

The Current State of Non-Specialized English Training Management at Some Universities in the Southeastern Provinces of Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

In today's era of international integration, English is widely recognized as a crucial language. However, the quality of non-specialized English training at Vietnamese universities remains uneven and poses many limitations. The objective of this article is to investigate the current situation and factors that impact the teaching and learning of non-specialized English at universities in the Southeast region of Vietnam, specifically in four provinces: Ba Ria - Vung Tau, Binh Duong, Binh Phuoc, and Dong Nai. The study used a research method that included statistical data analysis derived from survey questions distributed to managers and lecturers at several universities in the region. The findings of the research will contribute to the development of solutions aimed at improving the quality of non-specialized English training in the new context.

Keyword: training management, non-specialized English, tertiary level, Southeastern provinces, teaching quality

1. Introduction

In the modern world, English has become one of the most important languages for communication and collaboration with other nations. As a result, learning English is essential for everyone, particularly for students and lecturers, to stay updated with knowledge and connect with the global research community. Moreover, English learning enhances communication skills, critical thinking, and confidence in international business activities. Therefore, teaching English in an increasingly developing world is of great significance.

In recent years, the Vietnamese government has focused on improving the quality of English teaching in Vietnam, especially at the tertiary level. This is evidenced by increased efforts in research activities and the development of English teaching programs for students and lecturers, along with the duties and measures outlined in Government Resolution No. 14 of 2005 [1]: "To integrate internationally, Vietnam needs to enhance the implementation of teaching and learning in foreign languages, especially English, in higher education." Additionally, improving English proficiency among the younger generation has been a key goal of the government under the National Foreign Language Project until 2025 [3]. This project aims to "comprehensively innovate the teaching and learning of English within the national education system... making English a strength of Vietnam's human resources, serving the cause of industrialization and modernization of the country...[3]" Furthermore, the National Foreign Language Project's goals by 2025 include updating teaching and learning methods in the national education system, continuing to develop new curricula at all levels, enhancing proficiency, and improving the ability to use foreign languages to meet the demands of studying and working.

Meanwhile, the Southeastern region of Vietnam holds numerous economic advantages due to its favorable geographical location. Situated near Ho Chi Minh City and other major urban centers, it offers easy access to markets and resources. The region also boasts a well-developed transportation system, including highways, railways, and ports, creating favorable conditions for investors and businesses. Universities in this area

recognize these economic advantages and are continuously improving the quality of English teaching to enhance students' employment opportunities in today's globalized context.

Paradoxically, despite years of progress, English teaching at universities in the Southeastern region of Vietnam still faces limitations, such as inconsistent teacher quality, teaching methods that fail to meet modern learning needs, a lack of integration between English learning and real-life application, and insufficient interaction between educational institutions and businesses. Given these factors, assessing the state of English training management (ETM) at these universities to propose suitable solutions for improving its quality is a critical issue to meet both national and international standards.

Reading training management (TM), it plays a pivotal role in the education system of universities, assisting in defining the strategic development of institutional training. The TM include organizing training activities, managing admissions, conducting assessments, and ensuring quality in accordance with the regulations of the Ministry of Education and Training. Therefore, TM can be considered the core of a university's educational activities and a vital foundation for its development.

Thus, the concept of training management in tertiary level has been studied from various perspectives regarding its significance. These perspectives depend on the subjects involved, functions, content, management methods, or the management process itself. In this article, the author examines TM from the perspective of teaching and learning English for students in non-specialized English programs at higher education institutions.

2. Literature Review

Previous research on English training management (TM) at the tertiary level has highlighted its critical role in enhancing educational quality and meeting global demands. Nguyen [4] emphasized that effective TM involves aligning curricula with international standards like the CEFR, a practice adopted in Vietnam's National Foreign Language Project [3]. However, studies such as Tran [5] have identified persistent challenges in Vietnamese universities, including inconsistent teacher quality and limited integration of practical skills, echoing issues noted in the Southeastern region. While government initiatives, such as Resolution No. 14 of 2005 [1], have pushed for improved English proficiency, research specific to non-specialized English training in regional contexts remains scarce. This gap underscores the need for localized studies to inform policy and practice, particularly in economically dynamic areas like Southeastern Vietnam.

Furthermore, global perspectives on TM suggest that facilities, teaching methods, and student support are pivotal to language training success [6]. Yet, their application in Vietnam's non-specialized programs is underexplored. This study builds on these insights by examining NSETM in the Southeastern provinces, addressing a critical yet understudied aspect of Vietnam's educational landscape.

3. Research Framework

This study utilizes the Program Quality Assessment Standards (Circular 04/2016/TT-BGDĐT) [2], which includes 10 standards and 61 criteria evaluating key aspects of training programs, to investigate factors affecting training quality at universities. The article also employs a qualitative survey method to collect and analyze data from relevant groups, including managers and lecturers. Key survey topics include the structure of the training program content, teaching staff, student support activities, facilities and equipment, evaluation of student learning outcomes, and training results.

The objective of this article is to provide an overview of the current state and challenges in enhancing the quality of training programs at universities. Additionally, it aims to assess the current state of non-specialized English training management (NSETM) at universities in the Southeastern region, identifying solutions to improve NSETM quality in line with the standardization goals and enhancement of non-specialized English teaching and learning within the framework of the National Foreign Language Program (2017-2025) [3].

The research methodology combines qualitative research with individual surveys. The study's goal is to evaluate factors influencing the quality of NSETM at universities in the Southeastern region. It also analyzes and synthesizes relevant documents through a literature review method. Survey participants include managers and lecturers from universities and colleges in the region, such as heads of non-specialized English departments, coordinators of output standards, and lecturers from foreign language or English departments. Open-ended questionnaires were used to gather data on management policies, training quality, and issues related to NSETM.

4. Survey Results on the Current State of Non-Specialized English Training Management at Some Universities and Colleges in the Southeastern Provinces

4.1. Non-Specialized English Training Management

In this study, surveys were conducted to gather opinions from managers regarding NSETM at universities in Southeastern provinces in Vietnam. Results showed that 75% of managers (10 out of 12) agreed that NSETM follows a relatively stable roadmap. Specifically, most managers stated that training quality management is systematic, with specific plans implemented to meet program goals and content, ensuring students meet graduation requirements. However, some managers noted that more efforts are needed to ensure NSETM quality.

One highlighted issue is the large class sizes (over 40 students), which hinder interaction and information exchange between students and lecturers, as well as among students themselves. This can reduce idea-sharing opportunities, impede the development of social and communication skills, and pose challenges for lecturers in assessing and classifying student performance, potentially leading to errors or unfair evaluations.

Additionally, some managers suggested improving teaching methods and student support. Current teaching methods lack diversity and flexibility, which cannot meet the learning demands of all students. As a result, some students struggle to grasp content, lowering overall training quality. Another concern is the limited emphasis on student evaluation and feedback. While these activities are crucial for improving training quality, their implementation remains ineffective and faces numerous limitations. Greater seriousness in collecting student feedback, along with effective response measures, is needed to address raised issues.

4.2. Training Program Content Structure

Survey results from one university revealed high agreement among managers and leaders regarding the program's structure and content. Specifically, 100% of managers and leaders (12 out of 12) stated that the NSETM structure aligns with output standards based on the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) [2]. They noted that output standards and curricula at their institutions were developed per CEFR guidelines, with teaching materials categorized by proficiency levels to help students achieve learning goals.

However, among the surveyed lecturers (8 individuals), only 87.5% believed the NSETM content adequately develops all four English skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) and meets output standards, while 12.5% disagreed. The dissenting lecturers argued that some faculty members use materials overly focused on final exam structures, neglecting less critical sections of the curriculum. This approach fails to ensure comprehensive skill development. Additionally, focusing on only two skills (typically speaking and reading) for mid-term exams and the remaining two (listening and writing) for final exams limits students' consistent practice of all skills after the mid-term.

4.3. Teaching Staff

Survey results indicated that all leaders and managers (12 out of 12) believe lecturers possess adequate foreign language and pedagogical competencies to meet knowledge and teaching requirements. This is supported by the fact that all lecturers hold at least a bachelor's degree in English or higher.

However, some opinions suggested that to enhance training effectiveness, universities should regularly organize teaching method training for lecturers. Lecturer competency is a key factor affecting foreign

language training quality. Currently, evaluating lecturer quality faces challenges and lacks objectivity. Specifically, classroom observations to assess lecturer performance are not conducted seriously or frequently, and student feedback is not utilized as a source for evaluating lecturers' language and pedagogical skills. This can lead to discrepancies in identifying and improving lecturer quality.

4.4. Facilities

According to the survey, 75% of leaders and managers stated that current facilities only meet basic teaching and learning requirements. One reason is that classrooms are arranged traditionally with fixed desks and chairs, lacking flexibility for group activities or discussions, which is unsuitable for modern English teaching methods.

Moreover, equipping classrooms with teaching aids, such as projectors and sound systems poses difficulties. Survey results showed that classrooms are equipped with projectors and speakers but lack computers. Lecturers must employ their personal laptops for teaching, yet not all can afford high-performance devices to access integrated software in textbooks. Additionally, universities lack policies for lending computers to lecturers or students (or such policies are overly cumbersome and restrictive). This is a significant barrier to integrating technology into English teaching and learning.

On the positive side, all leaders and managers (12 out of 12) reported using modern, high-quality English textbooks from reputable international publishers. Similarly, 100% of lecturers (8 out of 8) praised the online learning features integrated into these textbooks, which provide students with engaging and practical opportunities to practice English skills. However, unstable internet quality at schools hinders access to online software or new teaching tools, limiting technology application in English instruction.

4.5. Support for a Foreign Language Environment

Survey results showed that 75% of leaders and managers and over 87% of lecturers believe universities have not sufficiently invested in or supported activities to create a foreign language learning environment for students, negatively affecting their learning needs and development. All lecturers agreed that an ideal English learning environment requires facilities and conditions for students to communicate and apply knowledge practically, such as self-study rooms, language labs, online rooms, foreign language libraries, or fully English or bilingual settings. However, these investments remain inadequate or fail to meet requirements for building an English environment.

Although some universities have organized regular English clubs to help students practice language skills, their quality and effectiveness are limited. Regularly, these clubs are run by English-major students without lecturer involvement, leading to disparities in participation and proficiency between specialized and non-specialized students. Consequently, non-specialized students tend to lose interest in these clubs, and the activities' content often does not match their needs or abilities.

Lecturers' perspectives on using English throughout teaching were also surveyed. All lecturers agreed that this is necessary to provide students with natural and effective language exposure while developing all four skills. However, 7 out of 8 lecturers noted that English use in class is insufficient or even absent, negatively impacting a positive learning environment and making it difficult for students to interact with lecturers and peers in English.

4.6. Assessment of Students' English Competency

All managers (12 out of 12) agreed that assessing students' English competency through periodic tests, mid-term, and final exams is appropriate and effective. Tests are designed to align with textbook content, with mid-term and final exams using pre-prepared test banks from publishers to ensure consistency in difficulty, format, duration, and accurate evaluation.

Meanwhile, entrance tests (or placement tests) are a key measure for classifying and determining students' English proficiency in university training programs. Surveyed managers and lecturers recognized their importance in ensuring students are placed in classes matching their abilities. However, the study also

highlighted proficiency disparities among students in the same class, influenced by their high school English learning environments and attitudes, posing challenges for teaching and learning, particularly in listening and speaking skills.

Additionally, all managers and lecturers (100%) were satisfied with the quality and fairness of exams. However, some noted that testing only listening and reading skills at mid-term and speaking and writing at the final exam may lead to imbalanced learning or neglect of previously tested skills.

A critical issue in assessing non-specialized students' English competency is output standards. Most leaders and managers emphasized the need for clear output standards for non-specialized students. Currently, many universities' output requirements are unreasonable, with students only needing to complete credits to graduate. This negatively affects competency evaluation and makes it difficult to establish, monitor, and improve education quality. Thus, universities should develop clear, appropriate output standards based on international frameworks and domestic realities.

5. Conclusion

This article evaluated the state of NSETM at several universities and colleges in the Southeastern provinces through factors such as training program content, teaching staff and pedagogical skills, student support activities, facilities and equipment, assessment of learning outcomes, and training results. The findings revealed consistency in NSETM effectiveness across surveyed institutions and evaluated factors.

These factors are central to achieving the goal of improving NSETM quality. Based on feedback from leaders, managers, and lecturers, universities should focus on:

- **Management:** Reduce class sizes, ensure accurate and appropriate output standards aligned with program goals to guide teaching and learning, enabling students to achieve optimal results meeting workplace demands. Output standards also ensure fairness, quality, and rationality in evaluating learning outcomes.
- **Content:** Continuously update curricula and teaching methods to meet current workplace needs; integrate practical, experimental, and real-world activities into teaching to help students apply non-specialized English knowledge; encourage creativity, self-study, and teamwork.
- **Resources:** Enhance lecturers' expertise and communication skills; provide equipment, tools, and resources for teaching and learning; establish strong ties with businesses, social organizations, and other universities to exchange experiences and update industry trends and needs.
- **Facilities:** Equip classrooms with high-performance computers to support technology use in teaching and learning; use modular, flexible desks to adapt to diverse learning activities, improving the teaching and learning environment and overall effectiveness.
- **Learning Environment:** Improve the quality of English clubs to facilitate English or bilingual exposure; foster a competitive yet supportive environment to help students enhance vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, communication, reading, and writing skills, meeting program output standards and future professional demands.

By addressing these factors, universities can train a workforce with strong non-specialized English skills and adaptability to evolving work environments—an essential condition for Vietnam's sustainable socio-economic development amid international integration. [3]

To conclude, non-specialized English training at universities in the Southeastern region is a vital activity for developing high-quality human resources. This study identified strengths and weaknesses in NSETM, proposing improvement solutions. However, this article is only a starting point for deeper research. Future studies could employ direct data collection from students, lecturers, and managers for a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of the situation and needs at Southeastern universities.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed to enhance the quality of non-specialized English training management (NSETM) at universities in the Southeastern provinces of Vietnam. Firstly, university management should prioritize reducing class sizes to facilitate better interaction between lecturers and students, as well as among students themselves. Smaller classes would allow for more personalized instruction, improved assessment accuracy, and enhanced development of communication skills, addressing the current limitation of large class sizes identified in the survey results. Additionally, clear and appropriate output standards aligned with international frameworks, such as the CEFR, and tailored to domestic needs should be established and enforced to ensure students achieve the necessary English proficiency levels for professional success.

Secondly, the content of training programs should be updated regularly to reflect current workplace demands [4]. This includes integrating practical, real-world activities into the curriculum to bridge the gap between English learning and its application, as highlighted by the lack of such integration in the survey findings. Universities should encourage innovative teaching methods that promote creativity, self-study, and teamwork among students. To support this, lecturers need regular professional development opportunities, such as workshops on modern teaching methodologies and technology integration, to enhance their pedagogical and language skills, addressing the identified need for improved lecturer training.

Thirdly, investment in facilities and resources is critical. Universities should equip classrooms with high-performance computers and stable internet connections to support the use of integrated software and online learning tools, overcoming the current barriers to technology adoption noted in the study. Flexible classroom designs with modular furniture should also be introduced to accommodate diverse teaching activities, such as group discussions and interactive sessions, which are currently limited by traditional setups. Furthermore, fostering a robust foreign language environment through well-structured English clubs, language labs, and bilingual settings would provide students with practical opportunities to apply their skills, addressing the inadequacy of such support reported by both managers and lecturers.

Finally, universities should strengthen partnerships with businesses and other educational institutions to align training programs with industry needs and provide students with real-world exposure. This collaboration could include internships, guest lectures, and joint projects, ensuring that non-specialized English training meets the demands of Vietnam's industrialization and modernization efforts, as outlined in the National Foreign Language Project [3]. By implementing these recommendations, universities can improve NSETM quality, preparing students to contribute effectively to the country's socio-economic development in an increasingly globalized context.

7. Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into the current state of non-specialized English training management at universities in the Southeastern provinces of Vietnam, it is subject to several limitations. Firstly, the sample size of the survey was relatively small, consisting of only 12 managers and 8 lecturers from a limited number of institutions in four provinces: Ba Ria - Vung Tau, Binh Duong, Binh Phuoc, and Dong Nai. This restricted scope may not fully represent the diversity of NSETM practices across all universities in the region, potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings. Future research could expand the sample size and include additional provinces to provide a more comprehensive analysis.

Secondly, the study relied primarily on qualitative data collected through open-ended questionnaires from managers and lecturers, without incorporating direct input from students. Students' perspectives on their learning experiences, challenges, and needs could offer a more holistic understanding of NSETM quality and effectiveness. The absence of student feedback represents a gap in the research, and future studies should include this group to triangulate data and enhance the validity of the results.

Thirdly, the research focused on a snapshot of the current situation as of the survey period and did not account for longitudinal changes or trends in NSETM over time. Factors such as policy shifts, technological advancements, or economic developments could influence training quality in the future, and these dynamics were beyond the scope of this study. A longitudinal approach in subsequent research could track progress and assess the impact of implemented solutions over time.

Lastly, the study did not evaluate the specific impact of external factors, such as government funding or regional economic conditions, on NSETM quality. While the Southeastern region's economic advantages were noted, a deeper analysis of how these factors shape training management could provide additional context for the findings. Despite these limitations, this research serves as a foundational step for understanding NSETM challenges and offers actionable recommendations for improvement, paving the way for more in-depth investigations in the future.

8. References

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