

BRIDGING CULTURES THROUGH 1-ON-1 TUTORING: AN ACTION RESEARCH ON LEARNER AGENCY AMONG ADULT VIETNAMESE LEARNERS IN TAIWAN

Abstract

Focusing on learner agency among Taiwanese adults learning Vietnamese through 1-on-1 tutoring, this research presents a pilot phase with two adult learners suggesting that co-constructed tutoring can lower emotional barriers and foster more adaptive language learning strategies in the context of Taiwan's growing cross-cultural and regional ties. As Taiwan's New Southbound Policy continues to deepen regional ties, more Taiwanese adults are seeking Vietnamese language proficiency to meet both professional and personal demands, yet research on Vietnamese as a second language in non-traditional, 1-on-1 adult tutoring contexts remains considerably underrepresented compared to mainstream English language education literature. The central aim is therefore to explore how co-constructed tutoring sessions can support learner agency and self-regulated learning habits, with particular attention to how each learner's personal motivations, rooted in direct cultural and family connections to Vietnam, shape their individual learning trajectories. A qualitative action research design was adopted in which the researcher serves simultaneously as tutor and observer — a dual role that, while offering rich insider access to the learning process, is openly acknowledged as a potential source of bias; to address this, ongoing reflexivity was maintained through systematic tutor journals and learner-generated reflections that help triangulate interpretations beyond the researcher's own perspective. The pilot cycle of four weeks was conducted between March and April 2026 with two male Taiwanese participants, one whose mother is Vietnamese and one whose wife is Vietnamese, where data were collected through pre- and post-course semi-structured interviews, tutor reflection journals, and learner-generated reflections across eight sessions, all analyzed using thematic analysis; notably, the research is currently in expanding progress, with three additional learners recently recruited to bring the total to five participants and the action research cycle extended from four to eight weeks, with full data collection and analysis expected to be completed by end of June 2026. Preliminary findings from the pilot phase suggest that 1-on-1 tutoring settings can noticeably lower emotional barriers, allowing for more responsive pedagogical adjustments that support individual learner agency — for the heritage learner whose mother is Vietnamese, the strongest sense of agency appeared when sessions systematically prioritized foundational topics first, enabling him to build confident mastery of the basics before gradually working toward his

longer-term professional ambitions in Vietnam, while for the older business owner whose wife is Vietnamese, the challenge was rather different in that despite having considerably more flexible time to dedicate to learning, he had little awareness of effective self-learning strategies and had relied informally on audio exposure for years, meaning the tutoring process first needed to help him unlearn some deeply rooted auditory habits before new learning could meaningfully take hold; together, these early patterns point to the value of "co-creating knowledge" in 1-on-1 contexts as a meaningful local innovation for adult language education that speaks to the broader reality of cross-cultural family ties and regional migration in contemporary Taiwan, further highlighting that flexibility and personalization are especially critical when adult learners must navigate the tension between unlearning entrenched habits and building more sustainable language practices.

Keywords: learner agency, action research, Vietnamese language tutoring, adult education, intercultural learning