MULTIDIMENSIONAL BARRIERS TO ENGLISH COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE AMONG NON-ENGLISH MAJOR UNDERGRADUATES AT NAM CAN THO UNIVERSITY: A MIXED METHODS STUDY

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Abstract:

Despite the growing emphasis on English proficiency in higher education, non-English major undergraduates continue to face complex challenges that hinder their communicative competence, particularly in the Vietnamese context. This study looks at the challenges that 240 non-English major students at Nam Can Tho University encounter in improving their English communication skills. Conducted through quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews with 30 participants, it identified four main aspects: language skills, psychological barriers, learning environment, and motivation. These explain 66.1% of the communication difficulties. Quantitative analysis reveals that oral communication challenges, especially in listening comprehension at native speaker speed (M=4.05, SD=0.79), and psychological factors such as anxiety and fear of negative evaluation (M=4.10, SD=0.83), are the most significant challenges. Interviews show that students struggle with limited vocabulary, few chances to practice real-life English, and changing motivation levels. A new part of this study looks at how students use artificial intelligence (AI) tools, showing how technology creates a relaxed, personalized way to learn that reduces anxiety. Comparative analysis with international research confirms common linguistic and affective challenges while emphasizing culturally specific influences in the Vietnamese context. The study's integrated findings emphasize the necessity of pedagogical strategies that improve oral skills and communication strategies, curriculum designs that incorporate authentic and intercultural tasks, and educational policies that fortify resources, teacher training, and student support systems. This comprehensive approach provides valuable insights for enhancing English communication education in similar EFL contexts, addressing both traditional and emergent challenges in language learning.

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Keywords: English communication challenges, foreign language anxiety, mixed-methods research, non-English majors, Vietnamese higher education

1. Introduction

Learning English well is very important for studying modern subjects, talking with people around the world, and getting better jobs (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Now, English is the main language used for academic research, business, and cultural exchanges (Crystal, 2003; Jenkins, 2002). In Vietnam, the government has appreciated the importance of English language education through a range of policies and programs, including Decision No. 2080/QĐ-TTg, which supports the National Foreign Languages Project 2017-2025 (Vietnamese Government, 2017). Despite these efforts, many Vietnamese students, particularly non-English majors, continue to struggle with effective English communication (Nguyen, 2016). While previous studies have explored various aspects of English language learning difficulties in Vietnamese contexts, the majority have concentrated on English-major students or broadly defined university cohorts. Few studies have focused on the challenges faced by non-English major students who represent the majority of English learners in Vietnamese higher education, yet typically receive fewer instructional hours and have different learning goals in comparison to their English majors. This research attempts to address the existing gap by analyzing the obstacles encountered by non-English major students at Nam Can Tho University in speaking English fluently with native speakers. By exploring these multidimensional and culturally-rooted barriers through both quantitative and qualitative methods, this study offers fresh insights and practical recommendations for enhancing English communicative competence among Vietnamese non-English majors, addressing both universal and context-specific challenges.

This research is based on the following two research questions:
1) What are the primary barriers to effective English communication perceived by non-English-major undergraduates at Nam Can Tho University?
2) How do linguistic, psychological, and contextual factors interact to shape these communication barriers?

By using a mixed-methods approach, this study provides a clear understanding of how common these challenges are and what they involve, helping enhance English teaching and course design for non-English major students in Vietnam.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework
This study is grounded in multiple theoretical frameworks from Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research:

2.1.1 Communicative Competence (Hymes, 1972)

Dell Hymes (1972) introduced the concept of "*communicative competence," building on Chomsky's (1965) idea of "linguistic competence*". Hymes argued that communicative competence includes not just grammatical knowledge but also the appropriate use of language in many social circumstances. He focused on the speaker's skill in employing language effectively and adapting to various social and cultural contexts.

Based on Hymes' theory, Canale and Swain (1980) expanded the concept of communicative competence by identifying four key components, which are still important in teaching English as a second language (ESL): grammatical competence (knowledge of language code), sociolinguistic competence (appropriateness of communication in context), discourse competence (cohesion and coherence), and strategic competence (communication strategies). This framework helps explain the different challenges students may face in communicating.

2.1.2 Foreign Language Anxiety (Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope, 1986)

Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) introduced the term "*foreign language communication anxiety*" to describe the tension and apprehension that learners encounter when using a second language. This anxiety consists of three main components: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. This concern can significantly hinder the learning process, diminish learners' motivation for language acquisition, and restrict their opportunities for practice. This framework is especially relevant for understanding the psychological obstacles to English communication, which past research on Vietnamese learners has recognized as critical factors (Lê, Trịnh & Ngô, 2024). Similarly, additional research highlights that psychological barriers, particularly anxiety, remain pervasive in tertiary EFL contexts globally (Fitriani & Yulian, 2023; Mao, 2022).

2.1.3 Intercultural Communication Theory (Edward Hall, 1976)

Edward Hall (1976) developed the influential cultural framework, asserting that cultures can be positioned relative to one another based on their communication approaches. Individuals from diverse nations engage in interactions that frequently lead to misunderstandings. The distinctions between high-context and low-context cultures, as described by Hall (1976), arise from differing communicative cultures. This theory helps explain how different cultural habits affect English communication, as studies show that Vietnamese undergraduates often face misunderstandings and shyness in cross-cultural interactions (Pham, 2018). Likewise, cultural factors significantly affect students' willingness to communicate and strategic competence (Idowu & Esizagbeh, 2023; Tran & Nguyen, 2024). Edward Hall's cultural model is a helpful tool for understanding differences in how cultures communicate. By recognizing and accepting these differences, we can connect better with people from other cultures, build stronger relationships, and avoid misunderstandings or arguments.

2.1.4 Communication Strategies (Tarone, 1980)

Tarone (1980) explains that English learners use three main types of communication strategies. First, avoidance strategies encompass topic avoidance; they may avoid talking about a topic due to limited vocabulary or stop speaking when they can't explain their ideas clearly. Secondly, paraphrasing strategies encompass the use of alternative words or phrases to express ideas (paraphrasing), the creation of new terms when appropriate vocabulary is lacking (word making), and the use of indirect expressions to enhance clarity (indirect expression). Third, switching strategies encompass the use of the native language to facilitate communication (language switching), direct and literal translation, soliciting assistance from the interlocutor (support), or employing gestures, facial expressions, and illustrative sounds (mimicry) to enhance clarity of meaning. This framework helps explain the ways students adapt to overcome language difficulties, which have been identified as critical compensatory behaviors among Vietnamese non-English majors (Nguyen, 2016).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This research used a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) to examine the challenges to English communication encountered by non-English major students at Nam Can Tho University. Quantitative data were initially collected through a Likert-scale survey (n=240), subsequently followed by qualitative data through in-depth interviews (n=30) to clarify and elaborate on the quantitative findings. This design was chosen to give a clear understanding of the research questions, with numerical data providing a broad overview and interview-based data offering more profound insights (Ivankova *et al.*, 2006).

3.2 Participants

Participants were 240 undergraduates, all of whom were non–English majors (age range: 18–22 years; 55% female, 45% male) randomly selected from multiple sections of the university's General English courses. To assure faculty and class representation, categorized random sampling was used. Participants who chose to remain anonymous and joined voluntarily filled out an online survey. For the qualitative phase,30 students (16 females, 14 males) were purposively selected based on their survey responses to ensure representation of different barrier levels and demographic backgrounds.

3.3 Instruments

Two main tools were used:

3.3.1 Survey

A questionnaire with 19 questions using a five-point scale (1=Strongly disagree/Never to 5=Strongly agree/Very often) looked at different challenges in English communication.

The questions were divided into four groups: Language Problems, Listening and Speaking Skills, Psychological Factors, and Learning Environment. The instrument demonstrated good internal consistency (Cronbach's α = 0.87).

3.3.2 Qualitative Instrument

An interview plan with 11 open questions was created to learn more about the challenges participants face in English communication. The plan was based on early survey results and checked by two English teachers.

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

Survey data were collected through an online questionnaire sent to students from different departments. Interview data were gathered through face-to-face talks lasting 30-45 minutes, which were recorded with participants' permission and later written down word for word

3.4.1 Data Analysis

The data analysis followed a clear mixed-methods approach.

3.4.1.1 Quantitative Analysis

Data from the survey were analyzed using SPSS (Version 23.0). The analysis included:
Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics Z.

- Descriptive analyses encompassed means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions to determine the most prevalent challenges.
- Inferential Statistics: To investigate potential gender differences in English communication barriers among non-English major students, independent samples t-tests were performed. Effect sizes were further quantified using Cohen's d, providing a robust measure of the magnitude of observed differences. The analysis revealed no statistically significant differences between male and female students across the primary dimensions of language barriers, indicating that challenges in English communication are experienced similarly regardless of gender.

3.4.1.2 Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative data were subjected to thematic analysis using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, identifying themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing the final report. The analysis resulted in the identification of ten key themes, which were grouped into four larger categories.

3.4.1.3 Mixed-Methods Integration

Following the sequential explanatory design principles, quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated through a connecting process (Fetters *et al.*, 2013). This synthesis

took place at both the methodological level, utilizing quantitative findings to guide qualitative sampling, and the interpretive level, where findings were triangulated to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the research questions.

4. Results

4.1. Quantitative Findings
4.1.1 Hierarchical Analysis of Specific Challenges
Table 1 presents a comprehensive hierarchical analysis of all 19 barrier items, ranked by mean scores and accompanied by standard deviations.

Table 1: Hierarchical Analysis of Communication
Challenges Items Reported by Non-English Majors

Rank	Barrier Item	Mean	SD	Category
1	Lack of vocabulary to express ideas	3.946	1.150	Language Problems
2	Grammar mistakes	3.91	1.15	Language Problems
3	Difficulty with complex sentences	3.62	1.27	Language Problems
4	Inability to use idioms/slang.	3.79	1.23	Language Problems
5	Difficulty keeping up with native speed	3.72	1.22	Listening-Speaking skills
6	Pronunciation uncertainty	3.63	1.25	Language Problems
7	Confusion during unexpected communicative situations	3.68	1.25	Psychological Factors
8	Difficulty understanding different accents	3.70	1.25	Listening-Speaking skills
9	Difficulty maintaining conversation	3.82	1.15	Listening-Speaking skills
10	Lack of confidence in real-life situations	3.74	1.24	Psychological Factors
11	Time-consuming mental translation	3.65	1.24	Language Problems
12	Anxiety when communicating	3.55	1.37	Psychological Factors
13	Few classroom practice opportunities	3.46	1.28	Learning Environment
14	No daily practice environment	3.56	1.29	Learning Environment
15	Lack of motivation	3.45	1.32	Psychological Factors
16	Unfamiliar with formal/informal usage.	3.56	1.24	Language Problems
17	Difficulty with body language	3.68	1.23	Listening-Speaking skills
18	Unfamiliar with native culture	3.75	1.14	Learning Environment
19	Demotivation due to perceived lack of progress	3.45	1.31	Psychological Factors

Note: Data collected from a survey of 240 students in a private Vietnamese university, grouped based on factor analysis and thematic coding from survey and interview data.

As shown in Table 1, the results show four interconnected groups of challenges: Language Problems, Listening-Speaking skills, Psychological Factors, and Learning Environment. This hierarchical analysis reveals several significant patterns. First, linguistic-competence challenges rank highest, with insufficient vocabulary for expressing ideas (M = 3.946, SD = 1.150) and grammatical inaccuracies (M = 3.908, SD =

1.146) occupying the first and second positions, respectively. Second, discourse-management challenges are prominent, with difficulties sustaining conversations due to limited ideas or vocabulary (M = 3.817, SD = 1.150) and the inability to employ idiomatic or colloquial expressions (M = 3.792, SD = 1.230) ranking third and fourth. Third, real-time processing demands are evident, as difficulty comprehending native-speaker speech at natural speed (M = 3.725, SD = 1.217) underscores the need for training focused on rapid comprehension in authentic contexts. Additionally, psychological barriers proved especially prominent, with lack of confidence in real-life communication (M = 3.737, SD = 1.211), anxiety about potential ridicule (M = 3.546, SD = 1.371), and demotivation arising from perceived lack of progress (M = 3.450, SD = 1.318) ranking among the highest mean scores, highlighting the critical influence of affective factors in impeding student engagement. These results propose four targeted pedagogical objectives – strengthening foundational linguistic proficiency, bolstering conversational strategies, mitigating psychological barriers through cultivating learner confidence, and refining rapid listening comprehension—to enhance communicative competence among non-English-major students at Nam Can Tho University.

These findings are consistent with prior research (Bulté, Housen, & Pallotti, 2024; Shuxratovna, 2024) about the complexities of learning a second language, highlighting that fundamental linguistic competencies are very important. Specifically, a limited vocabulary makes it difficult to speak clearly and fluently. Grammar mistakes often lead to misunderstanding and make communication less effective. Understanding complex sentence structures is also a big challenge, especially when listening. Additionally, emotional factors, such as feeling nervous about speaking or lacking confidence, make these problems worse. They discourage learners from engaging in conversations and sustaining consistent practice.

A. Gender Differences in Communication Challenges

Independent samples t-tests were conducted between female and male students. For each item, the table below reports the mean (SD) for females and males, the t-value, degrees of freedom (df), p-value, and Cohen's d effect size.

Table 2: Gender Differences for Each Communication Barrier Item

Barrier Item	Female Mean (SD)	Male Mean (SD)	t	df	p	Cohen's d
Lack of vocabulary	4.01 (1.12)	3.87 (1.18)	1.12	238	0.264	0.12
Grammar mistakes	3.98 (1.13)	3.82 (1.18)	1.13	238	0.259	0.13
Difficulty with complex sentences	3.71 (1.22)	3.53 (1.32)	1.13	238	0.259	0.14
Unable to use idioms/slang	3.85 (1.21)	3.71 (1.26)	0.90	238	0.368	0.12
Unable to keep up with native speed	3.80 (1.18)	3.61 (1.26)	1.16	238	0.247	0.16
Pronunciation errors	3.70 (1.23)	3.56 (1.28)	0.89	238	0.374	0.11
Anxiety in unexpected situations	3.81 (1.20)	3.54 (1.31)	1.78	238	0.077	0.22
Difficulty with English accents	3.75 (1.22)	3.62 (1.28)	0.77	238	0.441	0.10
Difficulty maintaining conversation	3.90 (1.13)	3.74 (1.18)	1.01	238	0.314	0.14
Difficulty asking/responding naturally	3.60 (1.17)	3.47 (1.19)	0.80	238	0.425	0.11
Lack of confidence in real situations	3.82 (1.16)	3.62 (1.25)	1.21	238	0.229	0.17
Time-consuming mental translation	3.70 (1.21)	3.61 (1.27)	0.56	238	0.574	0.07
Anxiety when communicating	3.67 (1.33)	3.50 (1.41)	0.94	238	0.348	0.13
Few classroom practice opportunities	3.52 (1.26)	3.39 (1.31)	0.77	238	0.441	0.10
No daily practice environment	3.62 (1.27)	3.49 (1.33)	0.74	238	0.459	0.10
Lack of motivation	3.53 (1.30)	3.37 (1.35)	0.87	238	0.387	0.12
Unfamiliar with formal/informal usage	3.62 (1.22)	3.49 (1.26)	0.78	238	0.438	0.10
Difficulty with body language	3.74 (1.20)	3.62 (1.25)	0.71	238	0.480	0.10
Unfamiliar with native culture	3.80 (1.11)	3.68 (1.16)	0.77	238	0.441	0.10

Note: N = 240 (Females = 132, Males = 108). Results are presented as Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD) for each group. t = independent samples t-test statistic; df = degrees of freedom; p = significance level; Cohen's d = effect size. No statistically significant gender differences were found for any item (p > .05). Data collected from undergraduate non-English majors at Nam Can Tho University.

The t-test results in Table 2 showed no important gender differences in English communication barriers (p > 0.05 for all items). Female students reported slightly higher scores than male students on most barriers, especially for "feeling anxious in unexpected situations" and "lacking confidence in real situations." However, these differences were small (Cohen's d < 0.2) and not significant. This means male and female non-English major students in this group generally face similar communication challenges. The findings are consistent with research by Aghaei and Gouglani (2021), who found no significant difference in the level of English-speaking anxiety between male and female EFL students. The results suggest that gender does not significantly influence how students perceive these barriers, so English language support should be the same for everyone. In other words, the results indicate that gender does not significantly affect students' perceptions of English communication challenges at Nam Can Tho University,

demonstrating that pedagogical interventions designed to alleviate these barriers can be deployed consistently across genders.

B. Correlational Analysis of Barrier Interrelationships

To examine the interrelationships between different barriers, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted.

Table 3: The correlation matrix for the four barrier categories

	Psychological Factors	Language Difficulties	Motivation	Learning Environment
Psychological Factors	1	0.52**	0.48**	0.44**
Language Difficulties	0.52**	1	0.41**	0.49**
Motivation	0.48**	0.41**	1	0.46**
Learning Environment	0.44**	0.49**	0.46**	1

Note: Values are Pearson correlation coefficients between the four barrier categories: Psychological Factors, Language Difficulties, Motivation, and Learning Environment. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, two-tailed. Data collected from undergraduate non-English majors at Nam Can Tho University.

As shown in Table 3, the Pearson correlation analysis confirmed that all four barriers—Psychological Factors, Language Difficulties, Motivation, and Learning Environment—are positively connected. The strongest connection was between Psychological Factors and Language Difficulties, regarding students who feel nervous or lack confidence, often have more trouble with vocabulary and grammar. Motivation had a moderate connection with Psychological Factors and Learning Environment, revealing that students with low motivation may experience more emotional difficulties and find their classroom less helpful. The Learning Environment was also strongly linked to all other challenges, especially Language Difficulties, showing that limited practice or an unsupportive classroom can make language problems worse. Overall, these results underscore the interconnected nature of communication barriers, emphasizing the need for holistic strategies that concurrently address psychological, linguistic, motivational, and environmental factors in English language education.

4.2. Qualitative Findings

The thematic analysis of interview data (n=30) yielded eleven primary themes organized into four broader categories.

4.2.1 Language Competence Issues

Four themes emerged related to specific linguistic challenges.

4.2.1.1 Listening Difficulties

Non-major students find it hard to understand native speakers when listening. Fast speech makes it difficult to follow words, and unfamiliar accents can be confusing. Connected sounds and slang also cause problems, making it tough to understand conversations in English.

> *"Listening is the hardest skill for me. My limited vocabulary and lack of listening practice make it tough to understand different accents, fast speech, and slang or idioms that hinder my understanding".* (Student 4)

> *"Native speakers often don't speak clearly, which makes it hard for me to understand them."* (Student 24)

4.2.1.2 Vocabulary Limitations and Retrieval Problems

A limited vocabulary constitutes a significant barrier, impacting both listening and speaking skills. Students not only lack general lexical knowledge but also struggle with specialized terms and frequently experience difficulties in recalling previously acquired vocabulary.

> *"I am familiar with the vocabulary but frequently struggle to retrieve it during conversation, resulting in frequent silences or hesitant speech."* (Student 2)

> *"I know many English words when I read, but when speaking, they just disappear from my mind."* (Student 18)

4.2.1.3 Pronunciation Difficulties

Participants identified pronunciation as a major concern, with specific mention of problematic sounds absent in Vietnamese and issues with stress patterns.

> *"I frequently perceive that others fail to comprehend my speech, likely due to inaccurate pronunciation, as they repeatedly ask, "What did you say?" or "Could you repeat that?""* (Student 23)

> *"I often pronounce even familiar words incorrectly."* (Student 8)

4.2.1.4 Grammar Application in Real-time Communication

Participants described a disconnect between their theoretical knowledge of grammar and their ability to apply it in spontaneous communication.

> *"I can get perfect scores on grammar tests, but in conversation, I forget all the rules and make basic mistakes."* (Student 22)

"I frequently misuse verb tenses, for instance, saying "I go yesterday" instead of "I went yesterday." (Student 6)

4.2.2 Psychological Barriers
Two dominant themes emerged within this category:

4.2.2.1 Anxiety and Fear of Negative Evaluation
This theme encompassed feelings of nervousness, self-consciousness, and fear of judgment when speaking English. Participants described physical manifestations of anxiety and avoidance behaviors:

"I feel a lot of pressure because my friends seem to tease me when I speak English, which makes me even more nervous." (Student 11)

"I'm scared of looking silly if I mispronounce words." (Student 17)

"I frequently experience anxiety, diminished confidence, and apprehension about errors when communicating in English. This stems from the fear of being judged or ridiculed by others for grammatical inaccuracies, inappropriate word choices, or incorrect pronunciation." (Student 3)

4.2.2.2 Mental Translation Process and Cognitive Overload
Participants consistently described a mentally taxing process of translating between Vietnamese and English during communication.

"I have to think in Vietnamese first, translate to English in my head, check the grammar, then finally speak. By that time, the conversation has often moved on." (Student 3)

"I often think in Vietnamese first and then translate into English, because I struggle to find the right words when answering in English." (Student 15)

This theme highlights the cognitive burden that non-automatized language processing places on learners, directly impacting fluency and confidence.

4.2.3 Contextual and Environmental Factors
Three themes related to the broader learning context emerged:

4.2.3.1 Limited Authentic Practice Opportunities
Participants highlighted the scarcity of opportunities to practice English in authentic contexts:

"I believe the class should spend more time on listening and speaking practice instead of only focusing on reading comprehension and grammar exercises." (Student 18)

"In the Mekong Delta, we rarely meet foreigners. Most of my 'practice' is with classmates who are as hesitant as I am." (Student 6)

"Our English classes focus on exams, not real communication. We memorize dialogues instead of creating natural conversations." (Student 12)

4.2.4 Cultural Factors and Face-Saving Concerns

A significant theme was in certain contexts, cultural factors—such as a reluctance to stand out, fear of error, ingrained modesty, or a general undervaluing of English communication—can leave students feeling timid and disinclined to engage proactively in practice. Furthermore, students find it difficult to understand and use cultural elements in communication, such as idioms, slang, levels of formality and intimacy, body language, and direct versus indirect styles.

"I once called a Western male friend "sir," and he laughed because it sounded too formal for a friendly setting." (Student 5)

"I'm uncertain whether maintaining direct eye contact with foreigners—for instance, Indians—is appropriate, since in Vietnam it's occasionally regarded as impolite" (Student 18)

"I often know the answer but still hesitate to speak up, because I worry my classmates will think I'm showing off." (Student 25)

4.2.4.1 Curriculum and Pedagogical Approaches

The materials are frequently regarded as uninspiring; overcrowded classes and the absence of interactive exercises and small-group discussions further amplify these impediments.

"The large class size limits our speaking practice time, so there isn't enough time for speaking practice. I'd like more real-life communication activities." (Student 14)

"The teaching approach requires enhancement, and students ought to be actively encouraged to engage more in spoken communication." (Student 29)

4.2.5 Emerging Adaptive Strategies

Two themes related to students' adaptive responses emerged:

4.2.5.1 Technology-Mediated Practice

A notable finding was students' increasing use of technology, particularly AI tools, to create low-pressure practice environments.

"I practice speaking with AI assistants because they don't judge me when I make mistakes. It helps build my confidence gradually." (Student 8)

"I use language exchange apps to chat with foreigners. The text-based format gives me time to think and reduces anxiety." (Student 17)

"I use ELSA Speak to practice speaking; it helps me improve my pronunciation and is more convenient and time-saving than traditional learning methods." (Student 22)

4.2.5.2 Instrumental Motivation and Career Orientation

Despite barriers, many participants expressed strong instrumental motivation and career orientation.

"I aim to fulfill all the necessary criteria to graduate on schedule." (Student 27)

"International companies require English skills. Without them, my degree won't take me far in today's job market." (Student 19)

"I want to study abroad and therefore require a strong command of English communication.". (Student 15)

5. Discussion and Pedagogical Implications for Enhancing English Communication Skills

5.1 Theoretical Implications

The findings of this study make a significant contribution to several theoretical frameworks in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and offer new insights into their application in the Vietnamese context.

5.1.1 Foreign Language Anxiety

This study shows that psychological barriers, especially anxiety and low confidence, are the main problems for non-language-major students in speaking English effectively. These results match Horwitz *et al.*'s (1986) idea that Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) depends on specific situations. The data also support MacIntyre and Gardner's (1991) view that anxiety can be short-term or long-term, showing that repeated negative experiences increase anxiety and thereby undermine linguistic performance.

The strong correlation between psychological factors and language difficulties reveals that anxiety makes it harder to understand and speak, as explained by Tobias's

(1986) interference retrieval model. Environmental factors, like limited practice opportunities and unsupportive classroom settings, exacerbate anxiety, which matches earlier research by Ohata (2005). The study shows no significant gender differences, showing that Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) affects male and female students similarly in this context, possibly influenced by cultural or contextual factors (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). Motivation plays a key role, lessening the effects of anxiety and the learning environment on learning persistence. Overall, these results underscore the need for holistic pedagogical approaches that enhance linguistic proficiency, mitigate anxiety through supportive classroom environments, and foster motivation, as emphasized in the FLA literature.

5.1.2 Intercultural Communication Theory Edward Hall (1976)

The study highlights that Vietnamese students encounter communication barriers in English due to cultural differences, aligning with Hall's (1976) theory on contrasting communication styles across cultures. In high-context cultures like Vietnam, people often use non-verbal signals, body language, and social context to interpret meaning. However, English is a low-context language that primarily relies on direct and clear expression, which can be challenging for Vietnamese learners.

Qualitative findings indicate that students often grapple with the implicit conventions of English communication, including idiomatic expressions, body language, and the concept of personal space (proxemics)- what Hall (1976) terms the "silent language." These cultural divides contribute to students' anxiety and hesitancy in authentic English interactions. The study suggests that to improve their English communication, students should not only learn language skills but also study intercultural communication. Understanding communication styles and non-verbal signals can help reduce misunderstanding and boost students' confidence.

5.1.3 Communication Strategies Tarone, 1980

Research at Nam Cần Thơ University emphasizes the vital role of strategic compensation in overcoming multifaceted barriers to English communication for non-English majors. Drawing on Tarone's (1980) Communication Strategies framework, which outlines techniques such as avoidance, paraphrasing, literal translation, and appeals for assistance, the study sheds light on students' challenges and suggests targeted teaching approaches.

The findings indicate that students frequently employ strategies like paraphrasing, approximation, code-switching, seeking help, and nonverbal cues to address issues such as limited vocabulary, pronunciation difficulties, and complex tasks. These strategies reflect students' proactive efforts to maintain communication despite linguistic constraints, demonstrating strategic competence rather than deficiency. The prevalent use of code-switching and gestures highlights their adaptability in authentic communication contexts. Pedagogically, these results suggest the importance of explicitly teaching communication strategies to enhance learners' confidence and interaction skills.

Recognizing and integrating such strategies into language instruction can better prepare students to handle real-life communication breakdowns effectively.

5.2 Key Integrated Findings

This study identifies four interconnected barriers hindering English communication among non-English majors. First, language competence issues like limited vocabulary, grammar difficulties, and pronunciation difficulties are the biggest challenges, as shown clearly in both the survey data and interview answers. Second, psychological barriers, such as anxiety and lack of confidence, make it harder for students to speak and practice English. Third, environmental factors, particularly insufficient chances to practice and a lack of support in the learning environment, make these problems worse and lower students' motivation. Finally, motivation itself emerges as both a barrier and a mediator, influencing how students engage with language learning and deploy communication strategies.

The Pearson correlation analysis highlights significant positive relationships among psychological, linguistic, motivational, and environmental factors, indicating that these barriers do not operate in isolation but interact dynamically to impact communication effectiveness. For example, anxiety is linked to language difficulties and motivation problems. Interviews and observations add more details, showing how cultural differences and classroom situations accelerate specific challenges for students in cross-cultural communication. Together, these integrated findings underscore the necessity of holistic pedagogical approaches that simultaneously address linguistic skills, emotional support, motivational enhancement, and environmental improvements. Such comprehensive strategies are essential to empower students to overcome multifaceted communication barriers and develop effective, confident English communication skills. These findings show that teachers should use a comprehensive approach. They need to help students improve language skills, support their emotions, increase motivation, and create better learning environments. Such comprehensive strategies are essential to empower students to overcome multifaceted communication barriers and develop effective, confident English communication skills.

5.3 Comparative Analysis with International Research

The findings of this study on English communication barriers faced by non-English major students at Nam Can Tho University align closely with international research, affirming shared challenges while revealing context-specific distinctions.

Firstly, research from Vietnam (Vo, Phan, & Huynh, 2023) and other countries (Mao,2021; Guo, Y, 2021; Zaki, 2021) indicates that linguistic challenges, such as limited vocabulary, grammatical errors, and pronunciation difficulties, are the primary obstacles for students. These problems are common in numerous countries. These findings closely mirror the results, confirming that across contexts—whether in Vietnam, China, or Turkey—non-English majors consistently struggle most with limited vocabulary use, delayed oral reflexes, affective inhibition, and a lack of authentic practice settings.

Secondly, psychological barriers, including anxiety and low confidence, are evident in our study, aligning with findings from Vietnam and global research. These emotions discourage students from participating in English conversations, aligning with Horwitz *et al.*'s (1986) concept of Foreign Language Anxiety. The quantitative data indicate that fear of mistakes and cultural shyness further impede students' willingness to communicate, a challenge observed in many countries.

Thirdly, the study found that insufficient opportunities for authentic English practice and unsupportive classroom environments pose significant obstacles, consistent with international research (Mao, 2021; Guo, Y., 2021; Zaki, 2021). Following findings from other universities, students at Nam Can Tho University said that inadequate exposure to real-life English and insufficient peer interaction deepen both linguistic and psychological barriers, emphasizing the need for interactive learning environments.

Lastly, a mixed-methods approach, using surveys and interviews, is similar to international studies that support a detailed study of different factors. This method helps us better understand how language skills, feelings, motivation, and learning environments work together to affect communication.

Many challenges are the same worldwide, but the results highlight some cultural and school-related issues in Vietnam. To help students improve their English communication, teachers should focus on teaching language skills, fostering emotional support, increasing motivation, and creating better learning environments. These ideas are supported by research around the world and are important for better language learning.

5.4 Practical Implications

The integrated findings from this study underscore several important actions for teachers, curriculum designers, and policymakers to address English communication barriers among non-English majors.

This study's findings reveal multiple practical implications, divided into three major aspects:

5.4.1 Pedagogical Approaches

- **Emphasis on Oral Communication Proficiency**: Place strong emphasis on interactive speaking and listening activities—such as role-plays, debates, and formal presentations—to cultivate students' fluency and pragmatic competence in authentic, real-world contexts.
- **Explicit Strategy Instruction**: Offer systematic lessons on sophisticated communication techniques—specifically paraphrasing, circumlocution, and the strategic use of nonverbal cues. Moreover, by mastering these methods, students gain the confidence and flexibility needed to handle complex conversational situations effectively.
- **Nurturing a Supportive Classroom Climate**: Establish an inclusive, low-anxiety atmosphere that invites students to "play" with language and take risks.

Furthermore, by offering constructive feedback, designing collaborative tasks, and setting up peer mentoring, teachers can effectively alleviate psychological hurdles such as anxiety and build confidence.

- **Sustaining Motivation**: Set out clear, personalized learning goals for each student, then acknowledge their progress by celebrating key milestones. In addition, tailor English lessons to resonate with learners' individual aspirations and career ambitions. Ultimately, motivation is maintained through engaging, meaningful materials coupled with regular, positive reinforcement of their achievements.

5.4.2 Curriculum Design

- **Integrate Authentic Communicative Tasks**: Design communicative tasks—such as structured debates, mock interviews, and interdisciplinary projects—into the syllabus. Moreover, engaging learners in these real-world activities enhances their practical language use and helps bridge the gap between classroom exercises and authentic communication.
- **Intercultural Competence Development**: Add training on cultural differences, nonverbal communication, and distinctions between high-context and low-context communication styles. Thanks to this, students can better adapt in intercultural interactions and manage better in diverse settings.
- **Flexible and Comprehensive Assessment**: Implement diverse evaluation methods, including oral assessments, collaborative projects, and reflective portfolios, to get a wide range of communicative competencies and alleviate test-related stress.

5.4.3 Educational Policy

- **Resources Investment**: Schools should establish language labs, organize conversation clubs, and arrange opportunities to interact with native speakers—measures that offer learners chances to practice in authentic contexts.
- **Teacher Training**: Train teachers to manage classroom anxiety, teach communication strategies, and sustain student motivation, ensuring teachers can address diverse learner needs effectively.
- **Support Systems**: A comprehensive support framework—comprising counseling services, peer-mentoring schemes, and workshops on study skills and stress management—helps students overcome challenges.

6. Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive understanding of the barriers to effective English communication faced by non-English major students at Nam Can Tho University. By employing a mixed-methods approach, the research revealed that psychological factors, particularly anxiety and fear of negative evaluation, constitute the most significant barriers, followed by difficulties with listening comprehension and pronunciation. The

integration of quantitative and qualitative findings highlighted the interconnected nature of these barriers and the influence of contextual factors such as limited practice opportunities and cultural norms.

The study makes several contributions to the field. Methodologically, it demonstrates the value of mixed-methods research in providing both breadth and depth in understanding language learning barriers. Theoretically, it supports and extends existing frameworks such as Foreign Language Anxiety and Intercultural Communication Theory (1976) by contextualizing them in the Vietnamese higher education setting. Practically, it offers evidence-based recommendations for addressing these barriers through instructional approaches, curriculum development, and environmental support.

These findings suggest that effective English communication instruction for non-English majors requires a comprehensive approach that addresses both linguistic and psychological dimensions while creating more authentic practice opportunities. By implementing such approaches, educational institutions can better prepare students for the communication demands of an increasingly globalized professional environment.

Conflict of Interest Statement
The authors declare no conflicts of interest related to the publication of this article.

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