



The Effects of Cognitive Linguistic-Based Instruction on EFL Learners' Acquisition of Intercultural Political Vocabulary

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ABSTRACT

This quasi-experimental study investigated the effectiveness of Cognitive Linguistic-Based Instruction (CLBI) on the acquisition and long-term retention of intercultural political vocabulary among Vietnamese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) university students. Sixty participants were divided equally into an experimental group, receiving CLBI centered on Conceptual Metaphor Theory, and a control group (n=30), taught via traditional translation and rote-learning methods. Data collected through a pretest, an immediate posttest, and a four-week delayed posttest were analyzed using independent and paired samples t-tests. The results revealed that the experimental group achieved significantly higher scores in both posttests and demonstrated a remarkably lower vocabulary decay rate over time compared to the control group.

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ABSTRACT

Studi kuasi-eksperimental ini menyelidiki efektivitas Instruksi Berbasis Linguistik Kognitif (CLBI) terhadap pemerolehan dan retensi jangka panjang kosakata politik lintas budaya di kalangan mahasiswa universitas EFL (English as a Foreign Language) di Vietnam. Enam puluh partisipan dibagi rata ke dalam kelompok eksperimen, yang menerima CLBI berbasis Teori Metafora Konseptual, dan kelompok kontrol, yang diajar melalui metode penerjemahan tradisional dan hafalan. Data yang dikumpulkan melalui pretest, posttest segera, dan posttest tertunda selama empat minggu dianalisis menggunakan uji-t sampel independen dan berpasangan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kelompok eksperimen mencapai skor yang signifikan secara statistik lebih tinggi pada kedua posttest dan menunjukkan tingkat peluruhan kosakata yang jauh lebih rendah dari waktu ke waktu dibandingkan dengan kelompok kontrol.

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INTRODUCTION

In the current era of robust globalization, developing specialized competence and enhancing professional skills for learners at foreign language majors in higher education institutions has become an urgent task (Mammadova, 2024). Among specialized fields of knowledge, mastering a socio-political lexicon plays an exceptionally important role, effectively supporting English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in improving their reading comprehension of international press, examining diplomatic texts, and analyzing political discourse. Building a solid foundation of political terminology not only helps learners expand their international vision, eliminate communication barriers, and promote cultural exchange (Zhu, 2024), but also increases their competitive advantage when seeking employment opportunities both domestically and internationally (Mammadova, 2024). Language, by nature, is a vehicle for transmitting culture; therefore, this vocabulary often deeply contains culturally-marked elements specific to native environments (Kuryleva & Nikiforova, 2012; Zhu, 2024). This raises the requirement for learners to attain a certain level of cultural sensitivity to empathize with national identity and accurately decode media messages (Kuryleva & Nikiforova, 2012).

However, acquiring and utilizing intercultural political vocabulary has always been a significant challenge for both English and non-English majors in Vietnam. Pedagogical reality indicates that learners often face relatively high levels of difficulty, typically manifested as lexical ambiguity, inconsistency between pronunciation and spelling, and a lack of learning motivation due to limited real-world exposure within the classroom (Luu & Le, 2026). Furthermore, the higher education environment at public universities in Vietnam in particular, and many Asian countries in general, remains heavily influenced by traditional teaching methods that favor rote learning and test preparation (Fatma, 2026; Sofiana et al., 2025). While this mechanical rote learning approach can support short-term retention of content to achieve high test scores, it stifles critical thinking, suppresses creativity, and prevents learners from deeply understanding the nature of concepts (Fatma, 2026). When approaching socio-political discourse, which is inherently open and constantly evolving, fragmented translation methods (Mammadova, 2024) fail to help students process "loaded" linguistic elements (those bearing deep cultural implications), thereby leading to communicative deficiencies or distorting message reception (Kuryleva & Nikiforova, 2012).

To fundamentally resolve this issue, educational researchers have strongly recommended a paradigm shift from traditional teaching to experiential, learner-centered models to optimize students' strategic engagement (Fatma, 2026; Luu & Le, 2026; Mammadova, 2024). In this context, Cognitive Linguistics (CL) emerges as a breakthrough solution, reshaping the relationship between language, the mind, and human embodied experiences with the surrounding world (Evans, 2012). Contrary to abstract generative grammar frameworks, CL focuses on investigating language as a tool for organizing, processing, and conveying information based on the encyclopedic and multidimensional nature of meaning (Geeraerts & Cuyckens, 2012). Grounded in this foundation, Cognitive Linguistic-Based Instruction (CLBI) was established, applying core principles such as prototype theory, categorization, and particularly Conceptual Metaphor Theory into the foreign language classroom (Chen, 2009). Conceptual Metaphor Theory, pioneered by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, posits that humans understand an abstract conceptual domain (Target Domain) through a more concrete, familiar conceptual domain (Source Domain). By implementing CLBI via explicit instruction, consciousness-raising, and scaffolding, instructors can provide intuitive, more accessible explanations for learners (Luu, 2025; Tyler, 2008), helping them shift from passive memorization to active self-regulated thinking (Luu & Le, 2026).



Despite its superior theoretical advantages, the empirical application of CLBI to intercultural political vocabulary in EFL classrooms remains a major gap. Native political discourse is inherently metaphor-rich; conceptual metaphor structures not only create linguistic coherence but also enhance the persuasive power of systematically interwoven metaphorical networks (Luu, 2026b). When political leaders utilize familiar metaphorical domains such as journey, construction, family, or war to frame collective struggles and foster national solidarity (Luu, 2026b), EFL learners frequently experience cognitive overload due to their habit of literal translation. For instance, when encountering vocabulary embedded within the conceptual metaphors POLITICS IS WAR or NATION IS A FAMILY, students easily face great difficulty in understanding why conflict terms or blood relations are used to describe elections and state institutions. Without decoding these cultural lacunae (gaps), it is challenging for learners to attain deep intercultural empathy (Kuryleva & Nikiforova, 2012).

Moreover, the majority of empirical research on CLBI to date has only focused on verifying its effectiveness on formulaic language, phrasal verbs, or idioms in general (Luu, 2025; Tyler, 2008). Pedagogical proposals incorporating ideological-political elements or teaching word formation via blended learning have been deployed, but they often lean heavily on theory and lack rigorous empirical validation (Luu, 2025; Zhang et al., 2022). At Vietnamese public universities, the absence of a learner-oriented learning environment coupled with the fear of making mistakes and negative evaluation causes English majors to easily fall into a state of hesitation, reducing their intercultural willingness to communicate (Luu, 2026a). Although storytelling activities or gamification tools can mitigate anxiety and enhance cultural interaction (Luu, 2026c; Sofiana et al., 2025), an intensive empirical intervention model to measure the acquisition and retention of political vocabulary through a cognitive lens has not been fully executed. Therefore, this study is conducted to provide a comprehensive empirical insight, comparing the efficacy of Cognitive Linguistic-Based Instruction (CLBI) against traditional methods in helping EFL students master and sustainably retain intercultural political vocabulary. To address the aforementioned problems, this study focuses on seeking answers to the following two specific research questions:

RQ1: Does the application of Cognitive Linguistic-Based Instruction (CLBI) yield better improvement in EFL learners' acquisition of intercultural political vocabulary compared to the traditional approach in an immediate posttest?

RQ2: Does the application of Cognitive Linguistic-Based Instruction (CLBI) help EFL learners retain intercultural political vocabulary better over time compared to the traditional approach in a delayed posttest?

Based on the research questions and the theoretical framework of cognitive linguistics, the following research hypotheses are proposed:

H1: The experimental group (intervened with the CLBI method) will achieve a statistically significantly higher mean score on the immediate posttest compared to the control group (taught via the traditional method).

H2: The experimental group (intervened with the CLBI method) will retain scores better and exhibit a statistically significantly lower vocabulary decay rate on the delayed posttest compared to the control group.

METHOD

Research design

This study employs a quantitative quasi-experimental pretest-posttest design to investigate the effects of Cognitive Linguistic-Based Instruction (CLBI) on EFL learners'



acquisition and retention of intercultural political vocabulary. Because random assignment of individual participants to groups was administratively impractical within the intact university classroom scheduling, existing class cohorts were designated as either the Experimental Group (EG) or the Control Group (CG).

This structure allowed for a controlled examination of pedagogical intervention over time while maintaining ecological validity in an authentic academic environment. To control for internal validity threats and ensure historical baseline parity, a pretest was administered to both cohorts prior to the educational interventions. Following a designated instructional treatment period, an immediate posttest was conducted to measure vocabulary acquisition, followed by a delayed posttest administered several weeks later to assess long-term lexical retention.

Participants

The participant pool consisted of 60 third-year undergraduate English majors enrolled in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) program at a public university in Vietnam. These participants were selected via purposive sampling and belonged to two intact classroom cohorts, with each cohort comprising exactly 30 students. Prior to the instructional treatment, an independent samples t-test was performed on their pretest scores to confirm that both groups possessed an equivalent baseline knowledge of the target intercultural political vocabulary. To provide a clear overview of the participants' demographic distribution across both the Experimental and Control groups, Table 1 details their relevant characteristics, including gender, age, and self-reported hours of weekly exposure to English media outside the classroom.

Table 1. Demographic Profiles of the Participants

Demographic Variables	Experimental Group (n=30)	Control Group (n=30)	Total (N=60)
Gender			
Male	8 (26.7%)	7 (23.3%)	15 (25.0%)
Female	22 (73.3%)	23 (76.7%)	45 (75.0%)
Age			
20 years old	12 (40.0%)	14 (46.7%)	26 (43.3%)
21 years old	16 (53.3%)	13 (43.3%)	29 (48.3%)
22 years old or older	2 (6.7%)	3 (10.0%)	5 (8.3%)
Weekly English Media Exposure			
Less than 5 hours	5 (16.7%)	6 (20.0%)	11 (18.3%)
5–10 hours	18 (60.0%)	16 (53.3%)	34 (56.7%)
More than 10 hours	7 (23.3%)	8 (26.7%)	15 (25.0%)

Target Vocabulary & Instruments

The target vocabulary selection for this study comprised 40 culturally-marked, native socio-political terms and idiomatic expressions chosen from authentic media corpora. These



items were systematically categorized under two primary dominant metaphorical domains: *POLITICS IS WAR* (e.g., campaign trail, political ally, front-runner, rallying a base, political fallout) and *NATION IS A FAMILY* (e.g., founding fathers, homeland security, big tent politics, sister republics, political parenting).

To gather empirical data, three testing instruments were developed and validated. The first instrument, the Pretest, was designed to measure participants' prior knowledge and eliminate baseline bias, ensuring that the chosen terms were genuinely unfamiliar to both cohorts before instruction commenced. The second instrument, the Immediate Posttest, was administered immediately following the final treatment session to measure short-term vocabulary acquisition (RQ1). The final instrument, the Delayed Posttest, was administered four weeks after the treatment ended without prior warning to assess long-term lexical retention (RQ2). All three tests featured equivalent test items that were systematically randomized in sequence and wording to avoid any potential testing effect or memory bias from previous iterations.

Instructional Treatments

The instructional intervention spanned a period of six weeks, consisting of one 90-minute session per week, totaling 9 hours of formal classroom instruction for each group. Both the Experimental Group and the Control Group were taught by the same instructor and exposed to identical target texts, readings, and socio-political vocabulary lists to isolate the pedagogical approach as the primary independent variable.

For the Control Group, vocabulary instruction adhered strictly to traditional, rote-based pedagogical practices. Students were assigned reading materials containing the target socio-political terms, followed by teacher-led direct translation. The instructor provided standard dictionary definitions, and the students completed structural text-based tasks such as fill-in-the-blank worksheets, sentence repetition, and mechanical matching exercises. Lexical items were treated as individual, literal semantic units, and no reference was made to cognitive structures or underlying cultural thought patterns.

In contrast, the Experimental Group received Cognitive Linguistic-Based Instruction (CLBI), which focused explicitly on deep conceptual engagement. Rather than presenting vocabulary in isolation, the instructor introduced the foundational frameworks of Conceptual Metaphor Theory. Students were guided to decode underlying root schemas such as *POLITICS IS WAR* and *NATION IS A FAMILY*. Instead of memorizing translations, students participated in cognitive tasks where they mapped concrete source domains onto abstract political domains, drew associative mind-maps to link metaphorical networks, and collaboratively decompressed political cartoons or news headlines. This allowed them to decipher hidden cultural nuances and systematically predict or deduce meanings based on cognitive associations.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data collected from the pretest, immediate posttest, and delayed posttest were coded and processed using statistical software (SPSS version 26.0). Descriptive statistics, including mean scores (M) and standard deviations (SD), were calculated to outline the overarching performance distribution of both groups.

Inferential statistical analyses were then conducted using a two-pronged approach. First, an Independent Samples t-test was performed at three critical intervals: during the pretest to verify group homogeneity, during the immediate posttest to compare short-term acquisition differences between CLBI and traditional methods, and during the delayed posttest to determine which approach yielded superior retention over time. Second, a Paired Samples t-test was



applied within each respective group to evaluate intra-group progress, comparing pretest scores against immediate posttest scores to measure overall lexical improvement, and immediate posttest scores against delayed posttest scores to analyze the longitudinal rate of vocabulary decay. All statistical significance thresholds were maintained at a standard level of $p < .05$.

RESULT

The quantitative data obtained from the pretest, immediate posttest, and delayed posttest were analyzed to evaluate the efficacy of Cognitive Linguistic-Based Instruction (CLBI) on the acquisition and retention of intercultural political vocabulary. To establish baseline equivalence between the two groups before the pedagogical intervention, an independent samples t-test was executed on the pretest scores. The statistical results revealed no significant difference in initial vocabulary knowledge between the experimental group ($M = 12.45$, $SD = 2.12$) and the control group ($M = 12.60$, $SD = 2.08$; $t(58) = -0.27$, $p = .785$), demonstrating that both student cohorts possessed a homogenous starting point.

To address the first research question (RQ1) regarding short-term vocabulary acquisition, an independent samples t-test was conducted on the immediate posttest scores. The experimental group achieved a mean score of 32.40 ($SD = 3.15$), whereas the control group obtained a mean score of 24.15 ($SD = 3.42$). The statistical analysis yielded a highly significant difference between the two cohorts ($t(58) = 9.72$, $p < .001$), with a remarkably large effect size (Cohen's $d = 2.51$). This finding indicates that students who received cognitive linguistic-based instruction outperformed those subjected to traditional rote-learning methods in immediate vocabulary acquisition, thereby providing robust empirical support to validate the first hypothesis (H1).

To answer the second research question (RQ2) focusing on long-term vocabulary retention, an independent samples t-test was carried out on the delayed posttest scores collected four weeks post-intervention. The experimental group maintained a high mean score of 29.85 ($SD = 3.24$), while the control group's mean score dropped substantially to 17.30 ($SD = 3.65$). The analytical results confirmed that the experimental group achieved a statistically significantly higher score than the control group ($t(58) = 14.07$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 3.63$). Furthermore, paired samples t-tests showed that the control group suffered a severe vocabulary decay rate, with scores plunging significantly from the immediate to the delayed posttest ($t(29) = 11.54$, $p < .001$). Conversely, the experimental group exhibited a much lower and more stable attrition pattern ($t(29) = 4.21$, $p < .001$). These outcomes demonstrate that CLBI vastly enhances long-term memory traces and limits vocabulary decay over time, validating the second hypothesis (H2). Table 2 summarizes the comprehensive statistical comparisons between both instructional groups across all testing phases.

Table 2. Independent Samples T-Test Results for Pretest, Immediate Posttest, and Delayed Posttest

Testing Phase	Experimental Group (n=30) M (SD)	Control Group (n=30) M (SD)	t-value	df	p-value	Cohen's d
Pretest	12.45 (2.12)	12.60 (2.08)	-0.27	58	.785	0.07
Immediate Posttest	32.40 (3.15)	24.15 (3.42)	9.72	58	< .001	2.51
Delayed Posttest	29.85 (3.24)	17.30 (3.65)	14.07	58	< .001	3.63



DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The empirical findings of this study demonstrate that Cognitive Linguistic-Based Instruction (CLBI) is highly effective for teaching culturally-marked political vocabulary. The significant improvement in the immediate posttest scores of the experimental group suggests that explicit conceptual mapping provides a clearer framework than traditional rote memorization (Chen, 2009; Tyler, 2008). When students understand the underlying source-to-target conceptual projections, such as mapping *WAR* or *FAMILY* onto *POLITICS*, they can easily organize individual lexical items into a structured mental network (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). This conceptual scaffolding reduces the cognitive load associated with learning abstract political expressions, allowing students to systematically decode expressions like rallying a base or political fallout instead of relying on literal translation.

The delayed posttest results underscore the value of CLBI for long-term vocabulary retention. While the control group experienced a rapid decline in vocabulary recall due to the superficial nature of mechanical memorization, the experimental group retained most of their vocabulary gains. This stability in memory retention aligns with the depth-of-processing paradigm, which posits that deeper cognitive engagement creates more durable memory traces (Boers, 2000; Csábi, 2004). By analyzing metaphors and mapping conceptual networks, students form rich episodic and semantic connections. This deep cognitive elaboration anchors new vocabulary firmly within their long-term memory, making the terms highly resistant to natural memory decay over time (Boers, 2000).

These findings carry important pedagogical and curriculum design implications for EFL education. First, foreign language instructors should move away from traditional rote-learning and translation methods when dealing with complex, culturally-marked language. Incorporating cognitive linguistic tools such as explicit conceptual metaphor identification, source-to-target schema mapping, and associative mind-mapping can significantly improve vocabulary instruction (Chen, 2009; Tyler, 2008). Second, textbook developers and curriculum planners should systematically organize socio-political and idiomatic language around core conceptual domains rather than relying on arbitrary alphabetical lists or isolated thematic units. Teaching students to recognize these underlying conceptual patterns helps them develop independent vocabulary learning strategies, ultimately enhancing their overall intercultural communicative competence and language awareness.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Cognitive Linguistic-Based Instruction (CLBI) significantly improves immediate acquisition and long-term retention of intercultural political vocabulary among Vietnamese EFL learners compared to traditional methods. However, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The sample size was relatively small and drawn from a single public university, which restricts the generalizability of the findings to broader EFL student populations. Additionally, the four-week delay for the posttest might not fully capture the lifelong durability of lexical traces. Future research should utilize larger, multi-institutional samples and longitudinal designs extending over several months. Incorporating qualitative data instruments, such as semi-structured interviews or think-aloud protocols, would also provide deeper insights into students' cognitive processing during metaphorical decoding tasks.

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