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TABLE OF CONTENT

APPLICATION OF TECHNOLOGY AND BIG DATA IN THE FIELDS OF FINANCE, ACCOUNTING AND AUDITING IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBALIZATION

BANK RUN AND SILICON VALLEY BANK	1
Lam Dang Xuan Hoa, Ho Minh Khoa, Huynh Vo Nhat Linh	1
BIG DATA AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS.....	14
Le Thi Minh, Vo Trung Hau	14
THE EFFICIENCY OF THE INTERNAL CONTROL SYSTEM IN RISK MANAGEMENT AT THE NAM A COMMERCIAL JOINT STOCK BANK	23
Truong Thanh Loc, Tran Ngoc Thanh.....	23
VIETNAM - AUSTRALIA ECONOMIC AND TRADE COOPERATION IN THE NEW NORMAL: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR VIETNAMESE INVESTORS.....	30
Nhu Nguyen Phuc Quynh*, Anh Nguyen Thi Nguyet, Duy Nguyen Anh	30
IMPACTS OF CREDIT GROWTH AND CREDIT RISK ON THE PROFIT OF VIETNAM JOINT STOCK COMMERCIAL BANKS	43
Dao Le Kieu Oanh*, Tran Thi Huong Ngan	43
FACTORS AFFECTING CUSTOMERS' DECISIONS TO USE E-BANKING AT JOINT STOCK COMMERCIAL BANKS IN HO CHI MINH CITY	57
Nguyen Duy Khanh ¹ , Pham Quoc Tham ²	57
HOW CHINA_USA POLITICAL TENSIONS AFFECT STOCK MARKET RETURN OF CHINA AND THE USA? A QUANTILE VAR CONNECTEDNESS APPROACH	70
Hao Wen Chang ¹ , Tsangyao Chang ² and Mei-Chih Wang ³	70
BANKING HUMAN RESOURCES BEFORE THE DEVELOPMENT OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AI	92
Nguyen Huynh Chi.....	92
IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF TRAINING THROUGH IMPROVEMENT OF STUDENT TESTING AND ASSESSMENT – CASE IN ACCOUNTING BRANCH, UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS AND FINANCE	102
Thuy Thi Ha	102
ACTIVITIES OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IN VIETNAMESE COMMERCIAL BANKS: AN OVERVIEW DURING THE COVID-19 RECOVERY PERIOD.....	109
Nguyễn Thị Quỳnh Châu, Đào Lê Kiều Oanh	109
OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR VIETNAM IN ATTRACTIVE FDI IN GLOBAL MINIMUM CORPORATE TAX IMPLEMENTATION	117
Ngo Hoang Thong	117

DIGITAL ECONOMY IN VIETNAM, TRENDS AND POTENTIABILITY

DEVELOPING SMART HOME MODEL FOR APARTMENTS IN HO CHI MINH CITY BASED ON INTERNET OF THINGS (IoT) TECHNOLOGY	182
Dang Thanh Thuy ¹ , Nguyen Thanh Dien ²	182
TRANSPARENCY OF ACCOUNTING INFORMATION OF CONSTRUCTION ENTERPRISES IN HO CHI MINH CITY – CASE STUDY OF APPLICATION OF ACCRUAL ACCOUNTING	193
Truong Thanh Loc ^{1*} , Pham Thi Yen Nhi ²	193
FACTORS AFFECTING THE QUALITY OF FINANCIAL STATEMENTS OF MANUFACTURING ENTERPRISES IN HO CHI MINH CITY	207
Truong Thanh Loc [*] , Dang Nguyen Tuong Han, Nguyen Ngoc Mai Phuong, Nguyen Thi Quynh Huong	207
THE CRITICAL FACTORS OF COLLEGE STUDENTS' INTENTION TO USE METAVERSE TECHNOLOGY FOR SUBJECTS RELATED TO IMPORT-EXPORT LEARNING	221
Van Thuy Nguyen Ho, Chau The Huu, Luan Thanh Nguyen [*]	221
CONSUMER PERCEPTION ABOUT THE SUSTAINABILITY COMMITMENT OF LUXURY BRANDS IN VIETNAM AND CHINA MARKETS.....	233
Tran Minh Tu ¹	233
INFLUENCE OF WOM AND EWOM IN MAKING DECISION BUYING GOODS	247
Doan Anh Tu ¹ , Kim Phi Rum ² , Nguyen Pham Hai Ha ³	247
DIGITAL ECONOMY AND DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL IN VIETNAM.....	257
Hoang Thi Chinh, Nguyen Hoang Phan	257
BLOCKCHAIN APPLICATION IN MODERN LOGISTICS: INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE AND SOME RECOMMENDATIONS FOR VIETNAM	266
Nguyen Nu Tuong Vi.....	266
FACTORS AFFECTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DIGITAL ECONOMY IN VIETNAM	272
Vo Tien Si	272
LEGAL FRAME FOR THE OPERATION OF THE REAL ESTATE BUSINESS UTILIZING THE BLOCKCHAIN PLATFORM IN VIETNAM.....	284
Le Thi Khanh Linh.....	284

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION – COOPERATION – GLOBAL INTEGRATION IN BUSINESS

FACTORS INFLUENCING BUSINESS ACCEPTANCE OF INDUSTRY 4.0 TECHNOLOGY APPLICATIONS IN DONG NAI PROVINCE.....	291
Thanh-Thu Vo*, Minh-Huong Tang.....	291
DIGITAL ORIENTATION, INNOVATION CAPABILITY AND FIRM PERFORMANCE: A PROPOSAL RESEARCH MODEL	298
Nguyen Van Hau	298
PREDICTION OF STUDENT'S BEHAVIORAL INTENTION TO USE SMART LEARNING ENVIRONMENT: A COMBINED MODEL OF SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY AND TECHNOLOGY ACCEPTANCE	309
Nguyen Thi Hai Binh ¹ , Dao Y Nhi ² , Nguyen Thanh Luan ³ , Dang Quan Tri ⁴	309
THE PEDAGOGICAL IMPACT OF GRAMMARLY ON EFL WRITING COMPETENCY: AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXT.	323
Nguyen Thi Hong Lien ¹ , Nguyen Truong Gia Minh ² , Nguyen Ngoc Vu ^{3*}	323
FACTORS AFFECTING PURCHASING DECISION OF THE YOUTH ON TIKTOK	336
Ngoc Pham ¹ , Thanh Cong Tran*.....	336
FACTORS AFFECTING OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY BEHAVIORS OF WORKERS DIRECT PRODUCTION AT CU CHI POWER COMPANY.....	345
Minh Luan Le, Thi Trang Tran.....	345
CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND EMPLOYEES' ORGANIZATIONAL CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIOUR.....	355
Nguyen Xuan Hung ¹ , Ha Le Thu Hoai ¹ , Nguyen Huu My Truc ^{2&3} , Pham Tan Nhat ^{2&3}	355
THE INNOVATION CAPACITY - THE ROLE OF LEADERS OF SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES IN HO CHI MINH CITY, VIETNAM.....	365
Huynh Nhut Nghia	365
PEOPLE'S THOUGHTS ON THE IMPACT OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE ON BUSINESS	376
Ton Nguyen Trong Hien, Bui Tuyet Anh	376
FACTORS AFFECTING BRAND SWITCHING INTENTION IN THE CONTEXT OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN VIETNAM	382
Ly Dan Thanh, Nguyen Phu Quoi, Tran Hoang Nam, Vo Hong Son, Nguyen Ngoc Thuy Tien	382
ENHANCE THE DIGITAL COMPETITIVENESS	398
Tran Quang Canh, Hoang Thi Chinh.....	398

ASSESSING PATIENT SATISFACTION (BRAND) AFTER THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AT THU DUC CITY HOSPITAL.....	408
Nguyen Hoang Dung ^{1*} , Nguyen Huynh Bao An ² , Van Phuong Trang ²	408
INDUSTRIAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES FORM THE FOUNDATION FOR BINH DUONG'S SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	408
Hoang-An Nguyen	417
IMPACT OF ORGANIZATIONAL FAIRNESS ON THE EMPLOYEES' KNOWLEDGE SHARING IN TRAVEL AND TOURISM ENTERPRISES IN HO CHI MINH CITY	426
Le Thi Nhu Quynh ^{1,2} , Le Thi Giang ² , Truong Quang Dung ¹	426
THE EFFECT OF PERSONAL MOTIVATION ON THE TACIT KNOWLEDGE SHARING BEHAVIOR OF 5-STAR HOTELS' EMPLOYEES IN HO CHI MINH CITY	440
Le Thi Giang, Nguyen Bach Hoang Phung.....	440
DIGITAL COMPETITIVENESS AND OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY OF ENTERPRISES IN THE DIGITAL ERA: THE CASE OF VIETNAMESE ENTERPRISES	453
Diep Nguyen Thi Ngoc ^{1*} , Canh Quang Tran ² , Anh Bach Hoang Ngoc ¹	453
FACTORS INFLUENCING PARENTS' SELECTION OF PRIVATE PRESCHOOLS IN THU DUC CITY	466
Thi-Trang Tran ¹ , Thi-My-Dung Pham ² , Thi-Bich-Diep Le ^{1*}	466

RECOVERY COMMUNICATIONS IN THE TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY AFTER THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

DEVELOPING A SPIRITUAL TOURISM DESTINATION IMAGE MEASUREMENT SCALE OF AN GIANG	474
Nguyen Vuong Hoai Thao ¹ , Nguyen Quyet Thang ²	474
PROSPECTS OF VIRTUAL REALITY TOURISM APPLICATION IN VIETNAM TOURISM PROMOTION	487
Nguyen Thi Hong Ha, Pham Thi Huong Giang.....	487
PERSONALIZATION TRAVEL TRENDING IN HO CHI MINH CITY IN THE CONTEXT OF POST COVID-19	497
Duong Bao Trung.....	497
IMPACTS OF MEDIA ON CUSTOMERS' DECISION TO CHOOSE FOOD AND BEVERAGE SERVICES POST THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC	511
Nguyen Thi Bich Van	511
DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION APPLICATION TO PROMOTE THE RECOVERY AND DEVELOPMENT OF INBOUND TOURISM IN HO CHI MINH CITY	521
Tran Trong Thanh	521
VIETNAM TOURISM AFTER COVID-19 PANDEMIC	527
Nguyen Hoang Phan ¹ , Hoang Thi Chinh ²	527
NAVIGATING THE EVOLVING LANDSCAPE OF SOCIAL MEDIA DATA MINING AND PRIVACY	537
Pham Thai Hien	537
THE CORRELATION BETWEEN STUDENT SELF-REPORTED GENERAL WELL-BEING AND PERCEIVED SUPPORT FROM FRIENDS, TEACHERS, AND UNIVERSITY	545
Virginia Kelsey ¹ , Đặng Thị Mai Ly ^{2*} , Nguyễn Anh Khoa ² , Nguyễn Văn Tường ²	545

DIGITAL VERSUS NON- DIGITAL

PROVIDING CONVENIENCE TO CUSTOMERS IN THE DIGITAL MARKETING ERA: OBSERVATIONS FROM COMMERCIAL BANKS IN HO CHI MINH CITY	556
Nguyen Quang Trung	556
VIRTUAL REALITY: AN INNOVATIVE TOOL IN TOURISM EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING	564
Thanh Nguyen Ngoc Le ¹ , Khuong Thanh Nguyen ²	564
THEORETICAL CONCEPTS OF STRATEGIC POSITIONING FOR PLACE BRANDING: A CASE STUDY OF DONG THAP PROVINCE	580
Phan Bao Giang.....	580
LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL MARKETING ON VIETNAM'S SMALL AND THE MEDIUM BUSINESS ENTERPRISES (SMEs)	587
Lê Kim Nguyên *	587

CHALLENGES FACED BY TEACHERS IN NON-TRADITIONAL EDUCATION

PROPOSE AN ONLINE TEACHING COMPETENCE SCALE FOR UNIVERSITY LECTURERS	596
Duong Thi Kim Oanh*, Dang Thi Dieu Hien	596
EXAMINE USAGE OF LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS (LMSS) BY FACULTY STAFF AT UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS (UEF) AND FINANCE WITH EXPANDED TECHNOLOGY ACCEPTANCE MODEL (TAM).....	608
Ha Truong Minh Hieu, Ngo Minh Hai*, Mach Tran Huy.....	608

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION
AN INDISPENSABLE EVOLUTION FOR SUSTAINABLE CORPORATES

FACTORS AFFECTING THE APPLICATION OF STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTING AT MANUFACTURING ENTERPRISES IN BINH DUONG PROVINCE	618
Truong Thanh Loc ^{1*} , Nguyen Thi Thanh Truc ²	618
HRM DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION: TAKING A ROAD OF SUCCESSION PLANNING ..	629
Trương Phan Hoàng Anh, Giang Ngọc Anh.....	629
THE IMPLICATION OF CONTACTLESS SERVICE AS A TOOL TO IMPROVE CUSTOMER REVISIT INTENTION	640
Linh, Nguyen Duy Yen*	640
TOURISM BRAND LOVE IN THE DIGITAL AGE: THE ROLE OF ONLINE TOURIST EXPERIENCES, TOURIST-BRAND RELATIONSHIP QUALITY AND SUSTAINABILITY	651
Thanh Nguyen Ngoc Le	651
CONDUCTING FOCUS GROUPS IN CROSS-CULTURAL SCHOLARSHIP OF TEACHING AND LEARNING (SoTL): A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY	662
Punithan Moganathas ¹ , Jenny Hill ² , Andy V.-M. Kok ² , Matt Barr ² , Ruffin Relja ^{2*} , Philippa Ward ² , Duong Tran Quang Hoang ³ , Quynh Phuong Tran ³	662
LEVERAGING DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION FOR SUSTAINABLE CORPORATE EVOLUTION IN VIETNAM	677
Nguyen, Tan Dat ¹ , Le, Dinh Thang ²	677

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND APPLICATIONS

FB-PROPHET MODEL FOR TIME SERIES FORECASTING IN SALES	691
Thanh Cong Tran	691
USING AI CODE IN C# PROGRAMMING	698
Nguyen Ha Giang.....	698
DETERMINANTS OF CONTINUANCE USAGE INTENTION OF MOBILE FOOD ORDERING APPLICATIONS (MFOAS) AMONG VIETNAMESE USERS: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF E- SATISFACTION	705
Lam Hoang Phuong ^{1*} , Nguyen Thi Kim Lien ² , Tien Hung Nguyen ³ , Vinh Long Nguyen ⁴	705
DECODING MARKETING INSIGHT: INSIGHT FROM OUTSIDE.....	718
Hoàng Thị Hằng, Trần Thành Công*	718
DIGITAL DISRUPTION AND DATA SECURITY: HOW FINTECH IS RESHAPING BANKING ...	724
Hoàng Văn Hiếu, Trần Ngọc Thiên Ngân.....	724

TRENDS AND ISSUES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

EFL LEARNERS' ATTITUDES AND LEARNING ENGAGEMENT IN COMMUNICATIVE GAME-BASED GRAMMAR TEACHING	736
Nguyen Thi Thanh Huyen ¹ , Tran Quoc Thao ²	736
APPROACHES TO TEACHING L2 LISTENING:.....	749
CLOSING THE GAP BETWEEN REAL-LIFE AND CLASSROOM-BASED LISTENING	749
Luu Thi Mai Vy	749
DEFINING ROLES OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN THE 21ST CENTURY LANGUAGE CLASSROOM	755
Ho Xuan Tien, Duong My Tham.....	755
EFL STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND LEARNING INVESTMENT IN PORTFOLIO - BASED ENGLISH WRITING LEARNING: A LITERATURE REVIEW	763
Ly Gia Huy ¹ , Tran Quoc Thao ²	763
EXPLORING EFL LEARNER IDENTITIES IN PROJECT-BASED LANGUAGE LEARNING AT A HIGH SCHOOL IN AN GIANG PROVINCE	774
Nguyen Hong Thien ¹ , Tran Quoc Thao ²	774
THE VALUES OF SYNTACTIC COMPLEXITY IN ACADEMIC WRITING: A LITERATURE REVIEW	791
THE ISSUE OF AMBIGUITY IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE.....	801
Nguyen Dinh Tuan	801
RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES ON JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL EFL STUDENTS' MOTIVATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING	812
Huynh Thanh Nhon ¹ , Tran Quoc Thao ²	812
EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF WRITING ANXIETY ON VIETNAMESE ESL UNDERGRADUATES' WRITING PERFORMANCE: A QUANTITATIVE STUDY.....	821
Nguyen Ngoc Nguyen, Nguyen Hoang Phan.....	821
THE APPLICATION OF THE "FLIPPED CLASSROOM" MODEL IN TEACHING ENGLISH IN THE VIETNAMESE UNIVERSITY EDUCATION ENVIRONMENT	838
THE USE OF RESOURCE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES IN EFLFLIPPED CLASSROOMS	847
Nguyen Quynh Thao Vy ^{1,*} , Duong My Tham ²	847
INSIGHTS INTO ENGLISH MAJOR STUDENTS' USE OF PHRASAL VERBS IN ACADEMIC WRITING.....	860
Do Thi Thanh Thuy, Tran Quoc Thao	860

LAW IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERNATIONAL INTEGRATION

LEGALISING INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY INFRINGEMENTS IN RUSSIA – A WAR TACTIC IN THE CONTEXT OF RUSSIA’S INVASION OF UKRAINE.....	869
Bui Thi Hong Ninh*	869
MODEL OF ASSET REGISTRATION WORLDWIDE AND LESSONS FOR VIETNAM IN IMPROVING ASSET REGISTRATION LAWS.....	880
Vu Anh Sao ^{1,2} , Nguyen Thi Xuan Mai ²	880
LEGAL ISSUES ARISING FROM THE DEVELOPMENT, IMPLEMENTATION, AND USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) - INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES AND LESSONS FOR VIETNAM	887
Le Hoang Minh Huy*, Nguyen Thi Thu Ha, Dao Trong Duc, Ky Dieu Linh, Bui Thi Thuy Linh, Nguyen Nam Trung.....	887
SOUTH KOREA’S EXPERIENCES ON PROPERTY REGISTRATION LAW - LESSONS FOR VIETNAM	896
Vu Anh Sao, Pham Huynh Bao Oanh.....	896
THE RISE OF REMOTE WORK: LEGAL CHALLENGES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR EMPLOYMENT LAW IN VIETNAM	903
Nguyen Thi Xuan Mai ¹ , Nguyen Thi Ngoc Loan ²	903
CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK IN THE EMERGING AGE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE.....	910
Nguyen Thi Thu Trang	910
THE IMPACTS OF GLOBAL MINIMUM TAX ON FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT (FDI) CORPORATIONS IN VIETNAM.....	921
Trần Ngọc Thanh ¹	921
CROSS-BORDER E-COMMERCE ACTIVITIES AND TAX MANAGEMENT ISSUES	933
Le Huynh Phuong Chinh, Ngo Thi Khanh Linh, Pham Ngoc Lan Anh.....	933
EXPERIENCE IN KOREA AND CHINA ON TAX MANAGEMENT FOR CROSS-BORDER E-COMMERCE ACTIVITIES	941
Duong Anh Son ¹ , Tran Vang Phu ²	941
LEGAL PERSPECTIVE ON REGULATIONS RALATED TO PERSONAL INCOME TAX WHEN EARNING INCOME THROUGH E-COMMERCE PLATFORMS IN VIETNAM, TAKING THE CASE OF INDIVIDUALS DOING BUSINESS THROUGH TIKTOK APPLICATION.....	946
Nguyen Duc Tri ¹ , Hoang Minh Châu ²	946
THE COMPATIBILITY ON THE SCOPE OF MUTUAL LEGAL ASSISTANCE (MLA) IN CRIMINAL MATTERS AND THE CONDITIONS OF REFUSAL MLA IN CRIMINAL MATTERS BETWEEN VIETNAMESE LAW AND INTERNATIONAL TREATIES WHICH VIETNAM HAS SIGNED.	956

Pham Huynh Bao Oanh.....	956
TAX POLICY FOR E-COMMERCE OF COUNTRIES IN THE WORLD AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO VIETNAM.....	967
Nguyen Thanh Minh Chanh, Ha Thi Van Anh, Pham Lam Tam Nhu	967
LEGAL REGULATIONS FOR ENTERPRISE OBLIGATIONS TO PROVIDE INFORMATION ON E-COMMERCE PLATFORM	974
Truong Kim Phung*, Nguyen Hoang Chuong	974
“ROBOT TAX” – RECOMMENDATIONS FOR VIETNAM.....	981
Gian Thi Le Na, Pham Phuong Doanh.....	981
WTO APPELLATE BODY REFORM IN THE CONTEXT OF ESCALATING GEOPOLITICAL TENSIONS.....	988
Nguyen Nam Trung.....	988

IMPACTS OF STATE OWNERSHIP AND BUSINESS CHARACTERISTICS ON TAX AVOIDANCE: EVIDENCE IN VIETNAM.....	128
Huyen Ngoc Nguyen, Thanh Dan Bui	128
RUSSIA'S IMPACTS AND SCENES ON BEING BANNED FROM SWIFT	143
Lam Dang Xuan Hoa ¹ , Phan Ngoc Anh ²	143
THE ROLE OF ACCESS TO FINANCE AND THE ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTION OF YOUNGERS IN THE SOUTHWESTERN PROVINCE, VIETNAM.....	151
Vu Truc Phuc*, Nguyen Dang Hat, Nguyen An Phu, Dao Le Kieu Oanh	151

EFL STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND LEARNING INVESTMENT IN PORTFOLIO - BASED ENGLISH WRITING LEARNING: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract

Portfolio-based learning (PoBL) is an innovative approach that enables students to actively participate in the writing process and take responsibility for their language development. Understanding how EFL students perceive the use of portfolios as a means to enhance their writing skills and their level of engagement in the learning process is crucial. However, there is limited research available on the attitudes and learning investment of EFL students in portfolio-based English writing learning. This paper presents relevant theories concerning the attitudes and learning investment of EFL students in portfolio-based English writing learning. It begins by exploring the definitions and types of portfolios and writing, followed by discussing the importance of portfolio-based writing learning. Furthermore, the paper presents contemporary theories regarding attitudes and learning investment. It also suggests pedagogical approaches to enhance students' writing proficiency and investment in the EFL classroom.

Keywords: *attitudes, learning investment, portfolio, portfolio-based learning, writing*

1. Introduction

The early years of the twenty-first century witnessed a significant shift in language teaching methodologies, with students becoming more active and creative participants in their own learning process (Mynbayeva et al., 2018; Lu & Wu, 2018). Traditional teacher-centered approaches gave way to student-centered learning methods, and one such promising innovation is portfolio-based learning (PoBL) (Kennedy et al., 2006; Barrett, 2000), which is an assessment approach that emphasizes the development of a portfolio showcasing a student's progress over time. It allows students to reflect on their learning, receive feedback, and plan their own learning trajectory (Burkaitienė & Teresevičienė, 2008). This student-centered approach promotes ownership of learning, fosters reflection, and facilitates complex and challenging assignments (Cambridge Assessment International Education, 2018). Moreover, PoBL offers teachers a holistic view of students' learning and enables targeted feedback (Jisc, 2019). By encouraging students to revise, brainstorm, and apply their knowledge in practice, PoBL enhances the effectiveness of the learning process (Mynbayeva et al., 2018). In addition to innovative teaching approaches, learners' attitudes play a significant role in language proficiency. Positive attitudes towards learning positively impact learning outcomes, while unfavorable behaviors can hinder progress (Zhao, 2015; Tella et al., 2010). Students' attitudes, motivation, interest, and self-efficacy are important predictors of learning investment (Honicke & Broadbent, 2016). To be specific, the concept of investment in language learning suggests that learners invest in the target language to acquire symbolic and material resources, thus increasing their cultural capital and social power (Norton, 2013). Investment in language practices, such as active participation and listening to the teacher, is crucial

for future success in language learning. Without students' investment, the application of PoBL may prove ineffective, as students may view it as a waste of time (Mynbayeva et al., 2018). Moreover, to attain English proficiency, it is crucial to develop productive (writing and speaking) and receptive (listening and reading) skills. Among the four skills, EFL writing is regarded as the most difficult and last to learn because it requires students to be proficient in lexical resource, coherence, and cohesion, grammar, as well as the generation of ideas, composition, and edition of a piece of writing in a correct format (Ahmed, 2010). In the context of Vietnam, it is common to observe that the majority of EFL teachers find writing skills difficult to teach, and no matter how many years students have studied writing skills, a lot of them cannot even write a paragraph without any errors (Nguyen, 2020). Fortunately, the research conducted by Tran and Le (2018) reveals that utilizing Facebook-based e-portfolios offers several benefits in terms of enhancing vocabulary and grammar, improving writing skills, facilitating feedback exchanges, promoting interactions, and bolstering motivation and confidence in writing. Additionally, the research by Tran and Duong (2020) revealed that there were a few participants who were not in favor of using portfolios in writing courses and were skeptical of their usefulness because of their shortcomings, which was similar to the findings by Aliweh (2011). Though there has been some research implemented recently on PoBL, just a little of it focuses on the students' attitudes towards it. Another study by Duong (2021) examined the perceptions of English majors regarding their autonomous learning skills and determined if their writing skills improved after a 15-week writing course that incorporated the use of an e-portfolio as a learning tool. The findings revealed a significant enhancement in the writing skills of the English majors, with positive attitudes towards autonomous learning skills such as setting learning goals, selecting learning materials, creating study plans, writing reflections, and engaging in peer assessment. Nevertheless, research related to learning investment was scarce in Vietnam, let alone the relationship between attitudes and learning investment in portfolio-based writing learning. In conclusion, the shift towards student-centered learning methods has led to the emergence of portfolio-based learning as an effective approach in language teaching. By promoting student ownership, reflection, and targeted feedback, PoBL facilitates learning progress; however, the success of PoBL implementation relies on students' attitudes and investment in language practices. This paper aims to provide relevant theories of attitudes and learning investment and suggest pedagogical approaches to enhance students' writing proficiency and investment in the EFL classroom.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Portfolios

A portfolio is a collection of student work that represents their best performance in both the process and final products (Burke et al., 1994). It is a purposeful, interrelated collection of student work that shows the student's efforts, progress, or achievement in one or more areas (Paulson, 1991; Barret, 2007). There are various types of portfolios, each with its own specific purpose and content. Paulson (1991) defines a showcase portfolio as an assessment portfolio, which is a deliberate compilation of student work that demonstrates the student's endeavors, advancement, and accomplishments in one or multiple domains. According to Cambridge et al. (2009), a learning portfolio is an organized gathering of student work that serves as evidence of learning within a specific subject area or across various disciplines. Another type is a reflective portfolio, which enables students to reflect on their learning journey, exhibit their comprehension, and showcase their metacognitive abilities (Moon, 2013). Lastly, an electronic portfolio, or e-portfolio, as described by Lorenzo and Ittelson (2005), refers to a digital assemblage of artifacts that represents an individual, group, or institution, leveraging digital technologies to showcase and document learning experiences and achievements. In terms of recording media, portfolios can be either paper-based (content is recorded on paper) or electronic (e-portfolio), where contents are recorded digitally using computerized

tools. Each type serves a distinct purpose, focusing on assessment, learning progression, demonstrating understanding, reflection, or leveraging digital technologies for presentation.

2.2 Writing

Writing can be defined as the process of creating written communication through the use of language and symbols. It is a complex cognitive and linguistic task that involves a wide range of skills, including planning, organizing, generating, and structuring ideas and communicating them effectively to the reader. There are several definitions of writing that have been put forward by researchers and scholars. According to Tynjälä et al. (2012), writing is a cognitive process that involves the construction and transformation of ideas through the use of language. They argue that writing is a recursive and iterative process in which writers continuously generate and revise their ideas as they write. Another definition of writing comes from Bereiter and Scardamalia (2013), who view writing as a knowledge-transforming process. They suggest that writing involves the use of language to create new knowledge, restructure existing knowledge, and communicate that knowledge effectively to the reader. Similarly, Graham and Perin (2007) define writing as a complex and multifaceted activity that involves the development and organization of ideas, the generation of appropriate language and vocabulary, and the use of various writing conventions and formats. Overall, these definitions of writing highlight its complexity and multifaceted nature, emphasizing the importance of cognitive, linguistic, and socio-cultural factors in the writing process.

Several scholars have identified key components that contribute to the process and quality of writing. One crucial component is vocabulary. A robust vocabulary allows writers to select appropriate words and phrases to convey their intended meaning accurately (Milton, 2010). Another vital component is grammar, which involves understanding and applying the rules of sentence structure, punctuation, and syntax (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Additionally, organization plays a significant role in effective writing. Writers must organize their ideas coherently and logically to ensure clarity and comprehension (Barroga & Matanguihan, 2021). Moreover, the inclusion of supporting evidence and examples strengthens the credibility and persuasiveness of the writing (Graff et al., 2014). Critical thinking holds a significant role, as it empowers authors to dissect information, assess propositions, and formulate well-justified stances (Lai, 2011). Equally vital is the composition process itself, which encompasses preliminary stages like idea generation and structuring, followed by composing and refining (Bayat, 2014). The act of writing is characterized by a dynamic and non-linear progression, frequently entailing iterative rounds of revision and enhancement aimed at augmenting lucidity, logical interconnection, and holistic excellence. Finally, feedback and revision are essential components for enhancing writing skills (Nystrand, 2006). Receiving feedback from peers, instructors, or editors allows writers to identify areas for improvement and make necessary revisions to their work.

2.3 Portfolio-based writing learning

The use of portfolio-based writing learning involves the collection of texts produced by the writer over a specific period, tailored to the requirements of a particular context (Kunnan & Hamp-Lyons, 1993). This approach offers a shift from exam-centered, high-stakes assessments to a learner-centered pedagogical approach that has demonstrated success in improving writing skills (Weigle, 1999, 2007). By implementing portfolio-based writing learning, teachers can guide students toward enhancing their writing abilities throughout the course while providing constructive feedback and advice (Lam, 2018). This process allows students to actively engage in their writing development by reflecting on their progress, revising their work, and setting goals for improvement. Through the use of portfolios, students are encouraged to take ownership of their learning, fostering autonomy and self-directedness. Additionally, portfolios provide opportunities for students to showcase their growth and development as writers, encouraging motivation and a sense of

accomplishment. Overall, the use of portfolio-based writing learning offers a learner-centered and pedagogically effective approach to supporting students in their journey to improve their writing skills.

To implement portfolio-based writing learning effectively, several procedures are commonly employed. One key procedure is the selection of diverse writing samples to include in the portfolio. This selection should encompass a range of genres, styles, and topics to showcase students' growth and mastery of different writing skills (Paulson, 1991). Another important procedure involves providing clear criteria or rubrics for assessing the writing samples in the portfolio. These criteria outline the specific expectations and standards for evaluating the quality of the writing, helping students understand the areas of focus and improvement (Wolf, 1989). Additionally, ongoing feedback and self-reflection are integral to the portfolio-based writing learning process. Students should be encouraged to reflect on their writing, identify strengths and weaknesses, and set goals for improvement (Lee, 2016). Regular conferences and discussions with teachers or peers constitute another procedure in portfolio-based writing learning. These conferences allow for individualized guidance and support, enabling students to receive feedback, ask questions, and engage in meaningful discussions about their writing (Tierney et al., 1991). Moreover, the process of revising and editing plays a significant role in portfolio-based writing learning. Students should be encouraged to revise their writing based on feedback received, demonstrate growth over time, and showcase their ability to refine and enhance their written work. These procedures foster a comprehensive approach to writing development, empowering students to reflect on their progress, set goals, and refine their writing skills.

2.4 Attitudes

Attitudes have been extensively explored by researchers to understand their impact on learning acquisition and to delve into this topic. Guido (2013) defines attitude as the inclination of individuals to organize their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors towards a psychological object. According to Eagly and Chaiken (2010), attitudes can be described as a psychological tendency manifested through the evaluation of a specific entity with varying degrees of favor or disfavor. These definitions highlight the cognitive and affective dimensions of attitudes, indicating that attitudes involve a complex interplay of thoughts, emotions, and behaviors towards an object or entity. Attitudes play a crucial role in shaping individuals' perceptions, beliefs, and subsequent actions, influencing their approach to learning and the outcomes they achieve. Understanding learners' attitudes is essential for educators, as it provides insights into their motivations, engagement levels, and willingness to learn. In the context of attitudes, three main components, namely cognitive, affective, and behavioral ones, are studied. According to Jain (2014), the emotional response (like/dislike) to an object with an attitude is explained as an affective component, whose significance is highlighted in most of the research. Because emotion interacts with the cognitive process concerning an attitude object at the same time, one cannot simply infer an individual's attitude toward an object by recognizing their ideas about it. Agarwal and Malhotra (2005) propose an integrated model of attitude and choice by combining the affect (feelings and emotions) and attitude (evaluative judgment based on brand beliefs) research streams. The cognitive component of attitudes refers to the beliefs, thoughts, and knowledge that an individual holds about a particular object, person, issue, or situation. This component involves the person's evaluation and understanding of the subject matter and it is one of the three main components of attitudes, alongside the affective (emotional) and behavioral components (Oskamp & Schultz, 2005). Regarding the behavioral element, it consists of how an individual reacts to attitude objects. It involves a person's response or reaction to do anything associated with an attitude object, as stated by Albarracin and Johnson (2018). The behavioral component tries to describe how people participate in the task and how they behave towards attitude objects. It has a great influence on how people react and behave.

In the realm of portfolio-based writing learning, attitudes shape the very fabric of one's creative journey. A writer's attitudes, encompassing elements such as openness to feedback, resilience in the face of challenges, and a willingness to embrace growth, are the intangible forces that guide the selection, crafting, and presentation of pieces within their portfolio. Moreover, a positive attitude towards learning and adaptation fuels the incorporation of diverse styles, genres, and perspectives, resulting in a multifaceted and rich compilation (Zhao, 2015). Learners' attitudes, encompassing cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions, play a pivotal role in driving their motivation to engage with the learning process. As attitudes influence the depth of motivation, they set the stage for learners to invest themselves wholeheartedly in their educational endeavors. This investment is further nurtured through the concept of portfolio-based writing learning, where students actively curate and reflect upon their evolving written works.

2.5 Learning investment

Drawing upon the work of Dauzón-Ledesma and Izquierdo (2023), investment in this study encompasses four dimensions: motivation, necessity or personal needs, engagement, and agency. Motivation, within the realm of studying learning investment, can be characterized as an inner condition that facilitates the act of learning and encompasses comprehension of the factors influencing this state (Darvin & Norton, 2023). It refers to the underlying reasons that drive an individual's actions and behaviors in pursuit of a specific objective. Motivation provides purpose and guidance for intentions and activities. Individuals engage in learning investment as they anticipate gaining a broader spectrum of intangible and tangible assets, consequently enhancing the worth of their cultural knowledge and social influence. As attitudes can be seen as a component of motivation (Lightbown & Spada, 2021), research on language learning investment frequently employs these terms interchangeably (Artamonova, 2020) or examines attitudes and motivation in conjunction (Taylor & Marsden, 2014). The motivation of learners can lead to outcomes that bring about a sense of fulfillment and recognize the advantages gained during the learning journey (Norton, 2013). When learners are driven by motivation to engage in language learning, their investment yields favorable results, serving as a form of positive reinforcement.

The second factor often associated with investment in language learning is the learners' necessity to utilize the language (Harrison et al., 2013; Łacka-Badura, 2021). The specific learning needs can vary based on individual differences and linguistic and sociocultural backgrounds (Ali, 2021), as well as the learners' expectations and anticipated personal benefits derived from acquiring a second language. These needs can encompass personal, professional, heritage, or economic considerations, all of which can impact learning investment (Ali, 2021; Lu & Shen, 2020; Amorati, 2018; Lightbown & Spada, 2021). The motivations for different groups of learners to acquire a second language differ depending on the particular context and factors involved. For example, individuals immersed in a second language context, such as immigrants in English-speaking communities, require the target language for communication, work, social integration, and establishing relationships (Norton, 2013). Other learners who are not immersed in the target language context may still need the language for professional or vocational purposes (Łacka-Badura, 2021). Furthermore, in the context of foreign language learning, learners' needs may revolve around recognition and potential financial gain (Yang et al., 2021).

Engagement and agency are two factors closely associated with investment when learners demonstrate interest, take initiative, and set goals for their own learning (Harrison et al., 2013). Norton argues that engagement in language learning investment is tied to taking action (Norton et al., 2020). While Hiver et al. (2021) suggest that engagement comprises multiple dimensions, Norton's concept of investment appears more aligned with Hiver's behavioral dimension of engagement, which emphasizes voluntary and active involvement in tasks (Hiver et al., 2021). According to Hiver et al. (2021), engagement refers to the extent

and quality of learners' active participation and involvement in language learning activities (Hiver et al., 2021). Other authors also recognize the behavioral aspect of engagement. Mercer (2019), for instance, refers to Skinner et al. (2009), who describe engagement as "energized, directed, and sustained actions". Angelovska et al. (2021) further emphasize that engagement involves behaviors that demonstrate effort and action in achieving goals. From this perspective, without engagement during the learning process, goals cannot be achieved, and learners' competencies will not develop. While motivation is limited to the intention of doing something, engagement entails the realization of action.

Agency is another concept that is closely linked to investment. According to Harrison et al. (2013), agency refers to the actions taken by students to actively shape their own learning, thereby enhancing their investment in the process. It is closely connected to investment because learners anticipate receiving positive outcomes in return for the effort and time they invest in specific activities aimed at achieving their goals. Agency is demonstrated through the willpower of learners, but more importantly, through their determination and perseverance to attain desired outcomes throughout the learning process (Harrison et al., 2013). Essentially, learners take the initiative to make decisions regarding their learning journey and regulate their progress by autonomously selecting learning activities and organizing their time (Little, 2020). As Naderpour (2022) explains, engagement can be seen as the initial step of agency, while taking action and displaying perseverance represent its final stages. During language learning investment, motivation, necessity, engagement, and agency are interconnected and mutually support the learning process and the achievement of goals. However, agency involves even greater effort as it is mediated by initiative, determination, and perseverance.

For the purposes of this study, it is necessary to study language learners' investment decisions within the context of the EFL classroom. Motivation fuels an individual's drive to learn and contributes to the richness of their portfolio. Necessity, arising from personal, professional, or economic considerations, guides the selection of learning assets to include. Engagement and agency, marked by active participation, initiative, and determination, shape the portfolio by dictating the depth and quality of its contents. As learners invest their efforts, time, and intentions into language acquisition, their portfolio becomes a dynamic reflection of their motivations, needs, and commitment. This symbiotic relationship between learning investment and portfolio-writing learning underscores the transformative journey of learners as they curate a diverse collection of linguistic and cultural assets, ultimately showcasing the depth of their engagement, competence, and personal growth.

3. Pedagogical Implications

Portfolio-based writing learning has the potential to serve as an alternative model within the context of language education, and it may offer a fresh approach for both educators and students to use in the process of educating and learning in the twenty-first century. There are significant implications that can be presented for pedagogy.

Firstly, the shift towards student-centered learning methods, such as portfolio-based learning (PoBL), has shown promise in language teaching (Kennedy et al., 2006; Barrett, 2000). Implementing PoBL in the classroom can promote student ownership, reflection, and targeted feedback, leading to enhanced learning progress (Cambridge Assessment International Education, 2018; Jisc, 2019; Mynbayeva et al., 2018). Therefore, teachers should consider integrating PoBL into their language teaching practices to foster a student-centered and effective learning environment.

Secondly, the success of PoBL implementation depends on students' attitudes and investments in language practices. Positive attitudes towards learning and high levels of investment are crucial for language

proficiency (Zhao, 2015; Tella et al., 2010). Therefore, teachers should strive to cultivate positive attitudes and motivation in students by addressing their personal needs, interests, and goals. They should also provide engaging learning activities that encourage active participation, self-reflection, and goal setting.

Furthermore, the teaching of writing skills, which is often considered challenging (Ahmed, 2010), can benefit from portfolio-based learning. Through the use of portfolios, students can actively engage in their writing development, reflect on their progress, and receive targeted feedback. Teachers should incorporate diverse writing samples in the portfolio, provide clear assessment criteria, and offer ongoing support and guidance to students. They should also emphasize the importance of the writing process, including prewriting activities, revising, editing, and receiving feedback.

In addition to addressing writing skills, teachers should pay attention to the various components that contribute to effective writing, such as vocabulary, grammar, organization, critical thinking, and the inclusion of supporting evidence (Milton, 2010; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Barroga & Matanguihan, 2021; Graff et al., 2014; Lai, 2011). By focusing on these components and providing appropriate instruction, teachers can enhance students' writing proficiency and overall language development.

Lastly, teachers should recognize the interconnectedness of attitudes and investment in language learning. By understanding the cognitive, affective, and behavioral components of attitudes, ELT educators and practitioners can design a curriculum that provides a supportive learning environment that fosters motivation, meets students' personal needs, encourages active engagement, and promotes learner agency (Tomlinson, 2021; Mercer & Williams, 2014). These factors collectively contribute to students' investment in language learning and their overall success.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the shift towards student-centered learning methods has given rise to portfolio-based learning (PoBL) as an effective approach in language teaching. PoBL promotes student ownership, reflection, and targeted feedback, which facilitate learning progress and enhance the effectiveness of the learning process. However, the success of PoBL implementation relies on students' attitudes and investment in language practices. Positive attitudes and high levels of investment are important predictors of learning outcomes and success in language learning. To implement PoBL effectively, teachers should consider the diverse types of portfolios, provide clear assessment criteria, encourage ongoing feedback and self-reflection, engage in regular conferences and discussions, and emphasize the importance of revision and editing. Furthermore, understanding the cognitive, affective, and behavioral components of attitudes and the dimensions of learning investment, including motivation, necessity, engagement, and agency, can inform pedagogical approaches to enhance students' writing proficiency and investment in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. By incorporating these strategies, educators can foster a learner-centered environment that promotes active student engagement, self-directedness, and growth in writing skills.

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ISBN: 978-604-79-3782-0

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