

Measures to improve the quality of teaching and learning English at the University of Da Nang, Vietnam

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Abstract

Vietnam's present Foreign Policy, Vietnam declares that Vietnam is a friend and areliable partner of all countries in the in the international community. To spreadbetter understanding and friendship, Vietnamese people, especially students in universities, should master English. Therefore, Vietnam's universities have invested in training human resource as well as upgrading equipments so that students can have the best environment for learning English. Practically, students' English skills have been improved significantly. However, there are still a lot of drawbacks in teaching and learning English at universities in Vietnam. The article reviewed the current situation of teaching and learning English at universities in Vietnam. The advantages and disadvantages of these activities are also demonstrated prominently through this review. Moreover, the article is conducted to propose the measures to improve the quality of English teaching and learning English at universities in Vietnam with the aim of contributing to improving the quality of these activities.

Keywords: teaching, learning, English, university, Vietnam.

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1. Introduction

In Vietnam's present Foreign Policy, Vietnam declares that Vietnam is a friend and a reliable partner of all countries in the international community, actively taking part in international and regional cooperation processes as well as deepening, stabilizing and sustaining established international relations, developing relations with countries and territories in the world, as well as international organizations. Along with other fields of the country, Vietnam's higher education is in the process of regional and world integration. In this context, foreign languages, especially English, play an extremely important role. It can be affirmed that English is not only a mere means but also 'a sharp weapon' in this integration period. In fact, to spread better understanding and friendship, Vietnamese people, especially students, should use English proficiently. Vietnam's Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) always determines that English is an essential major in the curriculum. One of the missions of Vietnam's universities is to improve students' knowledge of language and culture to contribute to national construction, development and international integration. Therefore, they must focus on the quality of teaching and learning English so that students can meet English standards in the international work. The MOET issued the projects for teaching and learning English at all schools; for example, the National Foreign Language 2020 project (lasted to 2025). The Management Board of this project has to lead the related units to undertake the task of training, fostering, and assessing foreign language skills, as well as developing pedagogical skills, and application of information technology in teaching and learning foreign languages.

Therefore, in the current context, the role of universities has become more and more important and practical in training high-quality human resources using English effectively to meet the needs of international and regional cooperation of the country. The universities have invested in training human resource as well as improving technology so that students have the best environment for learning English. Practically, their English skills have improved significantly. However, there are still a lot of drawbacks in teaching and learning English at universities. Consequently, we should conduct a review for the current situation of teaching and learning English at universities in Vietnam. Simultaneously, the article also proposed measures to improve the quality of teaching and learning English at universities in Vietnam with the aim of contributing to improving the quality of these activities.

2. Objectives

The study aims to:

1. Find out the current situation of teaching and learning English at universities in Vietnam
2. Propose the measures to improve the quality of English teaching and learning English at universities in Vietnam with the aim of contributing to improving the quality of these activities.

3. Literature Review

Hoang Van Van (2008) stated that the causes leading to the poor quality of non-English major training at Hanoi National University are: (1) There is no unified goal and objective for the subject, and the qualifications and skills have not been determined to state what learners must achieve for each stage from bachelor to doctorate; (2) Non-English major textbooks have not been systematically compiled; (3) The class size is large, the teaching aids are poor, and the practice environment is limited; (4) Teachers

have not been trained to teach non-English major and English major; (5) The connection between students' purposes, motivations, needs and desires to learn English has not been properly handled; (6) There are different interpretations of the assessment of English language proficiency and communication skills output and of English subject in a program.

In 2016, Nha Trang University organized a School-level seminar "Solutions to improve the quality of English training for non-English major" with the articles proposing solutions to improve the quality of English language training, such as: "Solutions to improve English ability for students of Nha Trang University" by Nguyen Duc Thuan, Vu Thang Long; "Creating an environment for English learning outside of school-time through the use of social networks and some supporting information technology tools" by Le Cao Hoang Ha; "Application of some active learning methods and assessment in English classes for business and economics" by Pham Thi Hai Trang; "Proposing some solutions to improve English proficiency for students in seafood processing technology: based on actual survey results" by Ngo Thi Hoai Duong.

Nguyen Thi Tuyet (2019) mentioned the importance of ESP for students and the current situation of teaching ESP at universities and propose some solutions to improve the quality of ESP teaching such as: Classifying of students' entry level; ensuring specialized English classes with a size of less than 30 students; adjusting, focusing on increasing the number of credits or modules for ESP; equipping facilities for teaching and learning ESP.

On October 26, 2020, a provincial scientific conference "Improving the quality of English teaching and learning in the industrial 4.0 era for English teachers and teachers at all levels in the locality" took place at Kien Giang University. Kien Giang Province". At the workshop, 12 presentations were presented and discussed issues such as: Why learners lack motivation to study in English class; Some solutions to encourage weak students to participate in learning activities; Factors affecting the application of technology in the Vietnamese education system; Ready for Education in Industry 4.0; How to Create a Natural Communication Context in the Classroom...

Nguyen Dinh Hung (2021) assessed the current situation of English teaching and learning at Quang Binh University, explaining why the quality of English training of the university is still not high. From that practice, the author proposed solutions to improve the quality of English teaching and learning of the school in the following years.

4. Conceptual Framework

- Vietnamese higher education in the integration period

Education has long been the lever of the development of the national economy, and the hope of changing the fate of millions of people around the world. In particular, higher education always plays an important role in training high-quality human resources with good moral character, good expertise, sensitivity, creativity, and the ability to catch up with the speed of integration and development of the world. The role of higher education becomes even more important in an era of knowledge economy, characterized by knowledge as a direct productive force, and knowledge itself has become a special commodity.

In the 21st century, the new trend of world higher education is clearly reflected in the documents "Learning: The Treasure Within" (Unesco, 1996) and "International Conference on Higher Education in the 21st Century: Vision and Action" (Unesco, 1998) which clearly states the major trends of the era that characterize the first few decades of the 21st century: Globalization, High technology, especially information technology,

knowledge economy, information society, learning society... These new trends pose new opportunities and challenges for higher education. More than ever, the quality of education in general and the quality of higher education in particular is an issue that always receives the attention of the whole society. Moreover, in the current integration trend, when the education systems of the continents and countries gradually move towards recognizing each other's degrees and training programs, the quality of higher education has significance and importance.

In the general context of world higher education, Vietnam faces new opportunities and challenges. Along with other fields, Vietnam's higher education is gradually integrating with the higher education systems of the continent and the world.

In the integration process of Vietnam in general, the higher education in particular, along with information technology, foreign languages and especially English, plays a very important role, especially is in the context of “world higher education is developing very rapidly with obvious trends: massification, marketization, diversification and internationalization” (The Government, 2008).

- The role of foreign languages

Foreign languages play an important role and position in education and training and in the development of the country. The contributions of foreign languages as well as foreign language teaching to the progress in all areas of our country's social life during the past time are very practical and necessary. Vietnam is a developing country, so foreign languages in general and English in particular are effective support tools to help us accelerate the process of integration and cooperation for development. Especially when Vietnam becomes an official member of the World Trade Organization (WTO), the role of foreign languages in Vietnam becomes even more necessary. On the other hand, in the industrialization and modernization, taking shortcuts and the lead so that Vietnamese people can rise to world intellectual heights, they also require us to be fluent in foreign languages. This is a useful means for communication, economic and cultural exchange, and access to the quintessential knowledge sources of mankind.

It is impossible to imagine living in today's world without foreign languages. The way to access all cultural achievements, scientific and technical progress of the world or to integrate into the world economy and community must go through the foreign language ‘bridge’. Using foreign languages fluently helps people learn from the good experiences of previous countries, shorten the groping distance, and avoid repeating unnecessary steps in the process of industrialization and modernization of the country. On the other hand, creating opportunities for people to choose, find jobs at home and abroad, helps people develop human values, especially have many opportunities to study and research, expand their knowledge wherever it is convenient for their personal future development and learning from the experiences of countries around the world in their specialized fields. It is also a useful means of improving the quality of human's material and spiritual life. Experiences of developed countries and newly industrialized countries in the world as well as in the Asia-Pacific region have shown that, in the necessary conditions for integration and development, foreign languages are a prerequisite. decisive, is an effective and effective tool and means in the process of integration and development in today's era.

5. Research Methodology

The research intends to determine the current situation of teaching and learning English at universities in Vietnam and propose the measures to improve the quality of these activities. We set up well-structured content for the current situation of teaching and

learning English at universities in Vietnam by a descriptive method to agree on the results of this practice.

The collection of data for reviewing from the articles of situations of learning English at universities; they are from the articles: The causes leading to the poor quality of non-English major training at Hanoi National University by Hoang Van Van (2008) which is located in the North of Vietnam; the proceeding of a School-level seminar named "Solutions to improve the quality of English training for non-English major" with the articles proposing solutions to improve the quality of non-English major training organised by Nha Trang University (2016) which is located in the central of Vietnam; the proceeding of a provincial scientific conference *"Improving the quality of English teaching and learning in the industrial 4.0 era for English teachers and teachers at all levels in the locality"* taken place at Kien Giang University (2020) which is located in the Western of Vietnam and the article of Nguyen Dinh Hung (2021) assessed the current situation of English teaching and learning at Quang Binh University which is located in the central of Vietnam. We conducted choosing the data resources for analysing the situations aiming to propose the measures to improve teaching and learning English at universities in Vietnam.

6. Results of the research paper

1. The current situation of English teaching and learning quality in universities in Vietnam

1.1 Activities of teaching and learning English at universities in Vietnam

- Lecturers consider the learning, their requirements, and the goal of students' learning to prepare lessons for English courses.
- Lecturers make and give activities to students ask them to prepare at class or home to achieve these courses' goals.
- Students prepare the content following the instructions of lecturers.
- Students do the tasks at class and at home.
- Lecturers give exams which can be conducted to help students memorize what they have learnt at class.
- Lecturers have some grading criteria to assess the progress of the students.

1.2 Advantages of teaching and learning English at universities in Vietnam

- With the implementation of the project "Teaching and learning foreign languages in the national education system for the period 2008-2020" (lasted to 2025), it has had a positive impact on English teaching activities at universities.
- The students' use of practical language skills has improved significantly. Most students can use English to communicate normally.
- All English teachers at universities have Ph.D's or master's degrees and have university pedagogical certificates, so they are both professional and have a good understanding of active teaching methods to convey knowledge effectively.
- In addition to regular school hours, many students participate in English lessons outside of school hours at foreign language centers, so they have more time to practice their skills with the guidance of instructors, most of which are native speakers.
- In integration and development with the world economic, Vietnam has attracted many international foreign investors to Vietnam, many of them contributed to creating opportunities for students to get a job with high salary after graduating by using English in working.

1.3 Difficulties of teaching and learning English at universities in Vietnam

- Students learn English to have enough points for completing the subject, so they are not self-disciplined in studying and practicing.
- Students' English input is different, especially students from remote areas, due to the lack of conditions to study English at high school level, are often when faced with cases, students in the classroom are better. Therefore, they lose motivation to study.
- Because students' levels of English are not the same, the application of the teaching method of is also greatly affected.
- The class size is usually with many students, usually over 50 students, so teachers do not have enough time to comment and correct lessons for students as well as students. Students have little opportunity to practice their English speaking skills.
- The time for English courses at universities cannot be enough for students to practice at class, this affects their learning results and ability to use English.
- Some lecturers have not really innovated teaching methods, especially for reading and listening skills, so they have not created excitement for students to study.
- Although the facilities and equipment for English teaching of universities have been improved, they have not yet met the teaching and learning needs such as: the computer room system is not equipped yet. synchronization, lack of English teaching software, weak wifi network.

The current situation of the quality of English teaching as above sets a requirement for universities to apply measures synchronously to improve the quality of English teaching and learning.

2. The measures to improve the quality of English teaching and learning at universities in Vietnam

2.1 Ensure the quality of the teaching and learning content and program of English subject

- English teaching and learning curriculum must be linked with the reality to meet the society's needs.
- The accreditation of the quality of the English teaching program is performed as a basis for assessing the quality of the subject.
- The equipments with rich reference materials in English need investing to create favorable conditions for students to access their English learning activities.
- A survey of learners' needs should be conducted to develop English teaching content in the direction of improving application skills, self-employment capacity to meet the needs of employers.
- The quality of English teaching staff must be ensured. The lecturers are decisive factors to the quality of the school's training. Therefore, to ensure the quality of the content and program of English subject, English teachers has a particularly important role in improving the quality of English teaching at the school. Moreover, the teaching staff directly implement the training goals of the school with a leading role in the teaching process, they directly and decisively affects the quality of teaching. Therefore, it is very important for universities to build a team of English teachers satisfying both quantity and quality.
- In the modern technology 4.0, universities must pay attention to the work of fostering and training the qualifications of English teachers through the form of long-term training and short-term training to update the new content related to English to do teaching plans more attractive. That can make students feel interesting and learn better, more effectively. Universities encourage English teachers to design lectures by English teaching software.

- Universities should consolidate and promote the activities of the faculties' scientific council in reviewing the contents of the English language teaching program as well as proposing orientations for the teaching and research of the lecturers.

2.2 Strengthen the management of English teaching activities

- Universities should step up the education inspection and examination staff to inspect and examine the implementation of teaching schedules, course outlines, lesson plans of teachers to ensure the number of teaching periods. Handling the results of inspection and evaluation is necessary to provide solutions and adjust the evaluation criteria to suit the actual conditions of the school.

- The English or foreign language faculty is the main unit in managing teaching activities of lecturers. The leaders should strengthen the management for the teaching activities of lecturers, including managing course outline, lesson plan, and assessment during and after the lesson, the submission of the lecturer's grades...

2.3 Implement innovation in English teaching methods in a positive direction

- Every English teacher must be aware of the fact that the innovation of teaching methods is not the negation of all the old teaching methods, but the application of all teaching methods flexibly and creatively. The process of organizing teaching and using of modern teaching means is conducted at the same time. The teaching methods used in the teaching process of the lecturers must be proactive in students' activities, maximize the positivity, creativity, interaction ability, teamwork, especially the ability to self-study, independent thinking among students. In addition, English teachers also have to know how to use natural teaching methods to create lively lessons and lessons. This requires a combination of teachers and students, so it is necessary to build a student-centered classroom environment. Learners are the center of classroom activities. Communication trends give priority to learners' language activities. Therefore, the mainstream method of Communicative Language Teaching must be applied thoroughly in order to promote the creativity and capacity of students.

- Universities need to organize training and fostering courses in professional capacity, pedagogical skills, teaching methods and teaching organization

- Universities regularly check and evaluate the innovation of English teaching methods by attending classes. In professional meetings, it is necessary to propose improvements. methods and forms of teaching organization and assessment of teaching hours so that English teachers can exchange and discuss in order to reach consensus, determine feasibility, and jointly detect problems arising in the actual conditions of students. and, more importantly, suggest remedial measures.

- Universities should organize seminars and conferences on innovation of teaching methods from traditional teaching methods to modern, active teaching methods "Students-centered" and "Knowledge occupied by students". This is an appropriate teaching method in the credit-based training method, which creates conditions for students to combine classroom training with self-study and self-study to acquire knowledge.

2.4 Innovate in testing and assessing students' learning outcomes according to English output standards

- Checking and evaluating students' learning results is a very important step in the teaching process. Therefore, innovating the method of teaching English for students is indispensable to renew the method of testing and assessing students. The modules and the final exam must aim at the objective of authentically assessing the results achieved by students after the learning process.

- Universities train and guide English teachers to proficiently use testing and assessment methods, format exam questions according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), Vietnamese Standardized Test of English Proficiency (VSTEP) or the other equivalent tests so that students get both knowledge of English and meet the outcome standards for graduating. Then, when they are motivated to do many purposes at the same time, they will perform the learning activity in the good mood of interest and mission. In fact, English teachers apply the design of the exam questions of those tests, students have conditions to approach, practice, and learn to meet the requirements of the subject output standards and the English output standards set by the school.

- English teachers should use a variety of assessment methods and use assessment methods which are suitable for practical language skills.

- The main documents should be invested to have supports as language testing materials, specialized materials for testing listening, speaking, reading, writing skills as well as translating English to Vietnamese and vice versa.

2.5 Ensure facilities, equipment and materials for teaching and learning English

- Teaching and learning facilities, equipments as well as materials are issues that teachers care about in the process of teaching English, because they are important contributing factors to the quality of each lesson in both the teaching process of English teachers and the learning process of students.

- English textbooks for students published by prestigious publishers in the world should be guaranteed. Besides, the source of English books and tapes should be very diverse for students to practice their language practice skills.

- The teaching facilities of the universities have been greatly improved to serve English teaching activities. However, it needs investing more and more.

In general, these measures will meet the improvement of quality of teaching and learning English at the current situations at universities in Vietnam.

7. Conclusion and Discussion

Teaching occupation, especially teaching English is considered a career of reputation which often viewed with respect, helping students to make the job all the more worthwhile and satisfying. And learning mission of students, especially learning English to contribute one part to the integration and international cooperation of the country is considered extremely important.

Facing the problems in teaching and learning English, teachers and students need hard effort to finish their mission. However, universities are the main factors in approaching the measures to solve the problems. They should conduct the presented measures as ensuring the quality of the teaching and learning content and program of English subject; strengthening the management of English teaching activities; implementing innovation in English teaching methods in a positive direction; innovating in testing and assessing students' learning outcomes according to English output standards as well as ensuring facilities, equipment and materials for teaching and learning English to get the most effectiveness for these activities.

8. Suggestions

In this study, we intended to make some suggestions as follows:

- Universities should apply these measures comprehensively to get the most effectiveness in improving the quality of teaching and learning English.
- Teachers renovate the teaching content gradually to transfer the positive ways in learning to students.
- Both universities and faculties of English/ foreign languages should strengthen the management of English teaching activities of teachers
- Universities, related departments, faculties of English/ foreign languages, teachers need to innovate in testing and assessing students' learning outcomes according to the world's and Vietnam's English test format.
- Universities should ensure facilities and equipment for teaching English, especially in the situation of e-learning and teaching in the COVID-19 as current.

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