

## Students' Perceptions of Foreign Lecturers' Bio-identities

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### Abstract

This study aims to explore students' perceptions of foreign lecturers regarding their bio-identities and the influence of their perceptions on classroom participation. Bio-identities are associated with primordial identities, self-grown identities, and assigned identities based on their connection with a person's life. We reviewed categories of identities and selected four theme-based identities, including professional, moral, ethnic, and cyber identities, regarding their commonality, prominence, and the current study scope. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to seek qualitative data from 33 participants at a university in Vietnam. Our findings illustrated that the more professional and moral foreign lecturers are, the more appealing they are to classroom participation. Moreover, foreign lecturers' ethnic identity was the first impression for students' enrolment. Nonetheless, foreign lecturers should reinforce their professionalism and morality to consolidate their competitive advantage. We hope that these results will assist universities and English language centers in better understand how students value foreign lecturers. Subsequently, they can make more appropriate requirements when recruiting foreign lecturers to their systems.

### Keywords

Identities, bio-identities, classroom participation, foreign lecturers, perceptions.

### Introduction

As globalization has worldwide taken place over the past several centuries, it has been significantly influencing various aspects of social development, especially language learning (Steger, 2003). Globalization could be drawn as "the interconnections of global economic, political, cultural and environmental processes that continually transform present conditions" (Steger, 2013, p.7-8). Consequently, a requirement for international communication has emerged. This trend suggests that learning foreign languages is an essential mission to meet working and communicative demands.

In the current educational context, most students tremendously shift to enroll in language centers to study with native-speaking lecturers to get more exposure to authentic language uses. It does no doubt that the demand for foreign lecturers in Vietnam has been increasing in recent years. Moreover, foreign lecturers have flown to non-speaking English countries to seek adventures and stabilization as a

positive trend of globalization (Block, 2010). They are aware of their competitive advantages in using English as a tool in the teaching profession, then the surge of applicants is seeking English teaching opportunities. Language centers are recruiting native speakers for communicative classes (Medgyes, 1992). In Asia, English teachers were exclusively recruited from certain native English-speaking countries such as the USA, UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, France, Germany, and Russia (JET Programme, 2011). The shift has changed to foreign teachers from countries where English is used as an official language or second language, including the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Hong Kong.

Students are trying to become better English users regarding communicating effectively and confidently thanks to frequent exposure to authentic input (Kardijan, 2017). Foreign lecturers are more likely to correct and give constructive instructions on improving students' pronunciation, intonation, and communicative language use. Previous studies show that most Vietnamese students are very eager to study with native speakers for the first few times, but their level of participation in classes has significantly declined (Klimova, 2011; S. Wang, 2015). Nevertheless, little research has been conducted on students' perceptions of this issue. Specifically, our research will focus on finding out answers to the research questions below:

- 1) What are students' perceptions of foreign lecturers' bio-identities in their learning processes?
- 2) How do students' perceptions of foreign lecturers' bio-identities influence students' classroom participation?

## **Literature Review**

### **Identity definition**

Samovar et al. (2016) defined identity as an abstract, complex, dynamic, and socially constructed concept. Lankveld et al. (2016) described identity as a complex and abstract notion studied theoretically across various fields. A study by Yilmaz and Ilhan (2017) modified identity as a dynamic, interactional, and multi-structured concept of self that individuals build deliberately to express themselves or determine the behaviors that society assigns to individuals.

In this study, we apply the definitions by these authors since we wish to emphasize the complexity, dynamism, and multi-dimensionality of lecturers' identities. Simultaneously, they can be a Ph.D., a husband/wife, a philosopher, a women's rights activist, an online influencer, a charity fundraiser, a Buddhist, and so on.

### **Bio-identities definition & classifications**

Bio- is a Greek prefix that signifies "life." This research describes bio-identities as identities connected to a person's existence throughout their lifetime. These identities may be naturally provided, polished, and assigned.

#### *Primordial identity*

A study by Z. Golubović (2011) indicated the concept of "primordial identity" as being conceived as a naturally given and unchangeable entity – belonging to the ethnic category. Hauskeller, Sturdy, and Tutton (2013), Imperato-McGinley et al. (1979), and Pol et al. (2006) reflected on ethnic identities as

not having any empirical basis at birth, and they should better be formed through experience. G. Constantine (2017) argued that identity is not fixed at birth. However, biological evidence demonstrates some characteristics in gender identity and inheritable identities such as sexual, morphological, and biological system characteristics.

#### *Self-grown identities*

According to Giddens (1991), in modern cultures, which can be understood as roughly equivalent to the "industrialized world," identity is viewed as "a matter of rational action and being dynamic." One might refer to identity as "a symbolic construction" that helps people locate their place in time and maintain continuity. Lecturers build up their qualifications, teaching experience, compassion, tenderness, online profile, and pre-training course.

This type of bio-identity encourages lecturers to improve themselves further thanks to their peers' feedback, perceiving their weaknesses and strengths, and mirroring their past selves. The literature, as mentioned earlier, identified that self-grown identities consist of social, role, individual, and gender identity.

#### *Assigned identities*

To better understand the teaching and learning processes, it is essential to start by comprehending lecturers' identities and better understand the professional, cultural, political, and personal identities they claim or are given to them (Varghese et al., 2005). An essential aspect of this is the relation between assigned identity—the identity imposed on one by others—and claimed identity, identities one acknowledges or claims for oneself (Buzzelli & Johnston, 2002).

According to G. Constantine (2017), the individual's identity does not emanate from within, nor does it reside in the individual's substance. However, social learning produces a biological network that ultimately determines identity performance—the Performativity of identity guarantees that the individual's identity is established. Identity is a performance of an existing script integrated into the neural network via learning and regulated by psychological mechanisms.

### **Students' perceptions of foreign lecturers' bio-identities influence classroom participation**

#### *Definition of classroom participation*

Dancer and Kamvounias (2005) described classroom participation as overall student engagement in the instructional process. They categorized it into five related categories: preparation, contribution to discussions, group skills, communication skills, and attendance. Classroom participation is considered a vital aspect in generating positive learning results for students and developing their abilities. That also allows students to enhance their knowledge, demonstrate understanding of the curriculum, gain confidence, and apply theory (M. Susak, 2016).

#### *Foreign lecturers' bio-identities influence students' participation in classroom*

Engagement levels in the classroom are influenced by various elements that lecturers need to plan to provide an effective learning environment and thus encourage students' participation.

#### *Foreign lecturers' ethnic identity*

Universities and English language centers around the world usually have diverse faculty by ethnicity. This creates a comparative advantage amongst the lecturers.

The ethnic identity of lecturers is usually expressed through the aspect of native or non-native speakers. Paikeday (1985) considered the native-speaker a 'fuzzy notion' used by linguists to identify 'competent users.' He believed the distinction between those who are and those who are not native-speakers is a form of 'linguistic apartheid.' In a broader and less critical sense, Medgyes (1994) defined the native-speaker as someone brought up in an English-speaking environment, understands correct English, and can "produce fluent, spontaneous discourse in English."

A study by Grubbs et al. (2010) found that students preferred non-native speaking teachers who bring a degree of familiarity with students' learning styles in the country to native speaking teachers who provide a degree of fluency in a language classroom. However, students from both groups valued native-speaking teachers and non-native speaking teachers equally important. They concluded that these students initially evaluated their native-speaking teachers by their ethnic identity but eventually emphasized their professionalism and morality rather than ethnicity.

#### *Foreign lecturers' professional identity*

A study by Sachs (2001), considered from lecturers' perspective, indicated this type of identity as a series of qualities attributed to the teaching profession by people within and outside the occupation. The perceptions of "who I am" and "whom I want to become" define professional identity. Through the course of professional education and experience, it may be developed and strengthened. It gives a framework for instructors and lecturers to establish their opinions on "how to act" and "how to be" in their profession and society as a working notion (Sachs, 2005).

The components forming lecturers' professional identity are personal characteristics, knowledge of educational institutions, learning experiences offered during pre-service training, and experiences in teaching practices (Lamote & Engels, 2010; Schepens, Aelterman, & Vlerick, 2009). Lecturers can express their competency through the teaching profession, perception of efficacy, emotions, and attitudes.

Being a competent lecturer demands effective student and time management (Woolfolk Hoy et al., 2006). Another study made by Deschenaux and Roussel (2011) reflected that lecturers need to have a mastery of technical competency to be effective. This inquiry emphasizes lecturers' appropriate dissection of class time, encouragement to all students, and comprehension of educational technologies.

Stories directly represent a literary and cultural legacy, and they help people accept, understand, and preserve diverse cultural standards (Pedersen, 1995). Storytelling, often known as narrative pedagogy, is a method of sharing and interrupting narratives to boost the learning experience (Diekelmann, 2001).

Lecturers' professional identities are also expressed through their outlook. The study by Craig and Savage (2015) concluded that lecturers' dress codes had a favorable direct and indirect influence on student learning. The attendance for students in the test group was 8.50 percentage points higher than comparison students, and this increase is associated with an improvement in their cumulative final exam score of 0.69 percentage points.

### *Foreign lecturers' moral identity*

The concept of moral identity is unconstrained social classifications or roles. The mental representation of one's moral character preserved internally as a cognitive schema and expressed to others outwardly through one's behaviors is described as moral identity (Aquino & Reed, 2002).

Individuals with this type of identity—which is shaped by individual characteristics like sympathy, dependability, and productivity, as well as social factors like family structure and cultural elements (Hart, Atkins, & Ford, 1998)—are susceptible to moral problems and issues and have a propensity to act morally in response to them (Aquino et al., 2009). The higher a person's moral identity, the more empathetic, caring, and kind he/she is (Stets & Carter, 2011).

Students are less likely to participate in the classroom if lecturers are unpleasant toward them, criticize them, or neglect them, according to Wade (1994). Hyde and Ruth (2002) concluded that professors could improve student participation by providing positive feedback and ensuring that the classroom conversation allows students to be critical to one another in a courteous manner. Rocca (2009) indicated that when professors make negative comments towards students, it could lower participation levels. The feedback lecturers provide students is critical in ensuring they have correctly understood the core of the problem. Especially, lecturers' feedback should be constructive and not seen as criticism.

### *Foreign lecturers' cyber identity*

Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram allow millions of individuals to connect and exchange information online every day. The work of lecturers might be influenced by the connections they establish on social media as they plan and deliver courses, experiences to develop their professionalism.

According to J. Suler (2002), the information is shown on your concerning web page. The persona or avatar in an online community is critical element of how individuals manage their online identities. He also describes that individuals can choose and promote what they regard to be the positive aspects of their identity while excluding any perceived undesirable ones or even create an "imaginary personal" in cyberspace.

As social media usage grows in popularity, lecturers may now share materials and connect with a large worldwide audience of colleagues, academics, students, and the public. Lecturers utilize social media platforms like Twitter, Researchgate, LinkedIn to improve their professional identities and influence how others perceive them and their work (Davis, 2016). Furthermore, lecturers are reported to create communities on social media and engage in social-media-based conversations to exchange information about their practices (Krutka & Carpenter 2016; Trust, Krukta, & Carpenter, 2016; Wesley, 2013). Many professionals utilize them to connect with other professionals in their field or promote themselves and their research (Veletsianos, 2012).

Social media has evolved into an educational tool with several benefits for both students and lecturers. Social media increases lecturer effectiveness in formal and informal ways by increasing cooperation, interaction, and learning material connected to courses. It improves their communication skills and knowledge of their job's work profile (Hurt, 2012). Notably, social media tools (e.g., Facebook,

Twitter, microblogging) stimulate student-student and student-lecturers interaction, which promotes creative thinking and the development of creative ideas (Lusk, 2010).

## **Methodology**

The fact that this study deals with existence, interpretation, and phenomenon understanding. For this reason, the qualitative design is chosen as the effective research technique of this study to discover answers for the research question based on research contextualization. In contrast to quantitative data, qualitative data is studied in-depth rather than quantified in terms of frequency or amount (Labuschagne, 2003). Good qualitative research can assist us in "understanding a situation that would otherwise be enigmatic or confusing" (Eisner, 1998). According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), the core of a qualitative setting is to collect data in the field where participants are actively involved in the study's concerns. Qualitative researchers do not set up a contrived situation, nor do they let participants respond to self-completion surveys to see actual acts and behaviors of individuals within the context. We want to explore the problems from different perspectives as well as what participants experience. That is the reason why a qualitative approach is employed in our study.

Reliability is defined as "the extent to which results are consistent over time and accurately represent the total population under study. The results of a study can be replicated using a similar methodology. In that case, the research instrument is reliable. Meanwhile, validity is defined as "measuring what is intended to be measured" (Field, 2005). To examine whether items in the instrument (e.g., questionnaires or surveys) are valid, researchers need to consider the following two criteria of validity: internal validity and external validity. Internal validity refers to whether there is a good match between the observations of researchers and the theoretical concepts they develop. External validity relates to the extent to which findings can be generalized across social contexts. In an attempt to maintain and improve the reliability and validity of the current research, we used pilot testing to define reliability for this research. A pilot study is a scaled-down version of a research or a trial run carried out in advance of a more extensive study, and it can be used to pretest a research instrument (Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). A pilot test of questions can uncover any statements in the study procedure that are confusing or ambiguous. In addition, we wanted to ensure that our participants thoroughly understood what each question meant. Therefore, we used a semi-structured approach to get the most out of participants' answers.

Moreover, we conduct theme-based questions to ensure research reliability to make the participants clear and concise content and aims. Triangulation is also a typical method for ensuring research validity. According to a study by Creswell in 2007, triangulating means using several data sources of information by evidence from the sources and utilizing it to construct a cohesive rationale for themes. When the data analysis is finished, we send out a summary of the developed topics and ask the participants for confirmation and feedback if necessary.

We attracted 37 participants, including students of Courses from 13 to 16. They either have experienced studying with foreign lecturers of FPT University in Can Tho or with foreign lecturers of English centers in Can Tho. We did a pilot on 4 participants and removed three because their answers were off track (referring to Vietnamese lecturers rather than foreign lecturers). In selecting the participants for this study, the study adopted Purposive Sampling as its sampling design. When adopting Purposive Sampling, it is essential to identify the quality of participants (Allen, 1971).

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According to Snedecor (1939), the researchers had to do cultural preparation before collecting the sample to discover qualified and reliable participants. In their research, Bernard (2002), Campbell (1955), Seidler (1974), and Tremblay (1957) described informants as observant, reflective of the community, with extensive knowledge of the culture who are both competent and eager to share their expertise. There are five criteria conducted to select the participants:

- Studying at FPT Can Tho University or English Center
- Studying with an English Foreign Lecturers
- Being willing to be interviewed
- Being willing to express an opinion
- Being open to giving the truth

In the study, conversational interviewing was the strategy for gathering and evaluating details to collect information. Schober and Conrad (1997) indicated that survey interviewers are prepared to understand questions accurately in English when conducting conversational interviews. Interviewers clarify important terminology if participants are confused by the questions (the terms can be used in their own words, assuming they have mastered the concepts or any information required to ensure that questions are understood). Interviewers should conduct themselves as if they were having a regular discussion, diverting from a standardized scenario to guarantee that respondents interpret questions correctly and consistently. It takes around 20 to 30 minutes for one researcher to interact with one participant. The first two minutes are spent getting to know the participant, which encourages them to dive straight into the context and keep up with the flow of questions in a succinct way.

Additionally, participants will be given some time to get comfortable with Google Meet or Zoom by deciding whether or not to turn on their camera. Conversational interviewing leads to a more consistent interpretation of the questions. Its goal is to keep the conversation focused on the objectives and prevent participants from drifting off. Theoretical sampling obtained through MDA encourages participants to share as many experiences as possible in a friendly and comfortable setting. New variables are investigated to expand the results using the instrument's multiple-case setting.

Moreover, audio-recording is a valuable method for ensuring that the content of conversational interviews is wholly accurate. The study by Bloor and Wood (2006) stated that capturing audio is utilized during data gathering to avoid misunderstanding or missing details. Recordings are transcribed into text to be thoroughly examined, connected to analytical notes, and/or code. Roberts (2004) claimed that transcriptions must be highly thorough in capturing elements of dialogue such as emphasis, pace, tone of voice, timing, and pauses. After obtaining consent from participants, taking notes and recording audio was carried out. Each audio file lasted between 25 and 30 minutes and was recorded entirely from beginning to end. After the recording is finished, a secure file is designed to ensure that all participants' identities are protected.

The quality of the interviewing questions was tested on a few students (04) at Can Tho FPT University. Based on the literature review, the list of questions was designed to take the conversational interviewing with 37 participants. Questions were delivered in Vietnamese to ensure that the participants' responses would not be influenced by their inability to comprehend the instructions or

questions. Before performing a pilot or interview, participants received an email to set a time and arrange for discreet interview settings using online platforms where they freely chose to turn on or off their camera to guarantee comfort and privacy. Participants in this study were given commitments in the form of consent forms and written promises from the researchers. Three participants were excluded during the interview because their answers were not relevant to the study, and the final number of participants was 37.

The questions were delivered in Vietnamese to ensure that the participants' responses would not be influenced by their inability to comprehend the instructions or questions if they were not native English speakers. Each participant was interviewed face to face, and we recorded the whole conversation and took detailed notes with their consent. The method is grounded on a communicative point of view; according to Cicourel (1974), Clark (1992), Schegloff (1984), and Tannen (1989), partners are supposed to cooperate and discuss what is being said until they are satisfied that they understand each other precisely. Following the interview, the audio/video recordings were transcribed into Microsoft Word, the whole discussion was translated into English, and all of the replies were sorted. In addition, the participants received a thank-you email with the content of their responses, allowing them to ensure that their responses were complete and accurate.

## **Data Analysis**

Following the Grounded Theory framework, the data employed from the conversational interviewing are coded in three steps: open, axial, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The initial approach to data in open coding is to examine how replies are processed line by line. The raw data is divided into smaller portions to ensure consistency and to understand the main ideas, as well as to express them in clear concepts, categories, and subcategories. Analyzing the link between the categories generated during the open coding stage is crucial. The axial coding step conceptualizes the essential phrases during the grouping process. When it comes to identifying the key categories and constructing theory, selective coding is used. As a result, the researchers either acknowledge the research's essential phenomenon or respond to the research question.

The list of conversational interview questions is divided into two categories. The first category aims to explore students' perceptions of foreign lecturers' bio-identities with questions focused on four identities - base themes (ethnic, professional, moral, and cyber identities) based on critical phrases defined by previous scholars. The second one investigates how those perceptions influence students' classroom participation with the four base themes about foreign lecturers' identities on a comparable basis.

## **Results**

### **Students' perceptions of foreign lecturers' bio-identities**

#### *Foreign lecturers' ethnic identity*

Roughly 30% of participants agreed to identify which country foreign lecturer comes from accent and physical features. Language and physical features were two factors that highlighted ethnic identity. The minority of participants (about 27%) said they could only guess what continent or nation the foreign lecturer belongs to.



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*I usually make a guess by the tone of their voice, like a deep, thick voice, I will recognize that they are from America. If it is a warmer, softer voice and easier to listen to, I'll say they come from Asia. (Participant 31<sup>st</sup>, Digital Marketing)*

*I am not sure if it is about identifying a specific country, but I can guess whether they are Asian, African, or European. (Participant 33<sup>rd</sup>, Software Engineering)*

It accounted for 18% of respondents who claimed that they can recognize the nationality or continent of the foreign lecturers' by physical features but cannot distinguish them by accent. An insignificant proportion of students cannot identify foreign lecturers' ethnic identity by two factors mentioned in the conversational interview (6%). Of the participants who could not identify but could only partially guess about the origin of foreign lecturers stood at 18%.

*Honestly, it is tough to guess which country they originate from. I look at them very closely to make a guess, unless I have been in a close relationship with them for a long time, I will be able to recognize them, and now I think the proportion of guessing it is not h, high about 40-50%. (Participant 11<sup>th</sup>, Hotel Management)*

### *Foreign lecturers' professional identity*

It is similar to the previous statement by Lamote and Engels (2010), Schepens, Aelterman, and Vlerick (2009), roughly 90% of respondents agreed that professional foreign lecturers are experts at delivering messages from the lectures, capable of making the contents from lectures appealing and approachable for students and enhancing interaction within the classroom.

*Say there is a word or content, which is hard to grasp in the lecture, but the way foreign lecturers make it comprehensive to students makes the issues understandable. That is the beauty of foreign lecturers' professionalism. (10<sup>th</sup> student, Hotel Management)*

*The way foreign lecturers listen to students' questions, their skills in conveying the lesson messages, and skills in sharing their personal experiences to be both relevant to the lesson and approachable to students establish their professionalism. (12<sup>th</sup> student, English Language)*

82% of participants' responses agreed that foreign lecturers' experience in their profession establishes their professionalism.

*Suppose a lecturer has had experience teaching in one country to another. In that case, they will slowly get used to their pedagogical style, reflexes in their profession, and they will have a better way of teaching in the future. I think experience is an essential thing in any profession. (19<sup>th</sup> student, Korean Language)*

Roughly 85% of the participants perceived that foreign lecturers' formal attire accumulates for their professionalism.

*The way that the foreign lecturers' outfit is suitable, appropriate for the culture of Vietnam, I will appreciate it more. I think this person has put in efforts to learn about Vietnamese culture and to be able to adapt to Vietnamese pedagogical style in the best way. (14<sup>th</sup> student, Business Management)*

75% of participants agreed that foreign lecturers' proficiency in using technology promotes their professionalism.

*Nowadays, everything is related to technology. When foreign lecturers know how to operate all those devices, they desire to learn and build their professionalism.* (16<sup>th</sup> student, English Language)

#### *Foreign lecturers' moral identity*

In our interviews, most participants (73%) expressed that a foreign lecturer who tends to show tolerance, concern, and sympathy for students' is conscientious. Participants indicated that this made them feel optimistic and grateful.

*Lecturers are often more concerned with submitting assignments on time than with the reasons for lateness, so lecturers who sympathize with me (for valid reasons), I will feel grateful.* (3<sup>rd</sup> Student, Business Administration)

In addition, 85% of participants indicated that a foreign lecturer's willingness to support students, such as sharing learning strategies, additional learning resources, or giving constructive feedback, establishes the morality of foreign lecturers.

*This is regarded as the most important aspect of demonstrating a lecturer's ethics and responsibilities. I believe that their purpose for teaching originates from a desire to train students rather than simply completing their fundamental teaching responsibilities of getting to class and completing the lesson. Dedicated attention and support is the most core virtue of the profession.* (1<sup>st</sup> Student, Digital Marketing)

Through the conversational interviews, two-thirds of the participants said that a moral lecturer is a foreign lecturer who respects society's laws and university norms and regulations. Moreover, nearly all participants believed that a foreign lecturer who complies with teaching profession ethics is moral.

*When foreign lecturers visit my nation, they must comply with all relevant standards and cultural norms* (2<sup>nd</sup> Student, Digital Marketing).

*If it is referred to as a regulation, the instructor must observe it and set an example for the students.* (7<sup>th</sup> Student, English Language)

#### *Foreign lecturers' cyber identity*

The majority of participants (63%) from the conversational interviews also agreed that being active on social media partly reflects the teaching career of the lecturers. They also provided that this is the basis for the first assessment of the foreign lecturer's qualifications, which gives them more trust in those lecturers.

*People tend to post important, memorable moments or milestones of their lives on social media. Instructors will post lots of pictures of where they have been, where they've taught, or what they've achieved. When others look at them, they will judge them as good and trustworthy people.* (Participant 7<sup>th</sup>, English Language)

In addition, the remaining one-third of the participants found it challenging to reflect on the aspect mentioned. Interviewees also emphasized that they place more importance on the way lecturers teach in class than what they show on social media.

*It depends on the personality and preferences of each lecturer that they want to share or not. For some lecturers who only share their lives, it is difficult for us to know the achievements. (Participant 3<sup>rd</sup>, Business Administration)*

### **The influence of students' perceptions of foreign lecturers' bio-identities on classroom participation**

#### *Foreign lecturers' ethnic identity*

In their interviews, we found that foreign lecturers' ethnic identity can initially attract and enhance the proportion of their classroom participation.

The majority of students (91%) said they were attracted to native English lecturers because of their accurate pronunciation. Students indicated that this helps them improve their accent, tone, intonation, response, and overall English skills across regular communication with native speakers. Besides phonics, cultural knowledge is another factor that students appreciate from foreign lecturers (15%).

*I am very interested, as I mentioned, I attach great importance to improving my English. When I have a close relationship with lecturers who use English as a native language, it is an opportunity for me to improve my English. (Participant 18<sup>th</sup>, English Language)*

*If I interact with native lecturers about their journey or the life in their hometown, I learn much more about culture and language use. (Participant 24<sup>th</sup>, English Language)*

#### *Foreign lecturers' professional identity*

Students are more engaged in classroom discussions and interaction with foreign lecturers' authentic knowledge. 100% of students agreed that foreign lecturers help them understand multiple features of cultures through their storytelling about their experiences with the corresponding countries.

*I feel highly interested in the class when foreign lecturers share their experiences in multiple cultures. Therefore, I really enjoy learning cultural elements through the lecturer's life experience. Let us take examples of cultural taboos or normative behavior. (5<sup>th</sup> student, Hotel Management)*

*I will find it more appealing to participate in class when the foreign lecturers share their life experiences. Their own stories are practical, and through them, I can learn cultural elements that are entirely outside the books. (10<sup>th</sup> student, English Language)*

It is reported that foreign lecturers' degrees or certificates and their subject matter expertise facilitate a sense of reliability for students and demonstrate the depth of their knowledge about the profession. As can be inferred from the respondents (85%), foreign lecturers' subject-matter expertise motivates them to participate in the classroom.

*Studying with foreign lecturers with advanced degrees and good English certificates will make me more interested in participating in class, and I feel there is more to learn from them. I think these factors will affect their competitiveness. (12<sup>th</sup> student, Hotel Management)*

More than 70% of responses illustrated the relationship between foreign lecturers' formal attire and their professionalism. The participants highlighted that their professional outlook gives them the first impression of appreciation for the profession, shows their styles to which students can adapt, and expresses respect for students and other lecturers.

*If foreign lecturers are well dressed, it also shows their lifestyle and their discipline. Moreover, a neat and careful manner in their attire also makes a good impression on students and shows a certain respect for their profession. (13<sup>th</sup> student, English Language)*

Just over 60% of participants agreed that foreign lecturers' proficiency in using technology boosts their classroom participation.

*I feel much more interested in the class and less bored of the curriculum. For example, about 30 minutes of class time, there is a Kahoot activity, something relaxing. That would really be energy-boosting. Moreover, this proficiency also helps the lesson to be more appealing. (1<sup>st</sup> Student, Hotel Management)*

*Foreign lecturers' moral identity*

More than 50% of participants indicated that the foreign lecturers' sympathy for students' reasonable excuses did not affect their classroom participation.

*That makes me lazier since I will use it as an excuse to be absent in class more often. I need foreign lecturers to encourage me in the same way that they force me to perform better. (5<sup>th</sup> student, Hotel Management)*

It is entirely in line with the results of nearly 97% of participants indicating that foreign lecturers with a sociable personality make students more motivated to learn, more approachable, and attract them to the classroom.

*I am more motivated to attend class when they have pleasant or open-minded lecturers who share about their lives. It will make me feel a little duller if they are quiet, but I believe they are incredibly experienced when I study with them. As a result, both sides will have their distinct features. (3<sup>rd</sup> Student, Business Administration)*

The foreign lecturer's constructive feedback and learning support attracted nearly 94% of the participants to the classroom.

*The lecturer gave me advice on how to improve to assist myself-development, which is extremely important. I want to hear them explain my weaknesses, hear criticism without personally offending me, know where I am, and utilize that information to motivate and improve myself. (4<sup>th</sup> Student, English Language)*

*Foreign lecturers' cyber identity*

It is worth noting that the twenty cases (61%) of this study acknowledged that foreign lecturers' activities on social networking sites affect students' class participation.

*When we know that the lecturer is very attentive to interacting with colleagues and students on social networks, we will feel more comfortable than when interacting directly in the classroom. As for lecturers being quiet on social media, which would make us feel a bit distant. (Participant 3<sup>rd</sup>, Business Administration)*

However, another part of students (39%) participating in the study tends to judge foreign lecturers only through direct interaction with them in class and believe that only that can help them increase their engagement in learning. They even think that foreign lecturers have social media activities that do not affect class participation, and they do not pay much attention to this issue.

*Lecturers' social media activities usually do not affect class participation. I rarely make friends or follow foreign lecturers on social media. Most of the time, I meet and interact with lecturers at school, so how they express themselves on social networks does not affect the learning experience or my interest in going to school. (26<sup>th</sup> student, English Language)*

## **Discussions**

The results also illustrate that foreign lecturers' ethnic identity is the most influential sub-theme for students' classroom participation, which is contrary to the research carried out by Grubbs et al. (2010) and corresponds to the study by I. Huang (2014). The participants further noted that this type of identity is a first impression for them in the initial stage. Interacting with native speakers, students enhance their speaking skills, pronunciation, and intonation. Afterward, participants value foreign lecturers' professionalism and morality; hence, which is more appealing to their willingness to participate in class.

Additionally, participants emphasized the importance of applying practical knowledge to the lectures alongside subject expertise. All participants highlighted that this teaching practice boosts their classroom participation, similar to Diekelmann (2001). Moreover, a majority of the responses value the magnetism of foreign lecturers' formal attire. This finding contradicts the study of Craig and Savage (2015), where the scholars discovered that foreign lecturers' formal attire had little impact on students' participation and performance. It illustrated that certain cultures might have different views on foreign lecturers' attire, some may highly evaluate it, and some may consider it freedom of choice. The Vietnamese culture has been long known for appreciating a person's attire. Hence, it is understandable that foreign lecturers' formal attire has a tremendous impact on Vietnamese students' classroom participation. In conclusion, foreign lecturers should consider their teaching attire appropriate to the culture where they are working.

The personality of foreign lecturers is exceedingly evaluated from the responses. Most participants indicate that having a sociable personality encourages them to engage in classroom activities. Approachable, open-minded, supportive, and committed foreign lecturers are highly impactful on students' classroom participation. Students expect their foreign lecturers to assist them in their studies, mainly by providing constructive feedback or suggestions on how they might be better in the future.

Many students, on the other hand, expect to be reprimanded by their foreign lecturers. They could learn from these criticisms and improve to become a better version of themselves in the future.

The fact that foreign lecturers interact with students on social networks effectively narrows the gap between them and students. This study finding suggests that foreign lecturers should establish a good personal profile or academic/professional profile and promote their willingness to support students on social media to a specific extent. Furthermore, their cyber identity reflects their ethnic identity and working journeys to learn sharable cultural details. Further studies are recommended to corroborate or consolidate this result on foreign lecturers' cyber identities.

In conclusion, foreign lecturers are often at a competitive advantage when it comes to their ethnicity. If they promote their cyber profile to be academic by expressing their professionalism, it strengthens the first impression towards students. Nevertheless, they need to reinforce their moral identity and professional identity in later stages.

## **Conclusion**

Although there is no absolute definition of bio-identity, we defined a typical thought that bio-identities as identities connected to a person's existence throughout their lifetime. In addition, the current study has explored students' perceptions of foreign lecturers' bio-identities and those perceptions that influence their classroom participation. The findings of the conversational interviews provided four critical results of students' perceptions. Foreign lecturers' ethnic identity plays as the first impression towards students. Most participants stated that their enrolment into universities or language centers is due to native English lecturers.

Nevertheless, students tend to prefer foreign lecturers with professionalism and morality in later stages. Moreover, participants illustrated a sense of appreciation for foreign lecturers who make efforts to study their culture. Foreign lecturers have an advantage with their ethnic identity. As they strengthen their professional identity and moral identity, they can promote their identity within the profession

## **Limitations and Future Studies**

### **Limitations**

There are limitations in this study that could be addressed in future research. First, due to the time limit, this study was implemented only in a small fraction of the population at Can Tho campus of FPT University. The research would be more reliable if researchers could conduct a study on a much larger group or carry out with other universities and students who have experienced learning in English language centers. Furthermore, to meet the time limit of the study, we were only able to conduct one conversational interview per participant. To avoid this limitation and increase credibility, researchers should conduct two or more interviews for each respondent. An additional limitation of our data collection procedure revolves around online interviewing. As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, we could not conduct face-to-face interviews, which lowered our ability to create rapport with the participants.

## Recommendations

We propose that future research should be expanded to include more foreign lecturers' identities and the ones we have mentioned (gender identity, religious identity, organizational identity, etc.). It is feasible to consider how those new identities might affect or generate astonishing results. The reliability in our thesis was not extremely strong because we used the qualitative methodology. For this reason, we call for other researchers to use a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to ensure higher reliability in data analysis. Questionnaires or observations could also be used to identify students' perceptions and classroom participation. Finally, further studies should be extended to other institutions in Vietnam and more diverse research subjects, and more learning experiences with foreign lecturers. It can also involve a large-scale survey including participants from other universities and language centers where many foreign lecturers are working.

## Compliance of research and publication ethics

I, as the Corresponding Author, declare and undertake that in the study titled as “Students' Perceptions of Foreign Lecturers' Bio-identities”, scientific, ethical and citation rules were followed; Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry Journal Editorial Board has no responsibility for all ethical violations to be encountered, that all responsibility belongs to the author/s and that this study has not been sent to any other academic publication platform for evaluation.

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