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Drivers of English Language Learning Satisfaction among University Students: A Cross-Sectional Investigation

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Abstract

This study aims to develop and empirically test a comprehensive model identifying the key drivers of English language learning satisfaction among university students. As English proficiency becomes increasingly integral to higher education and global career prospects, understanding the factors that contribute to a positive and practical learning experience is crucial for institutional quality assurance and pedagogical improvement. While previous research has explored various facets of student satisfaction, a holistic model tailored to the specific context of university-level English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction remains underdeveloped. This research addresses this gap through a quantitative, cross-sectional investigation. A survey instrument, measuring six potential drivers of satisfaction—Teacher Competence and Support, Curriculum and Content Quality, Learning Environment, Learner Motivation, Learner Autonomy, and Assessment and Feedback—was administered to a sample of 329 undergraduate students from diverse academic disciplines. The data were analyzed using a sequential, three-stage process. First, Cronbach's Alpha confirmed the high internal consistency of all measurement scales. Second, an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) validated a clear six-factor structure underlying the predictor variables. Finally, Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) multiple regression was employed to assess the predictive power of these six factors on overall student satisfaction. The regression model was statistically significant, explaining 72.9% of the variance in English language learning satisfaction. The findings revealed that Teacher Competence and Support emerged as the most potent predictors, followed closely by Curriculum and Content Quality. Assessment and Feedback, Learner Motivation, and the Learning Environment were also found to be significant, albeit more moderate, predictors. Learner Autonomy, while theoretically important, did not show a significant direct effect in the final model. These results underscore the centrality of high-quality instruction and a relevant, engaging curriculum in shaping student satisfaction. The study concludes with practical, evidence-based recommendations for university administrators, curriculum

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designers, and EFL instructors, emphasizing the need for a multi-faceted, student-centered approach to enhance the educational experience and foster institutional success.

Keywords: *English language learning satisfaction, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), University students, quantitative analysis, Vietnam.*

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary landscape of globalized higher education, proficiency in the English language has transitioned from a desirable skill to an essential competency. It serves as the primary medium for international academic discourse, scientific collaboration, and cross-cultural professional engagement (Feng et al., 2023). Consequently, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) courses have become a cornerstone of the university curriculum worldwide, designed to equip students with the linguistic tools necessary for academic success and future employability. Given this centrality, the evaluation of these programs has become a critical focus for educational institutions.

Traditionally, the success of language programs has been measured primarily through academic achievement metrics, such as test scores and grades. However, a significant paradigm shift has occurred in recent decades, with institutions increasingly recognizing student satisfaction as a vital indicator of educational quality and effectiveness (Guo et al., 2024). This shift is reflective of a broader trend in higher education that views students not merely as passive recipients of knowledge but as active stakeholders and, in some theoretical frameworks, as 'consumers' of an educational service. From this perspective, student satisfaction is no longer a peripheral concern but a key performance indicator (KPI) with profound implications for institutional vitality. Research has consistently shown that higher levels of student satisfaction are associated with a range of positive outcomes, including increased student motivation, improved academic performance, higher retention rates, and the recruitment of new students through positive word-of-mouth promotion. A satisfied student body contributes directly to the financial stability and reputational strength of an institution, making the study of satisfaction a matter of strategic importance.

Despite the acknowledged importance of student satisfaction, the body of research dedicated to this topic, particularly within the specific domain of university-level EFL instruction, remains fragmented. Numerous studies have provided valuable insights by examining individual drivers of satisfaction, such as the quality of teaching (Suarman, 2015), the role of technology (Pikhart et al., 2024), the learning environment (Zhang, 2023), or curriculum design (Masters, 2013). However, these investigations often exist in isolation, failing to capture the synergistic interplay of the multiple factors that collectively shape the student experience.

Furthermore, many general satisfaction scales and models developed for higher education as a whole may not adequately capture the unique nuances and challenges of the language learning process (Guo et al., 2024). Language learning is a distinct academic endeavor, characterized by high levels of interaction, the need for psychological safety to practice and make mistakes, and a unique form of anxiety associated with communicative performance (Hanus, 2016). A model of satisfaction for this context must therefore account for these specific dynamics. There is a clear and pressing need for a comprehensive, integrated, and empirically validated model that simultaneously investigates the relative importance of multiple potential drivers of satisfaction within the university EFL classroom (Mabkhot & Alzahrani, 2023). Such a model would provide a more holistic understanding of the student experience and offer a more robust evidence base for quality enhancement initiatives. This study seeks to address this critical gap in the literature.

The findings of this investigation are poised to make significant contributions on both theoretical and practical fronts. Theoretically, this study will contribute to the literature by proposing and empirically testing an integrated, multi-dimensional model of student satisfaction explicitly tailored to the EFL context in higher education. By simultaneously examining distinct yet interrelated drivers, the research will provide a more nuanced understanding of their relative contributions and potential interactions, thereby moving beyond single-factor explanations.

Practically, the results will yield evidence-based, actionable recommendations for a wide range of educational stakeholders. For university administrators and quality assurance managers, the findings will illuminate the key levers for enhancing the overall quality of their English language programs. For curriculum designers, the study will provide clear guidance on the elements of course design that resonate most strongly with students. Ultimately, for frontline EFL instructors, the research will provide insights into the specific pedagogical practices and supportive behaviors that foster a more satisfying and practical learning experience. By providing a clear, data-driven hierarchy of the factors that matter most to students, this study aims to empower institutions to make more strategic and impactful investments in their educational provision.

LITERATURE REVIEW

For this study, English Language Learning Satisfaction (ELLS) is defined as a student's subjective, favorable evaluation of the various outcomes and experiences associated with their English language course (Rahmatpour et al., 2019). It is conceptualized as a short-term attitude that results from a cognitive and affective evaluation of the educational services received (Weerasinghe et al., 2017). This definition distinguishes satisfaction from more transient emotional states, such as happiness, and positions it as a more stable, considered judgment of the learning experience.

Several key theoretical frameworks from consumer behavior and educational psychology inform the conceptualization of ELLS. First, Expectation-Confirmation Theory (ECT) posits that satisfaction is a function of the discrepancy between a consumer's pre-purchase expectations and the post-purchase perceived performance of a product or service. In an educational context, students enter a course with specific expectations regarding the quality of teaching, the relevance of the content, and the support they will receive. Satisfaction is achieved when their actual

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experiences meet or exceed these expectations (Stankovska et al., 2024). Dissatisfaction arises when experiences fall short.

Second, the Investment Model offers a complementary perspective, suggesting that students perceive their time, energy, and financial resources as an investment in their education. They are satisfied when they perceive a positive return on this investment, such as acquiring valuable skills, achieving good grades, or enhancing their career prospects. This framework emphasizes the goal-oriented nature of student satisfaction, directly linking it to the perceived value and utility of the educational experience.

This study adopts an approach that integrates these perspectives, measuring satisfaction as a global cognitive judgment that reflects the fulfillment of students' needs, expectations, and learning goals within their EFL course.

Teacher Competence and Support (TCS) is a multifaceted construct that encompasses the instructor's pedagogical expertise, subject matter knowledge, classroom management skills, and, crucially, the quality of their interpersonal relationships and supportive interactions with students. The literature overwhelmingly identifies the teacher as a pivotal, if not the most important, determinant of student satisfaction (Mabkhot & Alzahrani, 2023). Effective teaching involves more than just content delivery. It includes the ability to make complex topics accessible, correct student errors constructively, and provide ample opportunities for students to ask questions and participate in classroom activities (Prawadlerdruk & Sarobol, 2015). Beyond pedagogical skills, the personal characteristics of the teacher play a significant role. Instructors who are perceived as warm, friendly, approachable, punctual, and good listeners foster a more positive and engaging learning environment, which directly contributes to student satisfaction (Prawadlerdruk & Sarobol, 2015).

Furthermore, teacher support, both instructional and emotional, is a critical component. When students perceive their teachers as caring, supportive, and invested in their academic success, they are more likely to feel engaged, confident, and satisfied with their learning (Mabkhot & Alzahrani, 2023). This support can manifest as providing clear guidance, offering encouragement, and showing empathy. Research suggests that strong teacher support can bolster students' academic self-efficacy and resilience, enabling them to navigate the challenges of language learning more effectively (Huang et al., 2024). The positive relationship between teacher-student interaction and satisfaction is a robust and consistent finding across numerous studies (Mabkhot & Alzahrani, 2023). We formulate the following hypothesis regarding the relationship between Teacher Competence and Support and English language learning satisfaction:

H1: Teacher Competence and Support will be a positive predictor of English language learning satisfaction.

Curriculum and Content Quality (CCQ) refers to the perceived relevance, structure, coherence, and intellectual challenge of the course curriculum, as well as its associated learning materials and activities. A well-designed curriculum is fundamental to a satisfying educational experience, as it forms the very substance of what students learn and learn to do. Student satisfaction is profoundly influenced by the degree to which the curriculum meets their perceived needs and interests (Ye, 2024). When students see a clear link between the course content and their broader academic, personal, or future professional goals, their motivation and engagement increase, leading to higher satisfaction (Ye, 2024). Conversely, a curriculum that is perceived as irrelevant, outdated, or disconnected from students' needs is a primary source of dissatisfaction and disengagement (Ye, 2024). This is particularly true in contexts where courses are heavily exam-oriented, as this can lead to a focus on rote memorization at the expense of developing practical, applicable language skills (Ye, 2024).

The structure and delivery of the curriculum are also critical. A course that employs a variety of engaging teaching methods, uses authentic materials, and incorporates interactive activities is more likely to be viewed favorably than one that relies on a single, monolithic approach (Ferris, 2018). Additionally, the academic workload must be perceived as manageable and purposeful. An excessive workload can create stress and resentment, sacrificing the quality of learning for the quantity of work, thereby diminishing satisfaction (Masters, 2013). Therefore, a high-quality curriculum is relevant, engaging, varied, and appropriately challenging. In summary, Curriculum and Content Quality can positively correlate with English language learning satisfaction, as delineated below.

H2: Curriculum and Content Quality will be a positive predictor of English language learning satisfaction.

The Learning Environment (LE) is a broad, multidimensional construct that encompasses the physical, social, and psychological context in which learning takes place. A positive and supportive learning environment is crucial for promoting student engagement, motivation, and ultimately, satisfaction (Zhang, 2023).

The physical environment encompasses tangible aspects, including the classroom's comfort, lighting, temperature, and the availability of necessary learning resources such as computers and multimedia equipment (Zhang, 2023). A quiet, comfortable, and well-equipped space fosters a conducive atmosphere for concentration and learning.

The social environment is arguably even more critical, particularly in a language learning context that is inherently interactive. Positive interactions with peers are a significant predictor of student satisfaction (Mabkhot & Alzahrani, 2023). An environment that encourages collaboration, peer support, and a sense of community helps students feel connected and more willing to participate. Teachers play a key role in fostering this social climate by creating opportunities for students to interact in meaningful ways (Hanus, 2016).

The psychological environment refers to the overall climate of the classroom. A psychologically safe environment is one where students feel respected, supported, and comfortable taking the linguistic risks necessary for language acquisition, such as speaking and making mistakes without fear of harsh criticism or embarrassment (Hanus, 2016). This sense of safety and belonging is a cornerstone of a satisfying learning experience. The combination of these physical, social, and psychological elements creates a holistic learning environment that can either enhance or inhibit student satisfaction. Therefore, we posit that the Learning Environment can be positively linked to English language learning satisfaction, as detailed in the following hypothesis:

H3: A positive Learning Environment will be a positive predictor of English language learning satisfaction.

Learner Motivation (LM) is defined as the set of internal and external forces that energize, direct, and sustain a student's behavior towards achieving a learning goal. It is widely recognized

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as a fundamental prerequisite for success in any learning endeavor, and particularly in the long-term process of acquiring a new language (Alsayed, 2003). Motivation can be broadly categorized into two types. Intrinsic motivation refers to the desire to engage in an activity for the inherent pleasure and satisfaction it brings, such as learning English out of a genuine interest in the language and culture (Purnama et al., 2019). Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, involves engaging in an activity to achieve a separable outcome, such as obtaining good grades, passing a required examination, or securing a better job (Purnama et al., 2019).

Both forms of motivation can contribute to student satisfaction. Research based on expectancy-value theory suggests that students who genuinely have an interest in a subject (intrinsic motivation) and perceive the learning tasks as valuable and useful for their goals (a component of extrinsic motivation) are more likely to be satisfied with their learning experience (Li & Ni, 2024). Highly motivated students tend to invest more effort, show greater persistence in the face of challenges, and engage more deeply with the course material, all of which are likely to lead to a more positive and fulfilling experience (Li & Ni, 2024). While high motivation can be a result of success, it is also a powerful engine that drives the effort leading to that success and the resulting satisfaction.. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H4: Learner Motivation will be a positive predictor of English language learning satisfaction.

Learner Autonomy (LA) is defined as the capacity and willingness of a student to take charge of their learning (Ene & Orlando, 2022). This construct involves more than just independent study; it encompasses a set of skills and attitudes, including the ability to set personal learning goals, select appropriate learning strategies, monitor one's progress, and make meaningful choices about the learning process (Nguyen & Habók, 2021). Fostering learner autonomy is a central goal of modern, student-centered pedagogy (Ene & Orlando, 2022). According to Self-Determination Theory (SDT), autonomy is one of three basic psychological needs, along with competence and relatedness, that are essential for human motivation and well-being (Shukla & Soneji, 2020). When the learning environment supports students' need for autonomy, for example by offering choices in tasks or assessment methods, students are more likely to feel enthusiastic, engaged, and intrinsically motivated (Han, 2021).

An instructor who supports student autonomy acknowledges students' perspectives, provides rationales for tasks, and minimizes controlling language (Johansen et al., 2025). This autonomy-supportive teaching style has been shown to positively predict desirable learning outcomes such as vitality, situational interest, and a sense of well-being, all of which are closely intertwined with satisfaction (Johansen et al., 2025). By empowering students to become active agents in their education, instructors can foster a deeper sense of ownership and personal investment, which is expected to translate into higher levels of satisfaction with the learning experience. We formulate the following hypothesis regarding the relationship between Learner Autonomy and English language learning satisfaction:

H5: Learner Autonomy will be a positive predictor of English language learning satisfaction.

Assessment and Feedback (AF) is a critical pedagogical construct that concerns not only the methods used to evaluate student learning but, more importantly, the quality, timeliness, and utility of the feedback provided to students based on those assessments. Effective feedback is a powerful tool for learning and a significant driver of student satisfaction. The role of assessment has shifted from merely 'assessment of learning' (summative evaluation) to 'assessment for learning' (formative feedback to guide improvement). High-quality feedback is specific, timely, constructive, and directly relevant to the learning goals. It should communicate to students what they have done well and what they need to do to improve, effectively helping them to close the gap between their current performance and the desired standard (Ahea et al., 2016). When students receive such feedback, they feel supported, gain confidence, and develop a sense of ownership over their learning process.

Conversely, feedback that is vague, delayed, overly negative, or unhelpful can be a significant source of frustration and dissatisfaction (De Florio, 2023). Furthermore, the nature of the assessment tasks themselves is also important. Authentic assessments, which require students to apply their knowledge to meaningful, real-world-like tasks, are associated with greater student engagement, confidence, and satisfaction compared to assessments that focus on decontextualized memorization (Washington State University). Therefore, the combination of meaningful assessment tasks and high-quality, formative feedback is expected to be a strong contributor to overall student satisfaction. In summary, Assessment and Feedback can positively correlate with English language learning satisfaction, as delineated below.

H6: The quality of Assessment and Feedback practices will be a positive predictor of English language learning satisfaction.

The theoretical framework and the six hypotheses developed above can be visually summarized in our research model (Figure 1). This model posits that the six independent variables - Teacher Competence and Support (TCS), Curriculum and Content Quality (CCQ), Learning Environment (LE), Learner Motivation (LM), Learner Autonomy (LA), and Assessment and Feedback (AF)—are direct predictors of the dependent variable, English Language Learning Satisfaction (ELLS).

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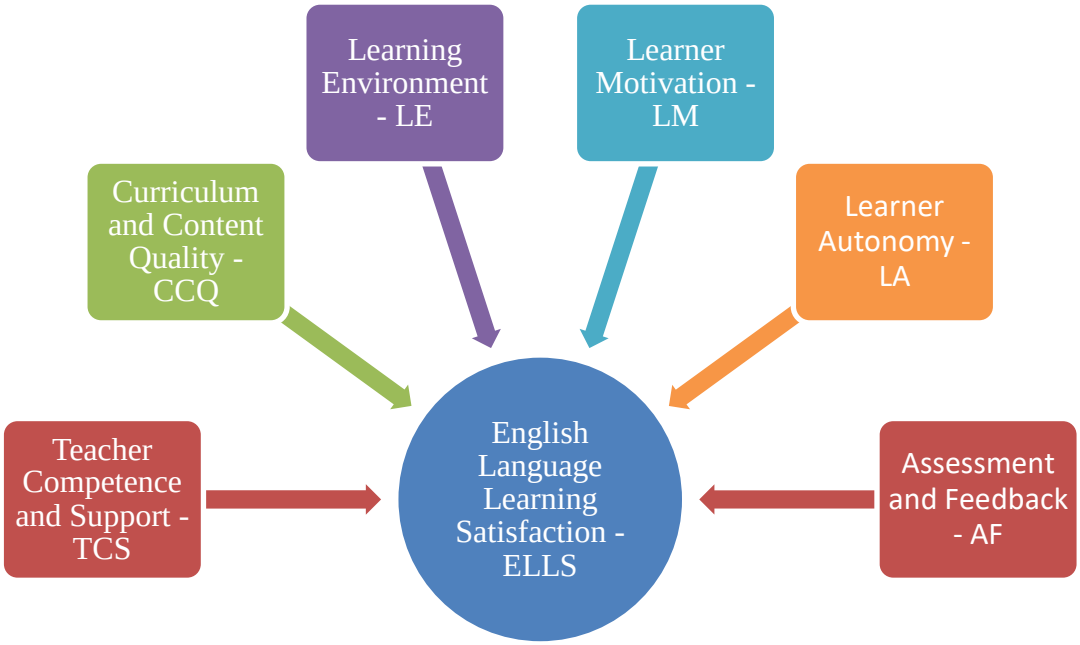

Figure 1: Research Framework

METHODS AND MATERIALS

To address the research question and test the proposed hypotheses, this study utilized a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design. This approach is highly suitable for capturing a snapshot of student attitudes, perceptions, and experiences at a single point in time. It enables the efficient collection of data from a large sample. It is well-suited for examining the statistical relationships between multiple variables, making it an ideal choice for developing and testing a predictive model of student satisfaction.

The study population consisted of undergraduate students enrolled in compulsory or elective English language courses at a large, comprehensive public university. A purposive sampling technique was employed to recruit participants. The recruitment process targeted students from a wide array of academic faculties, including Humanities and Social Sciences, Engineering, Natural Sciences, and Business Administration. This strategy was chosen to ensure that the final sample would be heterogeneous, reflecting a diverse range of academic backgrounds, motivations for learning English, and experiences within their respective EFL courses.

The final sample comprised 329 students who voluntarily completed the survey. Participation was anonymous and confidential to encourage candid responses, minimizing the potential for social desirability bias. All participants provided informed consent prior to commencing the survey.

A structured questionnaire was developed to collect the data for this study. The instrument was divided into two main sections: demographic information and the main measurement scales for the study's constructs. All substantive items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 5 ("Strongly Agree"), a widely used and validated format for measuring attitudes and perceptions in educational and social science research.

The items for the scales were developed through a careful process of adaptation from existing, validated instruments and theoretical concepts identified in the literature review, ensuring strong content validity. The questionnaire was pilot-tested with a small group of students to assess its clarity, readability, and item interpretation, with minor wording adjustments made based on their feedback. The whole instrument is provided in Appendix A.

The constructs for this study were operationalized through a series of scales adapted from established literature to fit the context of English language learning. The study's primary dependent variable was English Language Learning Satisfaction (ELLS). This three-item scale was designed to measure students' overall subjective evaluation of their course experience. To ensure its validity, items were adapted from the core concepts of two relevant instruments: the Foreign Language Lesson Satisfaction Scale (FLSS) developed by Taşgın and Korucuk (2018) and the College Student Life Satisfaction Scale (CSLSS) by Masagca (2025).

Six independent variables were examined to identify predictors of student satisfaction. The first, Teacher Competence and Support (TCS), was measured using a seven-item scale. These items were developed to capture the dual aspects of an instructor's role: their pedagogical skill and their supportive nature. The development of this construct was heavily guided by literature that emphasizes the critical importance of teacher quality and positive teacher-student relationships in educational outcomes (Suarman, 2015).

The second independent variable, Curriculum and Content Quality (CCQ), was assessed with a five-item scale. This construct focused on the students' perception of the relevance, engagement, and logical structure of the course materials and topics. Its design was informed by contemporary research on effective and motivating curriculum design (Ye, 2024).

Next, the Learning Environment (LE) was evaluated using a five-item scale. These items were designed to assess the holistic classroom atmosphere, encompassing its physical, social, and psychological aspects. The basis for this scale comes from research highlighting the significant impact of a conducive and interactive environment on student learning and engagement (Zhang, 2023).

Learner Motivation (LM) was measured with a four-item scale. This construct aimed to capture the driving forces behind a student's efforts, including items that reflect both intrinsic and extrinsic sources of motivation. The scale was adapted from

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established theories of motivation within the field of education and learning (Li & Ni, 2024).

Furthermore, Learner Autonomy (LA) was assessed through a four-item scale. The items for this construct were based on previously validated instruments, such as the Learner Autonomy Scale (LAS) and the Language Learner Autonomy Scale (LLAS), as discussed by Alrabai (2021). The scale focused explicitly on the provision of choice and the development of self-regulation skills. A sample item illustrates this focus: "This course gives me opportunities to make choices about my learning tasks or topics."

Finally, the construct of Assessment and Feedback (AF) was measured with a four-item scale. This scale was developed to gauge the perceived quality and practical utility of assessment tasks and the feedback provided to students. The items were formulated to reflect best practices in educational assessment as identified in the literature.

All collected data were systematically coded and analyzed using SPSS version 26. The analysis followed a rigorous, three-stage pipeline designed to address the study's research objectives. The first stage involved a Reliability Analysis to ensure the quality of the measurement instruments. The internal consistency of each of the seven scales was assessed by calculating Cronbach's Alpha (α) coefficient. Following established psychometric guidelines, a coefficient of $\alpha \geq 0.70$ was adopted as the threshold for acceptable reliability, providing evidence that the items within each scale consistently measure the same underlying construct (Studnicka et al., 2023).

In the second stage, an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted to validate the underlying structure of the predictor variables. The primary goal of the EFA was to confirm that the 29 items measuring the independent variables coalesced into six distinct, meaningful constructs as theorized. Before proceeding with the analysis, the suitability of the data for factor analysis was confirmed using two statistical tests: the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. A KMO value exceeding 0.60 and a statistically significant Bartlett's test ($p < .05$) were required to affirm that the data were appropriate for factor extraction (Cao & Pho, 2024).

The factor extraction and retention process utilized Principal Component Analysis (PCA) as the extraction method. The decision on the number of factors to retain was based on two convergent criteria: the Kaiser criterion, which suggests retaining all factors with Eigenvalues greater than 1, and a visual examination of the scree plot to identify the "elbow," or the point of inflection where the eigenvalues begin to level off (Hair, 2009). To facilitate an interpretable and straightforward factor structure, a Varimax (orthogonal) rotation was subsequently applied (Cao & Pho, 2024). This rotation method was chosen based on the theoretical assumption that while the factors are related, they represent conceptually distinct drivers of satisfaction. An item was considered to have a significant loading if its coefficient was $\geq .50$ on a single factor (Taşgın & Korucuk, 2018).

The final stage of the analysis consisted of a Multiple Regression Analysis to test the six research hypotheses and determine the predictive power of the identified factors on student satisfaction. A standard Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) multiple regression model was employed. In this model, the composite score for English Language Learning Satisfaction (ELLS), calculated as the mean of its items, was specified as the dependent variable. The composite scores for the six validated factors (TCS, CCQ, LE, LM, LA, and AF), also calculated as the mean of their respective items, were entered simultaneously into the model as independent variables. The analysis focused on evaluating the overall model fit through the coefficient of determination (R^2), the Adjusted R^2, and the F-statistic. The individual contribution and statistical significance of each predictor were assessed by examining their standardized beta coefficients (β) and corresponding p-values. To ensure the validity of the findings, the fundamental assumptions of multiple regression, including linearity, normality of residuals, homoscedasticity, and the absence of significant multicollinearity, were thoroughly checked.

RESULTS

The demographic profile of the 329 participants is summarized in Table 1. The sample was relatively balanced in terms of gender, with 54.1% identifying as female and 45.9% as male. The age of participants ranged from 18 to 25 years, with a mean age of 20.7 years (SD = 1.8). The distribution across years of study was diverse, with students from the first year (28.9%), second year (33.4%), third year (25.2%), and fourth year or above (12.5%) all represented. Participants were drawn from a variety of academic majors, with the largest groups coming from Engineering (30.1%), Humanities and Social Sciences (26.7%), and Natural Sciences (21.9%), ensuring a broad representation of the university's student body.

Table 1: Sample Demographic Profile (N = 329)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	178	54.1
	Male	151	45.9
Year of Study	First Year	95	28.9
	Second Year	110	33.4
	Third Year	83	25.2
	Fourth Year & Above	41	12.5

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Academic Major	Engineering	99	30.1
	Humanities & Social Sciences	88	26.7
	Natural Sciences	72	21.9
	Business & Economics	45	13.7
	Other	25	7.6
Age	Mean (SD)	20.7 (1.8)	

Data source processed by the researcher (2025)

The reliability of all scales was excellent, with Cronbach's Alpha coefficients ranging from 0.702 for English Language Learning Satisfaction to 0.907 for Teacher Competence and Support. All values comfortably exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating high internal consistency for each scale.

Table 2: Reliability (α) of Variables

Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Teacher Competence and Support - TCS	7	0.907
Curriculum and Content Quality - CCQ	5	0.858
Learning Environment - LE	5	0.885
Learner Motivation - LM	4	0.861
Learner Autonomy - LA	4	0.838
Assessment and Feedback - AF	4	0.880
English Language Learning Satisfaction - ELLS	3	0.702

Data source processed by the researcher (2025)

An EFA with Principal Component Analysis (PCA) and Varimax rotation was conducted on the 29 items corresponding to the six predictor variables to validate their underlying factor structure. The suitability of the data for factor analysis was confirmed. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was excellent, with a KMO value of 0.846, well above the recommended minimum of 0.60. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was highly significant ($\chi^2(406) = 4685.447$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that the correlations between items were sufficiently significant for EFA (Cao & Pho, 2024).

The analysis extracted exactly six factors with eigenvalues greater than 1, consistent with the proposed theoretical model. These six factors collectively explained 68.057% of the total variance in the items. The scree plot showed a clear point of inflection after the sixth factor, further supporting the retention of six factors.

The rotated component matrix is presented in Table 3. The results demonstrate an immaculate and interpretable six-factor solution. All items loaded strongly (all loadings > 0.70) on their intended theoretical constructs. This provides strong empirical evidence for the construct validity of the six-driver model, confirming that the questionnaire successfully measured six distinct, underlying dimensions of the student experience.

Table 3: Rotated Component Matrix for the Six Factors

Item	TCS	LE	CCQ	AF	LM	LA
TCS2	0.822					
TCS5	0.805					
TCS3	0.803					
TCS7	0.802					
TCS6	0.800					
TCS4	0.789					
TCS1	0.779					
LE1		0.831				
LE4		0.831				

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LE5		0.826				
LE3		0.820				
LE2		0.818				
CCQ2			0.806			
CCQ5			0.796			
CCQ3			0.795			
CCQ4			0.794			
CCQ1			0.790			
AF1				0.872		
AF2				0.858		
AF3				0.850		
AF4				0.847		
LM4					0.848	
LM3					0.845	
LM2					0.840	
LM1					0.818	
LA1						0.831
LA3						0.826
LA2						0.811
LA4						0.803
Eigenvalue	4.595	3.765	3.142	3.003	2.746	2.486
% of Variance	15.846	12.981	10.833	10.356	9.470	8.571

Data source processed by the researcher (2025)

To test the six research hypotheses, a standard multiple regression analysis was conducted with the six identified factors serving as independent variables to predict ELLS. The comprehensive results of this analysis are summarized in Table 4.

The overall regression model was found to be statistically significant, $F(6, 322) = 147.916$, $p < 0.001$, and it accounted for a substantial portion of the variance in student satisfaction. The Adjusted R^2 value was 0.729, indicating that the six-factor model successfully explains 72.9% of the total variability in ELLS. The fundamental assumptions of multiple regression were also met; the Durbin-Watson statistic of 1.958 indicated independence of residuals, and the VIF scores for all predictors were well below 2.0, confirming that multicollinearity was not an issue in the model.

Table 4: OLS Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting ELLS

Variable	**B**	**SE**	***β***	**t**	**p**
(Constant)	-0.052	0.157		-0.334	0.738
Learner Motivation (LM)	0.127	0.019	0.194	6.703	<0.001
Curriculum & Content Quality (CCQ)	0.310	0.020	0.451	15.544	<0.001
Teacher Competence & Support (TCS)	0.385	0.020	0.566	19.605	<0.001
Learner Autonomy (LA)	0.009	0.019	0.014	0.483	0.630
Learning Environment (LE)	0.143	0.019	0.222	7.650	<0.001

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Assessment & Feedback (AF)	0.183	0.018	0.292	10.139	<0.001

Data source processed by the researcher (2025)

An examination of the individual predictors provides specific insights into the drivers of student satisfaction, allowing for the direct testing of the research hypotheses. The results revealed a clear hierarchy of influence among the factors.

First, Teacher Competence and Support (TCS) emerged as the strongest significant predictor of ELLS ($\beta = 0.566$, $p < 0.001$). This result provides robust support for H1, underscoring the central and indispensable role of the instructor in shaping the student learning experience. The second most powerful predictor was Curriculum and Content Quality (CCQ) ($\beta = 0.451$, $p < 0.001$), providing strong support for H2. This finding demonstrates that the relevance, engagement, and quality of the teaching are significant determinants of student satisfaction.

Three other factors also showed a significant positive relationship with satisfaction. Assessment and Feedback (AF) was a significant predictor ($\beta = 0.292$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H6 and highlighting the importance of providing high-quality, constructive feedback within the learning process. The Learning Environment (LE) was also found to be a significant, though weaker, positive predictor ($\beta = 0.222$, $p < 0.001$), thus lending support to H3. Similarly, Learner Motivation (LM) had a significant positive influence ($\beta = 0.194$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H4 and suggesting that students' own intrinsic and extrinsic drive to learn contributes uniquely to their overall satisfaction. This indicates that while the classroom atmosphere and peer relations do matter, their impact is less pronounced than that of teacher and curriculum factors.

In contrast, Learner Autonomy (LA) was not a statistically significant predictor of ELLS in the final model ($\beta = 0.014$, $p = 0.630$). Therefore, H5 was not supported by the data.

In summary, the regression analysis provided support for five of the six hypotheses. The findings establish a hierarchy of influence, with teacher competence and curriculum quality being the primary drivers of student satisfaction. These are followed by assessment, learner motivation, and the learning environment, which serve as important secondary contributors.

DISCUSSION

The primary finding of this study is that student satisfaction in university-level English language courses is a complex, multidimensional construct that a combination of pedagogical, curricular, and learner-centric factors can effectively explain. The integrated six-factor model successfully accounted for nearly two-thirds of the variance in satisfaction, demonstrating its substantial explanatory power. The results not only confirm the importance of factors previously identified in disparate studies but also establish a clear hierarchy of their relative influence.

The confirmation of five of the six hypotheses highlights the multifaceted nature of a positive learning experience. The Primacy of the Teacher and Curriculum (H1 and H2): The most striking result is the dominant predictive power of Teacher Competence and Support (TCS) and Curriculum and Content Quality (CCQ). The finding that the instructor is the single most important driver of satisfaction ($\beta = 0.566$) aligns with a vast body of educational research that places the teacher at the heart of the learning process (Mabkhot & Alzahrani, 2023). It suggests that students' evaluation of their learning experience is fundamentally shaped by their perception of the instructor's expertise, pedagogical skill, and, crucially, their ability to create a supportive and interactive relationship. This goes beyond mere content delivery; it speaks to the instructor's role as a facilitator, guide, and mentor (Prawadlerdruk & Sarobol, 2015).

Similarly, the strong effect of CCQ ($\beta = 0.451$) underscores the principle that what is taught is as important as how it is taught (Ye, 2024). Students are goal-oriented learners who seek value from their educational investment. A curriculum perceived as relevant, engaging, and aligned with their academic or professional aspirations provides this value, thereby generating satisfaction (Ye, 2024). These two findings, taken together, suggest that the core of student satisfaction lies in the fundamental educational transaction: a competent and caring teacher delivering a high-quality and relevant curriculum.

The Supporting Ecosystem (H6, H4, and H3): While teacher and curriculum quality form the core, the significant effects of Assessment and Feedback (AF), Learner Motivation (LM), and the Learning Environment (LE) demonstrate the importance of a supportive ecosystem. The influence of AF ($\beta = 0.292$) confirms that learning is a developmental process, and students value clear, constructive guidance that helps them improve their performance. Effective feedback acts as a bridge between teaching and learning, making the instructor's guidance tangible and actionable.

The significant, though more moderate, effect of Learner Motivation ($\beta = 0.194$) is also noteworthy. This suggests that while external factors are influential, students' internal drive and interest contribute uniquely to their satisfaction (Li & Ni, 2024). This supports the idea that satisfaction is a co-created experience, dependent on both institutional provision and student engagement. The finding for the Learning Environment ($\beta = 0.222$) confirms that a favorable social and psychological climate does matter (Hanus, 2016). A classroom where students feel safe and connected provides the necessary foundation for the core learning activities to flourish.

The Puzzle of Learner Autonomy (H5): Perhaps the most intriguing finding is the non-significant direct effect of Learner Autonomy (LA) on satisfaction. This result does not imply that autonomy is unimportant. Instead, it suggests a more complex relationship than was hypothesized. Several interpretations are possible. First, the effect of autonomy on satisfaction might be indirect. For instance, an autonomy-supportive environment may boost a student's intrinsic motivation (Johansen et al., 2025), which in turn predicts satisfaction. Second, in the context of compulsory university courses with highly structured curricula, the opportunities for and impact of learner choice may be overshadowed by the more dominant, instructor-led factors of teaching and curriculum quality. Students may prioritize clear guidance and high-quality instruction over opportunities for self-direction in such settings. This finding opens up an important avenue for future research to explore the mediating and moderating roles of autonomy in the satisfaction equation.

Theoretical Contributions

This study makes several important contributions to the theoretical understanding of student satisfaction in higher education. First, it

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validates a comprehensive, multi-dimensional model specifically for the EFL learning context. By integrating six distinct drivers into a single empirical test, the research provides a more holistic and nuanced picture than previous single-factor studies. It moves the field towards a systemic understanding, where satisfaction is not the result of one single element but emerges from the interplay of a whole ecosystem of factors. This supports the notion that interventions to improve satisfaction must be multi-pronged, addressing the teacher, the curriculum, and the broader learning context simultaneously.

Second, the study adds empirical specificity to broader satisfaction theories, such as the Investment Model. While the model posits that students seek a return on their investment of time and effort, this study helps to define what constitutes a "reward" in the EFL classroom. The strong predictive power of TCS and CCQ suggests that the primary rewards students seek are high-quality instruction and a curriculum that provides tangible value. Conversely, factors such as a poor learning environment or unhelpful feedback can be conceptualized as additional "costs" that detract from the overall value proposition.

Finally, the unexpected finding regarding Learner Autonomy challenges simplistic assumptions and enriches the theoretical discourse. It suggests that the relationship between autonomy and satisfaction is not linear and may be highly context-dependent. This finding encourages a more critical application of theories like Self-Determination Theory (SDT) in specific educational settings, prompting researchers to investigate the conditions under which autonomy support is most effective and how it interacts with other crucial variables, such as course structure and student motivation.

Practical Recommendations

The findings of this study translate into a set of clear, evidence-based, and actionable recommendations for key stakeholders in higher education who are committed to enhancing the student learning experience in English language programs. These recommendations are tailored for university administrators, curriculum developers, and instructors.

For University Administrators and Deans:

The research identifies Teacher Competence and Support as the single most powerful driver of student satisfaction. Consequently, the primary recommendation for institutional leaders is to invest heavily in faculty development. Institutions should prioritize and allocate funding for robust, continuous professional development programs for their EFL instructors. These programs must extend beyond traditional pedagogical techniques and subject matter expertise to also cultivate essential interpersonal skills, foster supportive teacher-student relationships, and implement effective classroom interaction strategies (Hanus, 2016). In conjunction with this, administrators should refine course evaluation systems. To gather more meaningful insights, institutions must move beyond generic satisfaction surveys and implement evaluation instruments that specifically measure the key drivers identified in this study, such as separate metrics for teacher support, curriculum relevance, and feedback quality. This approach will provide more granular, actionable data essential for quality assurance and continuous improvement cycles.

For Curriculum Developers and Department Heads:

Given the significant impact of Curriculum and Content Quality, the focus for this group should be on ensuring the curriculum is both relevant and engaging. A key recommendation is to prioritize curriculum relevance through systematic needs analysis. Departments should regularly conduct needs analyses involving both students and relevant industry stakeholders to ensure the English curriculum is consistently aligned with students' current academic requirements and future professional aspirations (Ye, 2024). This practice effectively closes the gap between course content and its perceived value. Furthermore, curriculum designers should promote pedagogical variety and authenticity. This involves encouraging the use of diverse teaching materials, including authentic texts and multimedia resources, and designing curricula that incorporate a variety of task types. Moving beyond traditional lecture formats to incorporate project-based learning, collaborative tasks, and problem-solving activities that reflect real-world language use is crucial (Ferris, 2018). Finally, it is crucial to monitor and balance the academic workload. Care must be taken to ensure that the quantity of assignments is purposeful and does not compromise opportunities for deep learning and the provision of quality feedback, as an overwhelming workload can be a significant source of student stress and dissatisfaction (Masters, 2013).

For EFL Instructors:

As the individuals with the most direct impact on students, instructors are encouraged to focus on three key areas. First, they should proactively build a supportive and interactive classroom environment. This involves making a conscious effort to build positive rapport, such as by learning students' names, being approachable, and creating a psychologically safe atmosphere where students feel comfortable participating and making mistakes without fear of judgment (Mabkhot & Alzahrani, 2023). Second, instructors must focus on providing high-quality feedback. Feedback should be treated as a core teaching activity, ensuring it is timely, specific, constructive, and clearly articulates how students can improve. This practice is a powerful and direct way to enhance both learning and satisfaction. Lastly, instructors should explicitly connect course content to its value. By actively helping students see the relevance of what they are learning, connecting topics to their other university courses, potential career paths, and personal development goals, instructors can significantly boost both learner motivation and overall satisfaction with the course (Li & Ni, 2024).

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study aimed to develop and test an integrated model of the factors influencing satisfaction with English language learning among university students. Through a cross-sectional survey of 329 students and a rigorous quantitative analysis, the research has demonstrated that student satisfaction is a predictable outcome of various institutional and pedagogical factors. The findings revealed a clear hierarchy of influence, establishing that Teacher Competence and support, as well as curriculum and Content Quality, are the primary drivers of a satisfying learning experience. These core elements are significantly bolstered by a supportive ecosystem comprising practical Assessment and Feedback, high Learner Motivation, and a positive Learning Environment. The study contributes a validated, multidimensional model to the literature and provides clear, data-driven guidance for enhancing the quality of EFL education in university settings.

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Limitations of the Study

While this study provides valuable insights into the drivers of student satisfaction in English language learning, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. These limitations, in turn, highlight several promising avenues for future research. First, the study employed a cross-sectional design, with data collected at a single point in time. Although this design is effective for identifying statistical relationships between variables, it cannot definitively establish causality. For instance, while we found a significant positive relationship between learner motivation and satisfaction, it remains unclear whether high motivation leads to a more satisfying course experience or if a satisfying course experience subsequently boosts a student's motivation. Future research could address this by adopting a longitudinal design, collecting data at multiple points throughout a semester to track how these variables influence each other over time, thereby allowing for stronger causal inferences.

Second, the study relied exclusively on self-report measures to assess students' perceptions. Such measures can be susceptible to potential biases, including social desirability bias, where participants respond in a manner they perceive as favorable rather than entirely truthfully. Furthermore, the use of a single method (a survey) to measure all variables raises the possibility of standard method variance, which can artificially inflate the strength of the observed relationships. To build upon these findings, future studies could incorporate a multi-method approach. This might involve complementing student surveys with more objective data (e.g., attendance records, assignment grades), third-party classroom observations to assess the learning environment, or qualitative data from student interviews and focus groups to provide a richer, more triangulated understanding of the student experience.

Finally, the generalizability of the findings may be limited. The data were derived from a sample of students at a public university in Vietnam. While efforts were made to ensure diversity within this sample, the results may not be fully transferable to other institutional contexts, such as private universities, community colleges, or private language centers, which often have different student populations, resource levels, and educational models. Therefore, a crucial direction for future research is to replicate this study in various educational settings. Such comparative research would test the robustness of the current model and help identify contextual factors that may moderate the influence of key variables on student satisfaction.

Directions for Future Research

Building on the findings and limitations of the current study, several promising directions for future research emerge that can further illuminate the dynamics of student satisfaction in higher education. First, there is a clear need for more sophisticated research methodologies. Future work should employ longitudinal designs to track how student satisfaction and its drivers evolve over the course of a semester or an entire degree program. Such an approach would allow for a more robust analysis of the causal relationships suggested by this study. Furthermore, experimental or quasi-experimental studies could be designed to test the impact of specific, targeted interventions rigorously. For example, researchers could implement a new feedback training program for teachers and measure its direct effect on student satisfaction, providing clear, evidence-based guidance for pedagogical improvements.

Second, while this quantitative study successfully identified what drives satisfaction, a deeper understanding of the student experience is required. Future research should incorporate qualitative and mixed-methods approaches to explore the 'how' and 'why' behind the numbers. Methodologies such as in-depth interviews and focus groups are needed to capture the nuances of students' perspectives in their own words. A comprehensive mixed-methods study, combining the statistical power of quantitative data with the descriptive richness of qualitative insights, would provide a more holistic and deeply contextualized understanding of the student experience.

Third, the non-significant finding for Learner Autonomy suggests that its role may be more complex than initially hypothesized. This calls for the use of more sophisticated analytical models to investigate indirect and mediating effects. Future research should employ advanced techniques, such as Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), to investigate these pathways. It is plausible that autonomy does not directly impact satisfaction, but instead influences it through key mediators such as intrinsic motivation, academic self-efficacy, or tangible academic achievement. Uncovering these indirect relationships would provide a more accurate model of student success.

Finally, the scope of research should be expanded through cross-cultural and comparative studies. Replicating this study in different cultural and national contexts would be highly valuable for testing the cross-cultural validity and generalizability of the proposed model. This line of inquiry would help researchers understand how the relative importance of different satisfaction drivers varies across diverse educational systems and cultural norms, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of student satisfaction. By pursuing these avenues, the research community can continue to build a more comprehensive, nuanced, and actionable understanding of what constitutes a genuinely satisfying and practical language learning experience in higher education.

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