribed with participant consent.

Classroom observations provided an empirical lens to validate and contextualize interview narratives. At least one observation per FET-LET teaching pair was conducted during collaborative teaching sessions, using a structured observation form designed around the study's research questions and aligned with established dimensions of effective collaborative teaching (Friend & Cook, 2020; Honigsfeld & Dove, 2019). Observational notes documented instructional roles, communication patterns, classroom management approaches, and student engagement.

Document analysis examined institutional and instructional materials, including lesson plans, school timetables, TFETP policy guidelines, and administrative reports. This method provided contextual grounding and enabled cross-referencing of participant accounts with formal program expectations.

3.4. Data Analysis

Data analysis followed an iterative, inductive process in which interview transcripts, classroom observation records, and institutional documents were repeatedly read and compared across participants, schools, and data sources. Through continuous comparison, patterns and models were identified and refined, forming the thematic structure through which the findings are organized.

Drawing on *using stories in evaluation* (Krueger, 2015) as an interpretive technique, the analysis attended to the evaluative judgement, values, and meaning-making processes embedded in teachers' narratives. This technique enabled the researcher to surface implicit dimensions of collaborative experience—such as professional identity, relational dynamics, and cultural negotiation—that extend beyond coding categories. Institutional documents to enhance credibility, with representative stories selected to illustrate broader patterns across participants and school contexts.

5. Results

5.1. *The Common Institutional Landscape: Flexible Learning Periods¹*

Across all five participating schools, a consistent administrative strategy positioned collaborative teaching sessions within Flexible Learning Periods—a school-developed curricular space established under Taiwan’s 12-Year Basic Education Curriculum Guidelines that grants schools autonomy to design contextually responsive learning experiences. This arrangement was not incidental; it reflected a deliberate institutional logic designed to insulate collaborative teaching from the exam-driven demands of the core English curriculum.

The primary driver of this separation was the Comprehensive Assessment Program (CAP)², a high-stakes national exam for ninth-grade students in which English is a key subject. School administrators consistently framed their decision to position FET-led sessions outside the core curriculum as a protective measure that preserved instructional stability while allowing communicative goals to be pursued. As one administrator explained, placing the foreign teachers’ activities within Flexible Learning Periods ensured they would not interfere with the systematic progress required by core English classes.

This structural placement simultaneously defined the FET’s instructional role. In all five schools, FETs were explicitly informed by administration that their focus should be on motivating students to engage with spoken English rather than on examination content. One FET recounted being told that their goal was to help students enjoy using English, with all test-related instruction handled separately by local English teachers. Administratively, this logic also served to maintain LETs’ cooperation with the program: by ensuring FET activities reinforced rather than competed with LET-led grammar instruction, schools positioned the collaborative model as complementary rather than threatening to local English teachers’ professional role.

A consequence of this positioning was the emergence of a “one-to-many” staffing structure. Because Flexible Learning Periods are distributed across class timetables, administrators needed to allocate the FET across multiple time slots to fulfill the program’s mandated 20-period weekly teaching load. The result was that each FET rotated across numerous classes and collaborate with different LETs responsible for each class, rather than being paired with a single co-teacher. One FET at School A described this reality vividly: in Grade 7 alone, the FET was required to work with every local English teacher in the school, with no fixed partner (FET interview, School A).

5.2. *The Localized “One Teaching, One Assisting” Model*

Despite the theoretical availability of six co-teaching configurations described in the literature, classroom observations and interview data revealed that all five schools systematically enacted a localized version of the “One Teaching, One Assisting” model. In all observed sessions, the FET assumed primary responsibility for instructional delivery—leading communicative activities, modeling pronunciation and vocabulary, and managing pedagogical flow—while the LET performed a set of functional support roles.

Critically, this uniformity persisted within the Flexible Learning Periods, which had been specifically designed to be free from examination constraints. Classroom observation at School E documented lessons centered on communicative themes—such as occupational vocabulary and career discussions—that bore no relationship to examination content (Classroom observation, School E). This empirical finding challenges a simple exam-pressure explanation for model uniformity and points to deeper structural and psychological factors.

¹ The Flexible Learning Periods are part of the school-developed curriculum under Taiwan’s 12-Year Basic Education Curriculum Guidelines. It grants schools autonomy to design flexible and context-responsive learning experiences based on students’ needs, school characteristics, and local contexts.

² The Comprehensive Assessment Program (CAP) is a nationwide exam for ninth-grade students in Taiwan, typically held in May. English is one of the core subjects assessed. The results significantly influence students’ admission to senior high schools, making it an important academic milestone.

Three primary mechanisms were identified as driving the persistence of this model. The first is the structural consequence of the one-to-many pairing arrangement. More integrated co-teaching models, such as Station Teaching, Parallel Teaching, and Teaming, require not only joint planning time but a degree of relational familiarity—shared knowledge of students’ proficiency profiles, established communication routines, and a mutually negotiated pedagogical language—that can only develop through sustained, repeated collaboration.

When an FET-LET pair co-teaches the same class only once per week and the FET is simultaneously managing relationships with up to twenty different local teachers, the interpersonal and professional foundation required for more integrated models cannot realistically develop within a single academic year.

The second mechanism is the role identity that LETs internalized through administrative briefings and program design. Across all schools, LETs consistently described their functions in terms of linguistic support, classroom management, and technical facilitation—not co-instructional leadership. This self-positioning reflected a professional identity that conflicted with the role demands of alternative co-teaching configurations. As one LET at School E acknowledged, they did not feel it appropriate to interrupt the FET’s delivery, positioning themselves as a non-interruptive auxiliary figure. This role boundary, once established, effectively foreclosed the cognitive and organizational prerequisites for models requiring independent instructional authority from both partners (LET interview, School E).

The third mechanism was a stated pedagogical concern—that students’ limited English proficiency made independent engagement with FET-led instruction without LET linguistic mediation untenable. However, this rationale did not always align with observational evidence. At School E, notes recorded that approximately 80 percent of students were able to follow FET instructions without individual LET assistance during one speaking activity, and that no Chinese-language mediation was required for two consecutive demonstration rounds (Classroom observation, School E). This disjuncture suggests that the “students won’t understand” rationale may function more as much as a professional justification for low-burden role arrangement than as an accurate diagnostic of student need.

5.3. The Local English Teacher’s Functional Roles

Within the localized One Teaching, One Assisting model, LETs enacted three functional roles: linguistic translation, classroom management, and technical facilitation.

Classroom management was the most consistently observed LET function. LETs drew upon their established relationships with students as their English teachers to maintain order and attention during FET-led sessions and activities. Because the FET frequently lacked knowledge of individual students’ behavioral patterns and could not communicate with students in Chinese, the LET served as the primary disciplinary anchor. An administrator at School B acknowledged that early program implementations had encountered serious classroom management breakdowns when LETs failed to actively engage in managing the learning environment, including situations where students refused to participate or delivered inappropriate language to FETs without mediation or correction (Administrative interview, School B).

Linguistic translation formed the second core LET function. When students encountered difficulty understanding FET instructions—especially those involving unfamiliar vocabulary or longer utterances—LETs provided Chinese clarifications to enhance comprehension. Similarly, when students responded in Chinese due to language barriers, LETs translated student contributions for the FET. In one observed lesson, an LET immediately interpreted a student’s Chinese reference to a cultural landmark so that the FET could meaningfully engage with the student’s contribution (Classroom observation, School A). This real-time linguistic bridging was frequently reactive—triggered by student hesitation, blank expressions, or raised hands—rather than pre-planned.

Technical facilitation constituted the third functional role. Because FETs rotated across multiple classrooms and often lacked access to school-specific digital infrastructure—including Wi-Fi credentials, platform login details, and device obtained and charging logistics—LETs were responsible for pre-arranging the technological resources

and on-site support required for FET-led activities. One LET in School A described managing software updates and group assignments on the school's digital platform before each lesson, noting that the failure to complete this preparatory work would disrupt instructional flow and student engagement (LET interview, School A). Far from being incidental, this pre-lesson coordination represented a form of invisible labor that made communicative activities in FET-led teaching sessions operationally feasible.

Collectively, these three functional roles reveal that the LET's contribution, though framed as "assistance," constitutes a professional scaffolding function without which the collaborative teaching sessions would struggle to operate effectively. LETs served not as subordinate aides but as institutional bridges—sustaining instructional coherence across the linguistic, cultural, and logistical boundaries that the TFETP's cross-cultural FET-LET pairing creates.

5.4. Structural Constraints on Model Diversification

The findings illuminate several interlocking structural factors that constrained model diversification beyond the One Teaching, One Assisting configuration.

Limited co-planning time was identified as the most pervasive structural barrier. Across all five schools, dedicated, scheduled co-planning sessions between FETs and LETs were absent. Coordination was reduced to informal hallway conversations, brief exchanges before class, or digital messaging—interactions insufficient to support the joint curriculum design, role negotiation, and shared pedagogical visioning that more integrated models require. One LET at School B described typically seeing the FET's lesson materials—slides and activity sheets—during the short break immediately preceding the class, precluding any meaningful co-construction of instructional content (LET interview, School B).

Administrative workload compounded this constraint. The majority of LETs held concurrent homeroom responsibilities, managing student daily affairs, administrative paperwork, and examination logistics alongside their teaching duties. One administrator at School B noted that a formal co-planning initiative had once been implemented at the school but eventually discontinued because LETs' competing responsibilities left them unable to use the allocated time productively (Administrative interview, School B). The three-monthly examination cycle in each semester further intensified this pressure in recurring waves, consuming the time and energy that might otherwise be devoted to collaborative planning and professional reflection.

A power asymmetry rooted in employment conditions added a further constraint. Because FET's contract renewals were significantly influenced by school administration decisions, some FETs were observed to accommodate existing arrangements rather than advocate for alternative configurations. One tended to "go along with things" because the school held substantial influence over their continued employment. This institutional vulnerability created an incentive for FETs to conform to the LET's and school's preferred arrangement, reinforcing the persistence of the minimal-coordination One Teaching, One Assisting model.

5.5. Benefits and Challenges to Teacher's Professional Development

Alongside these structural constraints, the study also reveals that collaborative teaching generates meaningful, if largely incidental, benefits for teachers' professional development—particularly in oral proficiency, pedagogical repertoire, and intercultural awareness.

5.5.1. Benefits

Teachers across school sites reported meaningful professional benefits arising from the collaborative arrangement, though these were often incidental rather than structurally designed.

For LETs, the most consistently noted was improved oral English proficiency. One LET from School E observed that his spoken English improved markedly after a year of daily interaction with the FET, noting that prior to this

collaboration, his last sustained contact with a foreign speaker had been during university (LET interview, School E). The LET also described adapting his instructional approach after observing the FET's use of body language, classroom commands, and oral assessment—techniques he subsequently incorporated into his own lessons.

For FETs, the collaborative context offered exposure to Taiwanese pedagogical norms and institutional culture that would have been inaccessible without co-teacher mediation. The FET from School C described how a senior LET had informally mentored during the first year—demonstrating classroom techniques within shared lessons, providing feedback, and offering memorable guidance and encouragement (FET interview, School C). The FET credited these interactions with reshaping his curriculum design from a theme-based approach toward one more systematically linked to the content his students were studying in their regular English classes and more relatable to everyday life.

5.5.2. Challenge

Despite these benefits, both FETs and LETs identified constraints that limited deeper professional growth.

The FET at School A expressed concern that two years of simplifying his language for students had weakened his English vocabulary (FET interview, School A). The FET noted that the communicative demands of his role required him to consistently reduce lexical complexity. The one exception was an IGP (gifted) class, with whom he had experimented with idiom instruction—an experience he described as personally motivating and consistent with her professional aspirations.

The LET at School A identified repetition as a structural limitation. She observed that the FET's tendency to review prior content at the start of each session, while pedagogically intentional, could feel redundant for higher-ability students who were also encountering the same material in their regular English classes (LET interview, School A). This overlap between the FET's review-oriented approach and the LET's own instruction sometimes created a sense of low challenge for stronger learners.

For the LET at School B, the primary professional challenge was structural uncertainty at the outset. Having joined the school in August as a new teacher, she had no advance knowledge of the FET's curriculum sequence or instructional style. She identified this as the most significant thing she would change in retrospect—seeking earlier information from the academic director about the FET's teaching rhythm and expectations so that she could have been better prepared before the first class (FET interview, School B).

Beyond individual readiness, power dynamics also shaped FET professional agency in ways that constrained development. At School A, the administrator acknowledged that the FET tended to defer to existing institutional arrangements rather than advocate for preferred configurations—such as grouping students for differentiated activities—partly because contract renewal decisions rested with school administration. This institutional vulnerability discouraged professional risk-taking (Administrative interview, School A).

6. Discussion

The findings of this study illuminate a significant gap between the collaborative teaching aspiration embedded in TFETP policy and the instructional realities that emerge when those aspirations encounter the structural constraints of Taiwan's junior high school context. This gap has both theoretical and practical implications.

Theoretically, the findings affirm and extend the existing literature on challenges in cross-cultural collaborative teaching. The role ambiguity, power imbalance, and limited planning time documented in earlier studies (Kim & Moddie, 2023; Luo 2013; Wang, 2022) are not only replicated in TFETP's expanded iteration but are shown to be actively produced through the school-level arrangements that emerge in response to the program's implementation—including one-to-many teacher pairing, Flexible Learning Periods curriculum scheduling, and unequal division of instructional responsibility. The one-too-many staffing arrangement, while administratively efficient, systematically prevents the relational continuity that meaningful collaboration requires. This finding

responds to Luo's (2014) call for inquiries into the development and implementation of viable co-teaching models in context, and to her recommendation that school-level administrative arrangements be taken into account in such development by demonstrating that the "context" in the TFETP setting operates not merely at the level of individual teacher preferences or cultural differences, but at the level of the institutional structures that determine what forms of collaboration are possible in the first place.

The persistence of the One Teaching, One Assisting model across all five sites—within examination-free Flexible Learning Periods—reveals that exam pressure alone is an insufficient explanation. The deeper driver is the intersection of role identity, relational infrequency, and institutional power asymmetry. This finding advances the field by demonstrating that model adoption in cross-cultural co-teaching is determined not primarily by pedagogical deliberation but by structural conditions that constrain the range of viable professional choices available to teachers.

From a language acquisition perspective, the pervasive reliance on Chinese mediation in the observed sessions also raises questions about pedagogical alignment with TFETP's communicative goals. Drawing on principles of comprehensible input and communicative language teaching, optimal language acquisition environments are characterized by exposure to input that is slightly beyond learners' current competence, supported by scaffolding strategies that preserve the target language as the primary medium of communication (Krashen, 1982). When systematic translation becomes the default response to student comprehension difficulty, the productive struggle through which language acquisition develops may be reduced. The study's observations at School E—where FET-led communicative activities succeeded without Chinese mediation—suggested that alternative scaffolding approaches are pedagogically viable and could better serve TFETP's communicative objectives (Classroom observation, School E).

At the policy level, the findings suggest that TFETP's collaborative teaching mandate, while sound in principle, requires more deliberate structural support to function as intended. Mandating collaboration without providing the institutional conditions—dedicated planning time, manageable caseloads, clear role framework, and targeted professional development—risks producing compliance-driven arrangements that resemble collaboration superficially without achieving its professional or pedagogical benefits.

7. Conclusion

The study offers the first empirically grounded, qualitative examination of collaborative teaching under the expanded TFETP framework across multiple junior high school sites. The findings reveal that despite significant government investment and explicit collaborative teaching mandates, TFETP's implementation is systematically shaped by institutional structures that constrain pedagogical integration. The localized One Teaching, One Assisting model that prevails across all five schools is not a failure of individual teachers but a predictable outcome of structural conditions: one-to-many pairing arrangements, absent co-planning infrastructure, compounded administrative workloads, and power asymmetries that discourage professional risk-taking—all of which collectively limit teachers' capacity to experiment with more integrative collaborative teaching models that could better serve students' communicative and linguistic learning needs.

Based on these findings, this study offers five recommendations for strengthening collaborative teaching under TFETP. First, schools should establish structured, formally timetabled co-planning sessions for each FET-LET pair—time that is protected from competing administrative demands and embedded within the school calendar as a professional responsibility rather than a voluntary add-on. Second, administrative briefings should consciously reframe the LET's role from linguistic support provider to co-instructional partner, providing language and conceptual tools for LETs to understand and perform more active and equitable roles in collaborative sessions. Third, the one-to-many staffing model should be reconsidered in favor of a smaller, stable pairing arrangement that allow relational continuity and gradual development of shared pedagogical practice. Fourth, targeted professional development programs should equip both FETs and LETs with the practical skills needed to

implement alternative co-teaching configurations---not as prescriptions but as a professional repertoire from which teachers can select according to instructional contexts and student needs.

This study is subject to several limitations. The research is confined to junior high schools in a single city in central Taiwan; findings may differ in elementary school contexts, in other regions, or in private bilingual schools operating under different institutional arrangements. The data were collected in schools that participated voluntarily, potentially over-representing sites with relatively stable program implementation. Future research should extend the inquiry to elementary school settings, examine the perspective of students as program participants, and investigate whether professional development interventions targeting role recalibration and co-planning skills produce measurable shifts in collaborative teaching patterns over time.

The TFETP represents a significant and continuing commitment to bilingual English education in Taiwan. Realizing its collaborative teaching potential requires not only policy mandates but the structural conditions and professional scaffolding that allow teachers to move beyond functional compliance toward genuine pedagogical partnership.

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