Valuing undergraduates' investment in conducting EFL research: Views of students at a university in Vietnam

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Academic research is widely recognised as important to undergraduates' academic development, yet many students encounter practical, linguistic, and institutional challenges when engaging in research activities. In the Vietnamese EFL context, previous studies have examined students' perceptions of research and its academic benefits, but less attention has been given to how students understand their investment in research from a sociocultural perspective. Drawing on Darvin and Norton's model of investment, our exploratory mixed-method study examined how EFL undergraduates perceived the roles of identity, capital, and ideology in their research investment. Data were collected through a questionnaire with 63 English-major undergraduates and follow-up semi-structured interviews with six participants at a university in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam. Descriptive findings showed that all three dimensions were reported at high levels, with ideology receiving the highest mean score, followed by capital and identity. Interview findings further suggested that students' research investment was connected to their academic aspirations, perceived benefits of research, access to knowledge and skills, and the encouragement of lecturers and the institution. Our study contextualises the model of investment in EFL undergraduate research and offers practical implications for supporting students' research engagement through mentoring, research training, and a more visible research-oriented academic environment.

Introduction

In the Vietnamese context, several studies have examined the role of research in students' academic development. Existing research suggests that undergraduate students may gain various academic and professional benefits from conducting research, including the development of research skills, academic writing ability, critical thinking, and future career preparation (Truong et al., 2023). However, despite these recognised benefits, undergraduate participation in scientific research remains limited in many EFL higher education contexts. This suggests the need to examine not only students' motivation to conduct research, but also how they perceive the sociocultural dimensions associated with their research investment.

Previous studies on students' research participation in Vietnam have largely focused on individual-level factors, such as attitudes, interests, perceived benefits, and challenges in conducting research. While these perspectives are useful, they tend to frame research engagement mainly as a matter of personal motivation. Less attention has been given to the sociocultural conditions surrounding students' research participation, including how students understand their academic identities, how they access different forms of capital, and how institutional or social beliefs about research are related to their willingness to engage in research activities.

At the policy level, higher education reforms in Vietnam have increasingly positioned universities as research-oriented institutions, where student participation in scientific research is encouraged as part of academic quality assurance and graduate employability (National Assembly of Vietnam, 2018). Recent Vietnamese higher education studies also suggest that student engagement is shaped by the learning environment, institutional support, and students' perceived opportunities to participate meaningfully in academic activities (Nguyen et al., 2025; Ho Trung, 2026). This policy context provides an important backdrop for understanding undergraduate research engagement. However, policy encouragement alone does not fully explain how students perceive research, why they choose to invest in research activities, or what forms of support they consider meaningful. Therefore, a sociocultural perspective is useful for examining students' reported investment in research within a specific institutional context.

Recent work in *Issues in Educational Researc*h has begun to examine undergraduate research from related perspectives, including undergraduate research supervision, thesis-writing challenges, and student research engagement readiness. Razali et al. (2020) showed that undergraduate research supervision plays an important role in supporting students' independence and engagement in final-year research projects. Quinto (2022) further highlighted the academic and contextual challenges that undergraduate students experience when completing thesis-writing tasks. More recently, Lőrincz and Csernicskó (2026) developed the *Student Research Engagement Readines*s scale, emphasising research self-efficacy, motivation, perceived barriers, and research participation as key dimensions of students' readiness for research engagement. However, undergraduate students conducting research, particularly in EFL contexts, remains relatively under-represented in IIER. Therefore, our study contributes to this emerging discussion by examining EFL undergraduates' investment in research through the sociocultural dimensions of identity, capital, and ideology.

To address this gap, our study draws on Darvin and Norton's model of investment, which conceptualises learners' engagement as being situated at the intersection of identity, capital, and ideology. In this study, identity referred to how students position themselves in relation to research and future academic possibilities; capital refers to the economic, cultural, and social resources that students associate with research participation; and ideology refers to the beliefs, values, and institutional expectations that surround research engagement. Rather than treating research participation as a purely individual decision, the model of investment provides an analytical lens for examining how EFL undergraduates perceive their engagement in research as a socioculturally situated process.

For these reasons, our study explores how EFL undergraduates perceive identity, capital, and ideology in relation to their investment in conducting research. By focusing on students' reported investment and interview explanations, we aim to provide context-specific insights into undergraduate research engagement in an EFL higher education setting. The findings may also offer practical implications for universities and lecturers seeking to support students' research participation through mentoring, research training, and a more visible research-oriented academic environment.

The current study aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How do EFL undergraduates perceive the roles of identity, capital, and ideology in their investment in conducting research?
RQ2: To what extent do EFL undergraduates report identity, capital, and ideology as salient dimensions of their research investment?
RQ3: How do students' interview responses explain their reported investment in conducting EFL research?

Undergraduate research as a developmental academic practice

Undergraduate research can be understood as a developmental academic practice through which students learn to participate in knowledge-building activities, rather than merely as a technical requirement for completing a course or graduation project. From this perspective, research engagement involves more than collecting and analysing data; it also requires students to develop academic confidence, research skills, disciplinary awareness, and the ability to connect evidence with scholarly argumentation. Healey and Jenkins (2009) argued that undergraduate research and inquiry can be embedded into higher education curricula as a way of engaging students more actively in disciplinary learning. Similarly, Lopatto (2010) described undergraduate research as a high-impact educational experience that can support students' academic development.

Recent studies have extended this view by showing that undergraduate research experiences depend on how research opportunities are designed and supported. Ahmad and Al-Thani's (2022) systematic review of undergraduate research experience models showed that such experiences can take different forms, including traditional, course-based, and hybrid models, and that their effectiveness depends on pedagogical design, institutional structure, and the level of student support. Walkington and Ommering (2022) further argued that authentic undergraduate research can contribute to students' motivation and well-being when research is embedded in meaningful curriculum design and supported through mentoring. These studies suggest that the value of undergraduate research is not automatic; it depends on whether students are provided with structured opportunities to participate meaningfully in research practices. Recent studies on undergraduate research experiences further indicate that structured research opportunities can strengthen students' research identity, sense of belonging, and access to research participation when they are intentionally designed to lower barriers to entry (White et al., 2025; Amelung & Helmke, 2025).

In EFL contexts, undergraduate research may carry additional developmental value because students are required to engage with research knowledge through English academic reading, writing, and disciplinary communication. Truong et al. (2023) found that EFL undergraduates generally recognised the importance of conducting research and perceived it as useful for their academic and professional development. At the same time, EFL students' research engagement requires them to negotiate both research competence and English-medium academic literacy. Therefore, in the present study, undergraduate

research is approached not simply as an academic task, but as a developmental practice through which EFL students build research-related skills, academic confidence, and a clearer sense of participation in scholarly communities. Mantai et al. (2024) further showed that undergraduate research engagement should be understood as a learning process that requires attention to what students learn, how this learning is assessed, and how research-related development is supported across disciplines. Earlier research similarly linked undergraduate research with student engagement, persistence, and cognitive, personal and professional development (Kuh, 2003; Seymour et al., 2004; Hunter et al., 2007; Adebisi, 2022).

Research readiness, supervision, and challenges in undergraduate research

Although undergraduate research can support students' academic development, students do not enter research activities with the same level of readiness, confidence, or access to support. Lőrincz and Csernicskó (2026) conceptualised student research engagement readiness as a multidimensional construct involving research self-efficacy, research motivation, perceived barriers, and actual research participation. This perspective is useful because it shows that students' engagement in research cannot be explained only by whether they are interested in research. Their participation also depends on whether they feel capable of conducting research, understand the value of research, have prior exposure to research practices, and can overcome institutional or personal barriers (Manitzas Hill et al., 2022; Lőrincz & Csernicskó, 2026).

Supervision is another important condition shaping undergraduate research engagement. Razali et al. (2020) showed that undergraduate research supervision plays an important role in helping students become more independent and active in the research process. However, supervision may become ineffective when it remains overly supervisor-centred or when expectations between students and supervisors are unclear. For EFL undergraduates, this issue is particularly relevant because students may require guidance not only in research design and data collection, but also in academic reading, literature review writing, instrument development, and English-medium academic writing. Supportive supervision can therefore help students perceive research as more manageable and less intimidating. Recent studies on undergraduate thesis supervision similarly show that students' engagement with supervisory feedback is shaped by feedback clarity, affective responses, supervisors' feedback beliefs, and the extent to which supervision helps them revise, regulate, and sustain their writing process (Liu, 2026; Luo, 2023; Luo & Hu, 2024; Sari et al., 2025; Syafi'i et al., 2024).

Despite these potential supports, EFL undergraduates often face substantial challenges when conducting research. Truong et al. (2023) reported that EFL students commonly struggled with selecting research topics, constructing theoretical frameworks, and identifying research gaps after reviewing prior studies. Quinto (2022) similarly found that undergraduate thesis writing involves multiple student-related and adviser-related challenges, including difficulties in formulating research problems, managing thesis

requirements, and sustaining progress. These challenges are consistent with recent EFL thesis-writing studies showing that undergraduate students often struggle with topic development, academic writing, research organisation, and the emotional demands of completing a thesis (Alkhasanah & Kholis, 2024; Quinto, 2022; Truong et al., 2023).

Academic writing is a particularly important challenge in EFL research contexts. In EFL undergraduate thesis contexts, students' engagement with written corrective feedback and global comments has also been shown to involve cognitive, behavioural, and affective dimensions, especially when they revise coherence, citation use, research questions, methodology, and grammatical accuracy (Hapsari et al., 2025). Pravita and Kuswandono (2022) found that writing anxiety and academic procrastination influenced undergraduate thesis writing, while self-regulation helped students continue making progress. This finding is relevant to EFL undergraduates because research engagement often involves extended reading, writing, revision, and communication with supervisors. Taken together, recent studies suggest that undergraduate research engagement should be understood as a process shaped by research readiness, supervision, academic writing demands, affective barriers, and access to institutional support. In a recent study of undergraduate English-major students, Ziar et al. (2025) found that research anxiety was shaped by students' limited research experience, academic writing pressure, and uncertainty about the research process, suggesting that affective barriers should be considered alongside technical research challenges.

Investment as a sociocultural lens for EFL undergraduate research engagement

Our study uses Darvin and Norton's model of investment to examine EFL undergraduates' research engagement as a socioculturally situated process. In this model, investment is understood as unfolding at the intersection of identity, capital, and ideology (Darvin & Norton, 2015). Unlike approaches that explain engagement mainly through individual motivation, investment draws attention to the social conditions that make participation possible, meaningful, or constrained. Darvin and Norton (2023) further clarified that investment differs from motivation because it foregrounds identity, power, ideology, and access to valued resources. This distinction is important for the present study because EFL students may recognise the value of research but still hesitate to participate if they do not see themselves as legitimate novice researchers, lack research-related capital, or perceive research as inaccessible within their academic environment.

Identity is central to this perspective because students' research engagement may be shaped by how they imagine their academic and professional futures. Drawing on Norton's (2013) view of identity as a learner's understanding of their relationship to the world and future possibilities, research engagement can be seen as a way for students to position themselves as capable learners, future teachers, postgraduate students, or emerging researchers. Wang and Jiang (2025) in their study of Chinese university students' English-medium instruction experience, showed that students' investment was connected to linguistic capital, disciplinary positioning, and future identities. Similarly, in the context

of EFL learning, Rahaman (2025) demonstrated that learners' engagement can be shaped by the interaction of identity, ideology, and capital. These studies support the view that EFL students' research engagement should be examined not only in terms of what students want to achieve, but also in relation to who they think they can become through research participation.

Capital is also important because undergraduate research requires access to academic and institutional resources. Drawing on Bourdieu's (1986) concept of capital, Darvin and Norton's framework allows research engagement to be examined through students' access to cultural, social, economic, and symbolic resources. In the context of undergraduate EFL research, capital may include research knowledge, English academic writing competence, access to scholarly literature, lecturer guidance, peer networks, certificates, research funding, and opportunities to present or publish research. Students with greater access to these forms of capital may find research more attainable, while those with limited access may perceive research as difficult, distant, or reserved for more capable peers.

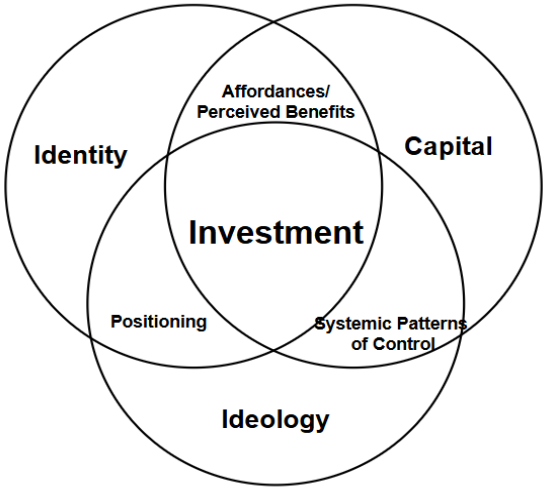

Figure 1: Model of investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015).

Ideology further shapes how students interpret the value and legitimacy of research. In university contexts, research may be positioned as a graduation requirement, a marker of academic excellence, a pathway to postgraduate study, or a professional advantage. These institutional and social beliefs influence whether students perceive research as worth investing in. For this reason, the model of investment is suitable for the present study because it explains EFL undergraduates' research engagement as more than a personal choice or motivational outcome. It allows the study to examine how students' reported investment in research is shaped by the interaction of identity, capital, and ideology within a specific Vietnamese higher education context.

Alali and Alruwaili (2024) similarly found that imagined identities supported EFL learners' investment by helping learners connect language learning with future self-positioning, agency, and participation in valued communities.

Method

Research design

We employed an exploratory mixed-method approach to investigate EFL undergraduates' investment in conducting research and the sociocultural dimensions associated with their reported research engagement. Quantitative and qualitative methods were combined to provide both descriptive patterns and deeper explanations of students' views and experiences (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007; Yin, 2006). The quantitative component involved a questionnaire designed on a five-point Likert scale, while the qualitative component used semi-structured interviews to gain more detailed insights into students' research investment. This design was considered appropriate because the study aimed to explore students' perceived investment in one institutional context rather than to make broad statistical generalisations. Because the study aimed to identify perceived salience rather than test causal relationships, descriptive statistics were used to summarise response patterns, while interviews were used to explain how students made sense of identity, capital, and ideology in their research engagement.

Participants

The participants were 63 English-major undergraduates from a university in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam. To be included in the study, participants were required to have experience with at least one scientific research project, either with or without the guidance of instructors. Among the participants, 66.7% were female and 33.3% were male. Regarding academic year, third-year students accounted for the largest proportion of the sample (49.2%), followed by second-year and final-year students, each accounting for 23.8%. Only two participants were first-year students.

Six participants were purposively selected from the survey sample and invited to participate in follow-up semi-structured interviews. They were selected to represent different experiences in conducting research, allowing the study to collect more diverse views on how students invested in research activities. Four interviewees were second-year students, one was a third-year student, and one was a final-year student. Although the sample size was modest, it was considered suitable for an exploratory mixed-method study situated in a specific institutional context. The interview sample was also guided by thematic saturation, as recurring themes related to identity, capital, and ideology emerged without substantially new insights in the later interviews.

Instruments

The questionnaire was used to identify the sociocultural dimensions that students perceived as important to their investment in conducting research. It consisted of 25 items

developed based on Darvin and Norton's (2015) model of investment. Each item was theoretically mapped onto one of the three dimensions of the model: identity, capital, or ideology. The questionnaire included three clusters: identity, capital, and ideology. All items were measured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

The questionnaire was prepared in Vietnamese to ensure that participants could understand the items clearly and respond accurately. Attention was given to wording and translation accuracy during the piloting stage. The use of Vietnamese was considered appropriate because the participants were Vietnamese EFL students, and the study aimed to capture their perceptions of research investment as clearly as possible.

To obtain deeper qualitative insights, six semi-structured interviews were conducted after the quantitative data had been collected and analysed. The interviews were also conducted in Vietnamese so that participants could express their views more naturally and in greater detail. The interview protocol included 25 questions developed based on Darvin and Norton's (2015) model of investment. Several follow-up questions were asked when further clarification was needed. The full list of questionnaire items is provided in Appendix A, while the semi-structured interview protocol is provided in Appendix B. Since the questionnaire was developed for the specific context of EFL undergraduate research rather than adopted from an existing validated scale, the items were reviewed and piloted for clarity, wording, and theoretical alignment with the three dimensions of the investment model.

Data collection and analysis procedure

Data collection began in May 2024 after the questionnaire had been piloted with 20 English-major students and revised for translation accuracy, clarity, and wording. The final Vietnamese version was then distributed to 63 participants who had experience conducting at least one scientific research project. Before participation, students received an informed consent form via email explaining the study purpose, voluntary participation, data use, and confidentiality.

The 63 valid questionnaire responses were entered into SPSS version 25. Descriptive statistics were used to examine students' reported investment across identity, capital, and ideology, while reliability analysis indicated high internal consistency for the questionnaire (Cronbach's alpha = 0.93). After the survey analysis, six follow-up interviews were conducted online via Microsoft Teams and recorded with participants' consent for transcription and analysis. The interview data were analysed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2012) approach, using initial deductive coding based on identity, capital, and ideology, followed by inductive refinement of emerging subthemes. To enhance credibility, member checking was conducted by sending interview summaries to participants for confirmation and clarification.

Table 1: Reliability of the questionnaire

Cronbach's alpha	No. of items	No. of participants
0.93	25	63

To define whether the analysed data was high or low from the range from 1 to 5, the researchers based it on Moidunny (2009).

Table 2: Mean score interpretation

Mean score	Interpretation
1.00 – 1.80	Very low
1.81 – 2.60	Low
2.61 – 3.20	Medium
3.21 – 4.20	High
4.21 – 5.0	Very high

Findings

Quantitative findings

Cluster-based findings

To address the research questions, quantitative data were collected through the questionnaire and analysed using descriptive statistics. Mean scores (M) and standard deviations (SD), calculated from 63 participants' responses, were used to describe students' reported investment in relation to identity, capital, and ideology.

Table 3: Cluster-based findings (N=63)

Constructs	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Identity	2.88	5.00	3.93	0.59
Capital	2.50	5.00	4.06	0.54
Ideology	2.80	5.00	4.15	0.63
Average	2.68	5.00	4.04	0.51

As indicated in Table 3, the overall mean score was 4.04 (SD 0.51), suggesting that participants reported a high level of investment in conducting research. Among the three sociocultural dimensions, ideology received the highest mean score (M 4.15, SD 0.63), followed by capital (M 4.06, SD 0.54) and identity (M 3.93, SD 0.59). These descriptive results suggest that all three dimensions were salient in students' reported research investment, with ideology being the most highly rated dimension.

Students' reported investment in relation to identity

Identity was reported at a high level, although it had the lowest mean score among the three dimensions. The highest-rated item was enhancing one's CV or résumé through scientific research (M 4.38), followed by receiving appreciation from teachers (M 4.16) and

being recognised for research records (M 4.14). By contrast, admiration from friends (M 3.63) and reputation (M 3.59) received lower scores. This suggests that identity-related investment was more strongly connected to academic recognition and profile development than to peer admiration.

Table 4: Students' investment by identity

Statements	Min	Max	Mean	SD
1. I engage in scientific research to become a good researcher in the future.	2.00	5.00	3.93	0.79
2. I do scientific research to receive higher appreciation from teachers.	3.00	5.00	4.16	0.79
3. I conduct scientific research in order to receive admiration from friends.	2.00	5.00	3.63	1.02
4. I engage in scientific research to change others' perspectives on me.	2.00	5.00	3.89	1.00
5. I want to be identified as a good student when it comes to conducting research.	2.00	5.00	3.81	0.84
6. I want to enhance my profile at the university by doing scientific research.	2.00	5.00	4.38	0.71
7. I want to be commended thanks to my scientific research records.	2.00	5.00	4.14	0.80
8. I participate in scientific research to boost my reputation.	2.00	5.00	3.59	0.90

Students' reported investment in relation to economic capital

Economic capital-related items were generally reported at a high level. Participants associated research with wider job opportunities (M 4.17), future salary benefits (M 4.10), and certificates (M 4.06). However, cash rewards (M 3.49) and full support budgets (M 3.46) received lower scores, suggesting that financial incentives were perceived as supplementary rather than central to students' research investment.

Table 5: Students' investment by economic capital

Statements	Min	Max	Mean	SD
9. I conduct scientific research because of the attractive cash rewards.	1.00	5.00	3.49	1.01
10. I conduct scientific research because of the full support budget.	1.00	5.00	3.46	1.00
11. I conduct scientific research because of my certificates.	2.00	5.00	4.06	0.82
12. I conduct research because the scientific research records could raise my job's salary in the future.	2.00	5.00	4.10	0.78
13. Scientific research records could offer me more job opportunities.	2.00	5.00	4.17	0.75

Students' reported investment in relation to cultural capital

Cultural capital was the most salient aspect of capital. Participants rated the development of reading and research skills most highly (M 4.44), followed by specialised knowledge (M 4.38), writing skills (M 4.38), and specialised vocabulary (M 4.30). These findings indicate that students mainly associated research investment with academic knowledge, research competence, writing ability, and disciplinary literacy.

Table 6: Students' investment by cultural capital

Statements	Min	Max	Mean	SD
14. I conduct scientific research because I can learn a lot of specialised knowledge.	3.00	5.00	4.38	0.66
15. I conduct scientific research in order to achieve better writing skills.	3.00	5.00	4.38	0.75
16. I conduct scientific research in order to improve my reading and research skills.	3.00	5.00	4.44	0.69
17. I conduct scientific research in order to learn more specialised vocabulary.	2.00	5.00	4.30	0.75
18. Conducting research keeps me updated with new English teaching and learning trends.	3.00	5.00	4.24	0.73

Students' reported investment in relation to social capital

Results from Table 7 show that social capital-related items were reported at a high level. The item related to meeting peers who share research interests was reported at a high level (M 3.90). Similarly, expanding one's relationship network was also reported at a high level (M 3.81). Overall, social capital was perceived as a relevant, though not necessarily dominant, aspect of students' research investment.

Table 7: Students' investment by social capital

Statements	Min	Max	Mean	SD
19. I conduct scientific research in order to expand my relationship network.	2.00	5.00	3.81	0.95
20. I conduct scientific research in order to meet friends who share research interests.	1.00	5.00	3.90	0.93

Students' reported investment in relation to ideology

Ideology received the highest overall mean score. The strongest item concerned students' belief that research brings benefits (M 4.30), followed by making one's CV more professional (M 4.27). Teachers' belief in the value of research (M 4.10) and university appreciation of research-active students (M 4.02) were also rated highly. These findings suggest that students' own beliefs about the value of research were especially salient in their reported investment.

Table 8: Students' investment by ideology

Statements	Min	Max	Mean	SD
21. I conduct scientific research because my university highly appreciates students who are good at conducting research.	2.00	5.00	4.02	0.87
22. I conduct scientific research because my teachers believe that it is beneficial for students.	2.00	5.00	4.10	0.86
23. I conduct scientific research because I believe it brings me benefits.	3.00	5.00	4.30	0.71
24. I conduct scientific research because I believe proficient researchers will get better jobs in the future.	2.00	5.00	4.05	0.88
25. I conduct scientific research to make my CV more professional.	2.00	5.00	4.27	0.77

Qualitative findings

Students' attitudes towards identity

The interview data supported the quantitative findings, showing that participants generally viewed themselves as novice researchers who still needed further research experience and competence.

Excerpt 1: I have a certain amount of experience in conducting research; however, I am still unable to write a research paper on my own (P-5).

The qualitative findings suggest that students' research investment was linked to future academic aspirations, as all six participants intended to pursue further study and some hoped to conduct research in English language education or related fields.

Excerpt 2: I want to have the ability to contribute to my field, and my research gets widely recognised, more specifically in education (P-1).

Excerpt 3: I want to become a researcher in fields that I am interested in, such as language or education (P-6).

Regarding reputation, only half of the interviewees described it as a relevant reason for conducting research. Some participants perceived research experience as a way to strengthen their academic profile and improve future opportunities for further study or employment. However, reputation was not consistently described as a central reason for engaging in research.

Excerpt 4: Contributing to scientific research can improve the profile of students and make them more well-known to people, and it adds extra credits to the student's resumé for finding work or enrolling in an international school for higher education (P-1).

Excerpt 5: I hope teachers and friends view me as someone who is driven and disciplined in learning and conducting research (P-1).

The interview results also showed varied views on whether students wanted to change others' perceptions of them through research. Three out of six interviewees noted that the

perceptions of peers and instructors mattered to them, partly because these relationships could provide support for research and personal development. Other participants placed less emphasis on how others viewed them and focused more on the support they received from teachers and instructors.

Students' attitudes towards economic capital

Excerpt 6: If the research were conducted by a person or two people, then the rewards would be fine, and it would be quite attractive, but once the number of people increases to about 4 or 5 people, the rewards start not to be enough anymore. If the research is just a small, unranked study done by 4 to 5 people, it is certainly not much (P-2).

Excerpt 7: When I do something, I always want to get recognition, and those certificates or rewards will give me more motivation so I can continue doing research in the future (P-6).

The interview results suggest that economic capital was relevant but not central to students' research investment. Participants were aware of monetary and certificate-based rewards for research achievements, but most did not view financial incentives as their primary motivation. Instead, monetary rewards were seen as complementary, while certificates were valued as evidence of effort and achievement. Four participants regarded these rewards as an important source of motivation, whereas two viewed them as supportive but not decisive in their decision to conduct research.

Students' attitudes towards cultural capital

Excerpt 8: Improving skills and learning new knowledge are exactly the motivations to execute research because constantly writing, reading, and searching for information will help me review these skills. Continuously, it does not fade away over time (P-5).

Excerpt 9: Probably knowledge. If you have knowledge, you will definitely get a job and make money. With knowledge, you will be able to talk to people and build relationships. In a university environment, acquiring knowledge is key. It should be knowledge that helps you create a good foundation for yourself (P-3).

The qualitative results suggest that cultural capital was strongly connected to students' research investment. Participants reported that conducting research helped them gain knowledge, develop new perspectives, and improve academic skills such as information searching, writing, reading, and critical thinking. Five out of six participants engaged in research to develop knowledge and skills that could support their coursework and future careers. Overall, knowledge development appeared to be one of the most salient reasons linked to students' research investment.

Students' attitudes towards social capital

Excerpt 11: I wanted to travel because it was my first time participating in such an exciting adventure. My success in the first season of Resfes enabled me to go to Quy Nhơn where my friends and I travelled as groups, and it was fun (P-3).

Excerpt 12: You also have to have relationships with people who have more expertise than you so they can guide you (P-5).

Excerpt 13: Conducting research has also expanded my relationships, and I also know people who have the same interests as me, as well as the same research topic, so I can ask questions and share experiences with each other (P-5, 6).

In terms of social capital, most participants agreed that research participation helped them expand their relationship networks, particularly through friendships or relationships with lecturers who shared similar research interests. One participant also associated research participation with opportunities to travel and share experiences with friends. However, participants also noted that some of these relationships were temporary and were not always maintained after the research activity ended. Overall, social capital appeared to be relevant to students' research experiences, but most participants did not describe it as a central reason for engaging in research.

Students' attitudes towards self-ideology

Excerpt 14: For those who are academically oriented in the future, I think doing research will help them a lot in their work and build a foundation in the present (P-3).

Excerpt 15: From my view, conducting research helps me develop critical thinking and problem-solving ability not only in the university but also in my daily life (P-1).

Excerpt 16: I have to figure out what research is and how to do research before I can decide whether I should do research or not (P-4).

The interviews suggest that self-ideology was a highly salient aspect of students' research investment. Participants generally viewed scientific research as valuable for their educational experience, academic development, and future career preparation. They also associated research engagement with the development of critical thinking and problem-solving ability. Overall, students' own beliefs about the value and benefits of research appeared to play an important role in their decision to engage in research activities.

Students' attitudes towards teachers' ideology

Excerpt 17: Lecturers are extremely focused on scientific research because I have met many lecturers, most of whom have at least 1-2 research articles that have been published in international or domestic journals. Many lecturers do research like that; it is also a motivation for me and also an effect, an influence on my thoughts about research (P-4).

Although lecturers' ideology was not always viewed as the most central factor, all participants considered lecturers' encouragement and research orientation relevant to their research engagement. Participants reported that lecturers introduced them to research, provided guidance, and helped them understand the research process when they were still inexperienced. Overall, lecturer support appeared to make research more accessible and manageable for students with limited research experience.

Students' attitudes towards the university's ideology

Excerpt 18: My university highly appreciates students who have achieved scientific research achievements because when students achieve high achievements in scientific research, they will be invited to attend the honour ceremony, a ceremony to reward outstanding and successful students. good accumulation (P-4).

Regarding university ideology, participants generally viewed institutional recognition as relevant but less central than self-ideology and teachers' ideology. Although they acknowledged the university's efforts to encourage research engagement, institutional ideology was usually perceived as a secondary factor compared with students' own beliefs and lecturers' support.

Discussion

This discussion interprets the findings through Darvin and Norton's model of investment, focusing on how identity, capital, and ideology were perceived by EFL undergraduates in relation to research engagement. Rather than claiming causal relationships among these dimensions, our study uses the model as an analytical lens for understanding students' reported investment in one institutional context.

Ideology received the highest reported salience, suggesting that students' research engagement was strongly connected to how they understood the value, legitimacy, and purpose of research within their academic environment. This finding indicates that students did not view research only as a technical academic task, but also as an activity shaped by institutional expectations, lecturers' encouragement, and their own beliefs about future academic and professional benefits. In this sense, ideology helped students make sense of why research was worth pursuing and how it could contribute to their development as EFL undergraduates.

This interpretation aligns with Darvin and Norton's (2023) argument that investment differed from motivation because it foregrounds the social conditions, power relations, and valued forms of participation that shape learners' engagement. It also resonates with Lőrincz and Csernicskó's (2026) view that research engagement readiness involves not only research skills but also motivation, perceived barriers, and participation. Therefore, students' reported investment should not be interpreted simply as personal interest in research, but as a socially situated perception of whether research was meaningful, recognised, and worth pursuing. This interpretation is also consistent with broader higher education research showing that student engagement may remain limited when institutional initiatives do not directly address practical, psychological, and contextual barriers to participation (Crabtree, 2023; Bergdahl et al., 2024).

Capital was also central to students' reported investment, particularly cultural capital. Students associated research with access to knowledge, research skills, academic writing ability, and disciplinary literacy. This suggests that cultural capital helped students perceive research as attainable rather than intimidating. The finding is consistent with recent work on undergraduate research support, especially Razali et al. (2020), who showed that supervision can support students' independence when it involves guidance and dialogue rather than a purely supervisor-centred process. In this study, lecturers' guidance and institutional support appeared to help students participate in research, despite still positioning themselves as novice researchers.

Identity received a lower mean score than ideology and capital, but the interview findings showed that it remained meaningful. Students linked research engagement to academic recognition, profile development, and possible future researcher identities. This interpretation is consistent with investment-oriented studies showing that learners' engagement is shaped by linguistic and academic capital, disciplinary positioning, and imagined future identities. From this perspective, EFL undergraduates' research investment was not only about completing a research project, but also about negotiating who they could become through participation in academic research practices.

Overall, the findings contextualise Darvin and Norton's model of investment in EFL undergraduate research. Ideology, capital, and identity were all salient in students' reported investment, although ideology appeared most strongly reported. Because the study relied on descriptive statistics and thematic interview analysis, these findings should be interpreted as perceived salience rather than evidence of causal or structural influence.

Conclusion and implications

This study examined sociocultural dimensions associated with EFL undergraduates' investment in conducting scientific research through Darvin and Norton's (2015) model of investment. The findings suggest that students' research engagement is not merely an individual choice but is also associated with ideology, capital, and identity within specific academic contexts.

The findings offer practical implications for higher education institutions seeking to support undergraduate research engagement. Universities should promote positive views of research through visible recognition of student achievements, research-oriented events, and communication that highlights the academic and professional value of research. Institutions should also strengthen students' cultural capital by providing structured research training, access to academic resources, and scaffolded curricula that gradually develop research competencies. Lecturers also play an important supportive role by mentoring students, modelling research practices, and creating opportunities for students to present their work. Although monetary incentives were not consistently described as central motives, transparent funding and reward mechanisms may still complement students' intrinsic motivation and signal institutional support for undergraduate research.

Despite meeting its objectives, this study has several limitations that suggest directions for future research. The relatively small sample size and focus on English-major students at a single university limit the generalisability of the findings. Future studies should involve larger and more diverse samples across disciplines and institutional types to better capture variation in students' reported research investment and to allow the use of inferential statistical procedures to examine relationships among the key constructs.

In addition, this study did not statistically examine the interrelationships among ideology, capital, and identity within the investment model. Future research could explore correlations or structural relationships among these constructs to provide a more

comprehensive understanding of students' investment in research. Longitudinal or comparative designs across institutions would also be valuable for examining how students' research investment develops over time and across academic contexts.

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Appendix A: Questionnaire items

No.	Dimension	Vietnamese version used in the questionnaire	English version
1	Identity	Tôi làm nghiên cứu khoa học để trở thành một nhà nghiên cứu giỏi trong tương lai.	I engage in scientific research to become a good researcher in the future.
2	Identity	Tôi làm nghiên cứu khoa học để nhận được sự đánh giá cao hơn từ thầy cô.	I engage in scientific research to receive greater appreciation from my teachers.
3	Identity	Tôi làm nghiên cứu khoa học để nhận được sự khâm phục hoặc ngưỡng mộ từ bạn bè.	I engage in scientific research to receive admiration from my friends.
4	Identity	Tôi làm nghiên cứu khoa học để mọi người có cách nhìn khác về tôi.	I engage in scientific research to change how others perceive me.
5	Identity	Tôi muốn được nhìn nhận là một sinh viên giỏi nghiên cứu khoa học.	I want to be recognised as a student who is good at scientific research.
6	Identity	Tôi muốn hồ sơ học tập ở trường của mình trở nên tốt hơn nhờ nghiên cứu khoa học.	I want to improve my academic profile at university through scientific research.
7	Identity	Tôi muốn được tuyên dương vì đạt thành tích trong nghiên cứu khoa học.	I want to be commended for my achievements in scientific research.
8	Identity	Tôi làm nghiên cứu khoa học để được nhiều người biết đến hơn.	I engage in scientific research to increase my reputation.
9	Economic capital	Tôi làm nghiên cứu khoa học vì mức tiền thưởng dành cho nghiên cứu khoa học hấp dẫn.	I engage in scientific research because the financial rewards are attractive.
10	Economic capital	Tôi làm nghiên cứu khoa học vì được hỗ trợ kinh phí trong quá trình thực hiện.	I engage in scientific research because financial support is provided during the research process.

11	Economic capital	Tôi làm nghiên cứu khoa học vì tôi có thể nhận được giấy chứng nhận hoặc bằng khen cho thành tích nghiên cứu.	I engage in scientific research because I can receive certificates or awards for my research achievements.
12	Economic capital	Tôi làm nghiên cứu khoa học vì thành tích nghiên cứu có thể giúp tôi có mức lương cao hơn trong công việc tương lai.	I engage in scientific research because research achievements may help me earn a higher salary in my future job.
13	Economic capital	Tôi làm nghiên cứu khoa học vì thành tích nghiên cứu có thể giúp tôi tìm việc làm dễ dàng hơn.	I engage in scientific research because research achievements may help me find a job more easily.
14	Cultural capital	Tôi làm nghiên cứu khoa học vì tôi có thể học được nhiều kiến thức chuyên môn trong quá trình nghiên cứu.	I engage in scientific research because I can learn a great deal of specialised knowledge during the research process.
15	Cultural capital	Tôi làm nghiên cứu khoa học để cải thiện kỹ năng viết của mình.	I engage in scientific research to improve my writing skills.
16	Cultural capital	Tôi làm nghiên cứu khoa học để rèn luyện kỹ năng đọc tài liệu và tra cứu thông tin.	I engage in scientific research to improve my reading and information-searching skills.
17	Cultural capital	Tôi làm nghiên cứu khoa học để học thêm nhiều từ vựng chuyên môn.	I engage in scientific research to learn more specialised vocabulary.
18	Cultural capital	Làm nghiên cứu khoa học giúp tôi cập nhật các xu hướng mới trong dạy và học tiếng Anh.	Engaging in scientific research helps me stay updated with new trends in English teaching and learning.
19	Social capital	Tôi làm nghiên cứu khoa học để mở rộng các mối quan hệ của mình.	I engage in scientific research to expand my social network.
20	Social capital	Tôi làm nghiên cứu khoa học để quen biết những người bạn có cùng sở thích nghiên cứu.	I engage in scientific research to meet peers who share similar research interests.
21	Ideology	Tôi làm nghiên cứu khoa học vì trường đại học của tôi đánh giá cao những sinh viên giỏi nghiên cứu khoa học.	I engage in scientific research because my university highly values students who are good at scientific research.
22	Ideology	Tôi làm nghiên cứu khoa học vì giảng viên của tôi cho rằng nghiên cứu khoa học có lợi cho sinh viên.	I engage in scientific research because my teachers believe that scientific research is beneficial for students.
23	Ideology	Tôi làm nghiên cứu khoa học vì bản thân tôi tin rằng nghiên cứu khoa học mang lại lợi ích cho mình.	I engage in scientific research because I believe that scientific research benefits me.
24	Ideology	Tôi làm nghiên cứu khoa học vì tôi tin rằng sinh viên giỏi nghiên cứu khoa học sẽ có công việc tốt hơn trong tương lai.	I engage in scientific research because I believe that students who are good at scientific research will have better jobs in the future.
25	Ideology	Tôi nghĩ rằng thành tích nghiên cứu khoa học sẽ giúp CV xin việc của tôi trở nên chuyên nghiệp hơn.	I believe that scientific research achievements will make my job application CV more professional.

Appendix B: Semi-structured interview protocol

No.	Vietnamese version used in the interview	English version
1	Hiện tại bạn đang là sinh viên năm mấy?	What is your current year of study?
2	Bạn đã tham gia hoặc hoàn thành bao nhiêu bài/dự án nghiên cứu khoa học?	How many research projects have you participated in or completed?
3	Bạn đã từng công bố hoặc trình bày bài nghiên cứu nào chưa? Nếu có, bạn có thể mô tả ngắn gọn không?	Have you ever published or presented any research work? If yes, could you briefly describe it?
4	Theo bạn, nghiên cứu khoa học có thể mang lại những lợi ích gì cho sinh viên đại học?	In your opinion, what benefits can scientific research bring to university students?
5	Bạn đã gặp những khó khăn gì khi tham gia nghiên cứu khoa học?	What difficulties have you experienced when participating in scientific research?
6	Điều gì tạo động lực để bạn đầu tư thời gian và công sức vào nghiên cứu khoa học?	What motivates you to invest your time and effort in scientific research?
7	Ở thời điểm hiện tại, bạn nhìn nhận bản thân như thế nào trong lĩnh vực nghiên cứu khoa học?	At the present time, how do you see yourself in the field of scientific research?
8	Trong tương lai, bạn muốn trở thành một người nghiên cứu như thế nào?	In the future, what kind of researcher do you want to become?
9	Theo bạn, bạn cần làm gì để trở thành phiên bản người nghiên cứu mà bạn mong muốn?	What do you think you need to do to become that kind of researcher?
10	Nghiên cứu khoa học giúp bạn xây dựng hình ảnh cá nhân hoặc danh tiếng của bản thân ở mức độ nào?	To what extent does scientific research help you build your personal image or reputation?
11	Việc tham gia nghiên cứu khoa học có ảnh hưởng đến cách thầy cô hoặc bạn bè nhìn nhận bạn không? Bạn có thể giải thích thêm không?	Does participating in scientific research affect how your teachers or peers see you? Please explain.
12	Theo kinh nghiệm hoặc hiểu biết của bạn, sinh viên khi tham gia nghiên cứu khoa học có nhận được tiền thưởng, chứng nhận, bằng khen hoặc hình thức công nhận chính thức nào không?	Based on your experience or knowledge, do students receive any financial rewards, certificates, or formal recognition when participating in scientific research?
13	Nếu có những phần thưởng hoặc hình thức công nhận như vậy, chúng có hấp dẫn đối với bạn không?	If such rewards are available, how attractive are they to you?
14	Tiền thưởng, chứng nhận, bằng khen hoặc sự công nhận chính thức có tạo động lực để bạn tham gia nghiên cứu khoa học không? Vì sao?	Do financial rewards, certificates, or formal recognition motivate you to participate in scientific research? Why or why not?
15	Bạn đã tiếp thu được những kiến thức mới nào thông qua việc tham gia nghiên cứu khoa học?	What new knowledge have you gained through participating in scientific research?

16	Bạn đã cải thiện những kỹ năng nào thông qua nghiên cứu khoa học, chẳng hạn như đọc tài liệu, viết học thuật, tìm kiếm thông tin, phân tích dữ liệu hoặc giao tiếp học thuật?	What skills have you improved through scientific research, such as reading, writing, searching for information, data analysis, or academic communication?
17	Việc học thêm kiến thức mới và cải thiện kỹ năng có tạo động lực để bạn đầu tư nhiều hơn vào nghiên cứu khoa học không? Bạn có thể giải thích thêm không?	Do these knowledge and skill gains motivate you to invest more effort in scientific research? Please explain.
18	Khi tham gia nghiên cứu khoa học, bạn có cơ hội gặp gỡ, giao lưu hoặc hợp tác với những người mới không?	When participating in scientific research, have you had opportunities to meet, interact, or collaborate with new people?
19	Bạn có thường xuyên liên lạc hoặc trao đổi ý tưởng với những người cũng tham gia nghiên cứu khoa học không?	Do you often communicate or exchange ideas with people who are also involved in scientific research?
20	Việc xây dựng mối quan hệ với bạn bè, giảng viên hoặc những người làm nghiên cứu khác có tạo động lực để bạn tham gia nghiên cứu khoa học không? Vì sao?	Does building relationships with peers, teachers, or other researchers motivate you to participate in scientific research? Why or why not?
21	Theo bạn, nghiên cứu khoa học có quan trọng đối với sinh viên đại học không? Vì sao?	In your opinion, is scientific research important for university students? Why or why not?
22	Theo bạn, giảng viên ở trường của bạn nhìn nhận như thế nào về tầm quan trọng của nghiên cứu khoa học?	How do teachers at your university view the importance of scientific research?
23	Cách giảng viên đánh giá về nghiên cứu khoa học có ảnh hưởng đến quyết định tham gia hoặc đầu tư công sức vào nghiên cứu của bạn không? Bạn có thể giải thích thêm không?	Does teachers' evaluation of scientific research influence your decision to participate in or invest effort in research? Please explain.
24	Trường của bạn có đánh giá cao những sinh viên có thành tích nghiên cứu khoa học không? Nếu có, điều này ảnh hưởng như thế nào đến động lực của bạn?	Does your university value students who have achievements in scientific research? If yes, how does this influence your motivation?
25	Theo bạn, sinh viên có kinh nghiệm nghiên cứu khoa học sẽ có những lợi thế gì sau khi ra trường? Những lợi thế đó có tạo động lực để bạn đầu tư vào nghiên cứu khoa học không?	In your opinion, what advantages can students gain after graduation if they have research experience? Do these advantages motivate you to invest in scientific research?
Closing quest.	Bạn có muốn bổ sung thêm điều gì về động lực, trải nghiệm hoặc khó khăn của mình khi tham gia nghiên cứu khoa học không?	Is there anything else you would like to add about your motivation, experience, or challenges in scientific research?

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