

English Language Teaching Educational Change: A Retrospective Analysis of Teacher Professional Development

Le Xuan Mai¹, Le Thanh Thao²

Can Tho University, Vietnam

*lxmai@ctu.edu.vn*¹, *thaole@ctu.edu.vn*²

Article History

Received: 24 June 2022

Reviewed: 03 October 2022

Accepted: 05 October 2022

Published: 30 November 2022

Keywords: ELT educational reforms, retrospective analysis, educational change, the necessities of change, southwest Vietnam

Abstract: The importance of English has demanded the introduction of English language teaching (ELT) educational reforms (ERs) in the Vietnamese context. However, the results of these reforms did not satisfy Vietnamese educators; as a result, many studies have explored the related issues, but almost none of them emphasized English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers' perceptions of the necessities of the reforms. Accordingly, this current study was conducted to fill in the aforementioned gap. Driven by that emphasis, this qualitative study used semi-structured interviews as a data-collecting instrument. Regarding the studied sampling, six EFL high school teachers from southwest Vietnam were recruited as the interviewees. According to the findings of the present study, teachers in Vietnam strongly perceived the need for ELT ERs. Besides, the reforms were fundamental to help catch up with the era of globalization. At the conclusion of the paper, some discussions focusing primarily on teacher training issues and educational implications, as well as suggestions for future research, were presented.

INTRODUCTION

The critical role of English has also required higher demands of English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching in Vietnam. Eventually, many English language teaching (ELT) educational changes or reforms have been introduced to enhance the English proficiency of Vietnamese people. For example, the National Foreign Language Project 2020 was implemented to better Vietnamese students' competencies. However, after implementing the reforms, the results seemed not as good as expected (Nguyen, 2013; Le & Nguyen, 2017; Tran & Marginson, 2018; Pham & Bui, 2019). As a result, several studies were administered to investigate the factors affecting the reforming process (i.e., Harvey & Broyles, 2010; Ibrahim et al., 2013; Nguyen & Burns, 2017; Thao & Mai, 2020). However, these studies explained the surface understanding of ELT educational reforms (ERs) in terms of the influential factors. Teachers themselves play an essential role in the outcomes of a particular reform. Without their

sufficient awareness of the need for reform, it is not likely to make the reforms will be successful. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate how much they understand the values of the reforms. However, none of those mentioned above studies has analyzed how Vietnamese EFL teachers think of the values of the reforms, the necessities of the reforms, and their roles in the reforming process. For that reason, this current study was employed to help fill the gaps above. By doing that, policymakers and administrators can help increase the teachers' awareness of the necessities of reforms. When the teachers highly perceive the values of the reforms, they would be more devoted to applying them to their teaching practices. Then, it is expected to avoid the unsatisfactory results observable in the previous implementation of reforms. Besides, understanding the teachers' perceptions of the necessities of the reforms would help policymakers, administrators, and the teachers themselves recognize their needs in terms of professional development events. As a result, this study could intensely discuss the need for professional development (PD) in English teaching and learning and relevant issues for these needs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Educational Change and Reforms

The conceptualization of change has been explored for years. First, looking for the definitions given by reliable academic dictionaries, such as Oxford and Cambridge, is necessary. According to the Cambridge dictionary, the definition of change is “becoming different”. In the Oxford dictionary, *change* was defined as “the act or result of something becoming different”. Similarly, Flamholtz and Randle (2008) used the term change to refer to anything that is not similar to the original norm. Ibrahim et al. (2013) defined a *change* as an unusual thing created in various ways. Hammonds (2002) defined *change* as unsure stability between constancy and stimulation. Although several definitions of change have been proposed, Burner (2018) asserted that change is compulsory in every corner. In general, change refers to transmitting a particular thing into another thing. More inclusively, a reform carries several changes for bettering things (Martin, 2011). Although the terms “reform” and “change” are defined quite differently, they are used interchangeably in the current study.

In education, El Zaatar (2011) defined *educational change* as how educational stakeholders, especially teachers, students, and administrators, develop their knowledge, skills, and dispositions to transmit from the current teaching and learning to a new one that matches the needs of society. Similarly, Adu-Gyamfi et al. (2016) defined *education reforms* as changes

and policies implemented to promote a country's educational system. Educational change or reform comes from the effects of globalization, the era of information and communication technology (ICT), and the requirements of developing educational organizations (Ibrahim et al., 2013). Besides, Burner (2018) indicated that educational change aims to enhance students' learning and set their development as the ultimate goal. However, these goals will become ambitious and unachievable without effective teaching (Burner, 2018). Fullan (2007) made a list of three different dimensions of educational change, namely new materials (curriculum materials and technologies), new teaching approaches (teaching strategies and activities), and new teaching and learning beliefs (perspectives). Consequently, in order to implement these "new things" (reforms) successfully, it is crucial to discuss the "human beings" factor.

The Impact of Educational Changes on Teachers

Educational reforms profoundly impact teachers' professional work and significantly affect their workload (Madden et al., 2012). When educational changes or reforms occur, teachers have to respond to the changes effectively and the radically changing nature of learners nowadays (Hall, 2009). Therefore, teachers play an essential role in the outcomes of the reforms, failed or successful (Kerr, 2006). Consequently, they have to be sufficiently conversant with the changes by improving their mechanisms, skills, and knowledge. In order to do that, policymakers or administrators are expected to provide teachers with sufficient professional development events, which would sharpen their skills in teaching and acquire widened and broadened knowledge (Lingam et al., 2017). Therefore, educational changes or reforms do not affect students' perceptions only but also their actions.

Educational Changes in the Vietnamese Context

Under the impact of globalization in the 21st century, Vietnam is forced to make changes in several aspects, namely politics, society, technology, economy, and education. The changes require the Vietnamese education system to equip students with new scientific and cultural knowledge and develop their critical thinking, creativity, and teamwork skills. For that, teaching and learning philosophies in Vietnam have significantly changed (Thanh, 2008). The traditional teaching and learning approach, emphasizing too much on individuals, achievements, and information transmission, does not help improve students' critical thinking, creativity, or teamwork skills, which are essential in this era. Therefore, competency-based education can help EFL students become actively involved in their learning process. As a

result, they could be more aware of what they should learn to compete in the job market. Student-centered learning, which is well-recognized in Western education systems, is adopted in the Vietnamese context. Vietnamese policymakers started the ideas with the simple thought that there was no reason why the adopted approaches were successful in other countries but failed in Vietnam.

Consequently, these adoptions are expected to take advantage of the forerunners who make a massive leap by skipping the painfully long research stage (Walker & Dimmock, 2000). Nonetheless, several problems have occurred when implementing the changes due to the mismatch between the Vietnamese education system and others. Cultural values and infrastructure conditions might be the most significant differences. Student-centered approaches are likely to be under expectations because Vietnamese teachers could not apply them to their classes due to several barriers, such as class size, teaching resources, and especially local assumptions about teaching and learning. Facing those failures might damage the teachers' trust in educational reforms.

The Necessities of Educational Reforms

In the Chinese educational context, Tan (2017) asserted that education aims to meet the needs of modernization, world standards, and the future of China. It can be inferred that the Chinese government was making educational changes to catch up with modernization, meet the requirements of the world, and develop human resources for future needs. It cannot deny the role of English learning and teaching (ELT) in their educational change or educational reform (ER) due to the importance of the English language. In the same vein, Le & Nguyen (2017) stated that ELT ERs aim to enhance Vietnamese people's English proficiency for developing the country towards industrialization and modernization. Not much different from the abovementioned perspectives, Burner (2018) listed three leading causes of educational change: the effects of globalization, the advancements in technology, and the increasing research into teaching and learning approaches. These causes or needs are explained by Burner (2018) as follows:

The increase of globalization intentionally leads to a diverse population with specific issues, including cultures, traditions, languages, etc. Thus, the principal mission of education is to help learners survive in a multilingual classroom. Therefore, education needs to reform in order to support its learners in catching up with globalization.

The vast development of technology in this era creates chances as well as challenges, especially in ELT. This development provides new teaching and learning methods, new ways of approaching information, new occupations, and a new door to an unpredictable future. Without changes or reforms, an education system is undoubtedly left behind.

The research database has been enriched for years. It becomes easier to access and collect ideas from those data regarding technological development and worldwide network connection. Moreover, educational research contributes to providing more practical and effective teaching.

The Interaction between Professional Development and Educational Reforms

Richards & Farrell (2005) stated that teachers' professional development (PD) comprises every activity severing long-term objectives and promoting teachers' growth in their teaching. Guskey & Sparks (2000) noted that PD activities are designed to enhance teachers' professional knowledge, teaching skills, attitudes toward teaching in practice, and students' learning outcomes. PD can help teachers use information and communication technologies (ICT) more effectively, keep abreast with evolving educational methods and practice, predict and meet students' needs more accurately, get awarded with personal achievements, stay updated with educational changes, and ensure the effectiveness of ERs (Falk, 2001; Richards & Farrell, 2005; Villegas-Reimers, 2003; Le & Nguyen, 2019; Le, 2020). Consequently, not only develop teachers' professional and students' learning outcomes, but PD is also essential to decide whether a specific educational change is successful or failed. For instance, several previous studies have indicated that the quality of Vietnamese teachers, who lacked training in developing their knowledge and skills to implement the reforms in Project 2020, is considered the primary factor of the project's failure.

Therefore, the current study is not expected to investigate EFL teachers' perceptions of the necessities of ELT ERs in the Vietnamese context only, but it aims to discuss more the link between English teacher professional development training and the implementing reforms. Doing that would provide readers with insightful needs of EFL teachers working in a part of Vietnam.

METHODS

The current study was designed as a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews to gather data. Six participants of this current study were those working in the southwest of Vietnam as the target research site. Their information was kept confidential. Table 1 displays the demographic information of the interviewees.

Table 1. The interviewees

	A	B	C	D	E	F
Gender	Male	Male	Female	Female	Male	Female
Qualification	Bachelor	Master	Bachelor	Master	Bachelor	Bachelor
Workplace	Gifted high school	Regular high school	Regular high school	Gifted high school	Regular high school	Regular high school
Working area	Countryside	Countryside	Countryside	City	Countryside	Countryside
Age	40s	20s	30s	30s	30s	40s
Teaching experience	X >20	X <5	5 < X <20	5 < X <20	5 < X <20	X >20

The interviewing questions mainly aimed to clarify the teachers' insightful understanding of the reforms' necessities in their teaching context. These questions followed a specific structure, beginning with a Yes/no question supported by a "Why?" question. For instance, "Do you think the educational reforms will help enhance your student's learning?" and "Why?" were used in the current research. Because of the Covid-19 infection, it was impossible to employ face-to-face interviews. Thus, Zalo, Skype, and Zoom platforms were used to organize the meetings. Each interview lasted approximately thirty minutes. In order to help the participants express their ideas quickly, comprehensively, and accurately, Vietnamese as their mother tongue was used during the interviews. Before the interviews, the researchers asked for the participants' permission to record and take notes of their answers.

Vietnamese transcriptions were sent to the interviewees to ensure no misunderstanding and misinformation in the notes taken. For the data analysis, these Vietnamese transcription versions were translated into English. The English versions, after that, were double-checked by an expert in the field of translation and interpretation. The analysis results were presented according to themes in the currently used framework. Specifically, there were two main themes: whether the EFL teachers think educational reforms are necessary for their teaching context and what aspects they will benefit from.

Regarding the second theme related to the benefits of reforms, five sub-themes were categorized as follows: reforms help (1) *enhance EFL students' learning*, (2) *develop teachers' knowledge*, (3) *catch up with globalization*, (4) *keep up with technological advancement*, and

(5) *employ the teaching databased research*. The researchers analyzed the data according to themes for qualitative data analysis, following these steps. First, the researchers read through the interview transcripts to be familiar with the data on participants' perceptions of the necessities of ERs, categorized into the five above-mentioned domains. Based on the literature review, all members coded and cross-checked the data to ensure the inter-rater reliability of the data analyses. The themes, as mentioned earlier, were coded in different colors, red for enhancing EFL students' learning, blue for developing teachers' knowledge, yellow for catching up with globalization, green for keeping up with technological advancement, and pink for employing the teaching database research. Then, all excerpts of the same code were grouped. After that, the researchers reviewed, categorized, and compared the codes. Similar codes were then presented; on the other hand, the different ones were sent to an expert in qualitative data coding to check and comment. The codes, commented on by the expert, would be considered carefully to decide whether they should be displayed in this current study.

FINDINGS

First and foremost, Teachers E and D, who shared their strong beliefs in the necessities of ELT ERs in education, said:

“Personally, I think that ELT ERs are extremely necessary. [...] When the word “reform” is mentioned, it means innovation. What is the purpose of innovation? In my opinion, innovation is about something better.”
(E; Male; Bachelor; Regular HS; Countryside; AT 30s years old; 5<Exp<20)

“... Undoubtedly, every educational system has to reform in order to fit with the demands of the world. Reforms in teaching English as a foreign language are absolutely necessary because this language is used as an international language. Therefore, I am very excited to apply reforms to my teaching.”
(D; Female; Master; Gifted HS; City; At 30s years old; 5<Exp<20)

Unlike the benefits mentioned earlier, the participants were aware of the challenges they might face during the implementation of ELT ERs in practice. Teacher B presented,

“Regarding ELT ERs, it is an opportunity to develop myself. However, it also has many issues to discuss. If teachers wanted to develop, there would be many other influential factors, including teaching conditions and opportunities for development,”
(B; Male; Master; Regular HS; Countryside; At 20s years old; Exp<5)

“Of course, no one can deny the necessities of reforms in education. However, when a change occurs, we have to do many things to implement it successfully. From my experience, there have been many failures when we change without taking into careful consideration”

(F; Female; Bachelor; Regular HS; Countryside; At 40s years old; Exp>20)

In order to enhance Vietnamese people’s English competency, it is essential to implement reforms in English teaching and learning. According to what was found in this current study, the teachers were well aware of the necessities of the implemented reforms. Nonetheless, it requires many things to implement these reforms successfully. According to the excerpts, EFL teachers need chances to develop their knowledge and skills.

Catching up with Globalization

The participants highly agreed on the values of ELT ERs in terms of catching up with globalization. Teachers E and F said,

“Recently, student-centered approaches have been widely used worldwide, not teacher-centered. It could be considered a reform in English teaching and learning in Vietnam. You know, if we continued to use traditional teaching approaches, called teacher-centered ones, we would never catch up with the development of other educational systems”

(E; Male; Bachelor; Regular HS; Countryside; AT 30s years old; 5<Exp<20)

“The ELT ERs process is also essential in the era of globalization However, I am aware that it is not easy to implement successfully. Therefore, it needs a lot of efforts that both teachers ourselves, policymakers, and administrators have made.”

(F; Female; Bachelor; Regular HS; Countryside; At 40s years old; Exp>20)

This perspective was reasoned due to the Vietnamese government’s considerable efforts in propagating the values of ELT ERs in practice. Teacher A explained,

“The government usually talks about reforms for the globalization and educational development all the road I agree that the government did well in terms of publishing information about educational changes. Nonetheless, many things need to be completed, especially related to teachers’ competency.”

(A; Male; Bachelor; Gifted HS; City; At 30s years old; 5<Exp<20)

The growth rate of globalization requires the educational system of Vietnam to act, and the implementation of ERs in language teaching and learning has been playing as evidence of its considerable efforts. It was a good sign as the participants were aware of that. Moreover,

teacher competency is considered the primary factor affecting the implementation of reforms. Therefore, further professional development training on developing teacher competency needs more attention.

Developing Teachers' Knowledge

The recognition of self-development encouraged the participants to continue adopting ELT ERs in their teaching. Teacher A shared,

“The adoption of ELT ERs enhanced teachers’ teaching abilities Before adopting ELT ERs in my teaching practices, I was trained in many professional development events. They were really helpful for my adoption of ERs.”
(A; Male; Bachelor; Gifted HS; City; At 30s years old; 5<Exp<20)

In the same vein, Teacher D agreed that she benefited from the ELT ERs, as Teacher A mentioned. Besides promoting students’ learning achievements and teachers’ teaching knowledge, Teacher D added strengthening teacher-student relationships as another advantage of ELT ERs. Teacher D remarked,

“I suppose I upgraded myself when adapting ELT ERs in my teaching. [...] Firstly, as I shared with you from the start of the interview, I feel that ELT ERs are totally good, bring many advantages, bring new teaching methods, and make the distance between teacher and student closer.”
(D; Female; Master; Gifted HS; City; At 30s years old; 5<Exp<20)

The quality of academic staff plays an essential role in implementing EFL ERs. Without a high-quality staff, it becomes overambitious to employ the changes successfully. The teachers’ self-efficacy in their professional development after experiencing ERs showed the effectiveness of ERs and their necessities.

Keeping up with Technological Advancement

The participants were aware of the needs for ELT ERs to utilize the innovations from the database findings in practice. Teacher F contented,

“The openness of the economy and ELT ERs are related because we use the successful teaching methods in the world to reform. From there, we will be able to catch up with them in the field of education. Besides that, the ELT ERs process is also essential in the era of globalization.”
(F; Female; Bachelor; Regular HS; Countryside; At 40s years old; Exp>20)

Also, the participants recognized the values of ELT ERs regarding encouraging their students to keep up with technological advancement. Teacher E said,

“Students also have the opportunity to access the development of technology. Isn't that really good? I like the student-centered approach because it helps my students actively participate in their learning. It especially requires them to use the internet to widen and broaden their horizon ... However, as a teacher, I want to make better use of technological advancement to support my students when needed.”
(E; Male; Bachelor; Regular HS; Countryside; AT 30s years old; 5<Exp<20)

As stated in the previous sections, the development of globalization and technology has brought many benefits to education worldwide. Nonetheless, the above-mentioned rapid growth has required the Vietnamese government to respond quickly and accurately enough to avoid being left behind compared to other education systems.

Enhancing EFL Students' Learning

The participants recognized the differences between the traditional teaching methods and the new ones in which the methods they had learned from the reforms were more effective than the previous ones. Teacher B said,

“The reason I adapted ELT ERs in my teaching was to compare with the traditional teaching methods, the new ones, student-centered teaching methods, focused on students, and improved their learning.”
(B; Male; Master; Regular HS; Countryside; At 20s years old; Exp<5)

In a simplifying explanation, Teacher E stated,

“Actually, ELT ERs can be simply understood as a change. It means that we change from the ways of teaching which are old to the others which are newer to maximize students' abilities for English learning.”
(E; Male; Bachelor; Regular HS; Countryside; AT 30s years old; 5<Exp<20)

However, the teachers also highlighted the importance of professional development in using new teaching methods. Teacher D said,

“In the beginning, it was not easy to apply changes to my teaching because they were too different from what I had learned before. However, I was then trained to

use them more effectively. After understanding how to implement the changes in practice, I felt so satisfied with the results of my students.”
(D; Female; Master; Gifted HS; City; At 30s years old; 5<Exp<20)

From the participants’ perspectives, ELT ERs changed the ways they used to help improve their students’ learning outcomes.

Applying Researched Innovations

Interestingly, the participants had an outstanding awareness of educational research, especially for ELT ERs in Vietnam. Teacher C shared,

“Reforming is good because it must have a reason if they want us to apply these reforms. There has certainly been researched on the effectiveness of these reforms before implementing them in practice. Therefore, I strongly believe in these reforms.”
(C; Female; Bachelor; Regular HS; Countryside; At 30s years old; 5<Exp<20)

However, Teacher D shared her concerns about the innovations researched in other contexts, not in Vietnam. Teacher D remarked,

“I agree that the reforms are carefully considered before implementing widely in the Vietnamese context. However, most of the innovations proposed in these reforms are successful teaching techniques used in other contexts, such as Western teaching ones. Therefore, the techniques should be researched in Vietnamese before they can be used widely in Vietnam. However, it is difficult to read or find an article published in reliable journals describing the techniques”
(D; Female; Master; Gifted HS; City; At 30s years old; 5<Exp<20)

Prior to implementing ERs, the innovations must be successfully administered somewhere. As a result, these innovations hopefully bring some same benefits to a particular context, the Vietnamese one, for instance. However, one-side-fit-all methods have been used in Vietnam, which has caused many problems with implementing these reforms in this context. It is strongly believed that many Vietnamese researchers have been conducting their studies about the impact of the reforms on teaching and learning English in Vietnam, but the productivities published in reliable journals are somehow under-expected.

Teacher F was optimistic about ELT ERs and their role in developing countries and society. Teacher F stated,

“In the reforming process, it not only brings good things to the teachers but also the students. In addition, it will make us more and more developed, and society will become more and more progressive.”

(F; Female; Bachelor; Regular HS; Countryside; At 40s years old; Exp>20)

In short, taken as a whole, the participants were intensely aware of the necessities of ELT ERs in this current study. Additionally, they stated that ELT ERs are essential to help catch up with globalization, develop teachers’ knowledge, keep up with technological advancement, enhance students’ learning outcomes, employ teaching innovations, and contribute to bettering society.

DISCUSSION

For Catching Up with Globalization

The participants strongly perceived that ELT ERs were implemented in Vietnam to catch up with internationalization and globalization. Heller (2010) explained the conceptualization of globalization and that it plays a crucial role in constructing political, economic, social, and even educational agendas worldwide. Also, it emphasizes the importance of English in actualizing the ideal of globalization or internationalization, particularly in Vietnam. Therefore, ELT ERs are extremely important.

Nonetheless, Vietnam could not guarantee the standardized criteria for high-quality education for several reasons, namely unqualified academic staff, financial problems, and so on (Dung, 2004). Also, the painful truth to Vietnamese educators has been stated that educational innovations in Vietnam are still a bit messy, confusing, and disappointing even though the increase in the number of students, educational institutions, and opportunities for Vietnamese people to approach English as an international language has been observed. Therefore, policymakers and administrators are expected to critically evaluate the values of previous innovations and provide their teachers with sufficient training to implement them.

For Developing Teachers’ Knowledge

The teachers also believed ELT ERs were necessary for their professional development related to the abovementioned concerns. The term professional development (PD) and its values in ELT classes have been extensively well-explored. It provides teachers opportunities

to update their professional knowledge and skills (Knapp, 2003), stay employable, and competently need the ever-growing demands of society (Guskey, 2002), and so on.

The interaction between ERs and teachers' PD is explained as a two-way or reciprocal relationship in the book entitled "*Teacher professional development an international review of literature*" by Villegas-Reimers (2003). Villegas-Reimers concluded that teachers' PD is the principal factor affecting the reforms at any level, including the international, national, or local one. Therefore, it was a promising sign when the participants of this study seemed to be aware of this complicated interaction.

However, as stated as a complicated interaction, it was also true to say that strengthening this interaction is not straightforward due to many influential factors. Systemized from the studies by Thieman (2000) and Thao & Mai (2020), the influential factors could include three primary levels, namely national, local, and individual level. First, as mentioned, everything changes rapidly in this era of globalization. Hence, the government has to make timely and intelligent decisions to catch up with the evolution of the world, or at least not to be left behind. Second, local policies must be sufficiently supportive of changes before asking teachers to make them, address teachers' needs in terms of institutional arrangements, provide chances to take part in extra-curricular programs, and so on (Villegas-Reimers, 2003). Finally, individual teachers have to be responsible for their PD to implement the reforms effectively.

For Keeping Up with Technological Advancement

The participants of this current study also highly agreed that the implementation of ELT ERs is for keeping up with technological advancement.

It is not easy to list all the benefits of this networked age, which helps improve the quality of education and sets the stage for an influential learning culture. However, technological advancement is also a double-edged knife since its strengths go hand in hand with its weaknesses. It has allowed people with shared interests to meet, express their ideas, and collaborate innovatively; however, to participate in this community, participants have no choice other than meet its requirements based on their expected contributions or critical practices (Brown, 2000). As a result, a lack of ability to contribute and demonstrate acceptable practices might prevent citizens from taking advantage of the advancement of technologies.

ICT applications, as a representative of technological advancement in education, have both advantages and disadvantages. Bryderup and Kowalski (2002) proposed a rhetorical paradox in ICT policy: ICT may positively affect EFL classes, but it also causes equivalent

problems without practical uses. Dang (2011) found that one hundred percent of EFL teachers in a study conducted in Ha Noi, the Vietnamese capital, had been aware of the benefits of ICT in EFL classes. It could enhance lesson preparation, improve teaching performance, increase teaching productivity, promote students' autonomous learning, facilitate a shift from teacher-centered to student-centered approaches, and enhance students' learning outcomes and future employability. However, from a different perspective, Dang (2011) also pointed out that positive attitudes towards ICT in EFL classes do not mean teachers can apply it in practice. Therefore, in the Vietnamese context, the need for training on using ICT in EFL classes has been increasing, and these needs have become more urgent in the age of ERs in the Vietnamese context.

Peeraer & Van Petergem (2012) analyzed technology planning documents in ICT policy in Vietnam. They found a significant gap between the rhetoric in the policy guidelines and the implementation of ICT in teaching practices. Lee et al. (2008) also stated that the guidelines were insufficient to define what teachers should do to integrate ICT into their teaching practice. Besides, teachers' needs did not catch the attention of training planners, and even training on developing teachers' use of ICT in EFL classes was limited (Peeraer & Van Petergem, 2012).

Regarding the analysis, the quality of Vietnamese teachers' use of ICT in their classrooms is put on a huge question mark, especially related to its potential for meeting the expectations of ELT ERs. Therefore, the experience in providing insufficient guidelines for the use of ICT in EFL classes in Vietnam could be helpful in other educational contexts.

For Enhancing Students' Learning Outcomes

It is nothing unintelligible to observe these high perceptions from the participants regarding the meanings of ELT ERs in developing students' learning outcomes. However, the curiosity about how teachers respond to ELT ERs when these reforms could not provide better student learning outcomes after the interventions drove the following discussions. Thieman (2000) viewed students' learning outcomes as the chief reason teachers continue applying these reforms in their classes or stop. The answer was illustrated in the study by Thao and Mai (2020), which stated that the factor on students' learning outcomes was the most influential factor affecting teachers' responses to the reforms. The factor of students' learning outcomes as the ultimate goal or objective is not irrational. However, the expectations of gaining positive results after implementing ELT ERs may intentionally become high pressure on teachers. To provide the teachers with sufficient support, policymakers and administrators need to deal with

teachers' psychological issues as well as their skills and knowledge. In addition to providing EFL teachers with sufficient training on their teaching skills and knowledge, EFL teachers are expected to participate in the training on controlling their mentality to familiarize themselves with the above-mentioned psychological issues. Consequently, dealing with these issues is not as difficult as imagined.

For Employing the Teaching Innovations

Compared before and after conducting the current study, it was surprising to observe that the participants highly perceived the necessities of ELT ERs in supporting them to employ educational research findings in the Vietnamese teaching context. In other words, it means they were highly aware of the interaction between EFL ERs and innovations in English pedagogy. As a backtrack of the previous literature related to the importance of innovative pedagogies, Paniagua & Instance (2018) shared their lens on the pedagogical focus that teachers have become experts in the art and science of teaching rather than just technicians striving to attain the objectives set by their superiors. Additionally, innovations in teaching and learning play “the root” of teachers' professionalism rather than “the branch” for particular groups of teachers to deal with spectacular cases. Not here as the stop point of the discussions around the importance of innovative pedagogies, Paniagua & Instance (2018) emphasized their role in providing a snapshot of teaching and learning methods used in different educational contexts, setting stages for educators and even policymakers to identify the potential seeds for changes in their working contexts, and so on.

However, in the Vietnamese context, Phuong et al. (2017) found that time constraints and financial issues might be significant barriers preventing lecturers and teachers from researching. Therefore, the assumption that most teachers just adopted what was in the documents of ERs rather than exploring issues around it by doing research was possible to happen. As a result, Vietnamese research productivity in the humanities and social sciences was low (Pham & Hayden, 2019). Many factors caused this low level, such as the lack of concerns about political censorship, the permissiveness of national publishers, and the lack of self-confidence in writing English papers.

For the first reason mentioned above, institutional and organizational supports are essential to push teachers' willingness to pay more attention to teaching innovations. Nguyen et al. (2021) stated that not only does it increase teachers' motivation for researching, but also the support from working organizations and educational institutions also promotes teachers'

expectations of employing their research. Additionally, it has raised an issue that EFL teachers' abilities to conduct their research should get more attention. Therefore, sufficient training in developing the teachers' research skills is expected to organize.

The second reason for the low level of high-quality social science papers written by Vietnamese authors was partly explained in the study by Vuong (2019), which discussed the harsh world of publishing in Vietnam. Specifically, there was a race to publish scientific papers in which Vietnam researchers were financially encouraged to publish their research in international and domestic journals. As a consequence, it was easy to observe the recent increase in scientific publications. However, this race seemed to have its traps and pitfalls as many as its given opportunities. Also, Vuong (2019) mentioned a hard-to-accept reality that publishers and authors from developed countries have dominated publishing standards in academic issues for years. The question of how Vietnamese domestic journals catch up with their high impact factor may need a long time to seek answers.

Last but not least, teachers' proficiency has not been a new issue in Vietnam anymore; lacking self-confidence in writing abilities also prevented them from maximizing the value of innovative pedagogical beliefs of Paniagua & Instance (2018). As the root of self-professionalism, teachers' innovations should spread in and out of domestic burdens. Therefore, training in writing research should be discussed more. Related to what writing is, Nystrand (2006) knitted the following elements: clarity, grammatical correctness, and preferred usage. Among the three stages of writing skills, including knowledge-telling, knowledge-transforming, and upper knowledge-transforming as knowledge-crafting (Kellogg, 2008), those teachers who want to publish their research in high-quality journals have to reach the highest stage, knowledge-crafting. It not only presents planned content, the text itself, and prospective readers' interpretations, but it also displays a high level of cognitive control over the maintenance of multiple aspects of the text. As a result, planning PD to provide teachers with efficient instructions for scientific writing is not an easy mission, especially in developing countries that lack qualified trainers as scientific writers (Pham & Hayden, 2019).

For Contributing to Bettering Society

Interestingly, the current study participants recognized the interaction between educational and social changes. The interaction between education and society has been questioned for years. In the USA, it took them nearly a century to confirm that education truly has the power to change society (Apple, 2012). In the book "*Multicultural Education in a*

Pluralistic Society”, which has been well-known as state-of-the-art literature by Gollnick and Chin (1994), the integration of multicultural education throughout the mandated curriculum can develop both teachers’ and students’ critical thinking about racism, sexism, ableism, ageism, and homophobia.

Education has strongly affected social and political persistence and change in the Vietnamese context and vice versa (Huong & Fry, 2004). In the study by Huong & Fry (2004), they listed four main social influential groups affecting educational changes in Vietnam: Chinese Confucian influences, French colonial influences, Soviet and US influences during the Cold War, and contemporary international global influences.

Understanding the complexity of cultural and social influential clusters affecting educational changes helps Vietnamese educators give equal educational opportunities to all students as well as prepare them based-knowledge of the globalized and multicultural world (Long et al., 2019), where they are well aware of the spectacular identities forged with the pride of the history of the country. Social work education must be clarified; however, several debates surrounding social work education still exist, such as the lack of qualified Vietnamese trainers and the inappropriateness of recruiting international consultants due to conflicts in cultures (Hugman et al., 2009). Needs for high-quality Vietnamese social work trainers, as well as sufficient teacher training on social skills, have been stated clearly.

CONCLUSION

The current study promoted the understanding of ELT ERs in the Vietnamese context. The most striking results to emerge from the data are that the participants, as the representatives of Vietnamese EFL teachers, were highly aware of the importance of ELT ERs in Vietnam.

It is a good chance for EFL teachers to reflect on their understanding of ELT ERs, especially their necessities in the era of globalization. Thence, it strengthens their faith in the values of the reforms in their development and their teaching performance in practice. Also, it encourages EFL teachers to develop themselves to support the ideals of the Minister of Education and Training throughout the ERs. Without their sufficient competencies, the ideals can be ideals only. Recently, opportunities for teacher professional development have been rich. EFL teachers can learn online and offline courses without any registration fee, often providing them with extensive teaching resources and completing certificates. Therefore, they are recommended to register to learn and develop their knowledge and skills.

Although the role of institutional administrators has not been made clear in the current study, some particular aspects of EFL teachers' PD, especially teachers' motivational issues, have been significantly affected by the administrators' support. Therefore, it is crucial to raise awareness of their role in a broader view of the development of teachers and the outcomes of ERs. Thus, the Minister of Education and Training is encouraged to collaborate with domestic television stations to discuss the roles of stakeholders, including the institutional administrators. Doing so may be an excellent way to enhance their awareness.

Policymakers greatly impact the outcomes of EFL ERs and teachers' sense of empowerment. Consequently, they should be aware of the influence level of their decisions related to the reforms to make them unrealistic and unachievable. Besides, this current study has contributed to detailing particular teachers' PD training needs, specifically on using ICT in EFL classes, scientific writing, or delivering multicultural classes.

LIMITATIONS AND STUDY FORWARD

This current paper has discussed in-depth issues about EFL ERs, especially in a region of the Vietnamese context. Consequently, further research in the field will have a reliable source to help them better understand and strengthen their perspectives on ERs.

As said, experience is the father of wisdom. Although the contribution of the current study can be significant, the findings are difficult to generalize the whole education of Vietnam due to its sampling. Therefore, further research should be conducted with a larger population. Besides, K12 teachers' perspectives cannot fulfill the picture of ERs. Eventually, other educational stakeholders, including institutional administrators, policymakers, EFL students, and so on, should be given opportunities to voice up.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

No words of thanks can fully show the gratitude the research team owes to the participants of this current study. Thanks to their participation, this study is promising to contribute to a better understanding of the field of educational changes.

REFERENCES

Adu-Gyamfi, S., Donkoh, W. J., & Addo, A. A. (2016). Educational reforms in Ghana: Past and present. *Journal of Education and Human Development*, 5(3), 158-172.

- Apple, M. W. (2012). *Can education change society?* Routledge.
- Brown, J. S. (2000). Growing up: Digital: How the web changes work, education, and the ways people learn. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 32(2), 11-20.
- Bryderup, I. M., & Kowalski, K. (2002). The role of local authorities in the integration of ICT in learning. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, 18(4), 469-479.
- Burner, T. (2018). Why is educational change so difficult and how can we make it more effective? *Forskning og forandring*, 1(1), 122-134.
- Dang, X. T. (2011). Factors influencing teachers' use of ICT in language teaching: A case study of Hanoi University, Vietnam. In Simonelli (Ed.), *International Conference "ICT for Language Learning" (4th ed)*.
- Dung, D. H. (2004). Centralism—the dilemma of educational reforms in Vietnam. In D. McCargo (Ed.), *Rethinking Vietnam* (pp. 159-168). Routledge.
- El Zaatar, A. W. M. (2011). *Resistance to educational change from the perspective of teachers in Al Ain Educational Zone in UAE* [Master thesis]. United Arab Emirates University.
- Falk, B. (2001). Professional learning through assessment. In A. Lieberman and L. Miller (Eds.), *Teachers Caught in the Action: The Work of Professional Development* (pp. 118-40). Teachers College Press.
- Flamholtz, E. G., & Randle, Y. (2008). *Leading strategic change*. Cambridge University Press.
- Fullan, M. (2007). *The new meaning of educational change* (4th ed.). Teachers College Press.
- Gollnick, D. M., & Chinn, P. C. (1994). *Multicultural education in a pluralistic society*. Merrill.
- Guskey, T. R. (2002). Professional development and teacher change. *Teachers and teaching: Theory and practice*, 8(3/4), 381-391.
- Guskey, T. R., & Sparks, D. (2000). *Evaluating professional development*. Corwin Press.
- Hall, G. (2009). The everyday practices of partnership: The interactional work of participants in a school and university collaboration. In M. Cooper (Ed.). *Teacher Education: Local and Global-Australian Teacher Education Association 33rd Annual Conference* (199-206).
- Hammonds, B. (2002). The latest ideas on school reform by Michael Fullan. *Leading and Learning for the 21stC*, 1(3).
- Harvey, T. R., & Broyles, E. A. (2010). *Resistance to change: A guide to harnessing its positive power*. R&L Education.

- Heller, H. (2010). Language as resource in the globalized new economy. In N. Coupland (Ed.), *Handbook of Language and Globalisation*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Hugman, R., Durst, D., Loan, L. H., Lan, N. T. T., & Hong, N. T. (2009). Developing social work in Vietnam: Issues in professional education. *Social Work Education, 28*(2), 177-189.
- Huong, P. L., & Fry, G. W. (2004). Education and economic, political, and social change in Vietnam. *Educational Research for Policy and Practice, 3*(3), 199-222.
- Ibrahim, A., Al-Kaabi, A., & El-Zaatari, W. (2013). Teacher resistance to educational change in the United Arab Emirates. *International Journal of Research Studies in Education, 2*(3), 25-36.
- Kellogg, R. T. (2008). Training writing skills: A cognitive developmental perspective. *Journal of Writing Research, 1*, 1-26.
- Kerr, L. (2006). *Between caring and counting: Teachers take on education reform*. University of Toronto Press.
- Knapp, M. S. (2003). Chapter 4: Professional development as a policy pathway. *Review of Research in Education, 27*(1), 109-157.
- Le, V. C. & Nguyen, N. T. (2017). Đề án ngoại ngữ quốc gia 2020 có thể học được gì từ kinh nghiệm châu Á? *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies, 33*(4), 10-23.
- Le, X. M. (2020). EFL lecturers' needs for professional development: A case study of an institution in the Mekong Delta. *Can Tho University Journal of Science, 12*(3), 7-16.
- Le, X.M., & Nguyen, T. M. T. (2019). Professional development for highschool teachers: A case in the Mekong Delta. In *Proceedings of 1st International Conference on Innovation of Teacher Education: Twenty Years of Development: A Model for Inner-Institutional Teacher Training* (pp. 74-85). National University Press.
- Lee, Y. J., Hung, D., & Cheah, H. M. (2008). IT and educational policy in the Asia-pacific region. In J. Voogt & G. Knezek (Eds.), *International Handbook of Information Technology in Primary and Secondary Education* (pp. 1119-1132). Springer.
- Lingam, G., Lingam, N., & Sharma, L. (2017). Educational reforms and implications on teachers' world of work: Perspectives of Fijian primary teachers. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education (Online), 42*(1), 19-35.
- Long, P. T., Hue, N. T., Nhat, H. T., Chinh, C. D., Van Tuan, N., Van Anh, D. T., & Ha, L. T. T. (2019). Multicultural Education in higher education in Vietnam. *American Journal of Educational Research, 7*(3), 189-193.
- Madden, J., Wilks, J., Maione, M., Loader, N., & Robinson, N. (2012). Journeying together: Understanding the process of teacher change and the impacts on student learning. *International Studies in Educational Administration, 40*(2), 19-35.

- Martin, J. R. (2011). *Education reconfigured: Culture, encounter, and change*. Routledge.
- Nguyen, H. T. M., & Burns, A. (2017). Teacher language proficiency and reform of English language education in Vietnam, 2008-2020. *Phnom Penh*, 19.
- Nguyen, N. H. (2013). Report on orientations in testing and assessment of English and other foreign languages in the national education system during 2013-2020. In *Seminar on Strategies of the National Foreign Language Project*.
- Nguyen, T. D., Bui, T. H. V., Nguyen, T. L. T., Tran, M. D., & Tran, T. K. N. (2021). Perception of organizational support to lecturers' research motivation: The case of Vietnam. *The Journal of Asian Finance, Economics, and Business*, 8(2), 657-666.
- Nystrand, M. (2006). The social and historical context for writing research. In C. A. MacArthur, S. Graham, & J. Fitzgerald (Eds.), *Handbook of Writing Research* (pp. 11-27). The Guilford Press.
- Paniagua, A., & Istance, D. (2018). *Teachers as designers of learning environments: The importance of innovative pedagogies*. Educational Research and Innovation. OECD Publishing. <http://doi.org/10.1787/9789264085374-en>
- Peeraer, J., & Van Petegem, P. (2012). Information and communication technology in teacher education in Vietnam: From policy to practice. *Educational Research for Policy and Practice*, 11(2), 89-103.
- Pham, L. T., & Hayden, M. (2019). Research in Vietnam: The experience of the humanities and social sciences. *Journal of International and Comparative Education*, 8(1), 27-40.
- Pham, T. N., & Bui, L. T. P. (2019). An exploration of students' voices on the English graduation benchmark policy across northern, central and southern Vietnam. *Language Testing in Asia*, 9(1), 1-20.
- Phuong, Y. H., Ly, P. T. B., & Vo, Q. P. (2017). Factors inhibiting English lecturers from doing research: The case of the Mekong Delta, Vietnam. *Phranakhon Rajabhat Research Journal (Humanities and Social Sciences)*, 12(2), 60-72.
- Richards, J. C., & Farrell, T. S. C. (2005). *Professional development for language teachers: Strategies for teacher learning*. Ernst Klett Sprachen.
- Tan, C. (2017). Constructivism and pedagogical reform in China: Issues and challenges. *Globalization, Societies and Education*, 15(2), 238-247.
- Thanh, P. T. H. (2008). The roles of teachers in implementing educational innovation: The case of implementing cooperative learning in Vietnam. *Asian Social Science*, 4(1).
- Thao, L. T., & Mai, L. X. (2020). English language teaching reforms in Vietnam: EFL teachers' perceptions of their responses and the influential factors. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, 1-12.
- Thieman, G. Y. (2000). *Factors influencing middle school teachers to change classroom practice in response to standards-based reform*. Portland State University.

- Tran, L. T., & Marginson, S. (2018). Internationalisation of Vietnamese higher education: An overview. In *Internationalisation in Vietnamese Higher Education* (pp. 1-16). Springer.
- Villegas-Reimers, E. (2003). *Teacher professional development: An international review of the literature*. International Institute for Educational Planning.
- Vuong, Q. H. (2019). The harsh world of publishing in emerging regions and implications for editors and publishers: The case of Vietnam. *Learned Publishing*, 32(4), 314-324.
- Walker, A., & Dimmock, C. (2000). One size fits all? Teacher appraisal in a Chinese culture. *Journal of Personnel Evaluation in Education*, 14(2), 155-178.