ENGLISH TEACHERS’ ATTITUDE AND CHALLENGES IN FACING IMMEDIATE ONLINE TEACHING: A CASE STUDY IN VIETNAM

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ABSTRACT

Background and Purpose: Early 21st century saw great changes in all fields of life due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Education worldwide has to suffer from many difficulties when schools are forced to close down for safety. In Vietnam, online teaching has been applied in most of cities and provinces where COVID-19 pandemic has been serious. The implementation of remote teaching in a large quantity of schools was first seen in 2021. However, not many studies have been found on massive immediate online teaching. Due to the fact that a thorough understanding of online teaching in English language teaching is necessary for better online teaching to be delivered in the near future, this study aims to investigate English teachers’ attitudes towards online teaching and their challenges.

Methodology: This study was designed as a qualitative case study. Nine English teachers from the primary schools and high schools were invited to participate in the semi-interviews. The research instrument used was the in-depth interviews, in which the questions were adapted from the previous studies. Data were generated using codes and analysed in themes.

Findings: The findings revealed that COVID-19 is the main factor forcing English teachers to equip themselves with knowledge and skills for online teaching. It was found that English teachers in Vietnam were reluctant to conduct remote language teaching due to the lack of knowledge and skills of integrating technology in education, facilities, teaching condition, and parents’ interference.

Contributions: The study concludes that English teachers in Vietnam experience hardship with the remote teaching and their challenges. With such understanding, it is suggested that instant support for
teachers and continuous training should be provided to reduce the hardship and improve teachers’ skills in conducting online teaching.

**Keywords:** English teaching, online teaching, teachers’ attitude, teacher training, educational technology.


**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

COVID-19 first appeared in the world and also in Vietnam in early 2020. Yet, in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic was not as serious as in some Western and American nations. Therefore, online teaching was only applied occasionally for a short time in major cities like Ha Noi, Ho Chi Minh or Da Nang. Since early 2021, the situation has become more serious and online teaching has been implemented nationwide at all levels. Online teaching has been conducted both synchronously and asynchronously (Huynh & Nguyen, 2021; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021; Phan, Vo, Nguyen, & Hoang, 2021; Pham & Ho, 2020; Vo, 2021).

Even though English teachers experienced some occasional remote teaching in 2020, they still find it challenging to deal with the new teaching mode (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021). Teaching facilities, teaching methods and policies have prevented teachers from having sufficient online lesson delivery. Many studies have been conducted in the world and also in Vietnam to gain understandings of online learning and teaching (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Balasopoulou et al., 2020; Daniel, Schumacher, Stelter, & Riley, 2016; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021; Richardson, Hollis, Pritchard, & Novosed-Lingat, 2020; Tartavulea, Albu, Albu, Dieaconescu, & Petre, 2020).

According to Vo and Pang (2021), lecturers of English in Vietnam were not very ready for online teaching, and the sudden move from the normal teaching to online teaching causes them many challenges due to the lack of facilities, as well as ICT knowledge and skills. In addition, lecturers were found to be resilient to implement immediate online teaching (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021). Secondary English teachers in Vietnam find it difficult to conduct online teaching to maintain their students’ learning (Vo, 2021). Yet, these studies focused on how ready teachers were for online teaching in the specific groups of teachers. More research for a
thorough understanding of online teaching among English teachers, especially their attitudes of online teaching should be implemented.

In order to investigate English teachers’ attitudes towards online teaching, and their difficulties in delivering remote teaching, a study was set in 2021 and focused on in-service English teachers at primary schools, secondary schools and high schools in Vietnam. Therefore, the research aims at answering the following questions:

1. What are English teachers’ attitudes towards online teaching in the COVID 19-situation?
2. What challenges do English teachers face during their implementation of online teaching?

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW
2.1 English Teaching in Vietnam

English, one of the major foreign languages in Vietnam, is a compulsory subject and students in Vietnam start learning English early during the third grade of primary schools, even the first grade in some major cities like Ha Noi, Ho Chi Minh and Da Nang (Vo, 2019). Students continue learning English until they graduate from high school. In every important examination such as high school entrance examinations and high school graduation examinations, English is a “must-to-sit” subject (Vo, 2019).

The Vietnamese government considers improving the quality of teaching and learning foreign languages in general, and English in particular, as key for the socio-economic development of the nation. Therefore, the government has invested greatly to upgrade the quality of teaching and learning English in Vietnam. Series of training programs have been conducted for in-service English teachers including the program to enhance teachers’ ability to integrate technology in education (Huynh & Nguyen, 2021; Pham, 2019; Vo, Pang, & Lee, 2018; Vo, 2019).

Currently, most schools in Vietnam are closed due to COVID-19, and the online teaching mode is being applied to maintain students’ learning nationwide. Ensuring the quality of English language teaching which requires interactions among students, and students with teachers, is not an easy task for English teachers at all levels (Vo, 2021).
2.2 Technology in Language Teaching and T-PACK

Technology in language teaching is a topic of concern these years, especially in the new teaching context when the application of technology in education becomes more essential than ever before (Pham, 2019). The increasing availability of digital and network tools have brought a great potential to the innovation in the language learning and teaching process. Yet, technology should be used as efficiency aids and extension devices rather than as digital tools (Koehler, Mishra, Kereluik, Shin, & Graham, 2008).

The Technology Pedagogical Content Knowledge Framework (TPACK) has been introduced as the framework that shows the connection among teachers’ knowledge of content, pedagogy, and technology in order to produce effective teaching. The framework is built on Lee Shulman’s construct of pedagogical content knowledge in relation to technology knowledge (Shulman, 1986) with Technological Content Knowledge (TCK), Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK), Technological Pedagogical Knowledge (TPK), Technological Pedagogical Knowledge (TCK), and Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge.

Technological Content Knowledge is perceived as the reciprocal relationship between technology and content. Pedagogical Content Knowledge is defined as “an understanding of how particular topics, problems or issues are organized, represented and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners, and presented for instruction” (Shulman, 1986, p. 8). Technological Pedagogical Knowledge is known as an understanding of technology which can facilitate pedagogical practices. Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge refers to “knowledge about the complex relations among technology, pedagogy, and content that enable teachers to develop appropriate and context-specific teaching strategies” (Koehler et al., 2008, p. 103).

![Figure 1: The Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge Framework](image)
As revealed from the figure, the TPACK framework indicates that in order to have effective integration of technology in language teaching, teachers need to master an understanding of each of the components, so that they are able to orchestrate and coordinate technology, pedagogy, and content into their teaching.

For effective online teaching, English teachers should be equipped with the ability to combine both ICT knowledge and skills and pedagogical knowledge and skills to build up online lessons as stated in TPACK. The components of TPACK should be used in relation to each other.

2.3 Immediate Online Teaching in the World
Numerous studies on online teaching have been conducted worldwide during COVID-19 pandemic (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Balasopoulou et al., 2020; Chandrasinghe et al., 2020; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021; Gao & Zhang, 2020; Tartavulea et al., 2020). In some Asian countries such as Sri Lanka, Vietnam and China, online teaching mode has been quickly implemented; yet, limited resources with low internet access and poor facilities cause certain difficulties to teachers (Chandrasinghe et al., 2020; Gao & Zhang, 2020; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021). Both synchronous and asynchronous online teaching modes are applied to maintain teaching and learning in Asian countries despite some constraints due to the low level of the economy. In addition, the lack of preparation for online teaching results in teachers’ unwillingness to teach in the new mode, especially when they are unprepared for both pedagogical and technological knowledge and skills.

According to Tartavulea et al., (2020), in European countries where the teaching condition is quite good, the online mode is also found to be less interactive. The sudden change to online teaching brings teachers in the world similar obstacles such as a lack of knowledge and skills to implement effective remote teaching.

2.3.1 Online Teaching in Vietnam
The year 2021 saw Vietnam’s educational system struggling with the COVID-19 pandemic. The Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training quickly implemented some actions to deal with the strict social distance, as well as the seriousness of the pandemic. Guidelines for online teaching and online testing were issued for the implementation of online teaching in Vietnam (Ministry of Education and Training, 2021). According to Nguyen and Nguyen (2021), lecturers of English in Vietnam were reluctant to conduct online teaching due to many challenges such as lack of facilities and preparation in terms of ICT skills and pedagogical
knowledge (Vo, 2021). At schools, teachers tried to maintain their teaching in various ways. Emails, Zalo and online meetings on Google Meets, Zoom or MS team were utilized to maintain their students’ learning. In late 2021, the situation got better when teachers and also schools had time for preparation as well as trainings on how to implement online teaching.

Further studies on the implementation of online teaching should be conducted especially in Vietnam to better understand the current situation of online teaching. It is hoped that the findings of this research can be useful for researchers, practitioners, as well as educators to figure out the policies, strategies and practical actions for improvements in the current and future remote teaching.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design
This descriptive case study research was conducted in 2021, and the study employed the qualitative approach with the in-depth interview as the instrument.

3.2 Research Sample
The participants were nine English teachers, comprising three primary teachers, three secondary ones, and three high school ones. All the participants actually implemented online teaching in either synchronous or asynchronous modes. Invitations were sent to them via emails, and if they agreed to take part in the interview, they would sign the agreement form before the interview.
Table 1: Sample population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N.</th>
<th>Anonymous Name</th>
<th>Level of Teaching</th>
<th>Experiences (years)</th>
<th>Qualifications</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Primary teacher 1</td>
<td>Primary school</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>B.A</td>
<td>F</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Primary teacher 2</td>
<td>Primary school</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>B.A</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Primary teacher 3</td>
<td>Primary school</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>B.A</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Secondary teacher 1</td>
<td>Secondary school</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>B.A</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Secondary teacher 2</td>
<td>Secondary school</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>B.A</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Secondary teacher 3</td>
<td>Secondary school</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>High school teacher 1</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>M.A</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>High school teacher 2</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>B.A</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>High school teacher 3</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>M.A</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The reason why most of the participants are females is that in Vietnam, there are always more females than males working as teachers (Vo, 2019).

3.3 Research Instrument

In-depth interviews were used to gather data for the study. The questions for the interview were prepared in advance though prompts would be added during the interview to obtain rich data for the research. Due to the seriousness of COVID-19, the interviews were conducted online through Zalo, and were recorded for later analysis.

3.4 Data Analysis

The qualitative data were analyzed using codes and themes. First, the recorded interviews were transcribed, and then analyzed to figure out themes. The data were processed to identify the major themes. For the first research question, the two themes that came out were reluctance to teach online and nervous feelings in online teaching. Four themes, which are lack of pedagogical knowledge and skills, lack of ICT skills, poor teaching conditions, and interference from parents were found in addressing the second research question. After the main themes were recognized, the researcher looked for the subthemes.


2.5 Reliability and Credibility

In order to keep the reliability and credibility of the research, a pilot study was implemented with two teachers. After the pilot study, the questions for the interview were edited. In addition, member checking was applied to maintain the credibility and reliability of the research (Merriam, 2009). All the transcripts of the interview and interpretation of data were sent to interviewees for checking. Member checking helped to prevent the researcher from misunderstanding the data, resulting in ineffective data analysis.

4.0 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings

4.1.1 English Teachers’ Attitudes towards Online Teaching in the COVID-19 Situation

Two major themes were identified from the interview data. English teachers in Vietnam showed their reluctance and worries to deliver online lessons due to the sudden appearance of the pandemic.

When asked about their attitudes when they had to conduct online teaching, all nine teachers shared the idea that they were reluctant to deliver online teaching. In fact, they were forced to have online teaching due to the situation. If they had had other choices, they would not have implemented remote teaching.

“Q: What do you feel towards online teaching?
A: If you asked me such question in the normal situation, I would say that I did not like online teaching. For me, online teaching is not an effective way to teach young children. But I have no choice.

Q: Does it mean that you have negative attitudes towards online teaching?
A: Not exactly, just no idea now. Getting ahead for online teaching to maintain my students’ learning.”

(Interview with Primary Teacher 1)

“Q: What do you feel towards online teaching?
A: Hard to say here. I’m not very happy with online teaching. I would rather have offline lessons because my pupils are too small to learn online (i.e., grades 3th and 4th)”

(Interview with Primary Teacher 2)
The interview with English teachers revealed that they had lots of worries, as it was the first time they did online teaching, and they were too worried about their online teaching.

“Q: What do you feel towards online teaching?
A: Just nervous. I am having sleep disorder because of lots of things I have to deal with in my teaching. I wish I did not have to teach online. ”

(Interview with High School Teacher 2)

Similar to high school English teachers and primary school English teachers, secondary school English teachers were found not ready to teach online. For them, if they had not been required to maintain their students’ learning through remote teaching, they would not have thought of online teaching.

“Q: What do you feel towards online teaching?
A: To be honest, I was not happy when my school asked us to teach online. It is not easy to have online lessons, especially when not all students have equipment. I had to spend lots of time preparing the lessons, and then the period was not successful...... “

(Interview with Secondary school teacher 3)

“Q: What do you feel towards online teaching?
A: Actually, I am not comfortable with my online lessons. To be honest, I felt extremely nervous when I first used Zoom for my teaching......”

(Interview with Primary Teacher 3)

Overall, reluctance to change from the offline mode to online teaching was found among in-service English teachers in Vietnam. They implemented online teaching because they were forced by the situation, and they did not feel happy with their online teaching.

Four key themes were drawn from the analysis of the data regarding teachers’ challenges in conducting online teaching. During the process of teaching, teachers had difficulties in relation to the lack of pedagogical knowledge and skills, lack of ICT skills, teaching condition, and parents’ interference.

Lack of pedagogical knowledge and skills is the first theme. The first and foremost challenge the teachers faced is the lack of pedagogical knowledge and skills for online teaching. Teaching English online is completely different from face-to-face teaching, and it is the first
time that an actual remote teaching has been conducted by in-service English teachers in Vietnam.

Primary English teachers have some concerns when they have online lessons with young learners. Teaching young learners requires knowledge and skills to keep their concentration on lessons and interest in language learning.

“Q: What difficulties have you faced when teaching online?
A: It is quite difficult for me when I have to teach young learners online. My students are at the third and fourth forms, and they are very naughty. I actually do not know how to design an online lesson suitable for young learners, especially when they are very young.

Q: Have you been equipped with pedagogical knowledge and skills for online teaching?
A: Not yet. I have had some training for a very short time to use Zoom, but just some skills to use zoom. What I need is how to design an online lesson for my students....”

(Interview with Primary Teacher 1)

Both secondary school teachers and high school teachers are in the same situation with primary teachers when they only had some basic technical trainings to organize online meetings on Zoom or MS Team. Being unfamiliar to the new mode of teaching prevents them from designing effective online lesson plans.

“Q: What difficulties have you faced when teaching online?
A: Difficulties? Cannot be counted (smile).

Q: What is the most difficult one?
A: I think that my knowledge and skills for online teaching. I can be handling some basic tools like Zoom, but teaching online is more than using tools. I need more methodological knowledge and skills.....”

(Interview with High school Teacher 3)
“Q: What difficulties have you faced when teaching online?
A: Ah, my most concern is how to make the lessons less boring and more effective. I have attended a short training before implementing my online teaching. But I know how to use Zoom for online classes, but quite hard to organize collaborative learning for my lessons when I do not have sufficient skills.....”

(Interview with Secondary school Teacher 2)

In other words, pedagogical knowledge and skills are what English teachers need to improve for their online teaching.

Lack of ICT skills is the second theme. As it is the first time conducting online teaching, English teachers had to face lots of technical problems. They were trained to use some tools like Zoom and MS Team for online meetings, but without experiences in using these tools, they found it stressful to use those tools for their teaching. In order to conduct some interactive online activities, they need to have good ICT skills.

In the interview with the Primary teacher 1, it is revealed that to make the lesson more interesting and interactive, the teacher had to spend much time getting familiar with some tools like Kahoot or Padlet, but her limited ICT ability made her unable to use these tools in her lesson.

“........I am very stressed with my teaching. My students are young, so I need to create activities to keep them focus on the lesson and during the online class. I tried to learn how to use Kahoot to design some games in my lessons but after much time preparing, I failed to use it in my class because of technical issues.....

(Interview with Primary Teacher 1)

Teachers also complained that their ICT skills were not good enough, so they hardly handled technical issues that arose in the lesson.

“........when I was sharing the screen and letting my students watch a video, for some unknown reasons, my students could not hear the sound, and finally I had to give up the activity that I designed carefully. My lesson was spoiled just because of such similar reasons several times”

(Interview with High school teacher 2)
“…… I had lots of technical issues. I did not know how to integrate tools in my lessons, so I just used slides. But when sharing slides, sometimes my students could not see. And getting students to listen is also a problem for me when the sharing function sometimes did not work for unknown reasons.

(Interview with Secondary school teacher 3)

Teaching conditions is one of the difficulties that teachers had to face during their online teaching. Even though all nine English teachers interviewed had their own laptops and Wi-Fi for their teaching, they still had issues with their teaching condition, such as the low quality of internet connection and the noisy environment.

“Q: Do you have any difficulties regarding your teaching condition?
A: …..my house is small and I have two children aged 2 and 6. It is not easy for me to arrange a private space for my teaching. And my laptop’s camera does not have good quality, so the image is not clear”

(Interview with Primary Teacher 3)

“Q: Do you have any difficulties regarding your teaching condition?
A: ….my neighbors sing karaoke all the day. You know, due to the implementation of social distance, they cannot do their own business (they run small restaurants) and they relax by karaoke singing. My teaching is badly affected.”

(Interview with Secondary school Teacher 2)

“Q: Do you have any difficulties regarding your teaching condition?
A; ....... (smile) my internet connection is not stable because I use the room on my rooftop. This room is quiet but the Wi-Fi cannot reach there well. Sometimes, my students complain that they see my face unchanged as if I were using a photo. “

(Interview with High school teacher 3)

Among nine English teachers who participated in the research, besides the above difficulties, the three primary teachers had to suffer pressure from the interference from students’ parents. Since primary students, especially those in their first grade are young and unfamiliar with computers, parents often accompany them during the lesson. The appearance of the parents in the virtual class makes teachers uncomfortable. Some of them even interrupted the lesson when their children could not understand something, or catch up with the lesson.
“...during some first lessons, I felt very irritated when my students' parents kept appearing in my online class. Some of them even asked me to repeat my words when their children could not hear because of the low quality of internet connection”

(Interview with Primary Teacher 2)

“... Parents are worried that their children are too small to use Zoom for their learning, so they often stay with their children during the lessons. I feel as if I were teaching both small children and adults at the same time.

(Interview with Primary Teacher 3)

All in all, the research shows that English teachers taking part in the study had to deal with such difficulties as the lack of pedagogical knowledge and skills, lack of ICT skills, difficult teaching conditions and interference from parents when they implemented online teaching.

5.0 DISCUSSION

As illustrated in the TPACK framework, the effectiveness of the integration of technology in language teaching depends on how teachers incorporate their knowledge in technology, pedagogy and content (Cengiz, 2015; Jen, Yeh, Hsu, Wu, & Chen, 2016). The implementation of online teaching would be more difficult for teachers when they lack the knowledge of technology, pedagogy, and content, especially the understandings of the connection among these factors.

The situation is currently similar in most countries when the new teaching mode has been applied. Barriers arising from the online teaching process are from both internal and external sources in relation to students, teachers and schools (Borup & Evmenova, 2019). According to Pelgrum (2001), technical and ICT-related constraints generally prevent teachers from having effective technology integration in teaching. In Vietnam, China, Sri Lanka, India, Malaysia, and India, teachers share difficulties in technological skills and content. They find it challenging to deal with tools for online learning, and how to use those tools for effective online teaching (Al-Mohair & Alwahaishi, 2020; Balasopoulou et al., 2020; Chandrasinghe et al., 2020; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021). Actually, Vietnamese English teachers have a very low competency to use technology in their language teaching (Pham, Tan, & Lee, 2019; Vo, Pang, & Lee, 2020). Therefore, the issue is, indeed, a challenge for English teachers to overcome when they have to deal with online teaching.

In addition to the uncomfortable feelings of remote teaching, teachers have the anxiety due to the lack of training for the pedagogical and ICT content (Tartavulea et al., 2020). As
shown from the research, English teachers had difficulties with pedagogical knowledge and skills. Based on the TPACK framework, there should be a cooperation of ICT, pedagogy, and content for effective and sufficient online lessons. Likewise, teachers in some Asian countries including China, Sri Lanka, and Malaysia have to struggle with the remote teaching. In European countries, the teaching condition and teachers’ access to technology are much better than in Asian countries like Vietnam. Yet, in those countries, a rather passive delivery and reduced interaction are still found due to the lack of teachers’ experience in cooperating ICT, pedagogy and content for an online lesson (Tartavulea et al., 2020).

Finally, poor teaching conditions is one obstacle that English teachers in Vietnam, as well as in other developing countries have to deal with (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Vo, 2021). Low internet connection and the poor quality of electronic devices for online teaching are found to occasionally interrupt the teaching process, resulting in the less efficient teaching process. Even though internet connection is widely accessible in Vietnam, its stability and quality are of concern. Teachers in general and English teachers in particular are facing lots of problems due to such technical issues (Vo, 2021). Besides, not all teachers can afford high quality electronic devices for their online teaching, so the teaching quality may be negatively affected.

6.0 CONCLUSION
It is drawn from the research that English teachers in Vietnam were not willing to teach online when they had to quickly switch from the normal teaching to online teaching mode. Teachers are worried about how to implement the new teaching mode. In addition, they had to face difficulties in relation to pedagogical knowledge and skills, ICT skills, teaching condition and parents’ interference.

In order to improve the quality of online teaching in Vietnam, it is recommended that training and instant support should be provided. Specifically, English teachers should be given opportunities to take part in the training to upgrade their ability to effectively apply technology in their language teaching in general and in online teaching in particular. According to Huynh and Nguyen (2021), the curriculum for the training course for English teachers in Vietnam should consist of four components, which are introduction to CALL, designing online lesson plans, designing and managing learning activities by using ICT, and employing social networking sites and cloud computing. As shown in the four components, besides ICT skills, pedagogy and content are also introduced with the aim to help teachers to have enough ability and skills to integrate technology in education.
In terms of instant support, it is also recommended for schools to organize support teams to facilitate teachers facing both technological issues and pedagogical problems during the process of conducting distance teaching. The support team can be a group of both English teachers and technicians so that members of the team can provide necessary help to teachers in not only ICT skills but also how to integrate technology in language teaching in online lessons. Such support should be provided in time so that the implementation of online teaching would be conducted more efficiently.

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