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# The Disadvantages of Using Mother Tongue in Teaching English on Students' Speaking and Listening Skills at Universities in Vietnam

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**Abstract:** The use of the students' mother tongue in English during Foreign Language classes has been controversial for a long time. This research paper aimed to determining the students' attitude and identifying main negative effects of lecturers' use of mother tongue in English as foreign language classes at universities. This is a cross-sectional study on graduate-level students at five universities in Vietnam in October 2021. We administered a self-reported questionnaire to 385 graduate students on their attitude and practice towards the use of mother tongue in learning English from Vietnamese lecturers, and assess their perceived impacts on students' speaking and listening skills. Descriptive analyses were used to summarize the results. Nearly all lecturers in the surveyed universities use first language in their lectures, half of respondents assumed that native language was used 20 to 50% of lecture's time. Most students assessed the two main purposes for using first language were to convey grammar (27.8%) and difficult new words (25.8%) better. 60.0% of students agreed that it is better if both mother tongue and English are used by lecturers in English lessons. While more than half of the respondents disagreed that lecturers' use of mother tongue impacted negatively on students' pronunciation, 51% opposed that lecturers' use of mother tongue limited students' listening skills. Majority of foreign language classes in graduate level in Vietnam's universities used both foreign and native language. Most students had a positive outlook on the impact of this dual-language system, however not being aware of the disadvantages of using mother tongue in teaching English to their speaking and listening skills.

**Keywords:** Disadvantages, Mother Tongue, Students, English as a Foreign Language, Universities

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## 1. Introduction

Many studies were conducted to find out the impacts of using mother tongue in teaching and learning English. They seemed to focus much on the positive effects rather than the negative ones. It can be seen that English skills can be improved better if they are taught in an only English environment [1]. We listen and respond to what we hear around us and then we succeed in mastering our mother tongue. As a result, the proponents of monolingual approach, we believe that second language learning follows a process similar to first language learning, claim that exposure is essential in learning English [2, 7]. In other words, learners of English should be exposed to an English environment as

much as possible to become master in English. Thus, using the students' mother tongue prevents learners from getting familiar with listening and speaking in English and that too much use of the mother tongue deprives the learners of input in English [3, 9]. Students need to have opportunities to remind and reuse what they have obtained and foster their skills. That means if lecturers use mother tongue when teaching English, students will have fewer chances to listen and speak English so it very hard for their speaking and listening skills to be improved.

In this research, we aimed to determine the students' attitude and identifying main negative effects of lecturers'

use of mother tongue in English as foreign language classes at universities.

## 2. Methods

We conducted an online questionnaire and administered to 385 students from 5 universities in Vietnam in October 2021 through Google Form. The questionnaire included fifteen questions about demographics, students' experience of using mother tongue language during foreign language classes, their attitude towards this practice and its impact to students' communication skills. Survey data was compiled into Excel spreadsheet and descriptive summary was conducted on Microsoft Excel 2016.

## 3. Findings and Discussions

### 3.1. The Usage of Mother Tongue

In the survey, it is evident that almost all lecturers use first language in their lectures. Nearly, a half of respondents assumed that their lecturers use the native language from 20 to 50 time-percent in one lesson. And there are a very small quantity of them noted that their lecturers did not use mother tongue in one English class at all [4, 5]. Especially, 19.2% participants asserted that first language was used by their lecturers in more than a half time of one lecture. It can be inferred that in spite of being in a foreign language university, students are still taught English by mother tongue in many times.

*Table 1. The usage of mother tongue in different purposes.*

No	Purposes for using mother tongue in teaching English	Percent (%)
1.	To make students feel more confident and comfortable	6.2
2.	To make fun and reduce anxiety	9.3
3.	To help students understand the lessons	13.9
4.	To give instructions	17
5.	To help students understand complex grammatical points	27.8
6.	To students understand difficult new words more clearly	25.8

### 3.2. Common Purposes for Using Mother Tongue in Teaching ENGLISH

This table illustrated six typical purposes that lecturers use mother tongue in English lessons including giving instructions, helping students understand complex grammatical point better, helping students difficult new words more clearly, helping students understand the lessons, making fun and reducing anxiety and making students feel more confident and comfortable [6]. As can be seen from the

table, the two main purposes for using first language are to help students understand complex grammatical points better (27.8%) and to help students understand difficult new words more clearly (25.8%). Simultaneously, almost one fifth (17%) of participants asserted that their lecturers use native language to give instructions. It is noticeable that only 6.2% students assume that mother tongue was used to make them feel more confident and comfortable, much lower than helping them understand the lessons (13.9%).

*Table 2. Students' opinions on using mother tongue in teaching English.*

No	Opinions	Strongly disagree	Disagree	No idea	Agree	Strongly agree
1	In English lessons, it is better if lecturers use both their mother tongue and English.	7.5%	7.5%	25%	48.9%	11.1%
2	It is better if English is the only language in English lessons.	3.9%	34.2%	30.3%	22.4%	9.2%
3	Lecturers should use mother tongue if necessary.	6.4%	3.8%	15.4%	52.6%	21.8%
4	It is not necessary for lecturers to use mother tongue in English lessons.	10.0%	48.1%	28.6%	14.3%	0%
5	When lecturers only use English, I feel very confused, and I can't understand the lessons.	17.0%	34.6%	29.3%	14.1%	5.1%
6	Lecturers' use of mother tongue deters me from improving my English.	24.1%	44.3%	17.7%	13.9%	0%

### 3.3. The Attitudes of Students Toward Using Mother Tongue in Teaching English

The table 2 show different students' opinions on using mother tongue in teaching English.

Overall, it is evident that there is a big different among attitudes of students. This table demonstrates the proportion of the way participants evaluate the usage of first language. As shown by the data in the table, more than a half of respondents (60.0%) agreed that it is better if both mother tongue and English are used by lecturers in English lessons. Simultaneously, nearly three fourth of students (74.4%)

assumed that lecturers should use mother tongue in certain necessary circumstances. On the contrary, there are 33.6% participants thought that it is better if only English is allowed in English lessons and 14.3% of them believed that the usage of mother tongue is unnecessary in English lessons. In addition, 13.9% students claimed that their English can be prevented from improving if lecturers use first language. It is noticeable that a large number of students put a tick on "No idea". For instance, 30.3% of them do not know whether it is better if only English is allowed in English lessons and 28.6% of them have no idea whether it is not necessary for lecturers to use mother

tongue in English lessons.

### 3.4. The Disadvantages of Using First Language in Teaching English on Respondents' Speaking and Listening Skills

The third part of the findings and discussions focuses on collecting and gathering the data about the disadvantages of using first language in teaching English on respondents' speaking and listening skills.

#### 3.4.1. Disadvantages of Lecturers' Use of Mother Tongue in English as Foreign Language Classes to Students' Speaking Skill

The negative effects of the lecturers' use of English in English as foreign language classes on students' speaking skill are shown in table 3. As revealed by the table, more than

a half (57.0%) of the respondents disagreed with the point that lecturers' use of mother tongue makes a bad influence on students' pronunciation. Additionally, 53.0% of participants opposed the opinion that their discussion skill, presentation skill and debating skill will be negatively affected by the lecturers' use of first language. Nevertheless, the portion of people in the opposite side is not low. To illustrate, 38.5% of respondents agreed that the lecturers' use of mother tongue makes it harder for them to get used to speaking English. It is noticeable that the portion among groups who agreed with the point of disadvantages of lecturers using mother tongue in fluency when speaking English (39.5%) is even higher in comparison to the portion of people having contradictory opinion (35%). Generally, students seem not to prefer the only-language-class in learning English [10].

*Table 3. Disadvantages of lecturers' use of mother tongue in English as foreign language classes to students' speaking skill.*

No	Opinions	Strongly disagree	Disagree	No idea	Agree	Strongly agree
1	Lecturers' use of mother tongue makes it harder to get used with speaking English.	13.7%	39.3%	6.5%	28.3%	10.2%
2	Lecturers' use of mother tongue deters me from learning in an English environment, so my speaking skill is slowly improved.	17.4%	35.6%	7.8%	39.2%	0%
3	Lecturers' use of mother tongue makes a bad influence on my pronunciation.	12.7%	44.3%	18.1%	20.6%	4.3%
4	Lecturers' use of mother tongue has negative effects on my discussion skill, presentation skill and debating skill.	12.5%	40.5%	26.7%	17.3%	3.4%
5	It is very hard to speak English fluently when my teachers keep speaking mother tongue.	6.8%	28.2%	25.5%	32.2%	7.3%

*Table 4. Disadvantages of lecturers' use of mother tongue in English as foreign language classes to students' listening skill.*

No	Opinions	Strongly disagree	Disagree	No idea	Agree	Strongly agree
1	Lecturers' use of mother tongue makes it harder to get used to listening to English.	11.3%	39.7%	17%	28.1%	3.9%
2	Lecturers' use of mother tongue deters me from learning in an English environment, so my listening skill is slowly improved.	10.5%	47.5%	14%	23.9%	4.1%
3	My dictation skill is badly influenced because the use of mother tongue of my lectures.	9.5%	36.5%	27.1%	25%	1.9%
4	Lecturers' use of mother tongue has negative effects on my note-taking skill.	7.3%	40.7%	33.5%	16.5%	2%

#### 3.4.2. Disadvantages of Lecturers' Use of Mother Tongue in English as Foreign Language Classes to Students' Listening Skill

Table 4 indicates the proportion of the way participants evaluated the disadvantages of lecturers' use of mother tongue in English as foreign language classes in listening. Overall, it is evident that there is a big disagreement with the point that the lecturers' use of mother tongue brings negative effects on students' listening skill. As can be seen, it is remarkable that more than a half of respondents (51%) opposed that lecturers' use of mother tongue makes it harder to get used to listening to English. In the same thought, nearly 60% disagreed that lecturers' use of mother tongue deters students from learning in an English environment thus it can be hard for learners' listening skill to be significantly improved. However, over one fourths participant asserted that lecturers' use mother tongue makes a bad influence on students' dictation skill. Besides, 18.5% students claimed that their note – taking skill can be negatively influenced by lecturers' use of the first language [11, 12]. In brief, this finding carries a conclusion that while there have been disadvantages of the lecturers' using mother tongue

in English as foreign language classes, the majority of students finds this use does not bring pessimistic influence in students' listening skill.

## 4. Conclusion

All in all, in this research paper, we devoted great effort to the data analysis and reached three main conclusions. First, the majority of students thought that lecturers use mother tongue mainly to help them understand complex grammatical points and difficult new words better. Second, although there is a big difference among attitudes of students, overall, they have positive attitudes on the use of first language by lecturers in English classes. Finally, most respondents have not been aware of the disadvantages of using mother tongue in teaching English to their speaking and listening skills.

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