# Employing Dictogloss as a Cooperative Learning Approach to Enhance Language Acquisition among Non-English Majors at a Vietnamese University

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## ABSTRACT

**Keywords**: cooperative learning, Dictogloss, language acquisition

This study was carried out to explore the effectiveness of implementing Dictogloss as a cooperative learning (CL) method in language acquisition. A mixed-method approach was employed, utilizing a survey questionnaire with 145 students, focus-group interviews with 15 students, and teacher diaries from 3 teachers. The results show that using Dictogloss as a cooperative learning strategy positively impacts students' perceived English language proficiency, motivation, and engagement. The research highlights the importance of comprehensively implementing Dictogloss as a teaching and learning method in the long term. Also, the study recommends incorporating Dictogloss into language curricula to provide substantial benefits for learners. This study hopefully contributes to the language teaching and learning method within the context of higher education in Vietnam and suggests that such an approach could be beneficial for English learners to enhance their learning outcomes.

## Introduction

Education is highly valued in several developing Asian nations, such as Vietnam, where it is seen as essential to success in life. Highly qualified individuals are highly valued in society, implying that credentials are occasionally valued more than abilities or talents (Le, 1999). This fact leads to the goal of learning, which could be obtaining certifications or passing tests. Furthermore, Vietnamese students are frequently accused of being passive. This is actually a result of adhering to Confucianism, which holds that teachers should be in charge of the classroom and assign tasks while students should remain silent and follow their instructions.

In today's global economic and cultural integration, the use of foreign languages, especially English, in communication has become increasingly essential. English has been required in most educational institutions in Vietnam, from primary to university levels. In addition to lowering learning quality, insufficient involvement makes acquiring the language skills

required for future employment more difficult. This lack of participation affects the quality of learning and creates barriers to developing the language skills necessary for future careers.

One of the top concerns of language educators is how to improve the interaction and motivation between students and teachers and between students in language practice activities. To address this problem, new pedagogical methods are constantly being tested and researched to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Among them, the CL method has emerged as a cutting-edge educational movement that is used globally and has been recommended to be applied in language classes by numerous studies (Namaziandost et al., 2019; Nguyen et al., 2022; Sarwat et al., 2024; Trinh, 2011)

Although English language teaching places a strong emphasis on traditional teaching methods like Presentation-Production-Practice or Test-Teach-Test for lesson design and teaching practice, these approaches are often criticized for being teacher-centered, focusing on accuracy over communication, and lacking flexibility (Pratista, 2023). In contrast, methods like Dictogloss, which enable collaborative learning with all four skills, including listening, speaking, writing, and reading, can foster learning engagement, critical thinking, and deeper linguistic knowledge awareness (Ardiansyah, 2020; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2023; Vasiljevic, 2010; Wen, 2024). These benefits are particularly valuable for non-English majors, who often struggle with motivation and may find traditional, teacher-centered approaches monotonous and less interactive.

In the context of this study, non-English major students at a Vietnamese university were provided with blended learning courses in English. They completed 10 weeks of English classes, which included 40 hours of face-to-face instruction and 35 hours of online study. The students could self-study the linguistic knowledge through the learning management system and practice English vocabulary, grammar, listening, reading, and writing exercises. The face-to-face lessons aimed to reinforce and extend language knowledge through interactive activities. This environment provides an ideal setting to implement Dictogloss as a cooperative learning approach that may bridge the gap between passive knowledge acquisition and active language use.

Due to Dictogloss's potential to enhance language acquisition through integrated skill development and collaborative learning, this study aims to investigate its effectiveness and provide insights into how this approach might be used to support language learning in similar educational settings.


## Literature review

### Foreign language teaching and learning

Learning and teaching a foreign language are intricate, multidimensional processes that numerous factors impact. Liuhuizi and Yasin (2024) mentioned psychological factors focusing on motivation, anxiety, attitudes, and cognitive factors. Sharing quite the same opinion, Abdulrahman (2023) referred to nine factors significantly impacting foreign language acquisition, such as interaction patterns in the classroom, rapport with teachers, motivation, learners' attitudes, general cultural concerns, initiation issues, self-consciousness, fear of making mistakes, and classroom anxiety. Hoang (2021) classified this process into internal and external elements, including communicative environment factors, comprehensive inputs, aptitude, age, gender, emotion or motivation, and learning strategies. Although each had their own way of categorizing, they all agreed that these elements interact to affect learners of foreign

languages, and motivation places great importance on the learners' language acquisition. Identifying these factors aids in determining learner difficulties and efficient teaching strategies and proposes suitable implications for learning and teaching foreign languages. Sun (2019) listed some noticeable features related to the teaching of language as follows:

- To create a language environment: Instead of teaching students to learn a language, teachers should concentrate on helping them acquire it. Therefore, teachers should place a high value on building a linguistic environment to increase language instruction's effectiveness. Teachers can first pique students' interest in language acquisition by introducing them to more of the target language's culture and customs; second, they can lessen students' reluctance to learn a foreign language by creating a welcoming environment. Third, in order to assist students in practicing what they have learned, teachers should host or encourage more language-learning activities.

- To provide more comprehensible input: The key to learning a language is getting a lot of intelligible input—mostly from reading and listening. In addition to teaching grammar, teachers are in charge of giving students understandable information in the classroom.

- To pay attention to the feedback on learning: Feedback gives students a clear picture of how well they are learning the language, allowing them to improve on their mistakes and study more effectively in the future. Genuine praise for students' efforts can help them learn the language more effectively, and their sense of accomplishment serves as motivation to get better at language acquisition.

Thus, the language environment for students to practice freely and actively and comprehensible material are two important factors leading to effective language acquisition.

## Cooperative learning

CL may be applied to a wide range of subjects and educational levels and is described as a teaching strategy that fosters learning, socializing, and higher-order thinking (Gillies, 2014). According to Barkley et al. (2012), in a cooperative learning environment, students work in groups under the guidance of a teacher who acts as an authoritative figure and decision-maker and assists students in their peer learning. CL is now a well-known teaching strategy in which students collaborate in small groups to accomplish shared objectives (Gillies, 2016; Johnson & Johnson, 2017).

According to Sarwat et al. (2024), CL is not just a teaching approach but also creates an active learning environment where students help one another accomplish shared objectives. CL has become a prominent pedagogical strategy in current educational research due to its many benefits, which may be observed in a variety of learning situations. One of the main benefits of CL is that it can improve academic performance. Several studies have demonstrated that it can enhance reading, writing, communication, scientific comprehension, and problem-solving skills (Wenning & Vieyra, 2019). Furthermore, CL fosters constructive interactions between students from various backgrounds, assisting in the development of critical social skills (Nguyen et al., 2022). Hence, persistent CL interventions can greatly increase students' motivation to learn (Nguyen et al., 2022; Wenning & Vieyra, 2019).

In short, CL has definite benefits over traditional learning strategies. The growing body of research demonstrating its ability to improve academic performance, encourage social skills, and increase motivation makes it a noteworthy teaching technique.

## Dictogloss

Dictogloss, an activity that originated from dictation, was developed by Wajnryb in 1990. According to Newman (2012), Dictogloss is the combination of two parts: "dicto" and "gloss",

in which "dicto" means dictation, and "gloss" refers to paraphrasing or interpretation of the text. The author took a close look at the term by separating it into two parts that are easy to understand. What makes Dictogloss different from traditional dictation is that the students do not passively copy the text word for word; they reproduce a new one but still keep the meaning and style as close as possible. In short, the above definitions are all correct and show the nature of Dictogloss but just from different perspectives. There are four steps in the original Dictogloss presented by Wajnryb (1990):

a. Preparation: Learners are introduced to topics and some related key vocabulary

b. Dictation: The teacher reads the text at a normal speed twice. The first time, the learners just listen to get general ideas about the text and should not write anything. The second time, they listen and take notes.

c. Reconstruction: The learners work in groups and share their notes to recreate the text.

d. Analysis and correction: This step is flexible; the learners can compare their text with other groups or with the original text and make corrections if necessary.

In this study, the original procedure is kept when Dictogloss is implemented. However, to diversify the activity, the teachers may ask the students to listen to the recording and reconstruct; the students may reconstruct the content in text or orally; or, in analysis and correction, the teachers can check the work or ask for cross-checking among groups.

Dictogloss brings about various benefits for the learning and teaching of language. Firstly, the reconstructing stage in Dictogloss helps students become more aware of linguistic knowledge and rhetorical patterns (Vasiljevic, 2010). During note-sharing and discussions, students closely examine the text, make sense of their notes, negotiate, and hypothesize. They focus on grammar points like verb tenses, parts of speech, and homonyms to maintain the text's main ideas. In the analysis stage, students compare their reconstructed texts with others, enhancing their self-awareness of rhetorical patterns and cohesive devices. Shak (2006) notes that Dictogloss aids vocabulary acquisition as students practice during the Preparation, Dictation, and Reconstruction steps.

Secondly, Dictogloss promotes cooperative learning, allowing students to work in groups rather than individually. This method encourages students to communicate and interact with each other, stimulating negotiation and communication skills (Wen, 2024). This approach also helps them share the workload, gather diverse ideas, and provide a supportive environment for speaking out (Jacobs & Small, 2003). As a result, students feel more confident in hypothesizing to understand the text.

Thirdly, Dictogloss is used in foreign language learning and contributes to improving many skills, such as listening, writing, and speaking (Ardiansyah, 2020; Ngo & Le, 2020; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2023). Dictogloss is also used to effectively promote grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation (Kurtaj, 2021; White, 2011).

Fourthly, Dictogloss lets teachers cut down on teacher-talk time while allowing students to work together through peer teaching and peer corrections. Furthermore, Dictogloss gives FFL/ESL teachers a chance to provide detailed feedback to students, building on their input despite being easier to prepare (Jose, 2022).

While Dictogloss is generally considered a beneficial approach for both learners and teachers, some issues need to be addressed, such as students' cognitive load. The activity involves various steps and skills that may overwhelm students, and students' engagement may be hindered by the complexity of the instruction (Ngo & Le, 2020; Vasiljevic, 2010). Besides, there may be

unequal contributions in group work; strong students may dominate group discussion while weak students become passive (Jacobs & Small, 2003), or the activity may be time-consuming; it may not fit into all curricula (Ardiansyah, 2020). Ngo and Le (2020) also highlight the topic and speed of the input or students' background knowledge as factors that need to be considered when applying Dictogloss.

*Previous studies on Dictogloss*

Ardiansyah (2020) used Dictogloss to examine its effectiveness in improving writing skills among university students. The data collection methods included observations, interviews, the pre-test, and the post-test. The findings showed an enhancement of students' collaboration to rewrite a delivered text in their own words, improving their comprehension of students' writing skills. The Dictogloss approach also improved contextual grammar learning, motivation, and interaction. Aminatun et al. (2021) conducted research to examine the effect of Dictogloss on senior high school students' listening. The study used quasi-experimental research with pre- and post-tests as a primary instrument to collect data. The result indicated that Dictogloss had a favorable impact on students' listening proficiency and might be a substitute method for teaching listening in the classroom. The study also regarded Dictogloss as a simple method for teaching listening skills and was a suitable approach that may be used to improve listening comprehension as well as other English language skills.

In Vietnam, Nguyen and Nguyen (2023) looked into how Vietnamese EFL students at a university might utilize Dictogloss to enhance their note-taking and listening abilities. Through student perception and performance, the study sought to investigate the efficacy of the Dictogloss approach. According to the pre-test, post-test, and survey questionnaire findings, students' listening and note-taking skills significantly improved. Furthermore, the majority of students reported that the Dictogloss method improved their listening comprehension and increased their interaction with teachers and peers. Ngo and Le (2021) conducted action research using qualitative methods to see whether the Dictogloss method improves listening comprehension for non-English majors at a university. The listening notes taken in class were examined, and forty students were invited to participate in focus group interviews. The findings showed that students found this method enjoyable and that their awareness of linguistic knowledge had increased. Additionally, they felt that the strategy significantly improved their listening skills.

In previous studies, Dictogloss has been widely used to promote specific language skills. There is limited research on how Dictogloss impacts learners' language acquisition comprehensively and systematically as a teaching method in a lesson that integrates all four language skills. Thus, this study will examine the effect of Dictogloss on teaching English cooperatively in a whole semester with non-English majors at a university. In order to achieve the research objectives, the following research question will be addressed:

*How do students perceive Dictogloss as a cooperative learning approach in their English language acquisition?*

## Methodology

*Participants*

The study's participants were second-year non-English majored students from five different intermediate-level classes. Their ages ranged from nineteen to twenty. Each participating student had two English lessons per week, with each lesson focusing on two language skills,

including listening-speaking and reading-writing, with a contact time of two hours. Each course lasted 10 weeks. Three teachers of classes applying Dictogloss also participated in the data collection procedure to provide insights for the study. They all have over 10 years of teaching experience.

### Data collection and analysis

This study was designed as a mixed-method descriptive study, combining quantitative and qualitative methods with the questionnaire and focus group interviews as the main source of data and the teachers' diaries as a supplementary source. The questionnaire was delivered to the students through Google Forms in week 10, and then focused group interviews were carried out one week after the researcher had screened the data from the questionnaire. This enabled the researcher to choose appropriate interviewees, which is justified in the focus group interview method below. The last research tool employed in this study was teacher diaries. The teacher diaries were collected every two weeks during the period dictogloss was applied in the English classes.

### Questionnaire

The researchers used a Google Form to administer an online survey to students in order to investigate their attitudes toward Dictogloss. The questionnaire was adapted from previous works in the same field by Shak (2006) and Nguyen et al. (2021). The three components of the English questionnaire were personal information, students' attitudes, and their perceptions of the effectiveness of Dictogloss in English learning. Five multiple-choice questions (MCQs) made up the first section, and fifteen Likert-type questions with responses ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree" made up the last section. Excel statistical software was used to calculate and show the survey data in tables and charts for comparison and analysis.

### Focus group interview

Out of the 145 students who gave their contact details and consented to be interviewed, the researchers then chose 15 of them. The students from different classes with uncertain responses, those who gave rich and extensive answers, and those whose responses were either similar to or different from the majority were among the selection criteria for student interviews. These criteria were intended to complement the quantity of data gathered and guarantee that the viewpoints and opinions accurately represented all facets of the study issue. The aim of these interviews was to clarify and elaborate on the answers provided in the survey questionnaire. The interviews also offered insights into students' attitudes and learning experiences. Each group interview consisted of five students. Every interview was recorded to aid in data analysis, lasted roughly thirty to thirty-five minutes, and was conducted in Vietnamese to avoid any misunderstanding due to language barriers. The questionnaire items used to investigate *students' attitudes* and *language improvement* following the implementation of Dictogloss in their class served as the basis for the interview questions. Interview data were transcribed and categorized according to the same themes to analyze qualitatively.

### Teacher Diaries

Although the primary data of this research were collected through the survey and interviews to investigate the participants' perceptions of Dictogloss in learning English, the teacher's diaries were also employed to help interpret and contextualize the students' responses. The teacher's reflections could also be used to triangulate findings. These diaries served as a supplementary source to support the interpretation of student-reported experiences. Three teachers were asked to note down their thoughts in diaries as personal reflections every two weeks. The diary was structured with three criteria: *The students' attitude, the students' ability to acquire English,* and

*Others*. The column "Others" was for the teachers to note down any occurrences or immediate thoughts while the activity was carried out. The teacher's diaries were kept in narrative form and categorized under the same themes.

## Findings

The key findings of the study are presented as follows:

*Students' attitudes*

**Table 1**

*Students' attitude towards the use of Dictogloss as a cooperative learning approach*

| No | | M | SD |
|----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|
| 1. | Dictogloss is easy to carry out in class | 4.02 | 0.85 |
| 2. | You willingly participate in Dictogloss activities. | 4.15 | 0.83 |
| 3. | You actively engage in the teaching-learning process during Dictogloss activities. | 4.15 | 0.83 |
| 4. | You feel more motivated and engaged when participating in Dictogloss activities. | 4.04 | 1.00 |
| 5. | Dictogloss enhances good working relationships among team members. | 4.02 | 0.85 |
| 6. | Dictogloss helps to develop more positive attitudes towards language learning in the classroom. | 4.21 | 0.82 |
| 7. | Dictogloss makes learners more responsible for their own learning. | 3.92 | 0.98 |

According to the questionnaire data, the majority of students enthusiastically participated in the activity with a mean score ranging from 3.92 to 4.21, and the moderate variety in students' attitudes is indicated by the SD values, which vary from 0.82 to 1.00. The participants ranked the highest score for the statement that Dictogloss assisted them in having positive attitudes towards learning. The group interview also confirms this result. The student shared that Dictogloss enabled them to actively participate in the learning process through group work, and it provided a comfortable learning environment for them to express themselves with their peers. They did not experience the pressure of learning like in other traditional classes (S#6, S1#0, S#11, #S14). Another student added: "*I feel less embarrassed being corrected by my teammates rather than by the teacher in front of the class. Thus, I dare to talk more, and I am more willing to take part in learning activities.*" (#S1). In terms of feedback, the teacher's diary commented: "*During the process of reconstruction, I noted that with Dictogloss, the students were more willing to ask the teacher, maybe asking during group work seemed to be less formal than asking in front of the whole class.*" (TD#5). The teachers' diaries also provide more insights into the students' motivation and engagement in the activities. It is recorded: "*In analysis step, every group tried to outperform the others by comparing their texts with the original. They were more active and more competitive in learning than in traditional class where the teacher teaches, students do exercise and check*" (TD#3).

Despite the positive result of the student's attitude towards using Dictogloss, some participants complained of uneven group member contributions (Interview 2, 3). The teacher's diary explained this: "*There were some groups in which good students seemed to dominate the weak ones in discussion and text reconstruction, and I sometimes needed to go around to monitor*

*group discussions.*" (TD#1). The difficulty level of the text or topic also affects the students' engagement in the activities. The teachers all admitted that some lessons had more challenging topics and vocabulary. However, because the Dictogloss was implemented as a learning approach for the whole semester when the teachers noted their students' less engagement, they had to provide more prompts in the preparation stage, and the discussion got better in the following lessons (TD#3, TD# 4).

*Students' language acquisition*

**Table 2**

*Students perceived the efficacy of language acquisition*

| No | | M | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| 8. | Dictogloss has improved your listening skills. | 4.30 | 0.88 |
| 9. | Dictogloss has improved your speaking skills. | 4.21 | 0.82 |
| 10. | Dictogloss has improved your reading skills. | 3.83 | 0.98 |
| 11. | Dictogloss has improved your writing skills. | 4.19 | 0.85 |
| 12. | Dictogloss has enhanced your overall language proficiency. | 4.00 | 0.88 |
| 13. | You can achieve more in language learning when working collaboratively using Dictogloss than when working alone. | 4.25 | 0.82 |
| 14. | Dictogloss helps you to understand a lesson better. | 4.31 | 0.84 |
| 15. | Dictogloss makes the language acquisition easier. | 4.21 | 0.85 |

Data from the questionnaire shows that Dictogloss is effective in improving various language skills. Listening (M=4.30) is the highest-ranked skill, followed by speaking (M=4.21), writing (M=4.19), and reading (M=3.83). While overall language proficiency is enhanced, there may be room for further improvement in reading skills. A high mean score in item #13 (M=4.25) also explains why students are so positive about Dictogloss in terms of language enhancement.

In the interview, one student said that Dictogloss is an "all-in-one" activity for studying English because it enables him to practice four skills (S#7). The other student added: "*Dictogloss helps me to remember vocabulary and acquire grammar knowledge better because I have to listen, write, speak, and read the text out during dictation and reconstruction steps. That really helps to raise my awareness of the linguistic knowledge.*" (S#15). Besides, the students also admitted that they could learn the language better with stronger students. Some students shared the same points that in the reconstruction step, they compared their notes with other group members and realized that they just tried to note down every word, not the keywords. Thus, next time, they learned to identify keywords and improve their notes. (S#1, S#2).

Another student in the same interview agreed:

> *Thanks to group discussion in Dictogloss, I can remember the learning strategy better. For example, in the dictation step, I can note down the phrases, such as big and something like i-no-mas. I am not sure; I just transcribed the pronunciation of that word. Then, in a discussion, my friend said that because the two words are linked by "and", they must have similar meanings; after that, we tried to base on the pronunciation and context to check that word in the dictionary. It is then "enormous". We did our best to find that word, and I think I will remember it forever!* (S#4).

The teachers' diaries also confirmed the results of the questionnaire and interview. All three teachers thought that their students' language proficiency had generally improved, thanks to Dictogloss. One teacher noted:

> *In traditional listening class, after listening, the students do exercises. However, I am not sure all of the students with correct answers can really understand the text, especially with MCQ questions. However, with Dictogloss, they had to connect the ideas to rebuild the text. That makes them really comprehend what they are studying* (TD#8).

The teacher also noticed that weaker students gradually improved their ability to catch keywords after some lessons with the Dictogloss approach. They became more confident in identifying the main ideas. (TD#10). Although reading is the skill that received the lowest score in the questionnaire (M=3.83), the teachers still noted some benefits, as the students became more aware of the text structure, discourse makers, and meaning relationships among paragraphs. (TD#4, TD#6, TD#7)

Nevertheless, the teachers also revealed that the most important step to help the students achieve their learning goal with the Dictogloss method was the preparation stage; if the new knowledge or vocabulary was not well introduced, the students were likely to fail in the following steps. They also added that it would take one or two first-class periods for the whole class to understand the flow of the approach during the activity, and the role of the teacher was important in monitoring the group discussion. (TD#4, TD#12, TD#13). Besides, it was noted that the students should also be trained in note-taking skills while listening because, when reconstructing the text, they tend to take more notes than in traditional language classes. Thus, good note-taking skills would enable them to perform better in the following steps of Dictogloss. (TD#2).

## Discussion

The study indicated that the students have a positive attitude towards Dictogloss in learning English. The first reason for that is that it brings about a favorable yet competitive learning environment with collaborative learning, in which the participants feel free to express themselves. They are not afraid of making mistakes and also strive for excellence. Secondly, Dictogloss enables them to receive prompt corrective feedback from their peers and teachers, which can improve their language proficiency. These findings also align with the previous study on Dictogloss to improve students' motivation and engagement from Jacobs and Small (2003), Jose (2022), Sarwat et al. (2024), and Wen (2024) for CL, as it helps create a favorable environment for learning. Also, the result confirmed Sun's suggestion (2019) that in order to have an appropriate teaching method, a language environment and timely feedback from peers and teachers are needed.

Additionally, the results revealed that Dictogloss could contribute to the students' self-efficacy in language acquisition. This method showed its effectiveness in all four skills and overall language proficiency because it is a collaborative and integrated approach to language learning. Thanks to it, the students can practice all language skills in one lesson, and working together helps them be more aware of language features and learning strategies better than in traditional classes. These findings are in line with other research in the literature, such as Ardiansyah (2020), Kurtaj (2021), Nguyen and Nguyen (2023), and White (2011), in which Dictogloss was proved to help enhance various aspects of language learning and Gillies (2016) and Johnson and Johnson (2017) for group goal achievement, Wenning and Vieyra (2019) for various skill promotion in CL.

The study also revealed some challenges in the implementation of Dictogloss in teaching English, such as uneven contribution among group members or different levels of difficulties among lessons. This could require the role of the teachers as the knowledge providers,

facilitators, managers, instructors, and counselors (Muliyah et al., 2020, as cited in Aminatun et al.,2021). It is also interesting to note that in order to carry out the method successfully, the students should be equipped with proper note-taking skills and the ability to work well in groups. Such challenges in applying Dictogloss also confirm the results from previous studies such as Jacobs and Small (2003), Ngo and Le (2020), and Vasiljevic (2010).

## Conclusion

The study investigates the effects of Dictogloss as a new teaching method to help students acquire language with non-English major students at a university. Dictogloss is implemented in the long term with 10 successive weeks in every English lesson of five English classes. The finding indicates that Dictogloss generally improves the students' perceived motivation, engagement, and efficacy of language acquisition. The study emphasizes how crucial it is to integrate Dictogloss into the language curriculum and use it as a teaching and learning strategy in a comprehensive manner over the long run. It is hoped that this study will advance the language teaching and learning methodology in Vietnam's higher education system and that non-English majors may benefit from this approach in terms of improving their learning outcomes.

Although this study contributes to the literature by investigating the effectiveness of using Dictogloss as a cooperative learning method in English language acquisition, some limitations of the research need to be addressed. First, the study is still conducted with non-English majors. Further studies could be carried out with English majors. Second, the study just evaluates the impact of Ditogloss on the perceived language proficiency of the learners. The following research should employ tests to measure the students' practical language ability to produce more objective results.

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## Biodata

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