

English Proficiency as Strategic Human Capital: Implications for Training, Talent Recruitment, and Workforce Performance among Vietnamese International Students

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Abstract

English proficiency is increasingly treated as a form of strategic human capital in internationally oriented labor markets, particularly in sectors requiring frequent cross-cultural communication, such as hospitality, tourism, health care, and multinational services. This study examines the relationships among English language proficiency, study-destination choice, academic performance, and self-reported work performance among Vietnamese students enrolled in English-taught degree programs. It further considers how the findings may inform human resource development, language-sensitive recruitment, and international talent management. Using a quantitative cross-sectional design and purposive snowball sampling, questionnaire data were collected from 171 Vietnamese undergraduate and postgraduate students studying in English-taught programs across 23 study destinations. English proficiency was assessed through self-reported listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities, while performance comprised academic performance and self-reported work performance among respondents who reported current or recent work experience. The results indicate that English proficiency was positively associated with the choice of an English-speaking study destination and with both academic and work performance. Students with higher levels of English proficiency were approximately 3.5 times more likely to study in an English-speaking country. However, study-destination choice was not significantly associated with either academic or work performance and did not moderate the relationships between English proficiency and the two performance outcomes. These findings suggest that individual language capability may be more consequential for performance than the English-speaking status of the study destination itself. From

an HRM perspective, English proficiency can be interpreted as developable human capital that supports workplace communication, learning readiness, international mobility, and career development. Adult-learning principles, including experiential learning, self-direction, problem-centered instruction, and immediate applicability, provide a useful foundation for designing occupation-specific language development programs. The study concludes with implications for universities, employers, and HR practitioners involved in training, recruiting, and developing internationally mobile talent.

Keywords

English Language Proficiency, Strategic Human Capital, Human Resource Development, International Talent Management, Adult Learning, Academic Performance, Work Performance, Study-Destination Choice

1. Introduction

The rapid development of globalization and internationalization has strengthened connections among individuals, educational institutions, and organizations across national and cultural boundaries. Increasing numbers of young people, particularly members of Generation Z, seek opportunities to travel, study abroad, participate in English-taught degree programs, and gain international work experience. As a result, cross-cultural learning and international education have become important pathways for developing the competencies required in increasingly globalized labor markets.

This trend is relevant not only to higher education but also to human resource management. International students represent a potential source of globally mobile talent for multinational corporations and internationally oriented industries, including hospitality, tourism, health care, and professional services. Their language proficiency, international exposure, academic preparation, and work experience may influence their employability, career development, and subsequent workplace performance. From an HRM perspective, English proficiency may therefore be viewed as a form of developable linguistic human capital that supports communication, learning, international mobility, and access to professional opportunities. Recent research has shown that English-language competence may contribute to career encouragement, internal social-capital development, promotion, wage growth, and career satisfaction in international organizational settings (Peltokorpi, 2023). However, English proficiency should not be regarded as the sole determinant of employability or performance because its value also depends on professional knowledge, work experience, interpersonal competencies, and organizational context (Hiew et al., 2021). Recent studies have further suggested that self-assessed language proficiency contributes to international graduates' employability primarily when combined with discipline-specific competencies, experiential learning, and workplace communication skills rather than functioning as an

independent predictor of career success.

English proficiency may also influence students' choice of study destination. Students with stronger English abilities may be more willing to pursue education in English-speaking study destinations, whereas others may select English-taught programs in destinations where English is not the primary societal language or in their home country. Previous research has nevertheless produced mixed findings regarding the relationship between English proficiency and academic performance. [Arsad et al. \(2011\)](#) found that English-language courses had little direct effect on overall academic performance, while [Addow et al. \(2014\)](#) reported only a weak relationship between English proficiency and academic achievement. In addition, many international students engage in internships or part-time employment during their studies. Their academic and work performance may therefore influence their career preparation and employment prospects after graduation. Despite this practical importance, relatively few studies have examined academic performance and workplace performance simultaneously within an integrated HRM framework.

Despite the growing importance of English proficiency in international education and employment, several gaps remain. Previous studies have primarily examined academic achievement, while fewer have considered academic and work performance within the same research model. Research has also given limited attention to differences between English-speaking and non-English-speaking study destinations and to whether destination choice changes the relationship between language proficiency and performance. Moreover, previous research has rarely examined whether English proficiency remains associated with performance after accounting for important background characteristics, such as study level, financial support, work experience, and destination context. Accordingly, this study examines the relationships among English proficiency, study-destination choice, academic performance, and work performance among Vietnamese students enrolled in English-taught degree programs. It also tests whether study-destination choice moderates the relationship between language proficiency and performance. By linking international education with human capital development and workforce outcomes, the study offers implications for students, higher-education institutions, employers, and HR professionals involved in training and international talent development.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. English Language Proficiency as Linguistic Human Capital

English language proficiency is a multidimensional capability involving the effective use of linguistic knowledge and communication skills in specific social, educational, and occupational contexts. [Canales \(1994\)](#) described language proficiency as the coordinated use of discrete factors, including vocabulary, discourse structure, grammar, and nonverbal communication, to convey meaning within a particular context. This definition emphasizes that proficiency is not limited to

knowledge of individual words or grammatical rules; rather, it involves the integration of multiple competencies required to communicate effectively.

Drennan and Rohde (2002) found that English proficiency may be particularly relevant to advanced subjects requiring problem-solving, interpretation, and the application of conceptual knowledge. Divi et al. (2007) defined limited English proficiency as an individual's restricted ability to speak, read, write, or understand English at a level that enables effective interaction. Although their research focused on health care, the definition has wider relevance because ineffective language communication may hinder the accurate exchange of information in educational institutions, workplaces, and service organizations.

Thang et al. (2011) found that students who recognize the importance of English are more likely to demonstrate stronger motivation to achieve higher grades and pursue further education. Motivation is particularly relevant because language proficiency is not necessarily a fixed personal characteristic. It can be developed through formal education, self-directed learning, workplace experience, international exposure, and continuing training. From an HRM perspective, English competence can therefore be regarded as a form of linguistic human capital: a developable capability that may improve an individual's access to information, participation in organizational communication, international mobility, employability, and career development.

The University of Southern Queensland defined English proficiency as students' ability to use English to communicate meaning in written and spoken contexts while pursuing their academic programs. Similarly, the College of Nurses of Ontario emphasized the ability to understand and communicate effectively in both oral and written forms. These definitions indicate that proficiency should be evaluated in relation to individuals' ability to perform meaningful tasks rather than merely their knowledge of isolated linguistic structures.

One of the widely recognized frameworks for describing and evaluating language proficiency is the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages Proficiency Guidelines. The guidelines describe functional characteristics across four major language skills: speaking, writing, reading, and listening. These four skills are also relevant to academic and organizational performance. Listening enables students and employees to understand lectures, instructions, meetings, and interpersonal communication. Speaking supports participation, teamwork, presentations, customer interaction, and knowledge sharing. Reading allows individuals to access textbooks, reports, technical materials, and organizational documents, while writing facilitates the preparation of assignments, reports, correspondence, and other professional communications.

More recent research has strengthened the interpretation of English proficiency as human capital with potential career value. Peltokorpi (2023) applied human capital and upward-mobility theories to employees working in foreign subsidiaries in Japan. The results showed that English competence was positively associated with career encouragement, social-capital development, promotion, wage growth,

and career satisfaction. English proficiency may therefore help employees gain access to influential organizational relationships and career-development opportunities, particularly in multinational or internationally oriented workplaces. However, its value depends on opportunities to apply the competence and on organizational practices that recognize and support employees' language capabilities. Recent human resource development research further suggests that language proficiency contributes to employability primarily through its interaction with professional competencies, experiential learning, and workplace communication rather than functioning as an isolated capability. English proficiency therefore represents a strategic but complementary component of human capital that supports learning transfer, career adaptability, and international employability.

The organizational value of language proficiency may be especially important in hospitality, tourism, health care, international education, multinational services, and other sectors characterized by frequent intercultural interaction. In these settings, employees may need to communicate with international customers, patients, supervisors, colleagues, and external partners. Language competence may influence the clarity of information exchange, service quality, confidence in cross-cultural interaction, and access to professional knowledge. Accordingly, English proficiency is treated in this study as a multidimensional individual capability comprising listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills.

2.2. Choice of Study Destinations

Study-destination choice refers to the process through which prospective students select the country, city, institution, or academic program in which they will pursue higher education. The concept has been defined and operationalized in several ways. Some studies classify destinations according to geographical regions or continents, while others emphasize the selection of a specific country or university. Another common distinction is between studying abroad and remaining in the home country.

Salisbury et al. (2013) defined overseas study as a process in which students enroll at a university in a foreign country, undertake credit-bearing courses, and experience the culture of the host society through residence with a host family, in university accommodation, or with other students. Study-abroad programs may range from short-term experiences lasting several weeks to full-degree programs lasting several years. These programs expose students to different educational systems, languages, cultures, social relationships, and professional environments.

Choice of study destination is generally understood as a multidimensional decision. Students may consider program cost, tuition fees, living expenses, institutional reputation, academic quality, program duration, scholarship opportunities, cultural attractions, safety, family influence, immigration regulations, employment opportunities, and the language of instruction. The selection of a destination may therefore reflect an assessment of both the anticipated benefits and the financial, linguistic, cultural, and psychological costs associated with international mo-

bility.

Recent research continues to show that destination choice depends on individual characteristics and features of the destination. He et al. (2022) found that international students' university choices were influenced by institutional image, perceived educational quality, country characteristics, social influence, and personal considerations. Language familiarity may reduce uncertainty and facilitate students' anticipated adjustment to academic and social life. Students may therefore prefer destinations where they expect to communicate effectively and successfully complete their studies.

Ovchinnikova et al. (2024) showed that students who evaluated their foreign-language ability as advanced were more likely to aspire to study abroad. It is found that the probability of choosing a particular country was substantially greater when students knew one of the country's official languages. Language proficiency is not merely an outcome of international mobility, it may also precede and shape the decision to participate in international education. These findings also suggest that destination choice reflects not only linguistic capability but also students' assessment of financial resources, career opportunities, and institutional attractiveness. Consequently, the study destination should be interpreted as a multidimensional educational decision rather than a purely language-driven choice.

In this research, study-destination choice is classified into two categories: English-speaking destinations and non-English-speaking destinations. This categorization is appropriate because English-taught degree programs are increasingly available not only in countries where English is the dominant language but also in countries where another language is used in the wider society. Students may therefore receive an English-medium education while experiencing different degrees of English exposure in their daily, social, and occupational environments.

2.3. Relationship between English Language Proficiency and Choice of Study Destinations

The push-pull framework has frequently been used to explain international students' destination choices. Push factors arise from conditions in the home country that encourage students to pursue education elsewhere, whereas pull factors are characteristics of destination countries or institutions that attract international students. Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) found that social and economic conditions in the home country may push students toward overseas education, while the reputation, educational quality, social environment, and perceived opportunities of host countries may pull students toward particular destinations. Language proficiency may operate within both sets of factors because it can expand or restrict the destinations that students perceive as accessible.

Williams (2005) found that students who studied overseas demonstrated greater changes in intercultural communication skills than students who remained on their home campuses. Exposure to culturally diverse environments was also an important predictor of intercultural communication competence. These

anticipated developmental benefits may motivate students to select destinations offering linguistic and cultural immersion.

Salisbury et al. (2008) examined the influence of human, social, financial, and cultural capital on students' intentions to study abroad. Their findings suggested that participation in international education depends partly on the resources available to students. Language proficiency represents one such resource because students with stronger language skills may perceive fewer communication barriers and greater confidence in their ability to manage academic and daily-life demands.

Kasravi (2009) similarly argued that personal and social factors substantially affect students' decisions to study abroad. Eder et al. (2010) identified language, career development, and personal growth as important push factors, while geographical characteristics, university-related considerations, and host-country culture operated as pull factors. Nyaupane et al. (2010) further showed that academic motivations and social relationships influence students' destination choices. Azmat et al. (2013) extended the push-pull perspective by emphasizing international students' aspirations and expectations when selecting a destination.

Language competence may influence destination choice through several mechanisms. First, students with stronger English proficiency may feel more capable of participating in lectures, preparing assignments, communicating with instructors, and completing administrative requirements in English-speaking environments. Second, proficiency may reduce anticipated adjustment costs and the fear of social isolation. Third, students may believe that studying in an English-speaking destination will further strengthen their language skills and improve future employment opportunities. Finally, students with higher English proficiency may have access to a wider range of universities and programs because they are better able to satisfy language-admission requirements.

Ovchinnikova et al. (2024) provided recent empirical support for these arguments. Using survey data from higher-education students in Belgium and the Netherlands, they found that advanced foreign-language proficiency and frequent language use were associated with stronger aspirations to study abroad. Students were also more likely to choose destinations where they were familiar with an official language. This evidence reinforces the proposition that language competence functions as both a personal resource and a facilitating condition in international education decisions.

In the present study, English proficiency reflects students' perceived ability to succeed in English-taught programs and to function in English-speaking environments. Students with stronger listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills are expected to be more confident in selecting English-speaking study destinations as their study destinations. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: English language proficiency is positively related to the choice of an English-speaking study destination.

2.4. Performance: Academic and Work

Performance generally refers to the extent to which an individual successfully completes assigned responsibilities or achieves expected outcomes. In this study, performance comprises two dimensions: academic performance and work performance. The inclusion of both dimensions recognizes that many international students combine higher education with part-time work, internships, volunteer activities, or other forms of employment experience.

Academic performance refers to students' achievement within an educational program and is commonly evaluated through grades, Grade Point Average (GPA), course completion, examination results, or other institutional assessments. It reflects not only knowledge acquisition but also students' ability to comprehend course content, complete assignments, apply analytical skills, manage time, and satisfy academic requirements.

Academic performance may also affect early career opportunities. [Samson et al. \(1984\)](#) identified a relationship between academic achievement and occupational success. Organizations have historically used GPA as one indicator when screening graduates, particularly when applicants have limited formal work experience. [Koeppel \(2006\)](#) similarly argued that employers may interpret GPA as an indication of work discipline, cognitive ability, and persistence. However, academic performance alone cannot represent all competencies required for workplace success.

Work performance, also referred to as job performance, concerns the quantity, quality, accuracy, timeliness, reliability, and interpersonal effectiveness of individuals' work behavior. [Ilyas \(2001\)](#) described performance as the quantity or quality of work produced by individuals or groups within organizations. [Schmidt \(2002\)](#) emphasized the relationship between general cognitive ability and job performance, arguing that cognitive ability supports employees' capacity to learn job requirements, solve problems, and adapt to complex tasks.

Contemporary HRM research generally treats work performance as multidimensional. Task performance concerns the effective completion of core job responsibilities, while contextual performance includes cooperation, initiative, dependability, and behaviors that support the organizational environment. For international students engaged in part-time employment, language proficiency may be relevant to both dimensions because it can influence their understanding of tasks as well as their ability to cooperate with colleagues and supervisors.

In this study, academic performance is measured through respondents' reported GPA, while work performance is assessed through self-reported evaluations of timeliness, work quality, work quantity, independence, and the promotion of cooperation and goodwill among coworkers and leaders.

2.5. Relationship between English Language Proficiency and Academic Performance

[Mansson \(2016\)](#) conceptualized concern about academic performance as a form of situational cognitive discomfort arising from a discrepancy between students'

desired level of performance or understanding and their actual performance or comprehension. For students undertaking degrees in a second language, such discrepancies may occur when insufficient language proficiency limits their ability to understand lectures, interpret examination questions, read academic materials, or communicate their knowledge effectively.

Tainer (1988) identified significant associations between English-language proficiency and economic outcomes among foreign-born individuals. Although the study focused primarily on earnings rather than academic achievement, it highlighted the wider value of language competence. Stephen et al. (2004) found that English proficiency was an important indicator of success among students studying at a tertiary institution.

Li et al. (2010) found that English-writing proficiency was an important factor explaining differences in academic achievement between Chinese and other international students. Writing competence may be particularly consequential because students are frequently required to demonstrate their understanding through essays, reports, examinations, research papers, and other written assessments. Reading proficiency may also affect access to textbooks and journal articles, while listening and speaking skills support lecture comprehension and classroom participation.

Nevertheless, English proficiency may not have a uniform effect across students, disciplines, or assessment systems. Drennan and Rohde (2002) found that language proficiency was especially relevant in advanced courses requiring interpretation and problem-solving. This suggests that language competence may become more important as academic tasks increase in conceptual complexity. By contrast, Arsad et al. (2011) and Addow et al. (2014) reported weak or limited relationships, indicating that prior academic ability, motivation, teaching quality, study strategies, and institutional support may also contribute to achievement.

Recent research on graduate employability and English-language competence similarly cautions against treating language proficiency as the sole source of performance. Hiew et al. (2021) found that English proficiency alone could not conclusively explain the employment outcomes of Malaysian science graduates. Instead, language ability must operate alongside disciplinary knowledge, employability skills, and work-related competencies. The same principle may apply to academic performance: English proficiency facilitates learning but does not replace effort, motivation, subject knowledge, or effective teaching. Similarly, recent studies on international graduate employability suggest that academic success is shaped jointly by language proficiency, prior academic preparation, learning engagement, institutional support, and socioeconomic resources (Clark et al., 2021). English proficiency should therefore be viewed as an important, but not exclusive, predictor of academic performance.

Despite these qualifications, stronger English proficiency is expected to help international students process course information, participate in learning activities, use academic resources, and express their knowledge more effectively. Ac-

cordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: There is a positive relationship between language proficiency and performance.

H2a: There is a positive relationship between language proficiency and academic performance.

2.6. Relationship between English Language Proficiency and Work Performance

A growing body of research has connected language proficiency with labor-market participation, employability, earnings, career development, and workplace communication. Dustmann and Fabbri (2003) found that language proficiency increased immigrants' employment probabilities and that limited English fluency was associated with earnings disadvantages. These findings demonstrate that language competence may influence individuals' ability to obtain employment and access better occupational opportunities.

Arkoudis et al. (2009) emphasized the importance of English proficiency and workplace readiness for the employment outcomes of international graduates. They observed that English competence may be less critical in low-level jobs involving limited communication but is particularly important in professional occupations. International graduates may also experience greater difficulty obtaining suitable full-time employment than domestic graduates because employers evaluate not only technical qualifications but also communication ability and familiarity with workplace practices.

Roshid and Chowdhury (2013) found that English-language competence affected Bangladeshi graduates' employment experiences in Australia and contributed to their access to more secure and higher-quality employment. Language proficiency can help job seekers prepare application materials, participate in interviews, understand workplace norms, and communicate with supervisors, coworkers, and customers.

The relationship between English proficiency and work performance may be explained through human capital and social-capital mechanisms. From a human-capital perspective, language competence expands employees' ability to acquire knowledge, understand training materials, and execute communication-intensive tasks. From a social-capital perspective, it may help employees build relationships, exchange information, and gain access to career support within organizations.

Peltokorpi (2023) provided strong recent evidence for these mechanisms. Across two time-lagged studies of employees in foreign subsidiaries, English-language competence was positively related to promotions, wage increases, and career satisfaction. Career encouragement and internal social-capital development helped explain these relationships. Although these outcomes are not identical to work performance, they demonstrate that language capability can influence employees' organizational experiences and career advancement.

Language proficiency may also influence performance by increasing employees'

confidence and reducing communication anxiety. Employees who can understand instructions, ask questions, and explain work-related problems may make fewer communication errors and require less corrective supervision. In customer-facing sectors such as hospitality, tourism, and health care, effective language communication may also influence service quality and stakeholder satisfaction.

However, general English proficiency may not fully represent occupation-specific communication competence. Employees may require specialized terminology, pragmatic skills, cultural awareness, and familiarity with organizational communication routines. Consequently, HR training should connect language development with authentic work tasks, including customer interaction, teamwork, presentations, report writing, problem-solving, and conflict management. Adult-learning principles are relevant because international employees are more likely to benefit from training that draws on prior experience and addresses immediately applicable workplace problems. Accordingly, organizations should integrate occupation-specific language training with experiential learning, mentoring, workplace simulations, and continuous professional development. Such an approach is consistent with contemporary human resource development practices emphasizing transferable workplace competencies rather than language ability alone.

In the present study, work performance is evaluated through respondents' self-reported timeliness, quality, quantity, independence, and interpersonal contribution. Students with stronger English proficiency are expected to understand workplace requirements more effectively, communicate with colleagues, and complete tasks with greater confidence. The following hypothesis is therefore proposed:

H2b: English language proficiency is positively related to work performance.

2.7. Relationship between Choice of Study Destinations and Performance

International study experiences have been associated with intellectual development, language learning, intercultural awareness, personal growth, professional development, cultural intelligence, and individual marketability. Ingraham and Peterson (2004) found that study-abroad participation could contribute to students' academic, personal, and intercultural development. Relyea et al. (2008) also suggested that students' perceptions of the value of international study influence their decisions to participate and may affect the benefits obtained from the experience.

Kelleher (2013) reported that overseas study programs offered nursing students opportunities for personal and professional growth, cognitive development, cultural sensitivity, and cultural competence. International exposure may challenge students to adapt to unfamiliar environments, communicate with culturally diverse individuals, and develop independence. These competencies may subsequently support both academic learning and professional performance.

Study destinations may affect performance through the educational, linguistic, cultural, and employment opportunities available in the host environment. Stu-

dents in English-speaking study destinations may experience greater English immersion in classrooms, workplaces, and daily life. Continuous exposure may strengthen listening and speaking competence and increase confidence in professional communication. English-speaking destinations may also provide access to established international academic networks and employment opportunities.

On the other hand, students in non-English-speaking study destinations may still study in English-taught programs and achieve strong academic and work outcomes. Such destinations may provide high-quality education, lower costs, supportive institutional environments, and opportunities to acquire an additional local language. Performance may therefore depend less on whether the destination is formally English-speaking and more on the quality of the program, students' personal resources, institutional support, and the opportunities available to apply their skills. Performance may also depend on students' individual characteristics, including prior work experience, level of study, financial support, and learning motivation. Consequently, any observed relationship between destination choice and performance should be interpreted alongside these contextual factors.

Recent international-mobility research shows that language familiarity influences destination decisions, but it does not necessarily establish that choosing a familiar-language destination automatically produces superior performance. [Ovchinnikova et al. \(2024\)](#) found that students were more likely to select destinations where they knew an official language. This preference may reduce anticipated linguistic and cultural barriers; however, destination selection and successful performance remain distinct processes. The present study differs from much of the previous literature by dividing destinations into English-speaking and non-English-speaking study destinations rather than simply comparing overseas study with study in the home country. It examines whether the linguistic environment associated with the destination is related to students' academic and work outcomes. On the basis of previous research concerning the developmental benefits of international and linguistically immersive environments, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Choice of study destination affects performance.

Hypothesis 3a (H3a): Choice of study destination affects academic performance.

Hypothesis 3b (H3b): Choice of study destination affects work performance.

2.8. Moderating Effect of Choice of Study Destinations

A moderating variable changes the strength or direction of the relationship between an independent variable and a dependent variable. In this study, study-destination choice is proposed as a moderator of the relationship between English proficiency and performance. The proposed moderation is based on the assumption that the value of English competence may depend partly on the linguistic environment in which students study and work.

[Williams \(2005\)](#) found that students who studied overseas experienced greater

development in intercultural communication skills than those who remained on their home campuses. Exposure to diverse cultures was one of the strongest predictors of intercultural communication competence. Such experiences may help students develop adaptability, cultural awareness, confidence, and other soft skills that support workplace performance.

Students studying in English-speaking study destinations are likely to encounter English across a broader range of academic, occupational, and social situations. They may use English not only in classrooms but also in transportation, accommodation, shopping, health care, employment, and social relationships. This continuous exposure may strengthen the relationship between prior English proficiency and performance because students with stronger proficiency may be better able to take advantage of the learning, networking, and employment opportunities available in the environment.

Conversely, students with lower English proficiency may experience greater adjustment difficulties in English-speaking destinations. They may have difficulty understanding lectures, participating in discussions, communicating with employers, and establishing social relationships. In this case, studying in an English-speaking country could amplify performance differences between students with higher and lower proficiency.

In non-English-speaking study destinations, English may be used primarily within English-taught academic programs or internationally oriented workplaces. The broader social environment may operate in another language. Under these conditions, students' English proficiency may remain important, but its effect on overall performance may differ because the frequency and contexts of English use are more limited or specialized.

Ovchinnikova et al. (2024) showed that students tend to select destinations where they know an official language, suggesting that linguistic familiarity shapes anticipated mobility and adaptation. However, relatively little research has tested whether the linguistic category of the destination changes the relationship between individual English proficiency and academic or work performance. This represents an important gap because language competence may generate different outcomes depending on the opportunities and demands present in the destination environment. Testing destination choice as a moderating variable therefore provides a more rigorous assessment of whether the educational context amplifies or attenuates the contribution of English proficiency after accounting for the direct effects of individual language capability.

Accordingly, this study proposes that English proficiency influences students' academic and work performance and that these relationships may vary according to whether students select an English-speaking or non-English-speaking study destination. The research model therefore treats study-destination choice as a moderating variable and proposes the following hypotheses:

H4: Choice of study destination moderates the relationship between English language proficiency and performance.

H4a: Choice of study destination moderates the relationship between English language proficiency and academic performance.

H4b: Choice of study destination moderates the relationship between English language proficiency and work performance.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design and Sampling

This study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationships among English language proficiency, study-destination choice, academic performance, and work performance. According to [McDaniel and Gates \(2002\)](#), sample sizes ranging from 30 to 500 may be appropriate for many types of empirical research. [Newman and Benz \(1998\)](#) further emphasized that a research sample should reflect the characteristics of the target population as closely as possible.

The target population consisted of Vietnamese undergraduate and postgraduate students enrolled in international or English-taught degree programs in Vietnam and other countries. Because no comprehensive sampling frame of Vietnamese students pursuing English-taught programs worldwide was available, a non-probability snowball-sampling method was employed. Snowball sampling relies on initial participants and their personal, academic, or social networks to identify and recruit other eligible respondents. This method was considered suitable because the target population was geographically dispersed across different universities, cities, and countries.

A total of 200 questionnaires were collected, of which 171 were considered valid and retained for the overall statistical analyses. Because work performance could only be meaningfully evaluated for respondents with relevant workplace experience, analyses involving self-reported work performance were conducted using the eligible subsample of 109 respondents who reported current employment, part-time work, internships, or other relevant work experience and completed the work-performance section of the questionnaire. Respondents without relevant workplace experience or who did not complete the work-performance section were excluded from work-performance analyses.

3.2. Data Collection

Data were collected through a self-administered online questionnaire developed using Google Forms, a web-based survey platform. The online format enabled the questionnaire to be distributed efficiently to Vietnamese students studying in different study destinations and reduced the geographical and financial limitations associated with paper-based surveys. Respondents were able to complete the questionnaire using a computer, tablet, or smartphone. Although online questionnaires require participants to possess internet access and basic digital literacy, this requirement was not considered a major obstacle for the target respondents. The participants were undergraduate and postgraduate students who were generally

familiar with computers, smartphones, online learning systems, and other digital technologies commonly used in higher education.

Before the main data-collection process, a pilot test was conducted to identify possible weaknesses in the questionnaire design and administration. Altman et al. (2006) explained that pilot testing can reveal deficiencies in proposed research procedures and allow researchers to revise them before conducting the principal study. In the present research, the pilot test was used to improve the clarity, relevance, and content validity of the questionnaire. Three professionals with previous international study and research experience were invited to evaluate the questionnaire for content relevance, clarity, wording, and overall appropriateness. Based on their feedback, ambiguous statements were revised, redundant wording was removed, and selected measurement items were refined to improve readability and relevance to Vietnamese students enrolled in English-taught degree programs. This expert review supported the content validity of the questionnaire by confirming that the items adequately represented the intended constructs of English proficiency, study-destination choice, academic performance, and work performance before the main survey was administered.

The revised English-language questionnaire was subsequently translated into Vietnamese. A back-translation procedure was used to examine the conceptual equivalence of the English and Vietnamese versions. Through this process, the meaning of each item in the Vietnamese questionnaire was compared carefully with the original English version. Necessary adjustments were made to reduce translation errors, ambiguity, and possible misunderstanding among respondents. After the Vietnamese version had been finalized, approximately two months were spent distributing the questionnaire and collecting responses. An additional month was used to screen, code, analyze, and statistically test the collected data.

3.3. Measurement Scales

The questionnaire contained sections measuring respondents' demographic characteristics, English language proficiency, academic performance, work performance, and study-destination choice. Most measurement items adopted five-point Likert-type scales. Likert-type scales allow responses to related statements to be summarized and facilitate the examination of patterns in respondents' perceptions and evaluations (Bryman, 2004). Questionnaires are also useful for collecting standardized information concerning respondents' abilities, experiences, attitudes, and self-evaluations (Sudman & Bradburn, 1974). Before hypothesis testing, the internal consistency reliability of the multi-item English-proficiency and work-performance scales was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficients.

3.3.1. English Language Proficiency

The first part of the questionnaire measured the English proficiency of Vietnamese students across four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The 20-item English-language proficiency scale was adapted from Quynh (2019),

with five items measuring each skill. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree.”

Representative listening items included “I can understand and follow my lecturer’s instructions in English without difficulty” and “I can easily understand what my classmates say when communicating with them in English.” Representative speaking items included “I have a natural English accent with accurate pronunciation and intonation” and “I can express exactly what I mean in English.”

The reading dimension included items such as “I can easily understand English academic documents and textbooks” and “I can search for information in English online quickly.” The writing dimension assessed respondents’ perceived vocabulary, grammatical resources, and ability to express their ideas in written English. Higher scores indicated stronger self-perceived English-language proficiency.

The overall English-proficiency scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency, with a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of 0.89. The four language-skill dimensions also demonstrated acceptable to good internal consistency, with Cronbach’s alpha values of 0.82 for Listening, 0.85 for Speaking, 0.81 for Reading, and 0.84 for Writing. These results indicate satisfactory reliability for measuring respondents’ self-perceived English-language proficiency.

3.3.2. Academic and Work Performance

The second part of the questionnaire measured respondents’ performance, including academic performance and work performance. The performance measure contained six items in total. Academic performance was measured using one item asking respondents to report their latest overall Grade Point Average. Because respondents studied in different countries and educational institutions using different grading systems, GPA was recorded using an 11-point scale designed to accommodate the various grading categories.

Work performance was measured using five items adapted from [Wiedower \(2001\)](#). Respondents evaluated their performance on a five-point scale ranging from 1 = “very poor” to 5 = “very good.” The scale assessed five dimensions of work performance: timeliness, quality, quantity, independence, and interpersonal contribution.

Timeliness referred to the extent to which activities were completed or results were produced within the desired time. Quality concerned the neatness, accuracy, and dependability of work outcomes, regardless of the amount of work produced. Quantity referred to the volume of work completed under normal conditions. Independence assessed the extent to which respondents could perform their job functions without repeatedly requesting supervisory assistance or intervention. Interpersonal contribution referred to the extent to which respondents promoted self-esteem, goodwill, and cooperation among coworkers and organizational leaders. Higher scores indicated stronger self-reported work performance.

3.3.3. Choice of Study Destination

The study measured destination choice in two related ways. First, respondents’

actual study destinations were classified into two categories: English-speaking study destinations and non-English-speaking study destinations. This categorical variable was used in the hypothesis tests examining the relationships among English proficiency, destination choice, academic performance, and work performance. Second, the questionnaire included a 12-item scale adapted from Kasravi (2009) to measure the importance of factors influencing respondents' study-destination decisions. The response scale ranged from 1 = "not important at all" to 5 = "very important."

The items included program cost, program duration, language of instruction, size of the city or town, parental or family influence, credit-transfer opportunities, interest in the available coursework, opportunities to explore heritage or cultural roots, and the availability of internships or volunteer work within the program. Higher scores indicated that respondents attached greater importance to the corresponding destination-selection factor. Because the destination-factor items represented separate decision criteria rather than a single reflective construct, they were analyzed descriptively and were not combined into one overall scale.

3.4. Data Analysis

The 171 valid questionnaires were screened, coded, and analyzed statistically. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize respondents' demographic characteristics, English proficiency, academic performance, work performance, and study-destination choices. Frequencies and percentages were used for categorical variables, while means and other descriptive statistics were used for continuous and scale-based variables.

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among English proficiency, academic performance, work performance, and study-destination-related variables. Regression analysis was used to test the relationships between English proficiency and the two performance outcomes. Because actual study destination was classified into English-speaking and non-English-speaking categories, logistic regression was used to examine whether English proficiency predicted the likelihood of selecting an English-speaking destination.

Independent-samples t-tests were conducted to determine whether academic and work performance differed between respondents studying in English-speaking and non-English-speaking study destinations. Moderated regression analysis was used to assess whether study-destination choice changed the relationship between English proficiency and academic or work performance. Interaction terms between English proficiency and study-destination category were included in the relevant regression models.

To address possible confounding effects, supplementary regression models were also estimated by adding key covariates, including study level, family financial support, work experience, and destination region. These covariates were selected because they may influence destination choice, academic outcomes, and

work-related performance independently of English proficiency. For work-performance models, the covariate-adjusted analyses were conducted only among respondents with current or recent work-related experience.

Additional chi-square tests and analyses of variance were conducted to examine selected relationships involving demographic characteristics, destination choice, work experience, and performance. Statistical significance was evaluated at the $p < 0.05$ level. Because the study used a cross-sectional, non-probability sample and self-reported measures, the analyses were interpreted as evidence of statistical association rather than causal effects.

4. Results

A total of 200 questionnaires were collected from Vietnamese students who had studied in English-taught programs in Vietnam or other countries. After data screening, 171 questionnaires were considered valid and retained for analysis, producing a valid-response rate of 85.5%. Regarding gender, 46% of the respondents were male, 51% were female, and 3% identified as another gender category. In terms of their places of origin in Vietnam, the majority were from Ho Chi Minh City (61%); most participants were single and had never married (91%). In relation to financial capacity, the largest proportion of respondents (33%) indicated that their families could contribute less than USD 10,000 per year toward their education. Regarding the duration of study, 47% of the respondents had been enrolled in their programs for three to four years, while 32% had studied for one to two years. Approximately 44% reported having between one and three years of work experience while pursuing their studies. Regarding the sources of funding for their education, 40% relied primarily on family support, 23% supported themselves through part-time employment, and 18% received scholarships. In terms of previous international experience, the largest group of respondents (43%) reported that their overseas experience had been limited mainly to travel or vacation purposes.

Among the 171 valid respondents, 109 reported current employment, internship participation, part-time work, or recent work experience and were therefore included in the work-performance analyses. The remaining respondents were included in analyses related to English proficiency, study-destination choice, and academic performance but were excluded from work-performance regression analyses because they lacked relevant workplace experience. Unless otherwise specified, analyses were conducted using the full sample of 171 respondents. Analyses involving work performance were based on the eligible subsample of 109 respondents who completed the work-performance section of the questionnaire.

4.1. Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the bivariate relationships among English language proficiency, academic performance, work performance, and study-destination choice. English language proficiency showed weak but sta-

tistically significant positive correlations with both academic performance ($p < 0.05$) and study-destination choice ($p < 0.05$). The correlation between study-destination choice and academic performance was not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$). Correlation analysis involving work performance was conducted only for respondents included in the work-performance subsample.

These results provided preliminary support for the proposed relationships between English proficiency and both destination choice and academic performance. Nevertheless, the hypotheses were evaluated more fully through logistic regression, linear regression, independent-samples t-tests, and moderated regression analyses.

4.2. Hypothesis Testing

The logistic regression results showed that English language proficiency significantly predicted study-destination choice ($p < 0.001$). The odds ratio, $\text{Exp}(B) = 3.508$, indicated that students with higher English-proficiency levels were approximately 3.51 times more likely to study in English-speaking study destinations than students with lower English-proficiency levels. Therefore, Hypothesis 1, which proposed a positive relationship between English language proficiency and the choice of an English-speaking study destination, was supported.

The regression results further showed that English language proficiency was a statistically significant predictor of academic performance ($p < 0.001$). The standardized coefficient ($\beta = 0.386$) indicated a positive relationship between English proficiency and academic performance, while approximately 14.9% of the variance in academic performance was explained by English proficiency. The variance inflation factor (VIF) was 1.00, indicating that multicollinearity was not a concern. Supplementary analyses including study level, family financial support, work experience, and destination region as covariates, produced substantively similar results, indicating that English proficiency remained a significant predictor of academic performance after adjustment for these background characteristics. Therefore, Hypothesis 2a, which proposed a positive relationship between English language proficiency and academic performance, was supported.

Among respondents with current or recent work-related experience, English language proficiency was a statistically significant predictor of self-reported work performance ($p < 0.001$). The standardized coefficient ($\beta = 0.390$) indicated a positive relationship between English proficiency and work performance, while approximately 15.2% of the variance in work performance was explained by English proficiency. $VIF = 1.00$, again indicating no multicollinearity problem. Therefore, Hypothesis 2b, which proposed a positive relationship between English language proficiency and work performance, was supported. Because both H2a and H2b were supported, the broader Hypothesis 2 was also supported.

To test H3, independent-samples t-tests were conducted to compare the academic and work performance of students studying in English-speaking and non-English-speaking study destinations. The results showed no significant difference

in academic performance between the two groups ($p = 0.552$). The mean academic-performance score of students studying in non-English-speaking study destinations was 8.17, while the mean score of students studying in English-speaking study destinations was 8.38. Based on the 11-point GPA scale, ranging from 1 = E/F to 11 = A/A+, the average academic performance of both groups was approximately equivalent to a grade of B, corresponding to approximately 83 - 86 out of 100, 8.3 - 8.6 out of 10, or 3.0 out of 4.0. Therefore, Hypothesis 3a, which proposed that study-destination choice affects academic performance, was not supported.

The results also showed no significant difference in work performance between students studying in English-speaking and non-English-speaking study destinations ($p = 0.317$). The mean work-performance score of students studying in non-English-speaking study destinations was 3.804, while the mean score of students studying in English-speaking study destinations was 3.898. Based on the five-point scale, ranging from 1 = "very poor" to 5 = "very good," both groups reported work performance close to the "good" category. Therefore, Hypothesis 3b, which proposed that study-destination choice affects work performance, was not supported. Because neither H3a nor H3b was supported, the broader Hypothesis 3 was also not supported.

To examine the moderating effect of study-destination choice on the relationship between English proficiency and academic performance, moderated regression analyses were conducted. The results indicated that English proficiency remained a significant predictor of academic performance ($p = 0.008$). However, the interaction term between English proficiency and study-destination choice was not statistically significant ($p = 0.317$). This result indicated that the relationship between English proficiency and academic performance did not differ significantly between students studying in English-speaking and non-English-speaking study destinations. Therefore, Hypothesis 4a was not supported.

Pearson correlation analysis indicated that English proficiency was positively correlated with work performance ($r = 0.316$, $p < 0.01$) among respondents included in the work-performance analyses. However, this bivariate association does not indicate that study-destination choice was associated with work performance. In the moderated regression model, English proficiency remained a significant predictor of work performance ($p < 0.05$), whereas the interaction term between English proficiency and study-destination choice was not statistically significant ($p = 0.391$). Therefore, study-destination choice did not moderate the relationship between English proficiency and work performance, and Hypothesis 4b was not supported. Because neither H4a nor H4b was supported, the broader Hypothesis 4 was also not supported.

In summary, H1, H2, H2a, and H2b were supported, whereas H3, H3a, H3b, H4, H4a, and H4b were not supported. As a robustness check, supplementary regression models incorporating study level, family financial support, work experience, and destination region as covariates were estimated. The inclusion of these

variables did not materially alter the direction or statistical significance of the relationship between English proficiency and the outcome variables, indicating that the principal findings were generally robust to the inclusion of plausible background characteristics.

5. Discussion, Implications, Limitations, and Conclusion

5.1. Discussion

This study produced four principal findings. First, English proficiency was positively associated with the choice of an English-speaking study destination. Second, English proficiency was positively related to both academic performance and self-reported work performance. Third, study-destination choice did not significantly affect either academic or work performance. Fourth, study-destination choice did not moderate the relationships between English proficiency and either performance outcome.

Students with higher English-proficiency levels were approximately 3.5 times more likely to study in English-speaking study destinations. This finding is consistent with earlier research showing that language ability, career expectations, personal growth, and cultural exposure influence international students' destination choices (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Williams, 2005; Salisbury et al., 2008; Eder et al., 2010). Stronger English proficiency may increase students' confidence in their ability to understand lectures, complete assignments, communicate with others, and adapt to English-speaking environments. The findings therefore support the interpretation of English proficiency as a facilitating resource that expands students' perceived educational opportunities rather than determining destination choice by itself.

English proficiency was positively related to academic performance and explained approximately 14.9% of its variance. This result is broadly consistent with previous research connecting language proficiency with academic achievement (Stephen et al., 2004; Li et al., 2010; Ghenghesh, 2015; Yan & Cheng, 2015). Students with stronger English skills may understand lectures and academic materials more effectively, participate more confidently, and communicate their knowledge more clearly. Nevertheless, the relatively modest proportion of explained variance suggests that academic performance is influenced by multiple factors beyond language proficiency, including prior academic preparation, learning engagement, institutional support, and socioeconomic circumstances. English proficiency should therefore be viewed as an important, but not exclusive, predictor of academic success.

English proficiency also positively predicted self-reported work performance among respondents with current or recent work-related experience and explained approximately 15.2% of its variance. Language competence may help employees understand instructions, access information, communicate with supervisors and colleagues, and complete communication-intensive tasks. This is particularly relevant in hospitality, tourism, health care, and multinational organizations. The

result is consistent with research linking language proficiency with employment opportunities, earnings, workplace communication, and career development (Dustmann & Fabbri, 2003; Roshid & Chowdhury, 2013; Peltokorpi, 2023). However, language proficiency alone cannot explain workplace performance, which is also influenced by professional knowledge, work experience, leadership, teamwork, motivation, organizational support, and working conditions.

Study-destination choice did not significantly affect academic or work performance. Students studying in English-speaking study destinations did not perform significantly better than those studying in non-English-speaking study destinations. This finding suggests that the linguistic environment of the destination alone is insufficient to explain differences in performance. Instead, individual capability, program quality, institutional support, and opportunities to apply English in academic and workplace settings may play more influential roles than the English-speaking status of the destination itself.

Study destination also did not moderate the relationships between English proficiency and performance. The absence of a significant moderation effect suggests that English proficiency functions as an individual capability that contributes to educational and workplace performance regardless of whether students study in English-speaking or non-English-speaking study destinations. Students enrolled in English-taught programs may continue to use English extensively in classrooms, international teamwork, workplaces, and digital communication even when studying in destinations where English is not the dominant societal language. Conversely, residence in an English-speaking destination does not automatically guarantee meaningful language use, academic engagement, or successful adaptation.

Overall, the findings support the view that English proficiency represents a transferable form of linguistic human capital whose contribution to performance extends across different educational contexts. Rather than the destination itself, it appears that students' individual competencies and the opportunities to apply those competencies are more important determinants of academic and workplace outcomes.

5.2. Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study contributes to the literature by conceptualizing English proficiency as a form of linguistic human capital relevant to international education, employability, and human resource management. Rather than viewing English proficiency as an independent source of competitive advantage, the findings suggest that it functions as complementary human capital whose value depends on its integration with professional knowledge, work experience, institutional support, and opportunities for practical application. This perspective extends previous research by demonstrating that English proficiency contributes to both academic and workplace outcomes while its effects remain independent of the English-speaking status of the study destination.

For students, the findings suggest that English proficiency can expand destination choices and support academic and workplace performance. Nevertheless, students should consider program quality, affordability, employment opportunities, personal interests, and long-term career goals rather than assuming that an English-speaking destination will automatically generate better outcomes. They should also develop speaking, listening, presentation, teamwork, interview, and professional-writing skills through internships, part-time work, international projects, and other experiential activities.

Higher-education institutions should connect English-language learning with employability and workplace preparation. Adult-learning principles may be applied through experiential, problem-centered, and immediately relevant activities. Hospitality students may practice guest interaction and complaint handling; tourism students may communicate with international visitors; health-care students may practice patient communication; and business students may conduct presentations, negotiations, meetings, and report writing. Employer partnerships, internships, mentoring, and workplace projects can help reduce the gap between classroom learning and organizational expectations.

For recruitment, HR practitioners should assess the language requirements of specific jobs rather than imposing unnecessarily high English standards across all positions. Practical assessments, such as structured interviews, simulations, role plays, presentations, and work samples, may provide more useful evidence than test scores alone. English proficiency should therefore be evaluated together with technical competence, work experience, interpersonal skills, and cultural adaptability.

From a human resource development perspective, organizations should regard English proficiency as a capability that can be continuously developed rather than merely as a fixed hiring criterion. Language-development initiatives should incorporate workplace simulations, customer interaction, teamwork, report writing, meetings, safety communication, conflict management, and other occupation-specific activities. Organizations should also create supportive learning environments in which employees feel comfortable asking questions, clarifying misunderstandings, and developing communication confidence without fear of embarrassment.

Although employee retention was not directly examined, language-development opportunities may contribute indirectly to long-term career development, organizational inclusion, and employee engagement when integrated with mentoring, promotion pathways, international assignments, and continuous professional development. Organizations should therefore avoid creating linguistic elites in which language proficiency alone determines career opportunities while overlooking technical competence and professional potential.

5.3. Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study focused exclusively on Vietnamese students enrolled in English-taught degree programs, which may

limit the generalizability of the findings to other nationalities, languages, or educational contexts. Second, the final sample consisted of 171 respondents recruited through snowball sampling and may not fully represent the broader population of Vietnamese international students. Third, English proficiency and work performance were measured using self-reported assessments, which may be affected by common-method bias, social desirability, or inaccurate self-evaluation. Future studies could incorporate standardized language assessments, supervisor evaluations, or objective indicators of workplace performance.

Fourth, academic performance was measured using a standardized GPA conversion procedure to improve comparability across different educational systems. Although this conversion enhanced consistency, institutional differences in grading practices may still have influenced the comparability of GPA across respondents. Fifth, the cross-sectional research design identifies statistical associations rather than causal relationships. Longitudinal research could examine how English proficiency, academic achievement, and workplace performance evolve over time. Furthermore, although this study considered several demographic characteristics, additional contextual variables may also influence the observed relationships. Finally, classifying destinations into English-speaking and non-English-speaking categories may oversimplify the complexity of students' actual language environments. Future research should directly measure the intensity of English use in classrooms, workplaces, and everyday life, as well as examine potential mediating variables such as communication confidence, cultural intelligence, social capital, learning engagement, and workplace adjustment. Additional HRM outcomes—including recruitment success, training effectiveness, organizational commitment, employee engagement, turnover intention, and retention—would further extend understanding of English proficiency as strategic human capital.

5.4. Conclusions

This study found that English proficiency positively influenced Vietnamese students' choice of English-speaking study destinations and was positively associated with academic and self-reported work performance. However, the effects were modest, indicating that English proficiency is an enabling capability rather than the sole determinant of success. Study-destination choice did not directly affect performance and did not moderate the relationships between English proficiency and academic or work performance. Students may therefore achieve strong outcomes in English-taught programs located in both English-speaking and non-English-speaking study destinations.

From an HRM perspective, the findings demonstrate that English proficiency functions as a transferable form of linguistic human capital that supports learning, workplace communication, international mobility, employability, and career development. Its strategic value, however, depends on its integration with disciplinary expertise, professional experience, supportive educational and organizational systems, and meaningful opportunities for practical application. Accord-

ingly, organizations and higher-education institutions should view English-language development as one component of broader talent development strategies rather than as a stand-alone indicator of future performance.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, Heidi Chang and Thinh Tran; Methodology, Heidi Chang and Thinh Tran; Software, Heidi Chang and Thinh Tran; Validation, Heidi Chang and Thinh Tran; Formal analysis, Thinh Tran; Investigation, Thinh Tran.; Resources, Heidi Chang and Thinh Tran; Data Curation, Heidi Chang and Thinh Tran; Writing—Original Draft preparation, Heidi Chang and Thinh Tran; Writing—Review and Editing, Heidi Chang.

All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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