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## DISCUSSION

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### A QUANTITATIVE STUDY ON EVALUATION OF AN INTENSIVE ENGLISH COURSE: VOICES OF NON-ENGLISH-MAJOR STUDENTS

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**Abstract:** The preliminary purpose of this study was to investigate how non-English-major first-year students evaluated some aspects of an intensive English course that aimed to improve their English language knowledge and skills. After that course, a total of 453 students participated in the study and completed a self-reported survey questionnaire of 31 items in various types. The quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS version 24. The results revealed that most students who attended the intensive English course held positive views towards the course including content, duration, teachers, materials, teaching methods, and facilities. The students were most interested in some components of the course, such as the teachers, their teaching methods, and the classroom facilities. They thought that their vocabulary and grammar improved the most, whereas teamwork skill witnessed the least improvement. Finally, they expected listening, speaking skills, and pronunciation to be added and reinforced more in the next course. The study offered several implications for future courses and relevant stakeholders.

*Keywords:* evaluation, intensive English course, non-English-major students

#### 1. Introduction

English has been widely accepted as the global language since the early 21st century, as the language is spoken in every corner of the world (Lam & Albright, 2019). It is used as the prime means of communication across sections, organisations, businesses, or enterprises in different countries and continents, even in the places where English is not the mother tongue (Riemer, 2002). English can be regarded as an effective tool for

communication and understanding among people of different races and origins who, however, share the same interests or concerns around the world. In the era of globalization, English has become increasingly essential not only for those who want to become global citizens or want to reside in other foreign countries, but also for those inside a country. In Vietnam, since the open-door policy (Doi Moi) in 1986, there have been more and more locally-based foreign businesses or enterprises that need high quality labour force who are fluent in

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English As the policy was “opening up to the outside world, mostly in terms of foreign investment and the global market” (To, 2010, p. 100), its implementation attracted an increasing amount of capital into the country and strengthened the trend of internationalization (Nguyen & Sloper, 1995; Tran & Heo, 2008; Vu, 2019). Millions of English-speaking visitors, tourists and businessmen decided to choose Vietnam as their destination, making English the most popular foreign language spoken in the country.

For the past few years, the fourth industrial revolution has witnessed a stronger internationalization. The concept of “border” among countries has become blurrier as one can live in a country and study or work in another country. Globalization and the fourth industrial revolution have brought about both challenges and opportunities; however, those who have a good command of English and their professional work can excel themselves and make full use of the opportunities. In this borderless world, English is clearly a passport for these high quality workers to enter the international labour market.

Consequently, English language teaching and learning has been deemed to be important in Vietnamese educational system (Truong, 2021). However, English remains a challenging language for a lot of Vietnamese students, most of whom study English as a minor part of the program (Nguyen & Habok, 2020). At non-English-major universities, English is not considered a means of communication, but a minor subject in the teaching curriculum with the total credit of six to eight for the whole course. At some universities, English is even left out of the curriculum and becomes a conditional subject. Although students have learnt English since high school or earlier, their English is still low and uneven when they enter the university (Lam & Albright,

2019; Mai & Pham, 2019). Urban students who have more opportunities to be exposed to English are said to have much better English proficiency than rural students who have little chance to learn the language (Lam, 2018). The situation of English teaching and learning at Thuyloi University is not an exception.

## **2. Background of the Study**

### **2.1. Contextual Background**

Originally as a technical university specialising in water resources and engineering, Thuyloi university has changed into a multi-disciplinary higher education institution for nearly 20 years. Although English is a minor subject, it has always been a compulsory subject for all students in their teaching curriculum. Before the school year 2019-2020, the exit requirement for graduates was A2 level (following the Common European Framework of Reference – CEFR) and the time allocation for the subject was eight credits (equivalent to 120 periods).

Facing higher and higher requirements from the labour market, since 2019, the university has decided to raise the quality of English teaching and their students’ English proficiency level. Graduates are required to achieve B1 level (following the CEFR) before receiving their degrees. Although the certificate is institutionally valued, this decision also requires students to have a more serious thought on the subject. Most of them come from the countryside, and English is one of their weaknesses. According to the statistics of the university’s Department of Undergraduate and Postgraduate Education, during the school years 2017-2018 and 2018-2019, the students’ marks of English in the entrance examinations were mainly low. The percentages of students having marks under 5 in these 2 years were 69.3% and 75.1% respectively. These percentages

clearly represented the limited English input quality of the students. More surprisingly, while requiring graduates to have a higher English exit requirement, the university has reduced the time allocated for this subject to only six credits for two courses English 1 and English 2 (two compulsory courses for all students starting at pre-intermediate level).

The decision to raise the exit requirement to B1 level has challenged not only students but also course instructors. The problem is how to help students improve their English to one level higher, while the input quality is not better, and the time allocation is reduced to two thirds. After lots of discussion at division and department levels with related parties, some intensive English courses (IEC) were first offered at Thuyloi University so that students' language knowledge and skills would be improved.

The course is placed outside the main program, and is designed as a supportive English course. Students who have marks of English in the entrance examination lower than four are not allowed to register for the compulsory English 1 course. They are encouraged to register in the IEC. As the IEC is not compulsory, the final results of students are not included in their transcripts. At the end of the course, students need a pass in the final exam which tests them vocabulary, grammar, and four skills as a standard A2 exam. When they have a pass in the IEC, they are eligible to register for the compulsory English 1 course. However, these students may not choose to take IEC at the university. Instead, they can improve their English by taking extra courses in other language centers and bring back the legible A2 certificate to fulfill the requirement for the compulsory English 1 course.

As IEC was first offered as a supportive and optional course for students whose English is inadequate and ineligible for the pre-intermediate level, the instructors

made efforts to schedule the course in the most appropriate time alongside with the students' official curriculum. The course consists of six credits (equivalent to 90 periods), which is divided into two 45-period sections: IEC1 and IEC2. The textbook Prepare 1 is used as the main teaching material in IEC1 and Prepare 2 in IEC2. In addition to those textbooks, the course instructors have also prepared two sets of supplementary materials. The supplementary materials include extra exercises in pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and all four skills, which support and revise the linguistic knowledge and language skills students are taught in each lesson. The students are expected to get used to the self-study habit with these materials. For most students, this habit is not easily formed, especially when their English proficiency level is still low. Therefore, the course instructors have provided detailed guidance for students' effective use of those materials and monitored their continuous self-study for the whole course.

At the end of IEC1, students take a mock test in the form of A2 level test. This test gets students to familiarise with A2 level test, and at the same time allows them to be aware of their current English proficiency level, based on which they can better plan for the next IEC2 section. At the end of IEC2, students take the real A2 level test in four skills. Those who pass the test and earn 50 points up in four skills are eligible to register for the compulsory English 1.

IEC also receives great attention from the university managing board. In order to serve best for students, the classrooms are well-equipped with facilities such as air-conditioners, multimedia projectors, interactive boards, TV screens, and loudspeakers. Moreover, the number of students is restricted to 25 learners in each IEC class so that teachers are able to apply new teaching methods and best facilitate students' performances. All teachers in

charge of IEC classes are qualified with their Master degrees or higher in TESOL. The university wants to reserve the best conditions for the course to encourage both instructors and students to achieve their goals.

It can be said that IEC has received the best preparation from the instructors as well as the administrative sectors with an aim to provide students with the most support. When the first IEC finished, the course instructors would prefer to examine whether the course was effective in some aspects from the students' perspectives so that they could adapt where necessary. As a result, this study aims at evaluating the content, time allocation, learning condition, learning materials, teaching methodologies, and instructors involved in the course on the basis of the learners' viewpoints.

## **2.2. Research Background**

Course evaluation in general is fundamental for course developers to decide what instructional materials and methods are satisfactory and where change is necessary (Beran, Violato & Kline, 2007; Cronbach, 2000). Course evaluation's purpose is to elucidate the question entitled "Is the course good?"; however, the definition of *good* is subject to evaluators and sources of information and some examples of a good course include learners' satisfaction, much learning, application of cutting-edge knowledge about language teaching and learning, and following principles of curriculum planning (Nation, 2000). The evaluation should include students' study process, proficiency and attitudes and their follow-up study. Therefore, the use of learners' feedback can be considered as a reliable method for course evaluators (Gravestock & Gregor-Greenleaf, 2008).

In language learning and teaching, students are considered as key participants in the evaluation of the program because they are able to provide evidence of their gains in

language proficiency. Learners also can give feedback on how the course was taught and what they have learned to their needs (Richards, 2001).

The term "evaluation" varies in different research. Some linguists and language teachers consider it as assessment. From Nunan's perspective, it is broader than assessment which only defines the students' learning outcomes, and sometimes is understood as tests to demonstrate what a learner is able to do in target language. This study uses the term "evaluation" with wider meaning which can assist course designers to decide if a course needs modification or what measures should be adopted to eliminate shortcomings (Nunan, 1991). Therefore, in order to investigate the effectiveness of a language program, Nunan (1991) proposed various aspects including *need analysis, content, implementation methodologies, resources, teacher, learners, assessment and evaluation*. In terms of *content*, whether the objectives and content are appropriate for students is the key question. *Implementation methodologies* and *resources* involve materials, activities and methods employed during the course. Learners can also evaluate their teacher through teacher's classroom management skills.

Besides, several features of a language training course namely *size and intensity* and *instructional materials and resources* should be put in the checklist in the program quality management according to context – adaptive model by Lynch (1990). The *size* here defines the number of students in each class and the total number of classes in the course. Intensity is defined in terms of class hours a week and the length of time to complete the entire course. It is also emphasized in Lynch's (1990) model to evaluate a program that *instructional materials and resources* concerning the available of course books, supplementary materials, audiovisual, technological aids,

basic classroom supplies are critical to make an accurate evaluation of how well a program has operated.

Aspects aforementioned for course evaluation from Nunan's (1991) check list and Lynch's (1990) model were theoretical background to develop the instrument of this study. Because this is a course evaluation sketched out only from the students' perspectives, the opinions from teachers or staffs and social and political climate discussed in Lynch's (1990) context-adaptive model are not mentioned. Other issues such as need analysis, assessment in Nunan's (1991) evaluation criteria are not research areas of this study as well. Due to these contextual factors, we decide to focus on students' evaluation on significant aspects including course content, time and intensity, materials and resources, implementation methodologies and teacher to develop our research instrument.

### 3. Methods

#### 3.1. Participants

The participants included 453 non-English-major first year students at Thuyloi university who completed the IEC in the first semester of the 2020 academic year. They were studying their majors in different areas such as economics, information technology, water resources and civil engineering.

#### 3.2. Instruments

The research aims at revealing the evaluation of IEC from students' perspectives, so the instrument for this research plays the role of reflection and perception explorer. With undeniable strengths including non-threatening, economical, fast, easy for many participants to complete, the reliable instrument to collect data is a self-developed questionnaire. This tool can easily gather information about participants' background, behaviors, attitudes and feelings (Davis, 2011).

The questionnaire was planned under a staged sequence proposed by Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018). Most of the steps mentioned in their guidelines were strictly followed. The primary purpose of this instrument is to explore the students' satisfaction in educational experiences in IEC. Besides, the questionnaire is also used to find out what language knowledge and skills students could improve when the course finished. As this was the first IEC conducted in the educational institution, adopting learners' recommendation for its effectiveness was critical for further courses.

The data collection was firstly targeted at all IEC students so that their voices could be fully considered. However, there were some students who did not attend class regularly. Consequently, they could not experience all training aspects. Their feedback and comments were not reliable indicators. Therefore, students who attended at least 80% of 90 class hours were the target population of the questionnaire.

After the population and sample were decided, the next step was to identify and itemize the issues related to central purposes which included the course content, the course duration, the learning condition, the course materials, the methodologies and the teachers.

In order to collect information of above subsidiary topics from a large size of the sample, a structured and closed questionnaire was recommended. Rating scale and multiple choice were question types to use. The data also aimed at participants' rich responses on course implementation and quality, so some more open questions could help in this case.

The questionnaire has 31 closed questions. The first part consists of 28 Likert scale items which require participants to choose one of the responses to best reflect their opinion: (1) *strongly disagree*, (2) *disagree*, (3) *neutral*, (4) *agree*, and

(5) *strongly agree*. The first three items concern the course content in which participants were asked to clarify their evaluation on course objectives, lesson topics, language knowledge and skills presented in the course. The class time and self-study time were also investigated in items 4, 5, and 6. The next four items in the next subpart focused on learning conditions with classroom supplies and technological aids provided. Specific details of teaching activities, teacher's instructions, class management, ways to approach lessons and instructor's facilitation were generated in the rest 18 rating scale items.

In the second part of the questionnaire, learners could choose their most favorite aspect of the training and reflect their skills or knowledge which were much improved in questions 29 and 30. Students could also express their expectations in question 31.

We also clarified and stated in the questionnaire that students could withdraw from the study whenever they wanted. Furthermore, all participants were guaranteed anonymity and the information they provided was completely confidential and used only for research purpose. We also assured that there were no harms to students' life and learning outcomes.

Back-translation method was exploited at this stage when the questionnaire was translated back into English (see more in Behr, 2017; Sousa & Rojjanasrirat, 2011). The questionnaire was translated into Vietnamese so that all respondents could fully understand the instructions and item content regardless of their English level. It was then evaluated by six academic colleagues who had relevant experiences in doing research, teaching English and course design. The experts panel worked seriously and pointed out some inadequacies in word choice of item 12 and expression of item 29. Some adjustments

were immediately updated in forward translated version. The comments and feedback from the panel members were really useful to improve the content validity. Some minor improvements in word choice were made to avoid ambiguities.

We piloted this questionnaire with five volunteer students before administration. These students were informed of the aims and objectives of the questionnaire. All aspects and terms were carefully explained so that volunteers could easily understand them. After the pilot study, there were no serious misunderstandings and volunteers were clear about their choice. The final version of the questionnaire was then produced and officially used in this study.

### **3.3. Data Collection**

Obtaining the approval from the Director of School of International Education and the Head of English Division to undertake this study, we had teachers of 24 IEC classes distribute the questionnaires to students at the end of the course.

We introduced the research objectives, aspects and guided teachers how to administer the surveys. All questions concerning research from teachers and students were timely answered. The paper-and-pencil questionnaires were administered in the last lesson of the course when most students could get and complete the questionnaire in class.

The questionnaire was distributed when IEC course finished at the end of 2020. A total of 453 questionnaires were completed and they were all valid representing 100% response rate.

### **3.4. Data Analysis**

After collecting the data, we scored, entered data into SPSS version 24, cleaned and accounted for missing data. Then we got descriptive statistics to find out what aspects of the course students evaluated and came to conclusions.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Reliability of the Survey Questionnaire

Internal reliability of the 28-item survey was investigated using Cronbach's alpha  $\alpha$  and the result indicated that the alpha value of the survey was equal to 0.928. This means the survey was a reliable tool to

#### Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics of the Content of the Course*

Item	M	Sd	SD & D (%)	N (%)	A & SA (%)
1. The objectives of the course were clearly presented at the beginning of the course, which helped me to identify my learning objectives.	4.16	0.65	1.5	8.7	89.8
2. The topics in the course suited my interests.	4.0	0.70	1.6	17.6	80.8
3. The knowledge regarding pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and four language skills was neither too difficult nor too easy for me.	4.01	0.76	1.5	19.4	79.1

Apparently, due to high percentages of *agree* and *disagree*, the majority of students surveyed believed that they were well informed of the course objectives (M = 4.16; Sd = 0.65) and that the course content was appropriate to their interests (M = 4.0; Sd = 0.70). Also, nearly 80% of the

#### Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics of the Duration of the Course*

Item	M	Sd	SD & D (%)	N (%)	A & SA (%)
4. 90 lessons is sufficient for me to achieve my learning objectives.	3.76	0.86	7.4	25.5	67.1
5. I spent at least 30 minutes studying before each class.	3.76	0.85	5.6	29.3	65.1
6. I think I need more time to self-study to consolidate the course's knowledge.	4.26	0.71	1.5	9.3	89.2

The results showed that although two thirds of the students surveyed thought that the duration of the course was appropriate for them (M = 3.76; Sd = 0.86), a quarter of them remained neutral in this idea. This means those students were not sure about

investigate the effectiveness of the IEC at Thuyloi University and it could provide immediate feedback to the stakeholders at the university.

### 4.2. Content of the Course

Table 1 below presents the summary of the result in this first scale.

respondents agreed with the idea that the course content did not exceed their level of English (M = 4.01; Sd = 0.76).

### 4.3. Duration of the Course

The descriptive statistics of the second scale is summarized in Table 2 below.

whether 90 lessons was sufficient to achieve their goals or not.

In addition, more than half of the students shared that they had at least half an hour for self-studying before class (M = 3.76; Sd = 0.85), whereas the others were

unsure about or did not agree with that idea. As a result, most respondents (89.2%) stated that they needed more self-studying time for knowledge consolidation ( $M = 4.26$ ;  $Sd = 0.71$ ).

**Table 3**

*Descriptive Statistics of the Teaching and Learning Facilities*

Item	M	Sd	SD & D (%)	N (%)	A & SA (%)
7. There are enough seats in class, which means it is not too crowded.	4.50	0.68	1.1	5.3	93.6
8. The classroom is full of light.	4.52	0.64	0.6	4.4	95.0
9. The classroom is fully equipped with facilities such as speakers, air-conditioners, boards, chalks, and tables.	4.43	0.69	1.3	6.0	92.7
10. The classroom is well-designed, which facilitates the arrangement of tables for class activities.	4.21	0.78	2.3	13.7	83.0

It is easily seen from the descriptive statistics that the proportions of *agree* and *disagree* were really high among three items. Accordingly, the majority of respondents expressed positive views towards the items concerning teaching and learning facilities. The students shared the idea that the classroom which was not too crowded ( $M = 4.50$ ;  $Sd = 0.68$ ) was provided with adequate

**Table 4**

*Descriptive Statistics of the Teaching and Learning Materials*

Item	M	Sd	SD & D (%)	N (%)	A & SA (%)
11. I can buy the course book easily and conveniently.	4.15	0.66	0.8	11.1	88.1
12. The course book is physically well-designed.	4.16	0.71	1.5	13.1	85.4
13. The teacher provided me with instructions to use textbooks, workbooks, and supplementary materials.	4.48	0.59	0.2	4.4	96.4
14. The teacher provided me with audio files for workbooks and supplementary materials.	4.54	0.57	0.2	2.7	97.1
15. The supplementary materials are designed with exercises to practice pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and language skills.	4.33	0.64	0.6	7.1	92.3
16. The supplementary materials are useful for my better understanding of lessons and knowledge consolidation.	4.18	0.63	0.2	11.8	88.0

**4.4. Teaching and learning facilities**

Table 3 illustrates the results regarding the extent to which the participant agreed or disagreed with the statements of facilities.

facilities for learning and teaching ( $M = 4.52$ ;  $Sd = 0.64$ ). Besides, the good design of their classroom supported learning activities ( $M = 4.21$ ;  $Sd = 0.78$ ).

**4.5. Teaching and Learning Materials**

The students' opinions on educational materials in the course are demonstrated in Table 4.



It is noted from the statistics that most students held positive attitudes about materials they used during the course. Specifically, they consented that they were given audio files for learning materials to practice listening and pronunciation ( $M = 4.54$ ;  $Sd = 0.57$ ).

Also, they were instructed to efficiently use learning materials by their teacher ( $M = 4.48$ ;  $Sd = 0.59$ ). The substantial numbers of students surveyed

agreed on the high quality of course books and supplementary materials in terms of content ( $M = 4.33$ ;  $Sd = 0.64$ ), usefulness ( $M = 4.18$ ;  $Sd = 0.63$ ), and appearance ( $M = 4.16$ ;  $Sd = 0.71$ ). Additionally, the students shared that the materials were easily accessible ( $M = 4.15$ ;  $Sd = 0.66$ ).

#### 4.6. Teaching Methods

How the participants evaluated teaching methods is summarized in Table 5 below.

**Table 5**  
*Descriptive Statistics of the Teaching Methods*

Item	M	Sd	SD & D (%)	N (%)	A & SA (%)
17. Teaching methods in class are suitable for me.	4.12	0.64	0.7	13.1	86.2
18. The teacher has various activities in class (e.g., handouts, games, clips, applications, and physical activities).	4.34	0.70	1.5	8.2	90.3
19. I have chances to work in pairs or groups to complete tasks.	4.24	0.66	1.3	8.0	90.7
20. The lessons are delivered with an appropriate speed.	4.14	0.64	1.1	11.5	87.4
21. The class activities are guided carefully.	4.24	0.60	0.0	8.9	91.1

Although the percentages of students who chose *neutral*, *disagree*, and *strongly disagree* were minor, in general, the respondents felt satisfied with teaching methods. To be more specific, they postulated that their teacher offered careful guidance in class activities ( $M = 4.24$ ,  $Sd = 0.60$ ) and nobody disagreed with this opinion. Moreover, they agreed that there were a lot of engaging class activities ( $M = 4.34$ ;  $Sd = 0.70$ ) and that they could join pair work and team work ( $M = 4.24$ ;  $Sd = 0.66$ ). They also found the suitability of the teaching methods for their language learning ( $M = 4.12$ ;  $Sd = 0.64$ ).

#### 4.7. Teachers

Table 6 below presents the participants' perceptions of their teachers in the course.

The statistics demonstrated that the means of the items in this scale were higher than those in the other scales and that the percentages of respondents who agreed and strongly agreed with the statements were really high. Notably, in items 25, 26, 27, and 28, the proportions of participants who stayed neutral were insignificant and there were no students who selected *disagree* and *strongly disagree*.

**Table 6***Descriptive Statistics of the Teachers*

Item	M	Sd	SD & D (%)	N (%)	A & SA (%)
22. The teacher insists on punctuality.	4.47	0.68	0.8	6.4	92.8
23. The teacher is enthusiastic about class teaching.	4.61	0.55	0.2	2.0	97.8
24. The way the teacher delivers the lessons is easy to understand and clear.	4.55	0.58	0.2	2.9	96.9
25. The teacher answers all the questions the students raise.	4.55	0.55	0.0	2.9	97.1
26. The teacher spends time helping students to complete tasks in the supplementary materials.	4.49	0.59	0.0	4.7	95.3
27. The teacher creates pleasant atmospheres in class, thereby stimulating the students' learning spirits.	4.55	0.59	0.0	5.1	94.9
28. The teacher initiated a social network for the class (e.g., Facebook and Zalo).	4.62	0.54	0.0	2.9	97.1

The points mentioned above pointed out that the respondents shared highly positive views about their teacher in the course. In accordance with their opinions, the teacher initiated a social group for the class ( $M = 4.62$ ;  $Sd = 0.54$ ), expressed enthusiasm about teaching ( $M = 4.61$ ;  $Sd = 0.55$ ), and delivered effective lessons ( $M = 4.55$ ;  $Sd = 0.58$ ). S/he also responded to all inquiries from students ( $M = 4.55$ ;  $Sd = 0.55$ ), brought relaxing atmospheres to class to motivate students ( $M = 4.55$ ;  $Sd = 0.59$ ), offered students help to complete supplementary materials ( $M = 4.49$ ;  $Sd = 0.59$ ), and was punctual ( $M = 4.47$ ;  $Sd = 0.68$ ).

#### 4.8. Students' Preferences in the Course

In question 29, students were asked to choose what they liked in the course on the basis of the aspects mentioned above. They could select more than one options based on their preferences. The options included topics, textbooks, supplementary materials, teaching methods, teaching and learning facilities, and teachers.

The descriptive statistics revealed that teachers were perceived to be the most

preferable factor by the students surveyed (74.8%;  $n = 338$ ), followed by teaching methods (63.5%;  $n = 287$ ). The third most popular factor among the respondents was teaching and learning facilities (46.7%;  $n = 211$ ), while the least favorite one manifested itself in supplementary materials (25.7%;  $n = 116$ ).

#### 4.9. Students' Self-Perceived Improvements

Question 30 required students to self-evaluate which language skills or language components were improved after the course. They could select multiple options.

According to the results, three quarters of the students believed that the course helped them to improve their vocabulary the most (75.2%;  $n = 340$ ). The second most selected area was grammar (66.8%;  $n = 302$ ), whereas teamwork skill was thought to improve by the smallest number of respondents (56%;  $n = 253$ ).

#### 4.10. Students' Expectations Regarding What Needs Improvements in the Course

In question 31, students were expected to indicate what, in their opinion, should be focused on to better the course.

The statistics showed that listening skill should be prioritized to enhance the quality of the course (70.6%; n = 319), followed by speaking skill (66.2%; n = 299) and pronunciation (44.9%; n = 203).

## 5. Discussions and Implications

Methodologically, as the study instrument was carefully developed based on a strict procedure, this contributed to ensuring its reliability and validity (Dörnyei, 2003). Therefore, this questionnaire is able to provide course designers with immediate feedback. However, it is critical to have further studies to develop and validate this questionnaire in different sociocultural contexts.

The findings represent mostly positive feedback from students in all examined aspects of the course. It seems this course has fulfilled the students' expectations and hopefully helped learners to increase their English proficiency.

IEC, as a whole, could receive favorable feedback from learners because the course was carefully designed following planning and implementation processes of language curriculum development including context consideration, learning outcome decision, course organization, effective teaching providing and program evaluation (Nation, 2000; Richards, 2001). Educators are strongly encouraged to have a certain framework and procedure to adopt when developing a language course.

While students expressed their affection for the whole course, there are some aspects that received less fondness from students. Course duration is less favored in IEC for several apparent reasons. As students taking IEC course were mostly at beginning (A1) level, 90 class hours was not a mighty and sufficient number for them to reach A2. It is scientifically stated that it takes at least 250 hours for a learner to achieve one level of proficiency in ideal

conditions (see more in Cambridge Assessment English, 2021). The intensive instructional hours were another explanation for students' modest feedback on time allocation. Students may find it tiring when they had to attend three IEC classes (three hours for one class) per week in ten consecutive weeks. It became more exhausting when students had to finish a vast amount of supplementary practice on grammar, vocabulary and four language skills after school, especially when they were not language students and were not used to this learning style before.

Students' self-study time is another course developer's concern. Weak and hardworking students might find it necessary to spend more time learning at home, and 30 minutes might be insufficient. However, those whose learning objectives and self-studying habits were lacking might be unsure about this duration.

Similar to time aspect, some students did not demonstrate their favour in the course content. Students might be uncertain about the content because objectives clarified at the beginning of the course and topics introduced in each lesson were not their keen interests. Understandably, IEC aimed at increasing English proficiency of a large number of students in general, so it was not a personally but massively designed course. It could not satisfy all learners consequently.

On the contrary to the three above factors, teachers, teaching methods and learning facilities are three other aspects that catch students' fancy. There are logical explanations for these findings. Firstly, in preparation for conducting IEC, all teachers of English Division who have high level competence of English and good teaching methods were supplied with a rich source of course books and supplementary materials with audio and video files. The best preparation of course instructors on active,

interactive and effective learning activities could bring students meaningful and exciting lessons. Moreover, the small size of class with no more than 25 students was beneficial for teachers to undertake and control class activities. Students were provided with more opportunities to acquire language knowledge, practice language skills and receive timely feedback from teachers. Hence, students became satisfied with the class size. This point was consistent with Kogan (2014) which concluded that the courses with fewer students got more positive feedback. Besides, students expressed their obvious satisfaction when they could learn in classroom supplied with sufficient light, and air-conditioners which contributed to the success of language learning (Fajriah, Gani & Samad, 2019). These well-equipped classrooms with modern facilities and flexible seats also gave teachers plenty of opportunities to carry out teaching activities. Undoubtedly, students highly valued all these priorities. The findings imply that a high-quality course which surely obtains positive feedback from its students is created from competent and enthusiastic teachers with effective teaching methods, small-sized classes, and adequate facilities from the institutional managing board.

The success of a language course can be demonstrated in terms of learners' improvement in language knowledge and skills. Students admitted that they enhanced grammar and vocabulary the most at the end of IEC. Weak students in the course might need more guidance on forms and vocabulary. It is possible that teachers tended to provide rich grammatical and lexical input and spend time reinforcing these components for students before teaching four language skills (see more in Trinh & Mai, 2019). Moreover, learners received excessive exposure of these language elements when finishing various exercises in supplementary materials which

have high proportions of grammatical and lexical practices.

Supplementary materials are the least favorite factor in students' preferences in IEC although the course developers had made a tremendous effort to design them and expected the students to use them as an effective self-study module. This situation is psychologically understandable when students had to learn under high time intensity with vast language knowledge acquired in class. Then they were assigned extra practice in supplementary materials at home for the next lesson. Gradually, they might lose interest in these course resources. Another reason why students seemed not to be interested in spending their self-study time on supplementary books was its pen-and-paper format. Integrating this resource into a blended learning platform or uploading it to some interactive applications might be considered as effective and long-term solutions to promote students' self-learning (see more in Bowyer & Chambers, 2017; Hrastinski, 2019). The material design in a language class can be examined more in Richards (2001) and Tomlinson (2012).

In terms of learners' expectations which were mentioned in question 29 of the survey, pronunciation, speaking, and listening skills needed enhancing. The first possible explanation results from the short duration of the course. 90 class hours was insufficient for teachers to provide their students with both language components and skills. It is also crucial for educators to find out whether the course focuses on what of language learning or how of language learning or both. Secondly, due to current challenges affecting tertiary English learning and teaching in Vietnam (Trinh & Mai, 2019), IEC developers and teachers had to handle the conflicts between time constraints and vast linguistic knowledge. The course developers can refer to the course planning process in Jacobs (2010) and North, Angelova, Jarosz, and Rossner

(2018). Thirdly, arguably, both teachers and students encountered washback effects, as about 60% of test items in IEC's final reading and writing tests were lexical and grammatical. That might lead to the fact that teachers and learners had to put more emphasis on components in the exams (see more in Spratt, 2005). As a result, the educators must take a more realistic option in which grammar and vocabulary were prioritized to include in the course, so they could not guarantee the chance for students to cover all the aspects of language learning.

It is recommended for course developers to consider the time allocation for skill improvements to gain students' better satisfaction for the whole course. Besides, there should be careful attention to granting learners more autonomy to stimulate their interest in course duration and course content as the dimension of control over learning content (see more in Benson, 2011). Evidently, students' evaluations obtained from the questionnaire provide teachers with a useful source of reference to revise course and educators can refer this valuable information to their further language programs (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018).

## 6. Conclusions

The study aims to gain understanding about how students, after attending the IEC, evaluated the course on the basis of some concerns including content, duration, materials, facilities, teachers, and teaching methods. The study also seeks to investigate what the students liked about the course, what they improved the most, and which parts could be strengthened in the next course. There were 453 students who participated in the study and completed the questionnaire. That questionnaire survey was self-developed on the basis of a rigorous process and the reliability value of Cronbach's alpha was really high. The

results pointed out positivity in the students' views regarding all the aspects of the course mentioned above. What interested the students most were the teachers, their teaching methods, and the teaching and learning facilities in the classroom and the participants' improvements were the biggest in vocabulary and grammar and the smallest in teamwork skill. The respondents looked forward to the addition and reinforcement of listening, speaking, and pronunciation in the further courses. Accordingly, some implications were provided on the basis of need analysis and more solid curriculum design. It was suggested that the ICE was appropriate for the participants to better their language proficiency and reach the university requirements of foreign language competences.

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## NGHIÊN CỨU ĐỊNH LƯỢNG VỀ ĐÁNH GIÁ CỦA SINH VIÊN KHÔNG CHUYÊN NGỮ ĐỐI VỚI KHÓA HỌC TIẾNG ANH TĂNG CƯỜNG

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**Tóm tắt:** Nghiên cứu được thực hiện để tìm hiểu về những đánh giá của sinh viên không chuyên ngữ với khóa học tiếng Anh tăng cường được giảng dạy ở năm thứ nhất tại Đại học Thủy lợi, Việt Nam. Đây là khóa học được thiết kế với mục đích nâng cao kiến thức và kỹ năng ngôn ngữ cho sinh viên. 453 sinh viên đã tham gia trả lời phiếu câu hỏi khảo sát vào cuối khóa học để cung cấp thông tin cho nghiên cứu. Sau khi dữ liệu được xử lý bởi SPSS phiên bản 24, các kết quả thu được rất đáng ghi nhận. Nghiên cứu đã cho thấy đa số sinh viên có nhận xét rất tích cực về nội dung, thời lượng, giáo viên, tài liệu và cơ sở vật chất của khóa học. Trong đó, sinh viên thể hiện sự hài lòng nhất với giáo viên cùng phương pháp giảng dạy của thầy cô và những trang thiết bị được cung cấp cho các lớp học tiếng Anh tăng cường. Các em đều nhận thấy từ vựng và ngữ pháp của mình tiến bộ đáng kể mặc dù các kỹ năng làm việc nhóm chưa thực sự được cải thiện như mong muốn. Sinh viên cũng hi vọng trong các khóa học tiếp theo sẽ được luyện tập nhiều hơn kỹ năng nghe, nói và phát âm. Nghiên cứu cũng đưa ra một số đề xuất và giải pháp để các nhà quản lý, người thiết kế chương trình, giáo viên và các bên liên quan có thể áp dụng cho các khóa học tiếp theo.

*Từ khóa:* đánh giá, tiếng Anh tăng cường, sinh viên không chuyên ngữ