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A survey into EFL students' perceptions of studying English with native English-speaking teachers at Eastern International University Foreign Language Center

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Abstract

The advantages and disadvantages of learning English from native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) continue to be a subject that needs further clarification. Examining the perspectives of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students on their encounters with NESTs while learning English at Eastern International University Foreign Language Center (EIU FLC) was carried out. The study utilized a quantitative methodology, employing the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software to analyze survey data gathered from EFL students. Descriptive statistics, such as mean scores, were used to analyze the students' overall perceptions and opinions based on their responses. The survey, consisting of 33 Likert scale questions and one open-ended question, aimed at evaluating many facets of students' perspectives, such as the benefits and drawbacks of learning English with NESTs and the characteristics linked to students' satisfaction with studying English with NESTs. The findings of the study revealed that most of the students at EIU FLC exhibited positive views towards learning English with NESTs. The results offer significant perspectives from EFL students regarding their experience of learning with NESTs at EIU FLC. The findings also emphasize both the strengths and areas that require improvement. These findings add to the current discussion about the role of NESTs in language instruction and provide valuable information for developing future teaching methods and training programs for teachers.

Keywords: English as a foreign language (EFL), Perceptions, Native English-speaking Teachers (NESTs), and Non-Native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs)

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1. Introduction

English is widely recognised as a global language and is used by several countries throughout the world as a secondary language for communication. English learners utilise the English language as a valuable instrument for professional endeavours, academic pursuits, interpersonal communication, and accessing the vast array of human knowledge and achievements. The majority of Vietnamese students in Vietnam choose to study English as a foreign language, and there is an increasing need for English education. Nevertheless, English language learners continue to face challenges in selecting English teachers who can successfully enhance their learning and improve their proficiency. The ongoing discussion

revolves around the relative effectiveness of acquiring English language skills through instruction provided by native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) compared to non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs).

NESTs appeared to be more efficient in imparting cultural knowledge, facilitating oral communication, and enhancing pronunciation skills in the target language. However, they encountered some challenges in effectively interacting with students. NNESTs showed greater success in teaching essential information, particularly in the areas of grammar, writing, and reading. Nevertheless, their instructional approach was deficient in conventional classroom exercises. Therefore, students would derive benefits from obtaining instruction from both NESTs and NNESTs ((Jieyin & Gajaseni, 2018).

This research endeavors to investigate the perspectives of students regarding their experiences of learning English with NESTs at EIU FLC, with the overarching aim of contributing to the advancement of English language education. To achieve this goal, three specific objectives will be pursued. Firstly, the research aims to delve deeply into students' perceptions concerning the advantages and disadvantages of studying English with NESTs, aiming to provide a nuanced understanding of their experiences. Secondly, it seeks to identify the factors that contribute to students' favorable opinions towards learning English with NESTs, thereby elucidating the elements of NEST-led instruction that resonate positively with students. Lastly, the research endeavors to propose recommendations for improving students' learning experiences with NESTs at EIU FLC, aiming to enhance comprehension of the dynamics of English language education and offer valuable insights for refining teaching and learning practices. Through these objectives, the research aspires to contribute to the ongoing discourse on effective language pedagogy and facilitate the development of more effective methods for teaching and learning English in the context of EIU FLC.

2. Methodology

The study has been carefully designed to address its specific research objectives by finding answers to the following two research questions:

What are students' attitudes towards the advantages and disadvantages they have when studying English with 100% native English-speaking teachers?

What are the factors associated with students' satisfaction towards studying English with native English-speaking teachers?

The research applied a quantitative methodology, employing a survey instrument consisting of targeted multiple-choice questions and statements rated on a Likert scale. This approach facilitated the provision of a unified frame of reference for respondents, aiding in the selection of their responses, as demonstrated by Schuman and Presser (1996). The study was conducted at Eastern International University (EIU) in Binh Duong province, chosen due to the presence of a team of NESTs and the university's successful track record in offering an academic English program. This program aimed at achieving a band IELTS score of 6.0 as a compulsory requirement for graduation.

A survey was administered to examine the demographic characteristics of teachers at EIU FLC, providing insight into key aspects impacting students' attitudes towards studying English

with NESTs. The research cohort comprised 309 undergraduate students from Eastern International University.

The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire on students's perceptions of studying English with NESTs, their practices, and their experience in their English classes. The questionnaire was divided into 2 sections, with 5 parts and 39 items. The questionnaire was designed on a Likert five-point scale. Students's perceptions are ranked on an opinion-based scale, from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The questionnaire includes two sections. Section one was designed to record the participants' basic demographic information: gender, age, time spent studying English, current English level, and major studied at EIU. Section two, more importantly, with four parts, contains the items that collected the data on students's perceptions of studying English with NESTs. Part two included six items (from 2.1 to 2.6). for collecting data on students' attitudes towards studying English with 100% NESTs. Part three comprises seven items (from 3.1 to 3.7) paralleling the ones in Part two, which investigated students' attitudes towards the disadvantages of studying English with 100% NESTs. Part four included 20 items (from 4.1.1 to 4.1.9 and 4.2.1 to 4.2.11) towards the advantages of studying English with 100% NESTs. Part five comprises one open question (item 5) for getting objective ideas from students.

3. Finding and discussions

3.1 Students and Teachers at EIU FLC

3.1.1. Students

The study had a cohort of 309 undergraduate students at Eastern International University that were involved in the research. The study group consists of 160 male students and 149 female students. The majority of these students are in the age range of 18–19 and 20–21 years old. Their English learning experience ranged mostly from 5 to 10 years of learning English before entering the university. These students are pursuing various majors at Eastern International University, with the largest numbers enrolled in the Business Administration and Software Engineering faculties. They are currently studying English in 13 classes at EIU FLC, from Level 1 to Level 5.

3.1.2. Teachers

The examination of the teaching staff currently employed at EIU FLC during the project's execution is provided. Notably, all teachers, constituting 100% of the total, are native English-speaking teachers originating from five English-speaking nations: the United Kingdom, the United States, Ireland, New Zealand, and Australia. The age categories with the highest proportion of instructors are the 30 to under 35-year-old group and the 35 to under 40-year-old group. The group of teachers who are between 40 and less than 45 years old has the lowest rate. The data indicates a youthful and dynamic team composition.

All teachers at EIU FLC must hold at least a bachelor's degree and a teaching certificate as a minimum requirement. Nevertheless, the data reveals that a considerable number of teachers had higher education, with a substantial proportion possessing a Master's degree (38.6%) and even a Ph.D. (2.3%). In addition to the normal CELTA certificate, a percentage of teachers also possess advanced teaching credentials, such as the DELTA. Significantly, 22.7% of teachers possess a Master of Arts in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (MA TESOL)

degree, which is extremely relevant and highly beneficial for their teaching responsibilities at EIU FLC. The data shows that all teachers have at least 3 years of experience teaching English. Most teachers have experience ranging from 5 to 10 years. In addition, 36.3% of teachers have worked as IELTS examiners, and 22.7% of them still maintain the status of being IELTS examiners. This is a valuable experience, and these teachers are essential for teaching the academic IELTS program at EIU FLC.

3.2. Likert scale used in the survey

Primarily, the author organizes, enumerates, computes, and presents qualitative and quantitative data in the format of tables or charts to depict and analyze them. Descriptive statistics, Reliability tests, and the Likert scale approach are necessary for analyzing the data. The Excel application and SPSS facilitate the author in doing descriptive statistics and reliability tests. Additionally, the Likert scale approach is implemented based on a specific formula.

$$\text{Gap width} = \frac{\text{Series width}}{\text{Number of the group}}$$

The meanings of the values are shown in the following table:

Table 1. Gap widths of a 5-point likert scale

Item	Item description	Score range
1	Strongly disagree	1.00 - 1.80
2	Disagree	1.81 - 2.60
3	Neutral	2.61 - 3.40
4	Agree	3.41 - 4.20
5	Strongly agree	4.21 - 5.00
Gap width = $4/5 = 0.8$		

After the data has been analyzed, it will be interpreted and discussed in light of the research objectives.

3.3 Assessment of the reliability for measurement scale

Students' attitudes towards studying English with 100% NESTs.

Table 2. Findings and discussion regarding questions 2.1–2.6

Items	N	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean	Std. Dev.
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2.1 Prefer studying English with NESTs to NNESTs	309	5 1.6%	10 3.2%	40 12.9%	73 23.6%	181 58.6%	4.34	.936
2.2 The behaviors of your NESTs are friendly and open-minded.	309	0 0%	5 1.6%	20 6.5%	69 22.3%	215 69.6%	4.60	.684
2.3 The teaching methods of your NESTs are really effective, motivating, and enjoyable	309	0 0%	5 1.6%	20 6.5%	109 35.3%	175 56.6%	4.47	.691
2.4 The teaching materials used in your English classes with NESTs are effective and relevant	309	0 0%	10 3.2%	30 9.7%	99 32.0%	170 55%	4.39	.792
2.5 You are satisfied with the teaching facilities, such as classrooms, equipment, and technology provided by EIU FLC	309	0 0%	10 3.2%	43 13.9%	75 24.3%	181 58.6%	4.38	.843
2.6 You are satisfied with the administration and student care service at EIU FLC	309	0 0%	14 4.5%	50 16.2%	113 36.6%	132 42.7%	4.17	.861
Valid N (listwise)	309							
Average							4.39	

Source: calculation results from SPSS 26.0 software

Table 2 shows students' general attitudes towards studying English with 100% NESTs at EIU FLC. The mean scores of the six items, which varied from 2.1 to 2.6, were not significantly

different. With an average mean score of 4.39, it indicates that the majority of students enjoy studying with NESTs and strongly agree with the benefits of studying with NESTs at EIU FLC. 69.6% agreed with the idea that the behavior of their NESTs is friendly and open-minded. The second-highest strongly agreed rate is 58.6%, indicating that students prefer studying English with NESTs to NNESTs. The lowest level of strongly agreed-upon agreement is that the satisfaction of students with the administration and student care service at EIU FLC is 42.7%.

The data analysis findings indicate a significant preference among students at EIU FLC to choose NESTs for studying English rather than NNESTs. Students perceive NESTs as kind, open-minded, and successful educators, which reinforces their attraction to them. More precisely, students agree with the teaching techniques of NESTs, considering them to be extremely effective, inspiring, and pleasant. In addition, students see the teaching materials utilized in English lessons with NESTs as very successful and directly applicable to their learning requirements. In addition, students' impressions of their learning experience with NESTs at EIU FLC are also influenced by elements such as educational facilities, which include classrooms, equipment, and technology, as well as the administration and student care services provided.

Students' attitudes towards the disadvantages of studying English with 100% NESTs.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for questions 3.1-3.7

Items	N	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean	Std. Dev.
3.1 NESTs speak too quickly	309	39 12.6%	103 33.3%	122 39.5%	25 8.1%	20 6.5%	2.62	1.020
3.2 NESTs do not explain the concepts or words in Vietnamese	309	83 26.9%	113 36.6%	64 20.7%	25 8.1%	24 7.8%	2.33	1.180

3.3 NESTs, when using English for explanations in the lesson, can sometimes cause confusion and difficulty for students to understand	309	106 34.3%	113 36.6%	60 19.4%	25 8.1%	5 1.6%	2.06	1.003
3.4 NESTs do not understand Vietnamese culture	309	117 37.9%	104 33.7%	68 22%	10 3.2%	10 3.2%	2.00	1.011
3.5 NESTs are too strict in marking.	309	82 26.5%	100 32.4%	83 26.9%	30 9.7%	14 4.5%	2.33	1.106
3.6 NESTs do not assess students' language knowledge properly.	309	104 33.7%	140 45.3%	35 11.3%	20 6.5%	10 3.2%	2.00	1.002
3.7 NESTs are not patient about explaining students' errors.	309	156 50.5%	98 31.7%	40 12.9%	5 1.6%	10 3.2%	1.75	.966
Valid N (listwise)	309							
Average							2.16	

Table 3 shows students' attitudes towards the disadvantages of studying English with 100% NESTs. The mean scores of the seven items, which varied from 3.1 to 3.7, were a little bit different with a gap of 0.87 (min 1.75 to max 2.62). With an average mean score of 2.16, it indicates that the majority of students just lightly agree with the disadvantages of studying with NESTs. The highest mean score is 2.62, belonging to the idea that NESTs speak too quickly.

The lowest mean score of 1.75 is about NESTs not being patient about explaining students' errors.

Students' attitudes towards the disadvantages of studying English with 100% NESTs do not reflect a high percentage. It can be inferred that students do not perceive NESTs as having numerous disadvantages in English instruction. Some of these perceived disadvantages include speaking too quickly, a lack of explanation of concepts or words in Vietnamese, difficulties in responding to students' questions about English language usage, being overly strict in grading, or inadequately assessing students' language knowledge. Interestingly, according to students' perceptions, the two least identified disadvantageous factors are NESTs' lack of understanding of Vietnamese culture and impatience in explaining students' errors. This suggests that the majority of NESTs at EIU FLC are experienced instructors who have spent considerable time in Vietnam and have extensive experience teaching English as a foreign language. Consequently, they possess a nuanced understanding of Vietnamese culture and exhibit patience when addressing students' errors.

Students' attitudes towards the advantages of studying English with 100% NESTs in general

Table 4. Descriptive statistics for questions 4.1.1-4.1.9

Items	N	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean (M)	Std. Dev.
4.1.1 NESTs can pronounce naturally and accurately.	309	0	5 1.6%	20 6.5%	124 40.1%	160 51.8%	4.42	.687
4.1.2 NESTs can correct students' pronunciation.	309	0	5 1.6%	20 6.5%	100 32.4%	184 59.5%	4.50	.691
4.1.3 NESTs encourage students to speak more English in class.	309	5 1.6%	0	20 6.5%	30 9.7%	254 82.2%	4.71	.729

4.1.4 NESTs provide extensive information about the culture of English-speaking countries.	309	0	5 1.6%	20 6.5%	100 32.4%	184 59.5%	4.50	.691
4.1.5 NESTs apply modern teaching methods and techniques.	309	0	5 1.6%	45 14.6%	103 33.3%	156 50.5%	4.33	.781
4.1.6 NESTs prepare learners well for the IELTS exams.	309	0	5 1.6%	15 4.9%	55 17.8%	234 75.7%	4.68	.644
4.1.7 NESTs often offer extensive chances for practice and reinforcement through homework assignments.	309	10 3.2%	5 1.6%	118 38.2%	59 19.1%	117 37.9%	3.87	1.050
4.1.8 NESTs use more interesting class activities	309	0	5 1.6%	49 15.9%	109 35.3%	146 47.2%	4.28	.786
4.1.9 NESTs implement a comfortable classroom policy and organization that contribute to a positive learning environment.	309	0	5 1.6%	25 8.1%	99 32.0%	180 58.3%	4.47	.714
Average							4.42	

Source: calculation results from SPSS 26.0 software

Similarly, Table 4 shows that the mean scores of the items regarding students' opinions on the advantages of NESTs in general were $M\ 4.1.1 = 4.42$, $M\ 4.1.2 = 4.50$, $M\ 4.1.3 = 4.71$, $M\ 4.1.4 = 4.50$, $M\ 4.1.5 = 4.33$, $M\ 4.1.6 = 4.68$, $M\ 4.1.7 = 3.87$, $M\ 4.1.8 = 4.28$, and $M\ 4.1.9 = 4.47$, respectively. Interestingly, the students had the highest agreement for item 4.1.3 ($M = 4.71$). This infers that the students held strong beliefs about the statement that NESTs encourage students to speak more English in class. Concerning the statement that NESTs prepare learners well for the IELTS exams, students showed agreement with $M\ 4.1.6 = 4.68$. The students' perspective about NESTs assigning a lot of homework was at least highlighted ($M\ 4.1.7 = 3.87$). In general, it points out that EFL students agreed with the statements about the advantages of NESTs in general.

In relation to the survey question on students' perspectives on the benefits of studying English with 100% NESTs in general, the respondents showed the greatest degree of agreement with the statement that NESTs efficiently prepare learners for the IELTS Exams. In addition, students displayed significant agreement about the high level of competence exhibited by NESTs in teaching and correcting pronunciation, their capacity to promote oral communication, and their offer of extensive knowledge about the culture of English-speaking countries. In addition, the majority of students expressed a strong sense of comfort with the classroom regulations and structure implemented by NESTs, which greatly enhance a good learning atmosphere. However, there were three characteristics that resulted in less consensus among students. These aspects include the implementation of contemporary teaching methods and approaches, the inclusion of more captivating classroom activities, and the availability of many chances for practice and reinforcement through homework assignments.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics for questions 4.2.1-4.2.11

Items	N	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean (M)	Std. Dev.
4.2.1 My NEST is a good English teacher	309	5 1.6%	0	5 1.6%	80 25.9%	219 70.9%	4.64	.676
4.2.2 I would enjoy taking another class with THIS NEST.	309	5 1.6%	0	44 14.2%	115 37.2%	145 46.9%	4.28	.826
4.2.3 I would recommend a friend to take a class with THIS NEST.	309	5 1.6%	0	45 14.6%	104 33.7%	155 50.2%	4.31	.837

4.2.4 My English is improving a lot with this NEST.	309	5 1.6%	0	30 9.7%	85 27.5%	189 61.2%	4.47	.800
4.2.5 My NEST is the kind of teacher I expected to have here.	309	5 1.6%	0	20 6.5%	138 44.7%	146 47.2%	4.36	.745
4.2.6 My NEST explains difficult concepts well	309	0	10 3.2%	50 16.2%	134 43.4%	115 37.2%	4.14	.8027
4.2.7 My NEST is able to simplify difficult material so I can understand it	309	0	0	50 16.2%	133 43.0%	126 40.8%	4.25	.715
4.2.8 My NEST teaches in a manner that helps me learn	309	0	5 1.6%	20 6.5%	95 30.7%	189 61.2%	4.51	.691
4.2.9 My NEST motivates me to do my best to learn English.	309	0	5 1.6%	24 7.8%	80 25.9%	200 64.7%	4.54	.709
4.2.10 My pronunciation is being improved with this NEST.	309	0	5 1.6%	20 6.5%	120 38.8%	164 53.1%	4.43	.688
4.2.11 I understand my English teacher's pronunciation easily.	309	0	5 1.6%	40 12.9%	85 27.5%	179 57.9%	4.42	.775
Valid N (listwise)	309							
Average							4.40	

Source: calculation results from SPSS 26.0 software

Descriptive statistics of students' opinions on the advantages of their NESTs are in Table 5. The mean scores (M) were M 4.2.1 = 4.64, M 4.2.2 = 4.28, M 4.2.3 = 4.31, M 4.2.4 = 4.47, M 4.2.5 = 4.36, M 4.2.6 = 4.14, M 4.2.7 = 4.25, M 4.2.8 = 4.51, M 4.2.9 = 4.54, M 4.2.10 = 4.43, and M 4.2.11 = 4.42. Table 5 showed that the students thought that they had many advantages to learning English with their NESTs, such as enjoying studying English with their NEST, improving a lot of skills, and being able to teach in a manner that helps them learn and motivates them to do their best to learn English. In general, their NEST is good, meets their expectations, and helps them to improve a lot.

The survey participants definitely expressed their determined agreement with the advantages of acquiring English language skills from teachers who are NESTs, both in a general sense and with respect to the individual NESTs they are presently being instructed by.

Regarding the survey question on students' attitudes towards the advantages of studying English with their current NEST, a significant majority of students (96.8%) either agree or strongly agree that their NEST is a proficient English teacher. Moreover, a substantial proportion (90.6%) express high agreement regarding their NEST's ability to motivate them to achieve the best result in their English learning endeavours. Additionally, an overwhelming majority (91.9%) acknowledge their NEST's teaching style as conducive to effective learning. Furthermore, the questionnaire receives a high level of agreement on several areas of the students' perception of their specific NEST. This includes their general competence, healthfulness, and proficiency in the teaching approach, especially in explaining complex concepts. Students also acknowledge their NEST's effectiveness in improving pronunciation skills and fostering motivation, with 88.7% expressing agreement or strong agreement that their English proficiency has significantly improved under their NEST's guidance.

The factors that influence students' study with NESTs at EIU FLC according to students' opinions

Number of students have/do not have additional opinions about NESTs	Ideas	Total number of students (309 students)
Students do not have additional opinions about NESTs	<i>None</i>	281 students (91%)
Students have additional opinions about NESTs	Total number of students having ideas	28 students (9%)

In the exploration of factors influencing students' studies with NESTs at EIU FLC by an open question, it is evident that students have provided insightful subjective comments (9% of students). They emphasize the importance of the teachers' openness and non-judgmental attitude, which create a conducive learning environment. Despite initial challenges arising from cultural differences and varied teaching methodologies compared to Vietnamese instructors, students recognize the expertise of NESTs in teaching English as their native language. This expertise, coupled with the students' acknowledgment of their own shyness and vocabulary limitations, underscores the need for patience and adaptation to the teaching approach. Students express gratitude for the support received from NESTs in overcoming language barriers, enabling them to communicate confidently and effectively. Notably, students report significant improvements in their writing, pronunciation, and speaking skills, attributing this progress to the effective teaching methods employed by NESTs. Furthermore, students appreciate the opportunity to enhance their pronunciation, listening, and cultural understanding through learning with NESTs, further enriching their educational experience at EIU FLC. In contrast, there are few ideas on the impact of classroom facilities on students' learning. More particularly, the visibility of the data projector is poor, and the listening conditions in the classroom make it challenging to hear. These interconnected aspects will also impact the process of studying for students, thus they should be acknowledged and enhanced.

Summarizing the research finding for the research question one and research question 2 as follows:

Research question 1: What are students' attitudes towards the advantages and disadvantages they have when studying English with 100% native English-speaking teachers?

It is proven that there is a match between a student's positive attitude and NESTs' behaviors, teaching methods, teaching materials, teaching facilities, and administration and student care, all factors are strongly agree which the advantages except administration and student care (agree), mean = 4.17. The consistency of students' positive attitude towards studying with NESTs was found throughout the study. As can be seen in the general questions in Part 2 of the questionnaires, this gained a high degree of students' approval. It is concluded that students are all satisfied with their studies with NESTs. As for the disadvantages towards studying English with NESTs, although there were some disadvantages in the process of studying with NESTs, students still showed their positive attitudes via their answers to the questionnaire (see Table 3)

Research question 2: What are the factors associated with students' satisfaction towards studying English with native English-speaking teachers?

The factors that have strong effects on students studying with NESTs are as follows: NESTs encourage students to speak more English in class (the highest mean score of item 4.1.3 is 4.71), NESTs prepare learners well for the IELTS exams (the second highest mean score of item 4.1.6 is 4.68), and the behaviors of their NESTs are friendly and open-minded (the third highest mean score of item 2.2 is 4.60).

4. Conclusion

This research examines students' attitudes towards studying with NESTs. It poses two research questions. The findings of the study answered the two research questions about students' attitudes towards the advantages and disadvantages when studying English with NESTs.

The NESTs' notable positive qualities include their capacity to speak words naturally and provide students with instructions, especially in pronunciation. In addition, students consider the teaching methods used by NESTs efficient, inspiring, and pleasurable. In addition, NESTs also create an interesting atmosphere for students' learning.

On the other hand, the negative elements that have been observed are related to the NESTs' teaching are insufficient comprehension of Vietnamese culture. This affects their capacity to explain word ideas and effectively respond to students' questions on English language usage. These findings highlight the significance of cultural understanding and efficient ways to communicate to maximise the learning experience with NESTs.

With the students' positive attitude towards their NESTs, this reveals that the team of teachers at EIU FLC is qualified because they meet the criteria of English teachers, and this needs to be maintained and expanded.

The findings of the study proved that administration management and student care services are the two factors that need improvement. Administration management involves administrative procedures and enhancing the quality of student care services, including more extra activities outside classroom hours with NESTs, organizing more English-speaking clubs, and providing English tutor support for underperforming students, to guarantee a smooth and effective learning atmosphere. Delivering prompt and efficient support to students may greatly improve their entire academic experience and satisfaction. In addition, adjusting teaching and learning facilities is also an essential demand.

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