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Foreword

Volume 27, Issue 2 of The English as a Foreign Language International Journal (EFLIJ) provides three comprehensive articles on the different facets of teaching English as a foreign language.

In the first article, *Exploring English Pronunciation Teaching in Vietnam: Time for a New Approach?* Hai Yen Vu and Stephen H. Moore delve into the issue of Vietnamese learners' English pronunciation, which despite many attempts to improve it, persists as a significant challenge. It notes the existence of prior research that has compared the phonology of English and Vietnamese. However, this paper takes a different approach by examining the social, psychological, and cultural factors that impact Vietnamese learners' English pronunciation. To achieve this, the study investigates the attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs of learners and teachers at a private English Language Centre. The study's findings reveal that the conflict between viewing language as a system versus a social practice creates a dilemma for stakeholders regarding their goals, challenges, and possible solutions. This paper presents a study that builds on previous research to provide a more comprehensive understanding of teaching and learning English pronunciation (EP) at an English Language Centre in Vietnam. It highlights the differences in perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes of learners and teachers regarding the main goals and difficulties in learning and teaching EP. The teaching and learning of EP in Vietnam have primarily focused on viewing language as a system and have paid little attention to language as a social practice. However, despite many attempts to address these issues, the same problems persist due to the system's long-standing practices. The paper suggests a need for a new approach that balances the two opposing views of language as a system and language as a social practice to equip learners with both knowledge and skills to use English effectively in communication. Although changing the system is a daunting task, it is necessary to address the needs of English language learners in Vietnam's educational system.

In the second article, *Vietnamese Undergraduate English-majored Students’ Beliefs about English Language Learning*, Hieu Manh Do and Huong Phan Thu Le investigated the beliefs of Vietnamese undergraduate English-majored students about five factors related to English language learning: self-efficacy, the roles of teachers and students, the nature of learning, and expectations. The study found that students rated their role and self-efficacy much higher than the teacher's role, learning nature, and traditional learning orientation. Gender did not significantly impact learners' beliefs, except for self-efficacy and traditional learning orientation, with male learners showing higher self-efficacy and females having a greater preference for traditional orientation. The study suggests pedagogical implications for task-based language teaching and learner-centered instruction based on the results. Further, the study examines Vietnamese students' beliefs about English language learning and finds that they are highly aware of their self-efficacy and have a more active role in their learning process than teachers. They believe that repetition, practice, and listening to English channels are essential for learning, while L1 translation and using Vietnamese in an English class are not encouraged. However, the study has some limitations, including a small sample size and only using a quantitative method. The study implies that future research should consider expanding the number of participants and using qualitative methods, such as interviews with students and teachers, to gain a deeper understanding of their learning preferences.

has led to the replacement of face-to-face classes with online classes, and this has brought about potential areas and challenges that need to be explored from the perspectives of both teachers and students. To investigate these perceptions, a mixed-methods study was conducted in the EFL context of Iran. The study used a random sampling method to select 200 female students and 25 female teachers for the quantitative part, and 20 students and 5 teachers for the qualitative part. The data were collected through a questionnaire and a focus group discussion and were analyzed using percentage calculation and content analysis. The findings indicated that participants had mixed feelings about online classes, with some finding them comfortable and convenient, while others found them boring and unengaging. The lack of reliable devices and erratic internet connection also posed a challenge. However, online learning was found to have potential benefits in terms of flexibility, efficacy, and motivation, while the challenges included extra workload, lack of face-to-face interaction, and difficulty in assessing students’ abilities. Based on the findings, the study suggests various implications for different stakeholders. Moreover, it aimed to investigate teachers’ and students’ perceptions of online courses during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results showed that online classes have both potential and challenges. The potential areas include flexibility, efficacy, and promoted motivation, while the challenges entail extra workload, lack of face-to-face interactions, and difficulty in assessing students’ ability. To adopt online classes, traditional modes of education need to be reformed. The voices of teachers and students should be considered to humanize the practices and solve challenges. The study suggests some implications such as improving internet connectivity, equipping organizations with modern technologies, holding online training workshops, and preparing for blended classes. Further research is recommended to explore the topic in other parts of the country, in higher education centers, using different data collection instruments.

Volume 27, Issue 2 of The English as a Foreign Language International Journal (EFLIJ) provides readers with a valuable and insightful collection of articles on teaching English as a foreign language. The three articles explore different facets of teaching and learning English in Vietnam and Iran, covering issues related to pronunciation, beliefs about language learning, and the challenges and potential benefits of online classes in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors provide comprehensive research and analysis, highlighting the attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs of learners and teachers towards these issues. The findings reveal the importance of addressing social, psychological, and cultural factors when teaching English as a foreign language, as well as the need to balance the traditional approach of viewing language as a system with a more communicative approach that emphasizes language as a social practice. The authors also suggest pedagogical implications for improving the teaching and learning of English, such as incorporating task-based language teaching and learner-centered instruction. Overall, this collection of articles offers valuable insights and recommendations for both teachers and learners of English as a foreign language.

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Exploring English pronunciation teaching in Vietnam: Time for a new approach?

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Abstract
This paper explores the issue of Vietnamese learners’ pronunciation of English and why, despite considerable efforts over decades, it seems to remain an intractable problem. There is already substantial existing literature comparing phonology between English and Vietnamese. This paper reports a case study that looks beyond this dimension and focuses on social, psychological, and cultural aspects impacting Vietnamese learners of English and their pronunciation. This study investigates attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs of two key stakeholder groups: learners and teachers, in a private-sector English Language Centre. The findings show how the ‘language as a system’ versus ‘language as social practice’ dilemma plays out in conflicted responses regarding goals, challenges, and possible solutions.

Keywords: Teaching English pronunciation, English language teaching, language as system, language as social practice.
Introduction

As evidenced in a growing body of research worldwide, English Pronunciation (EP) teaching and learning is largely neglected relative to other aspects of language learning in English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as Foreign Language (EFL) contexts (Canagarajah, 2005; Hismanoglu, 2006; Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2010; Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011; Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2013; Ketabi & Saeb, 2015). Indeed, EP is not only avoided by teachers (Brown, 1992; Claire, 1993; Fraser, 2000; Yates, 2001) but also by learners (Gilakjani, 2012), many of whom believe EP to present substantial challenges (Gilakjani, 2011; Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011).

Historically, Vietnam, like most other countries in East Asia, used “teacher-centred, book-centred, and grammar-translation methods” to teach EFL (Liu & Littlewood, 1997) (cited in Son, 2011, p.37), where learners would show “a great deal of dependence on the teacher” (Tomlinson & Dat, 2004, p. 200), and were positioned to receive knowledge, mainly from their teachers. Learning and teaching activities placed great emphasis on grammar, reading and writing, while oral skills seemed to be ignored by both teachers and learners. EP, consequently, became an aspect of language learning that was considered relatively unimportant and little time was devoted to it. The main aim of learning and teaching was to pass examinations. The result of this approach was that “students may achieve the highest scores in the exams but fail to show their excellence in real life performance” (Hoang, 1999, p. 79; see also Huy, 2006).

In more recent times, with English being recognized as playing an increasingly important role in Vietnam’s communication with the outside world, EP has now received more attention as Vietnamese people know it is a crucial factor contributing to their success in communicating well in English. However, EP is not easy to learn, especially for Vietnamese people (Cunningham, 2009). Indeed, scholars have shown that though Vietnamese learners spend many years learning English in school domestically (or even overseas), they still find it hard to be understood by foreigners (Huy, 2006; Nguyen, 2007; Cunningham, 2010; Tweedy, 2012; Lin, 2014).

Findings from these studies are valuable to all Vietnamese learners who dream of having better EP by providing them with knowledge about phonological and speech articulatorly aspects of English. Unfortunately, despite the availability of this knowledge, Vietnamese learners of English continue to show slight improvement in learning EP and in recent research, scholars have noted that Vietnamese learners still encounter problems with EP (Lin, 2014; Nguyen, 2015). Thus, this scenario raises the question of what exactly hinders Vietnamese learners in learning EP if it is not EP knowledge alone that matters.
This study, therefore, aims to address this gap by investigating the goals and challenges that Vietnamese learners and teachers have beyond English phonological and speech articulatory knowledge when learning and teaching EP. It is inspired by the argument made by Saraceni (2015) that takes a critical approach to the central dilemma of reconciling ‘language as system’ with ‘language as social practice.’ The EP teaching approach to date in Vietnam has largely focused on English as a system of sounds to be deconstructed and mastered individually, whereas communicative English demands a focus on socially purposeful uses of English in Vietnam. Ultimately, this study aims to shed light on aspects of EP that could suggest ways for changing and improving learning and teaching practices.

2. Literature review

2.1 Goals in learning and teaching EP

2.1.1 Goals in learning EP

According to Jenkins (1998), as English is now increasingly used as an international language, the goal to achieve a native-like accent is not the ultimate target of a majority of learners and communicating with native speakers is no longer their principal motivation for learning English. Jenkins argues that English learners need to be successful in communication with non-native speakers from various L1 backgrounds. Thus, it is necessary to consider which pronunciation norms and models are the most suitable for learners of English whose purpose is to use English as an international communication tool (Jenkins, 1998). Tergujeff (2013) observes that the literature on learners’ self-reports on goals in English pronunciation has shown many interesting results. For example, Pihko (1997) and Dalton-Puffer et al. (1997) discovered that learners show negative attitudes towards (their own) non-native and outer-circle (Kachru 1985) varieties of English, and they tend to prefer accents that are familiar to them, such as British Received Pronunciation (Dalton-Puffer et al. 1997; Waniek-Klimczak & Klimczak, 2005) (also see Derwing, 2003). In Timmis’s (2002) survey that examined attitudes of 400 students from 14 different countries towards native and non-native English, the results revealed that learners “saw native-speaker pronunciation as a benchmark of achievement” (p. 242). Similarly, Rindal and Piercy (2013) found that American English was the preferred English pronunciation standard of Norwegian learners (29 out of 70 participants), followed by British English (23 participants). In contrast, Tergujeff (2013), in a more recent study on learner perspectives on English pronunciation teaching in an EFL context (Finland), found that fluency and intelligibility were reported as the learners’ main goals in English pronunciation and they showed no ambition to learn a specific variety of English.
2.1.2 Goals in teaching EP

Takagishi (2012), in research on non-native English teachers’ views towards goals and models of pronunciation teaching, found that among six teacher participants, three would target a native-like accent and the other three would target a non-native but intelligible accent for their teaching. In the same vein, Coskun (2011), in a study examining future English teachers’ attitudes towards teaching pronunciation within an EIL perspective, found that there were more future English teachers (46 out of 47) who believed the goal of pronunciation teaching is to help students become clear and intelligible rather than to help students become as native-like as possible (41 out of 47). Jenkins (2005), in her in-depth interviews with eight non-native teachers of English about their attitudes toward their own accents and desire for native-like accents, discovered that all participants showed “ambivalence” concerning their attitudes toward their own accents. They considered native accents as “good”, “perfect”, “correct”, “proficient”, “competent”, “fluent”, “real” or “original” English, whereas non-native accents were “not good”, “wrong”, “incorrect”, “not real”, “fake”, “deficient” or “strong” (p. 541). In a survey conducted by Timmis (2002), over 180 teachers of English from 45 different countries were asked about their attitudes toward “accented intelligibility” and “native-speaker pronunciation”. The results show that teachers tended to perceive “accented intelligibility” as the most desirable outcome, and many of them believed that “native-speaker pronunciation” is “the benchmark of perfection, and therefore it is axiomatic that this should [only] be the long-term goal” (p. 243). Also, many teacher participants in this survey were reported to show no preference, and they considered the choice of pronunciation model as a decision to be made by their students.

2.2 Techniques of pronunciation teaching and learning

The techniques that language teachers use to teach pronunciation in the classroom merit consideration. According to Hismanoglu and Hismanoglu (2010), language teachers traditionally make use of

“The phonetic alphabet, and activities such as transcription practice, diagnostic passages, detailed description of the articulatory systems, recognition/discrimination tasks, developmental approximation drills, focused production tasks (e.g., minimal pair drills, contextualized sentence practice, reading of short passages or dialogues, reading aloud/recitation), tongue twisters, and games (e.g., Pronunciation Bingo)” (p. 985).

Celce-Murcia et al. (1996) also point out some other techniques for pronunciation teaching, such as listening and imitating, using visual aids, the practice of vowel shifts, and stress shifts related to affixation and using recordings of learner’s own speech production.
However, any one technique cannot on its own address all problems; some learners may find it beneficial to learn pronunciation through some of these techniques while others may find certain techniques ineffective for them. Thus, determining which techniques to use for which learners is an important issue and largely depends on what is understood to be the main pronunciation goal of the learners and teachers. Is it, for example, the attainment of native-speaker-like accents or the attainment of more general intelligibility?

### 2.3 Challenging in teaching EP

According to Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011), “pronunciation can be one of the most challenging parts for a language learner to master and one of the least favorite topics for teachers to address in the classroom” (p. 81). Research has shown that problems encountered by English language teachers are varied; however, some are more fundamental and more frequently perceived, such as the lack of ability (i.e., pedagogical knowledge) to teach pronunciation and the shortage of sufficient teacher training programs (Foote, Holtby & Derwing, 2012). For example, Wahid and Sulong (2013), in their study on the gap between research and practice of pronunciation teaching, found that teacher participants show their reluctance to teach pronunciation which, the authors claimed, originates from teachers’ inability to teach the required skills. In addition, Thomson (2012), in research to investigate ESL teachers' beliefs and practices in pronunciation teaching, discovered that many English language teachers are unlikely to have sufficient background knowledge and lack the necessary confidence to critically assess questionable pronunciation beliefs and practices, which they may discover in their teaching materials. Thomson further concludes that it is necessary for language teacher education programs to offer English language teachers courses specifically on teaching pronunciation.

### 2.4 Challenges in learning EP

Foreign language learners inevitably encounter challenges (Kucukoglu, 2012), especially in pronunciation (Gilakjani, 2012). In the Vietnamese context, researchers have conducted many studies on challenges that Vietnamese learners have in learning English pronunciation. For example, Tam (2005), in her study on pronunciation problems of Vietnamese learners of English, found three common errors when pronouncing English: (1) sound omission (medial and final sounds); (2) sound confusion (e.g., t = ʧ, tr = ʧ or ʤ = z/d); and (3) sound redundancy (e.g., s, z). Nguyen (2007) investigated Vietnamese learners and their challenges in pronouncing English final consonants; and Ha (2007) discovered that Vietnamese learners of English have three common errors when pronouncing English: sound omission (medial and
final sounds), sound confusion (e.g., t = /ʃ/, tr = /ʃɭ/ or z/d = /ð/) and sound redundancy (e.g., s, z). Tuan (2011) conducted research to examine the most problematic English consonants for Vietnamese students at a Vietnamese university. The findings revealed that students had the most difficulty in pronouncing the English fricatives /ʃ/, /ʒ/ and the affricates /tʃ/ and /dʒ/ and that they were likely to substitute Vietnamese sounds for the English sounds. Also, a study conducted by Dang (2014) showed that Vietnamese learners of English had many pronunciation problems that could reduce their speech intelligibility.

2.5 ‘Language as system’ versus ‘language as social practice’ views

Saraceni (2015) discusses at length two broad and opposing views of the nature of language and notes that one perspective on language learning sees language “as a system which can be described and studied. The other considers language a form of social practice, that is, inseparable from any human activity that it is used as an integral part of” (p. 10). Concerning the former view, language is formally described as “the system of spoken or written communication used by a particular country, people and community, typically consisting of words used within a regular grammatical and syntactic structure” (Oxford English Dictionary, cited in Saraceni, 2015, p. 11), or “a set of (finite or infinite) sentences, each finite in length and constructed out of a finite set of elements” (Chomsky, 1957, cited in Saraceni, 2015, p. 11). However, “the nature of language is in fact extremely complex” (Saraceni, 2015, p. 10); it is also seen as “a tool for communication […] for achieving ends that go beyond the language itself” (Nunan, 2012, cited in Saraceni, 2015, p. 11), and “[language] doesn’t consist of sentences; it consists of text, or discourse – the exchange of meanings in interpersonal contexts of one kind or another” (Halliday, 1978, cited in Saraceni, 2015, p. 13). By this last formulation, language is seen as a social semiotic, that is, “language within a socio-cultural context, in which the culture itself is interpreted in semiotic terms” (Halliday, 1978, cited by Saraceni, 2015, p. 13).

Studies to date on EP teaching and learning have mainly focused on the language itself and its sounds, words, and sentences (i.e., language as a system). Factors related to EP teaching and learning in a socio-cultural context (i.e., language as social practice) have been largely unexplored and, therefore, in need of investigation. To address this gap, this paper focuses on what learners and teachers self-report about their non-phonological problems in learning and teaching English pronunciation.
3. Research Methodology

3.1 The research site

Because the examination system in Vietnam’s public education sector favours written over spoken work, English speaking skills, including English pronunciation, have become marginalised in the school curriculum. Paradoxically, driven by globalisation, there has been an increasing need for Vietnamese to be able to function (i.e., communicate) in English with a variety of English speakers from around the world. To meet the demand for learning communicative English, the private sector in Vietnam has created hundreds of ‘English Language Centres’ (ELCs) nation-wide. These centres have become crucial sites for the teaching and learning of English speaking and pronunciation. However, virtually none has been investigated as a site of research into teaching and learning practices. This study, therefore, aims to research one such ELC in Vietnam’s capital city, Hanoi, as a case study to explore how ELCs go about teaching English speaking skills, especially English pronunciation. This centre can be considered a typical ELC in Hanoi in terms of its size, organization, and the way it functions (see Eslbase, 2016). ELCs provide learners with evening and weekend English classes at all proficiency levels. The main focuses of these classes are on improving communicative skills, achieving high scores on standardized international English proficiency tests (such as IELTS or CEFR), and developing proficiency in English for specific purposes (ESP) courses. ELCs employ both local and foreign teachers. Unlike their public counterparts, ELCs are flexible in curriculum design and material selection (e.g., textbooks), and it is not necessary for all ELCs to use the same kind of teaching materials.

The ELC investigated in this study favours materials published by Cambridge University Press. Thus, the materials they selected were mainly focused on British English. Learners in this centre are required to take a placement test before enrolling in any specific classes. Each class normally has from ten to 15 learners, and they are required to take progress tests during courses of two- or three-months’ duration. At the end of each course, learners have to take an end-of-course test to upgrade to a higher level; in some cases, more advanced learners are also advised to take international English proficiency tests.

3.2 Research methodology

3.2.1 Methodological approach

To achieve the research’s main aims, case study research is chosen as the most appropriate research strategy for this study. Like other ways of doing social science research, case study research has its own “peculiar advantages and disadvantages depending on three conditions:
(a) the type of research question, (b) the control an investigator has over actual behavioral events, and (c) the focus on contemporary as opposed to historical phenomena” (Yin, 2003, p.1). Taking all three conditions into account, the current research benefits significantly from using case study as it offers several advantages, such as helping the researcher “understand complex inter-relationships” (in-depth understanding of what is to be studied) in “lived reality”; “facilitating the exploration of the unexpected and unusual”; and enabling research to “focus on the significance of the idiosyncratic” (Hodkinson and Hodkinson; 2001, p.3). By using case study research for this study, the researcher has a suitable and effective research tool to attain the research goals.

This case study employs both qualitative and quantitative approaches - a mixed-methods research methodology (Table 1) within an interpretive research paradigm, collecting data using questionnaires and semi-structured interviews (Table1). A mixed-methods research methodology was chosen as it “uses the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research. It aims to select the best methods, regardless of the qualitative-quantitative divide, to find the answers to research questions” (Kumar, 2014, p.14). Also, Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) assert that mixed methods provides a more comprehensive picture and understanding of the research matter from both qualitative and quantitative perspectives. Many scholars in addition have supported the use of a mixed-methods approach, especially in social research. Bernard (1994), for example, noted that “whatever our theoretical orientation, a sound mix of qualitative and quantitative data is inevitable in any study of human thought and behavior” (p.1). Similarly, Brewer and Hunter (1989) assert that “since the [nineteen] fifties, the social sciences have grown tremendously. And with that growth, there is now virtually no major problem-area that is studied exclusively within one method” (p.22). Due to time and resource constraints, all the data were self-reported and were not supplemented by, for example, classroom observations. However, this research is nevertheless a clearly defined case study of one private-sector ELC that is indicative of how other ELCs also function.

Table 1. *Research instruments used for each group of participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Research instruments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Questionnaires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learners</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.2.2. Instruments

Rationale for using questionnaires and interviews

The present study aims to investigate the research issues within the constraints of the researcher residing in Australia and the participants in Vietnam. They did not have face-to-face interaction and classroom observation was not possible. Therefore, in such circumstances questionnaires and semi-structured interviews are perhaps the two most favorable research instruments to use.

Questionnaires, as noted by Dornyei (2003), are extremely efficient in terms of “researcher time, researcher effort and financial resources” as “by administering a questionnaire to a group of people, one can collect a huge amount of information in less than an hour” (p.9). Moreover, questionnaires can also help participants with poor English proficiency (e.g., learner participants at beginner and low-intermediate English levels) as questionnaires can be translated so that all participants can understand and respond accordingly. Also, as noted by Richards and Lockhart (1994), surveys are a useful tool to gather “information about affective dimensions of teaching and learning, such as beliefs, attitudes, motivations, and preferences” (p. 10). Taking all the advantages into account, a questionnaire was considered to be the most effective and suitable instrument for this study.

Together with questionnaire, semi-structured interviews (SSIs) were employed in this research as they not only ensure every participant gets the same key questions asked but also provide flexibility in how participants are asked and what follow up and probing questions to use (Van Teijlingen, 2014). Also, SSIs are particularly useful for exploring views, attitudes and beliefs of a person towards a particular topic. In this study, SSIs therefore were used to investigate more deeply the attitude and beliefs of teachers concerning EP teaching and learning. As discussed in the previous paragraph, regarding the number of participants and their geographical locations, interviews are used for teachers only (and not learners) as they are manageable in number (ten teachers) to complement the quantitative data collected from questionnaires.

Questionnaires

Data from learners and teachers were collected from questionnaires to provide the researchers with a broad range of information about the learners’ and teachers’ actual views on the teaching of EP. The questionnaire for both learner and teacher participants consisted of five sections with many items extracted from instruments used in previous studies, such as Jung (2010), Beinhoff (2014), Murphy (2011), Tweedy (2012), Burgess and Spencer (2000), Yates
and Zielinski (2009), Coskun (2011), Ma (2012), Walkinshaw and Oanh (2014), Ulate (2011) and Elliot (1995). There were 30 questions asked in the learner questionnaire and 39 questions asked in the teacher’s version (see Appendix 1A & 1B). Some items were modified, (i.e., in Q.5 in teacher questionnaire and Q.6, 9, 27 in learner’s version, the phrases ‘English center’, ‘Vietnamese learners’ and details of CEFR framework were added to facilitate the participants’ understanding) and others were created to make the questionnaire relevant to Vietnamese students who were studying English as a foreign language.

**Semi-structured interviews (SSIs)**

In this study, interview questions (designed by the researchers and informed by questionnaire questions and responses) were also prepared and administered to teachers. As discussed below in Section 3.2.3 below regarding the number of participants and their geographical locations, interviews were used to complement the quantitative data of teachers as they were manageable in number. with 14 questions were asked (see Appendix 2). The first section focused on teacher participants’ background information (e.g., teaching experience), while the remaining sections targeted their views about the challenges in learning as well as teaching EP and the main EP goals of Vietnamese learners of English.

**3.2.3 Participants**

Participants in this study were recruited on a voluntary basis under an ethics approval to conduct human participant research granted at Macquarie University. As the first step, the authors contacted the CEO (owner/manager) of the ELC by email to get his permission to conduct the research at his centre. When the authors received the CEO’s approval email to allow the research, the Expression of Interest(s) (EOI(s)) were sent to the potential learners and teachers via emails or by physical distribution of hard copies at the research site. The participants then showed their interest in participating in the research by returning their singed EOI(s) and getting their version of questionnaire for the data collection.

**Learner participants**

Learner participants were drawn from a range of class types (i.e., general English, English for tourism workers, and IELTS preparation) and English proficiency levels (i.e., pre-intermediate to advanced). The researchers received 89 questionnaires, of which eight were only half or one-third completed. Therefore, 81 valid questionnaires were analyzed for this study. Of the 81 learner participants, 22 were males and 58 females (one did not identify
their gender), aged largely under 25, and from different educational and professional backgrounds, such as university students, English teachers, managers, and soldiers. Given this diversity, there was an expectation of a wide range of responses from these varied learners.

Teacher participants
The researchers planned to recruit both Vietnamese and foreign teachers for questionnaires and interviews; however, of the ten teachers who returned the questionnaires, and all were local Vietnamese teachers. One of the questionnaires was only half completed; thus, the actual number of completed questionnaires valid for data analysis was nine. Of the nine teacher participants, three were male and six females, their age ranging from 20 to 49, but most teachers (7 out of 9) were in the age range of 30-39. In terms of their English teaching experience, these teachers differed considerably; however, about half had more than six years of teaching experience. Two foreign teachers agreed to be interviewed. Thus, the actual number of teacher participants interviewed was eight local teachers and two foreign counterparts.

3.3 Data analysis procedures
In this study, we used SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software to analyze the questionnaire data. First, the data were anonymized, then the variables (such as learners’ views on what was the most crucial factor in communicating with people from other cultures or learners’ self-reports about their challenges in learning EP) were created based on the content of each question in the questionnaires and the main research purposes. After coding and creating the variables, data were entered by the researchers and were double-checked to avoid missing or wrongly entered items. Each variable was then analyzed to find indicators, such as frequencies to support the data interpreting process. Only descriptive statistical analyses were performed as they were sufficient for the goals of this study.

Regarding data collected from interviews, the authors intended to use Nvivo for the data analysis process. However, as the interview sample was relatively small (only 10 interviews totalling less than two hours), the authors decided to analyse the interview data manually. First, the main themes were identified and coded deductively according to the question focus of the interviews (i.e., the responses of participants were classified under different question categories) (Table 2). Then the responses of participants were classified under these main themes. After identifying responses that fall within these different themes, the frequency of a
theme occurrence was tabulated, and a sample of the responses was provided in the data analysis as evidence.

Table 2. Main themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview question focus</th>
<th>Main themes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Common techniques used in teaching and learning EP</strong></td>
<td>Teaching EP by showing the phonetic script of the target words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asking learners to practice by imitating their own modelling or native speakers’ models in materials</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Challenges in learning and teaching EP</strong></td>
<td>Learning</td>
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<td>Negative effects of Vietnamese as L1 on the way learners pronounce English</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Teaching</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Learners’ motivation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Differences between Vietnamese and English</td>
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<td>Time available for teaching EP</td>
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<td></td>
<td>English environment for practice</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Learners’ beliefs in their teachers (teaching competence)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Teachers’ lack of confidence in their own English pronunciation and their teaching methodology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Insignificant role that EP plays in the whole curriculum</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Results

4.1 Learners’ main goals in learning EP

Figure 1 shows the data collected from learners’ responses to the question of which models of English pronunciation they preferred to learn. Forty-two out of 80 respondents considered British pronunciation as their preferred English pronunciation model. The number of learners who preferred other varieties of English was relatively high, with 37 responses, while only one respondent chose American English.

![Figure 1. Learners’ preference of EP model (n = 80)](image)

Data from the teachers’ survey, however, showed that the main goal they believed learners had when learning EP is to sound nearly native-like (six out of nine teachers), and
eight out of nine teachers considered that English native-speaking teachers were best placed to teach EP to Vietnamese learners.

4.2 Common techniques used in teaching and learning EP

The survey invited teachers to report their views about the teaching of EP in Vietnam. First, teachers were asked to report about the Pronunciation Teaching Methods (PTM) that they recently used and their opinions on the effectiveness of each PTM. The findings, shown in Table 3, indicate that teachers did use various PTMs, but the effectiveness of each method differed widely from teacher to teacher. For example, while most teachers thought that PTMs, such as learners practice one sound or word at a time; learners practice whole sentences together; and the teacher encourages learners to think about whether their pronunciation goals were effective or quite effective, there were nevertheless some teachers who reported that these PTMs were not at all effective. There were two teachers who noted that apart from the PTMs given by the researchers in the survey, they had their own ways to teach EP, and they rated those methods to be the most effective. For example, one of those methods was the so-called “shadowing technique,” which allows learners to watch segments of movies, then imitate the characters’ speeches or listen to an audio clip and then read the transcript out aloud.

Table 3. Pronunciation Teaching Methods (PTM) that teachers have recently used (n=9)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PTMs</th>
<th>Teacher opinions (No.) (Frequency (%))</th>
<th>Missing (Not answered)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher speaks and learners repeat what teacher says</td>
<td>1 (12.5) 6 (75.0) 1 (12.5) 0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher corrects learners’ pronunciation as they read out loud</td>
<td>0 4 (50.0) 4 (50.0) 0 1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learner’s practice one sound or word at a time</td>
<td>0 4 (57.1) 2 (28.6) 1(14.3) 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learners practice whole sentences together</td>
<td>0 3 (33.3) 5 (55.6) 1 (11.1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learners practice intonation</td>
<td>1 (11.1) 4 (44.4) 4 (44.4) 0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher encourages learners to think about their pronunciation goals</td>
<td>0 4 (57.1) 2 (28.6) 1 (14.3) 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other methods</td>
<td>1 (50.0) 1 (50.0) 0 0 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the qualitative interview data, teachers’ responses also show that they normally taught EP by showing the phonetic script of the target words and then asking learners to practice by imitating their own modeling or native speakers’ models in materials, such as CDs or videos.

LT5: “First, I write new words on the board, then write their transcripts. After that, I read aloud and let my students read aloud after me as a whole. I also call some of the students to read as models […]”

FT1: “I normally introduce the IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) and practice spelling simple English words to help the students master all of the sounds.”

Two respondents mentioned teaching word and sentence stress in their responses.

LT8: “I present learners the International Phonetics Alphabet to help them know how to pronounce the words and how to put the stress correctly.”

FT1: “[...] For word and sentence stress, I do a lot of ‘read, listen and repeat’.”

4.3 Challenges in learning and teaching EP

4.3.1 Challenges in learning EP

The survey asked learners to express their views on the learning of EP such that their difficulties might be revealed. The results as presented in Table 4 illustrate that for 81 participants English stress/rhythm/intonation was problematic for the highest proportion of respondents (56 or 71.8%); the difficulty caused by being heavily affected by mother tongue (e.g., pronounce English but sounds like Vietnamese) was next with 37 responses (47.4%); while problems with perceiving and producing problematic sounds and correspondence between pronunciation and written forms were reported by 32 (41%) and 33 (42.3%) learners, respectively. Other challenges were also noted by a few respondents (3 learners – 3.8%), and one of these challenges was remembering the stress patterns of English words after learning them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learners’ challenges in learning EP</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Percent of Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning English Stress/Rhythm/Intonation</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>71.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceiving and producing Problematic Sounds</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>41.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correspondence between pronunciation and written forms</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>42.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being heavily affected by mother tongue (pronounce English but sounds like Vietnamese)</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>47.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other challenges</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>161</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For teacher participants, a question about the challenges learners have when learning EP was also posed. The quantitative findings (see Figure 2) show that the most problematic issues that learners may have when learning EP according to the teachers’ perspective were learning English stress/rhythm/intonation and being heavily affected by their mother tongue with nine and six participants agreeing, respectively. Perceiving and producing problematic sounds was also reported as one of the main challenges of learners by five out of nine teachers, while three respondents thought that learners might have problems with correspondence between pronunciation and written form.

![Figure 2. Teachers’ perceptions on the challenges that learners have when learning EP (n=9)](image)

The qualitative interview data, on the other hand, show that the most frequently mentioned problem was the negative effects of Vietnamese as L1 on the way learners pronounce English.

L1: “[…] Vietnamese learners often mispronounce English words, and they are affected heavily by their mother tongue […]”

FT1: “[…] I think that when speaking Vietnamese, a person uses his/her mouth (tongue, throat, breath, teeth, lips) in a totally different way than when speaking English. The tonality of Vietnamese also makes the sentence stress difficult to grasp […]”

Furthermore, some teachers who believed learners had challenges in learning EP because they lacked motivation and awareness about the role of EP, as evidenced in the following extracts:
LT6: “[...] they think it is not important [...] they do not learn it seriously. That’s why there are many learners at university who do not know anything about English though they have spent ten or 12 years studying it before [...]”

FT2: “[...] they give up too soon [...] they don’t practice enough [...]”

4.3 Challenges in teaching EP
The survey then asked teachers about their main challenges in teaching EP and to rank their problems in order of difficulty. The results (see Figure 3) show that most teacher participants had problems in managing time in class to teach EP, which nearly 70% of them ranked as the most difficult. Lacking sufficient materials and equipment and students’ unawareness of EP’s importance were also two problems that were highly placed in teachers’ ranking of their challenges. Such matters related to teaching methods, teacher education, teachers’ confidence and teachers’ understanding of learners’ culture and challenges in learning EP seemed to cause teachers fewer troubles as they were placed mainly as lower-ranking items by most of the teacher respondents.

Figure 3. Teachers’ views on what are the main challenges in teaching EP (NB Selections are ranked in order of difficulty)

The same results were also found in qualitative data as teacher participants pointed out many challenges which were related to learners’ motivation (x6); the differences between Vietnamese and English (x3); time available for teaching EP (x3); the English environment in which to practice (x3); learners’ beliefs in their teachers (x2); and teachers’ lack of confidence
in their own English pronunciation and their teaching methodology (x2). These views are evidenced in the following excerpts:

LT6: “[…] **I have difficulty with my pronunciation** because I know my pronunciation is not like the pronunciation of native speakers. Thus, sometimes I **feel not confident enough with some certain words or sentences** […] Another difficulty that I have is **I do not know how to deliver an interesting pronunciation lesson to learners** so that they can get involved in and feel excited in pronunciation activities […]”

LT1: “[…] **learners lack belief in Vietnamese teachers’ ability in teaching pronunciation** as they think Vietnamese teachers’ pronunciation is not standard […]”

LT2: “With Vietnamese learners, the first difficulty is that **Vietnamese is so different from English** thus it is hard for them to imitate the way native speakers pronounce English sounds […]”

LT3: “[…] **students here stand little chance of communicating with native speakers** […]”

LT5: “[…] **sometimes students do not like pronunciation** because they don’t have to take an oral exam […]”

LT6: “[…] I also have difficulty in **managing the time in class for pronunciation teaching** as our English curriculum does not have much time for teaching pronunciation […]”

Apart from all of the above-perceived problems, there were a small number of teachers who mentioned such troubles as learner confusion between some sounds which are transferred from Vietnamese into English and seem unable to be corrected (x1); and the relatively insignificant role that EP plays in the whole curriculum (x1).

Learners were also asked to give their opinions about challenges that teachers (both local and foreign) may have when teaching EP. The data analysis shows that while a majority of respondents (74% or 54 out of 73) believed that local teachers had difficulty with their **teaching behavior**, 52 out of 64 (81.3%) and 30 (46.9%) hold the view that foreign teachers might **find it difficult to explain abstract things by not knowing students' mother tongue** and that foreign teachers might have difficulty in teaching EP as they **do not understand students' culture**, respectively. Other challenges were of minor significance (see Tables 5 and 6).
Table 5. Local teachers’ challenges (n=73)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local teachers’ challenges</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Percent of Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of confidence as English is not their mother tongue</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor English proficiency</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching behavior</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>60.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other difficulties</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6. Foreign teachers’ difficulties (n=64)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Foreign teachers’ difficulties</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Percent of Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do not understand students' culture</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>32.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack teaching pedagogy training</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find it difficult to explain abstract things by not knowing students' mother tongue</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>56.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Discussion

We shall now consider the principal findings of this study regarding learners’ main goals, learners’ challenges, and teachers’ challenges concerning EP as practiced at an ELC in Hanoi. We deal with each of these issues in turn below.

The learner participants revealed through the questionnaire data that their primary goal in learning EP was to achieve native-like pronunciation and British pronunciation (42 out of 80). This preference is very much in line with Saraceni (2015)’s critical argument that geographical demarcations of languages is 19th-century thinking in today’s multilingual globalized world and unhelpful ‘baggage’ for language learners to bear. It is another aspect of ‘language as system,’ i.e., an enclosed entity that can be deconstructed, taught, and learned.

Teacher participants were also aware of the reported main goal of learners since both quantitative and qualitative data from teachers revealed that six out of nine teachers also perceived their learners’ wishes to achieve the pronunciation model of native or near native-like speakers. However, regarding the question of the most realistic goal for learners in general, the teachers believed that Vietnamese learners should aim for intelligible pronunciation. Psychologically, it seems that Vietnamese learners always desire to achieve the highest possible outcomes when learning. Thus, aiming to have native-like pronunciation
when learning EP is a natural and understandable goal for such learners. However, Vietnamese learners are living in settings where conditions are those of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), and English is not in general use in such contexts. With the minimal presence of English outside classroom walls, learners have little or no opportunity to communicate with foreigners in person. Most of them can only use English to talk with classmates, or sometimes with their Vietnamese teachers of English. In these cases, understanding what others are saying – and being understood by them – are realistic goals. Indeed, as stated by Bruthiaux (2010), “to learners in developing [countries], resource poor EFL settings especially, it matters very little who says tomato and who says tomayto. Knowing the word tomato is achievement enough” (p. 368). Thus, when setting EP goals (individually, institutionally, and nationally), the socio-cultural conditions of where the EP learning takes place and where English will actually be used must be taken into account, and realistic goals need to be understood and accepted by learners and targeted for achievement by teachers; otherwise, desirable EP outcomes will never be achieved on a large scale.

The results of this study also show that learners and teachers faced many difficulties with EP that need to be seriously addressed to improve the effectiveness of EP learning and teaching. In terms of learner difficulties, the analysis of responses in the quantitative data collected from learners and teachers reveals the high agreement among them about the difficulties that learners encounter, including learning English stress/rhythm/intonation, being heavily affected by their mother tongue, and perceiving and producing problematic sounds. These difficulties, however, can be seen as exclusively concerned with the view of the English language as a system and contrasting L2 with L1 at a phonemic level. Accordingly, they do not sufficiently address the suprasegmental aspect of English used in actual connected speech. Moreover, these ‘language as system’ difficulties have already been identified by many previous studies of other languages, such as Hoque (2011); Alimemaj (2014); and Burgess and Spencer (2000) and can perhaps best be considered as the visible part of the pronunciation-problem ‘iceberg’ for Vietnamese learners. The invisible social, psychological, and cultural part has largely been ignored. The results gathered in the current study from the teachers’ qualitative data, however, help to uncover the hidden part of the iceberg of EP problems in Vietnam. According to the teachers, many difficulties are caused by learners’ motivation, learners’ lack of awareness of the importance of EP, and their reluctance to speak English because they are afraid of making mistakes in public and feeling frustrated or embarrassed. Teachers also pointed out that Vietnamese learners found EP difficult because of the lack of an appropriate English environment where they could use what they had learned in real communication. They also noted the heavy L1 influence of Vietnamese, which reinforces
the findings from the quantitative data.

There appears to be a mismatch between learners’ self-reports and teachers’ perceptions about learners’ difficulties in learning EP. More specifically, while learners’ quantitative data show that they were highly aware of the importance of EP in both communication and language learning (with 62 of 80 learners reporting that EP is very important, and 18 other learners reporting it is important or somewhat important), teachers’ quantitative and qualitative data, however, revealed that they believed learners did not value and spend enough time practising EP. Also, the findings from quantitative learner data suggest that a significant number of learners (65%) reported to having problems with learning methods when acquiring EP, whereas teacher participants did not identify this as a serious problem either in their responses to questionnaires or in subsequent interviews. There is evidence here of confusion concerning learning and teaching English as a body of knowledge versus as a resource for communication. A clearer alignment is needed between learner and teacher expectations regarding responsibilities for learning and teaching EP.

Turning to the matter of teachers’ challenges in teaching EP, teachers reported that time constraints and lack of sufficient materials were their greatest difficulties. They also emphasized that teacher education that was focused on how to teach EP is very important and much needed, but unfortunately, inadequately provided for. Teacher participants in this study pointed out that the training programs they undertook mainly focused on phonological aspects of EP, while knowledge about how to teach EP was largely neglected. As a result, teachers tend to teach pronunciation to their learners in the same way that they were taught, with an emphasis placed on phonology and the employment of such traditional techniques as dictation, reading aloud, and dialogue drills learned by heart. In this sense, language is clearly taught and learnt as a system of sounds and words. Generations of Vietnamese learners have been taught EP in this way, but it seems not to have resulted in the hoped-for outcomes. If teachers want to help learners improve their EP, they need to create opportunities for learners to put their English to use and practice by having in-class activities, such as role-plays and simulations, group discussions and interactive presentations, or out-of-class activities, such as field-trip encounters. As stated simply by Grant (2014), “students would make better progress in pronunciation if they just practiced more” (p. 137), but they also need engaging opportunities to do so. From the learners’ perspective, EP difficulties that they perceived their teachers to have that were believed to cause the most troubles included teaching practices (local teachers) and providing poor explanations for abstract concepts where teachers did not know the learners’ L1 (foreign teachers). As teachers would stand to benefit from receiving
this kind of feedback, they should be encouraged to engage more with their learners on reflecting on how to improve classroom experiences.

In sum, the findings concerning the difficulties in learning and teaching EP reveal and confirm that quite apart from phonological troubles widely reported in the literature over recent decades, learners and teachers are facing other problems which seem to have a significant influence on their learning and teaching EP. Among these are (1) inadequate learning and teaching methodologies (though there are signs that a small number of teachers in the current study are trying to use new techniques which aim to help learners put their English to use); (2) insufficient time to teach and learn EP; (3) little exposure to English; and (4) the lack of a context or language environment where their English can be practiced and used. In other words, to improve learning and teaching EP, it is important to consider not only the knowledge of pronunciation (such as phonological and articulatory aspects) but also the aforementioned factors as they can otherwise become great barriers that hinder learners and teachers from attaining their EP goals. Realistically, these issues need to be addressed from the bottom up, with learners being clear about achievable goals and possible contexts for practicing using English; and with teachers working in different ways that are most appropriate to a particular cohort of learners. In short, a greater focus on English as social practice and less focus on the English language as a system would help address the current learning and teaching difficulties identified in this study.

6. Conclusion
This paper has reported a study built on previous findings in the research literature regarding learning and teaching EP to present a clearer picture of these practices in an ELC in Vietnam. It has demonstrated the differences in perceptions, beliefs and attitudes of learners and teachers regarding learners’ main goals for EP and learner and teacher difficulties in learning and teaching EP. Beyond this, the current study has shown that the teaching and learning of EP in Vietnam (with evidence from one ELC) have emphasized viewing language as a system and paid relatively little attention to language as social practice. Generations of Vietnamese learners and teachers have been taught and trained in this same way, with poor learning outcomes, yet the same practices and problems persist regardless of the time and effort that educators and scholars have devoted to solving them. As stated by Nelson (2011):

“No one can pronounce English in all the ways in which it is (or may be) pronounced; no one can know all the lexicon of an unfamiliar variety. But we can be attitudinally open and equipped with the skills that allow us to explore possibilities in order to achieve effective communication with users of other Englishes.” (p. 91)
Bearing in mind the ultimate communicative needs of Vietnamese learners of English, it is time to seriously consider a new approach to be implemented with a focus squarely placed on gaining a better balance between the two opposing views of language as a system and language as social practice, in order that learners are provided not only enough knowledge about EP (e.g., phonology and phonemes, sound articulation, and intonation) but also more useful skills and opportunities to put their learnt English to practice and use in communication. There is still a long way to go because changing a system that has existed for generations (i.e., the way Vietnamese people learn and teach EP) is enormously challenging. However, sooner or later, the shift in the approach needs to commence if Vietnam’s educational system addresses the needs of its English language learners truly.

References


### Appendix: QUESTIONNAIRES/INTERVIEWS

#### Appendix 1: QUESTIONNAIRES

#### Appendix 1A

**Questionnaire for Learners**

**Section 1: Background information**

1. Gender: □ Male □ Female
2. Age: □ 18-20 □ 21-25 □ 25-30 □ 30 or above
3. What is your occupation?
   □ University student □ Teacher of English
   □ Other (Please specify ____________________________________________)

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4. First language: _____________________________________________________________

5. How many years have you been learning English?
   ☐ less than 2 years    ☐ 2-5 years
   ☐ 6-10 years         ☐ more than 10 years

6. How long have you learned at your current English center?
   ☐ less than 1 month   ☐ 2-3 months ☐ 3-5 months   ☐ more than 6 months

7. How do you use English currently?
   ☐ Frequently        ☐ Sometimes      ☐ Rarely
   ☐ Other (Please specify) _____________________________________________________

8. What is the focus of your study?
   ☐ Vocabulary         ☐ Grammar        ☐ Reading
   ☐ Writing            ☐ Listening       ☐ Speaking
   ☐ Other (Please specify) _____________________________________________________

9. What level of English is your class?
   ☐ Beginner
   ☐ Elementary
   ☐ Pre-intermediate (B1)
   ☐ Intermediate (C1)
   ☐ IELTS (target 4.5-5.5)
   ☐ IELTS (target 6.0-6.5)
   ☐ IELTS (target 6.5 and higher)

10. What kind of English proficiency test have you undertaken recently?
    (Please circle the level in CEFR and specify overall band score and approximate date when
    you took the test in the provided space)

    Overall band score   Month and year
    ☐ CEFR (Level:   A1 ;  A2 ;  B1 ;  B2 ;  C1 ;  C2 )
                      ________________ _____________
    ☐ IELTS            ________________ _____________
    ☐ TOEIC            ________________ _____________
    ☐ TOEFL            ________________ _____________
    ☐ Other (Please specify) _____________________________________________________

11. What level do you think your English pronunciation is at?
    (Please tick the level that best fit your English pronunciation)

    CERF            Descriptions
    ☐ C2            AsC1
    ☐ C1            Can vary intonation and place sentence stress correctly in order to
express finer shades of meaning.

☐  B2  Has acquired a clear, natural, pronunciation and intonation.
☐  B1  Pronunciation is clearly intelligible even if a foreign accent is sometimes evident and occasional mispronunciations occur.
☐  A2  Pronunciation is generally clear enough to be understood despite a noticeable foreign accent, but conversational partners will need to ask for repetition from time to time.
☐  A1  Pronunciation of a very limited repertoire of learnt words and phrases can be understood with some effort by native speakers used to dealing with speakers of his/her language group.

*Note.* The labels A1-C2 refer to the proficiency level of the learner, where A1 stands for beginner level, A2 for waystage or elementary, B1 for threshold or intermediate, B2 for upper intermediate, C1 for advanced and C2 for “mastery” level.

**Section 2: Your views on the importance of English pronunciation**

12. Which factor is the most crucial to communicate with people from other cultures?
☐ Pronunciation
☐ Grammatical aspects
☐ Cultural aspects
☐ English Fluency

13. How much can you understand when communicating with native speakers?
☐ 100%  ☐ 80 %  ☐ 50 %  ☐ under 30 %

14. Do you think pronunciation can be a barrier to communicate with people from other cultures?
☐ Yes  ☐ No

Why?/ Why not? (Please clarify) _______________________________________________________________

15. How important do you think it is to learn English pronunciation?
☐ Very important
☐ Important
☐ Somewhat important
☐ Not important

Please explain why. ________________________________________________________________

**Section 3: Your views on the learning of English pronunciation**

16. Are you taught English pronunciation in class every lesson?
☐ Yes (Go to question 17)  ☐ No (Go to question 18)

17. How often are you (explicitly) taught pronunciation in your English class?
(Select the option that is closest to your usual learning routine)
☐ More than once a week
18. Do you regularly learn English pronunciation outside class time?
☐ Yes (Go to question 19)  ☐ No (Go to question 20)

19. In what way do you learn English pronunciation outside class time?
(Please tick all items that are appropriate to your situation)
☐ I practice English pronunciation with friends and/or teachers
☐ I practice English pronunciation by talking with foreigners
☐ I practice English pronunciation on my own
☐ Other (Please specify) ________________________________________________

20. What are your difficulties in learning English pronunciation?
(Please tick all items that are appropriate to you)
☐ Learning English stress/rhythm/intonation
☐ Perceiving and producing problematic sounds
☐ Correspondence between pronunciation and written forms
☐ Being heavily affected by my mother tongue
(I pronounce English, but it sounds like Vietnamese)
☐ Other (Please specify) ________________________________________________

21. What do you think are the reasons for such difficulties?
(Please tick all items that are appropriate to you)
☐ I do not have enough time to learn and practice English Pronunciation
☐ I do not have a chance to use English for communication in the real world
☐ There is a lack of sufficient materials and equipment
☐ My learning method is inappropriate
☐ The teaching methodology is ineffective where I study
☐ Other (Please specify) ________________________________________________

22. What do you think teachers should do to help learners in learning English pronunciation?
(Please tick all items that are appropriate to you)
☐ Give students more exercises to practice English pronunciation
☐ Understand students’ needs and difficulties in learning English pronunciation
☐ Create a friendly learning environment in order to help students feel more confident to speak
☐ Correct students English pronunciation mistakes right away and more regularly in class
☐ Enhance their English pronunciation skills and knowledge regularly
☐ Take part in teacher training courses, especially those overseas
☐ Other (Please specify) ________________________________________________
Section 4: Your views on the teaching of English pronunciation

23. Do you prefer to be taught English pronunciation by a local teacher or by a foreign teacher? (Select one only)

☐ local (Vietnamese) teacher  ☐ foreign teacher

Why?
(Please tick the items that best fit you)

☐ Friendly personality
☐ Interesting classes
☐ Enthusiastic
☐ Experienced at teaching
☐ Good qualifications
☐ Understands students’ culture
☐ Understands / speaks English fluently
☐ Other (Please specify) __________________________________________________________

24. From whom do you receive more English pronunciation teaching, local teachers, or foreign teachers? (Please tick the items that best fit you)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local (Vietnamese) teacher</th>
<th>Foreign teacher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

25. What do you think are the difficulties that teachers encounter when teaching English pronunciation? (Please tick the items that reflects your experience)

Local teacher

☐ Lack of confidence as English is not their mother tongue
☐ Poor English proficiency
☐ Teaching behavior

☐ Other (Please specify) __________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________

Foreign teachers

☐ Do not understand students’ culture
☐ Lack teaching pedagogy training
☐ May find it hard to explain abstract things to students as they do not know students’ mother tongue

☐ Other (Please specify) __________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________

____________________________________

30
26. Is there anything that you would like teachers to change to improve their English pronunciation teaching?
☐ Yes  ☐ No
If yes, what is this? (Please specify) ________________________________________________________________

27. Who do you think can best teach English pronunciation to Vietnamese learners?
☐ Vietnamese teachers with domestic training
☐ English native speaking teachers
☐ Non-native English-speaking teachers
☐ Vietnamese teachers with overseas training in pronunciation teaching
☐ Other (Please specify) ________________________________________________________________

Section 5: Your views on Vietnamese learners’ main goal in English pronunciation

28. Which English pronunciation do you prefer to use?
☐ Varieties of English pronunciation  ☐ British pronunciation  ☐ American pronunciation

29. Would you like to be taught varieties of English other than British and American English such as Singapore or Indian English?
☐ Yes  ☐ No
Please explain why/why not. ________________________________________________________________

30. Please answer the questions using the numbers below, circle the number that fits your feelings best:
5 = Strongly agree
4 = Somewhat agree
3 = Neither disagree or agree
2 = Somewhat disagree
1 = Strongly disagree

**Pronunciation Attitude Inventory** (PAI)

1. I would like to sound like native English speaker when I speak English
   1  2  3  4  5

2. Good pronunciation in English is important to me.
   1  2  3  4  5

3. I will never be able to speak English with a good accent.
   1  2  3  4  5

4. I believe I can improve my pronunciation skills in English.
   1  2  3  4  5

5. I believe my teacher should teach pronunciation more.
   1  2  3  4  5

6. I try to imitate native speakers of English as much as possible.
   1  2  3  4  5

7. For me, communicating is much more important that sounding like a native English speaker.
   1  2  3  4  5

8. Learning good pronunciation is NOT as important as learning grammar and vocabulary.
   1  2  3  4  5

9. Sounding like a native English speaker is VERY important to
   1  2  3  4  5
If you have any other observations about EFL pronunciation teaching, or any of the issues raised in this survey, please record them here.

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

Thank you for participating!

Appendix 1B
Questionnaire for teachers

Section 1: Background information

1. Gender:  
   ☐ Male  ☐ Female

2. Age:  
   ☐ 20-29  ☐ 30-39  ☐ 40-49  ☐ 50 or above

3. How long have you been teaching English to speakers of other languages?
   ☐ Less than 2 years  ☐ 2-5 years  ☐ 6-10 years
   ☐ 11-15 years  ☐ 16-20 years  ☐ more than 20 years

4. What kind of professional/institutional context do you work in (e.g., private language school, university, etc.)?

5. How many years have you worked at your current English center?
   ☐ Less than 2 years  ☐ 2-5 years  ☐ more than 5 years

6. What is your first language?

7. What qualifications do you have? (Please tick all the relevant items and list your major)

   Major

   ☐ College of Education
   ☐ Bachelor’s degree
   ☐ Postgraduate Certificate
   ☐ Postgraduate Diploma Master’s degree
   ☐ Master’s degree
   ☐ PhD Degree
   ☐ Other (Please specify)

8. I am a local / native English teacher. (Please circle)

9. Do you have any preference for teaching certain skills? (If your answer is negative, please go to question 11)
   ☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ Somewhat  ☐ Not sure

10. From the following language skills, which ones do you prefer to teach? (Number them from 1 to 8 (or 9, if applicable) in order of importance, 1 being what you like
teaching the most.)
☐ Grammar        ☐ Speaking       ☐ Pronunciation
☐ Listening      ☐ Culture        ☐ Writing
☐ Reading        ☐ Vocabulary      ☐ Other
Other (Please specify) ______________________________________________________

11. Your major responsibilities when teaching English are: (Please tick all the relevant items)
☐ Reading        ☐ Writing        ☐ Listening
☐ Speaking       ☐ Pronunciation  ☐ Grammar
☐ Vocabulary     ☐ Culture        ☐ Other
Other (Please specify) ______________________________________________________

12. What levels of learners do you teach?
☐ KET (A2)
☐ PET (B1)
☐ FCE (B2)
☐ CAE (C1)
☐ CPE (C2)
☐ Other (Please specify) ____________________________________________________

13. Do you teach pronunciation as a separate lesson?
☐ Yes        ☐ No

14. Do you integrate pronunciation teaching with other skills?
☐ Yes        ☐ No

15. Do you have a systematic approach to pronunciation (such as a separate pronunciation syllabus), or do you deal with problems as they arise?
☐ Systematic approach        ☐ Deal with problems as they arise

Section 2: Training for English pronunciation teaching
16. Have you received any training on how to teach English pronunciation?
☐ Yes (Go to questions 17/ 18/ 19)        ☐ No (Go to question 19)

17. Which of the following types of pronunciation training have you undertaken? (Please tick all the relevant items)
☐ Training in university as a subject with more focus on pronunciation pedagogy
☐ Training in university as a subject with more focus on phonetics and phonology
☐ Self-training as a requirement of your teaching job
☐ Other (Please specify) _________________________________
18. To what extent do you think the training provided to you for English pronunciation teaching was appropriate? (Please tick)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The content was appropriate</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Don’t Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge given was applicable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

19. What type of training do you think should be provided to teachers to teach English pronunciation?
- ☐ Training that provides teachers with pronunciation pedagogy knowledge and skills
- ☐ Training that provides teachers with phonology and phonetics knowledge
- ☐ Training that provides teachers with phonology, phonetics, and pronunciation pedagogy knowledge and skills
- ☐ Other (Please specify) ____________________________________________

Section 3: Your views on English pronunciation teaching in Vietnam

20. What are the two most important considerations to teach English in the EFL contexts? (Choose two).
- ☐ Cultural aspects
- ☐ Linguistic aspects
- ☐ Phonology aspects
- ☐ Socio-linguistic and pragmatic aspects

21. Which factor is crucial to communicate with people from other cultures?
- ☐ Pronunciation
- ☐ Grammatical aspects
- ☐ Cultural aspects
- ☐ English Fluency

22. Do you think pronunciation can be a barrier to communicate with people from other cultures?
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Why? / Why not? (Please clarify) ____________________________________________

23. How important do you think it is to teach pronunciation in an English class?
- ☐ Very important
- ☐ Important
- ☐ Somewhat important
- ☐ Not important

Please explain why. ____________________________________________
24. How often do you (explicitly) teach pronunciation in your English class? Select the option that is closest to your usual teaching routine.
☐ More than once a week
☐ Less than once a week but more than once a month
☐ Approximately once a month or less
☐ Never

25. To what extent do you agree that English pronunciation teaching is paid much less attention to by teachers than other skills like reading, writing, listening or grammar? *(Please tick only one)*
☐ Strongly disagree
☐ Disagree
☐ Neither
☐ Agree
☐ Strongly Agree
☐ Don’t Know

26. Do you like teaching English pronunciation?
☐ Yes  ☐ No
Why?/ Why not? (Please clarify) ____________________________________________

27. Which model of English pronunciation do you teach your learners?
☐ British English
☐ American English
☐ I do not teach a specific model of pronunciation
☐ Other (please specify) ______________________________________________________

28. On which model of English are most of your teaching materials based?
☐ British English
☐ American English
☐ Other (please specify) ______________________________________________________

29. Which of the following pronunciation teaching methods (PTM) have you used in your English class within the last three months? Select all that apply and indicate how effective you have found them to be at improving your learners’ English pronunciation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pronunciation Teaching Methods</th>
<th>Very effective</th>
<th>Effective</th>
<th>Quite effective</th>
<th>Not effective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You speak and learners repeat what you say</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You correct learners’ pronunciation as they read out loud</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learners practise one sound or word at a time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Learners practise whole sentences together
Learners practise intonation
You encourage learners to think about their pronunciation goals
Other

If you selected ‘Other’, please give details of other methods used:

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

30. What do you find are the main difficulties in pronunciation teaching?
(Please rank in order of difficulties from 1 to 7 (or 8, if applicable), 1 being what you find the most difficult)
☐ I do not have enough time to teach and practice English pronunciation for students in class.
☐ I do not understand students’ culture and their difficulties in learning English.
☐ There is a lack of sufficient materials and equipment for teaching pronunciation.
☐ Students are unaware of the importance of English pronunciation and normally do not concentrate in class.
☐ My teaching methodology is ineffective.
☐ My teacher education on English pronunciation is insufficient to my real teaching now.
☐ I do not feel confident when teaching English pronunciation as it is not my strength.
☐ Other (Please specify)

___________________________________________________________________________

31. What do you think the administrators should do to best facilitate teachers to teach English pronunciation better?
☐ Provide teachers with appropriate training courses
☐ Create chances for teachers to share experiences
☐ Conduct surveys on students’ needs when they learn English to help teachers better understand their students
☐ Provide sufficient materials and equipment
☐ Honor the teachers who perform outstandingly well, to motivate others
☐ Other (Please specify)

___________________________________________________________________________

32. Who do you think can best teach English pronunciation to Vietnamese learners?
☐ Vietnamese teachers with domestic training
☐ English native-speaking teachers
☐ English non-native speaking teachers
Section 4: Your views on Vietnamese learners’ English pronunciation

33. What do you think in general about Vietnamese learners (in your classes)’ English pronunciation?
☐ very easy to understand
☐ easy to understand
☐ understandable
☐ difficult to understand
☐ very difficult to understand

34. What do you think are the difficulties that Vietnamese learners encounter when learning English pronunciation? (Tick all items that you agree with)
☐ Learning English stress/rhythm/intonation
☐ Perceiving and producing problematic sounds
☐ Correspondence between pronunciation and written forms
☐ Being heavily affected by their mother tongue (They pronounce English, but it sounds like Vietnamese)
☐ Other (Please specify) ____________________________________________________________

35. Why do you think they have such difficulties?
(Please rank in order of importance from 1 to 4 (or 5, if applicable), 1 being what you find the most important)
☐ Students are unaware of the importance of English pronunciation thus they do not spend enough time to learn and practice it.
☐ Students’ learning method is insufficient
☐ Teaching method is not effective
☐ Students lack opportunities to use English in real life
☐ Other (Please specify) ____________________________________________________________

36. How do you think Vietnamese learners can overcome these problems?
(Please rank in order of importance from 1 to 4 (or 5, if applicable), 1 being what you find the most important)
They should:
☐ Spend more time to learn and practice English pronunciation
☐ Make use of chances to speak English with their friends and teachers
☐ Use the internet as a source to expose themselves to real world English to practice English
Section 5: Your view on Vietnamese learners’ main goal in English pronunciation
37. With whom do you think Vietnamese learners communicate more in English with? (Please tick)
   Now
   ☐ English native speakers  ☐ Non-native English speakers
   In the next 5 years
   ☐ English native speakers  ☐ Non-native English speakers

38. What level of English pronunciation do you think the majority of your learners would like to achieve?
   ☐ To sound like a native speaker of British English
   ☐ To sound like a native speaker of American English
   ☐ To sound like a native speaker of any variety of English
   ☐ To sound clear enough to be understood by other non-native speakers
   ☐ To sound clear enough to be understood by native speakers
   ☐ I don’t know

39. Which of the following do you think is the appropriate and realistic goal for Vietnamese learners in learning English pronunciation? (Please tick one only)
   ☐ To be intelligible  ☐ To sound nearly native-like  ☐ To sound native-like

If you have any other observations about EFL pronunciation teaching, or any of the issues raised in this survey, please record them here.

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

Thank you for participating!

Appendix 2: INTERVIEW

Appendix 2

Interviews form for teachers

Section 1: Background information
1. What is your first language?
2. How many years have you been teaching English?
Section 2: Difficulties in teaching English

3. Do you typically teach pronunciation in your classes? Why? Why not?
4. When you teach pronunciation, what do you normally do?
5. What types of difficulties do you encounter when teaching Vietnamese learners English pronunciation?
6. What do you think teachers should do to overcome these difficulties?
7. Who do you think can best teach English pronunciation to Vietnamese learners?

Section 3: Teachers’ view on teacher education programs

8. What do you think about current teacher education programs for English pronunciation teaching?
9. What do you think teachers should know to be able to teach English pronunciation?

Section 4: Teachers’ view on Vietnamese learners’ pronunciation of English

10. Do you think that Vietnamese learners’ pronunciation of English is generally intelligible to foreigners?
11. What do you think contributes to the problems encountered by Vietnamese learners when pronouncing English?
12. Do you think that Vietnamese learners should be taught a variety of English other than British or American English?

Section 5: Teachers’ view on English pronunciation goals for Vietnamese students

13. With whom do you think Vietnamese learners communicate most often in English?
14. What do you think is the English pronunciation main goal for Vietnamese learners? Why?
Vietnamese Undergraduate English-majored Students’ Beliefs about English Language Learning

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Date Accepted: 09 April 2022

Abstract

Students’ beliefs about English language learning play an important role in learning and teaching process. Understanding learners’ beliefs, thus, can facilitate teachers to develop suitable syllabi and use appropriate teaching methods for their English classes. The current study investigates Vietnamese students’ beliefs about English language learning regarding five different factors, namely self-efficacy, teacher’s and students’ roles, the nature of learning, and expectations. A total of 121 undergraduate English-majored students volunteered to complete
an online survey on Google Form. Learners’ rating scores were compared across five aspects of learners’ beliefs, and independent T-tests were conducted to find out any significant differences between males and females’ ratings. Results revealed that students’ role and their self-efficacy were rated much higher than teachers’ role, learning nature, and traditional learning orientation (expectation). Additionally, gender had little impact on learners’ beliefs in learning English. However, there is a significant difference in the beliefs regarding self-efficacy and traditional orientation of English learning. Accordingly, male learners showed a higher belief in self-efficacy than female learners, while females reported a greater preference to traditional orientation in learning English. The results were discussed in terms of pedagogical implications for the focus on learner-centered instruction.

Key words: Students’ beliefs, English language learning, Vietnamese EFL students

Introduction
With the widespread popularity of English in the modern world (Christison & Murray, 2014), there is a variety of research attempting to enhance an in-depth understanding of learning English language. Accordingly, learners’ beliefs about English language learning play a crucial role in enhancing their learning (Gao Wei, 2007; Genç et al., 2016). Acknowledging this critical issue, a plethora of studies have been conducted in varied EFL contexts. Abhakorn (2014) stated that one of the main issues affecting Thai students’ language learning was the paths of students’ perceptions regarding learning methods and learners’ confidence in their language learning ability. In line with Cotterall’s study (1995), learners’ beliefs about learning English affected how they performed and determined the learning outcome. Indeed, Jaliyya and Idrus (2017) found that good students usually found ways to improve their language learning (self-efficacy, students’ role). Therefore, educators may take students’ beliefs in English language learning into consideration, which helps them avoid the mismatch between classroom practices and students’ beliefs (Alsamaani, 2012; Basaran & Cabaroglu, 2014; Horwitz, 1988; Schulz, 2001).

In Vietnam, traditional teaching was reported as a dominant teaching approach (Tonogbanua, 2018; Do, 2023), which might result in poor communication skills among students. In fact, students start learning English at primary schools (grade three), high schools, and colleges as a compulsory subject. Also, they frequently attend extra classes at English centers. Nevertheless, not many students meet the expectations of businesses and agencies in the working environment, which demands an absolute English language skill set, when applying for jobs (Huynh, 2020). Tonogbanua (2018) found that the primary purpose of
Vietnamese high school students when they learned English was to prepare for examinations. The examination-driven teaching was widely adopted, which mainly focused on doing reading and grammatical tests while listening and speaking skills were neglected. Learners failed to have many opportunities to practice the target language in English classes, and they communicated mainly in their first language (Vietnamese). As a result, teachers seem to be supreme authorities who provide knowledge; while students are receivers without challenges (Nguyen & Habok, 2021). This might limit students’ language learning achievements as well as their communication skills.

With the non-stop changes in our modern society, learning and teaching also witness dramatic adjustments. Therefore, Vietnamese students’ beliefs in learning English should be investigated to remain updated. Based on our knowledge so far, studies investigating English-majored Vietnamese undergraduates’ beliefs about English language seem modest in numbers. In addition, EFL students have different beliefs about English language learning, which might depend on educational background, culture, and language proficiency (Alsamaani, 2012; Amuzie & Winke, 2009; Bassano, 1986). Considering this knowledge, the current study aims to investigate English-majored Vietnamese students’ beliefs about English language learning regarding the five aspects including students’ self-efficacy, students’ and teacher’s roles, nature and traditional orientation of learning English. This investigation could be a foundational step to give EFL teachers, especially Vietnamese language teachers and native English teachers teaching in Vietnam, a better understanding of students’ beliefs in language learning related to five distinct factors. Accordingly, teachers would recognize how students acknowledge their English learning abilities (strengths, weaknesses, styles, and roles), or their learning motivation and expectations. The study also investigates the differences between males’ and females’ beliefs in English language learning, which would be helpful for teachers in terms of choosing appropriate teaching methods and principles for their target students based on gender (Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005; Sakui & Gaies, 1999). They might tailor their teaching methods to eliminate incongruities between classroom practices (Alsamaani, 2012; Ellis, 2008; Yalçın, 2013) and students’ learning style preferences (Oxford, 1990). The two research questions that guided the study are presented as follows:

1. What are undergraduate English-majored students’ beliefs about English language learning (students’ self-efficacy, students’ and teacher’s roles, nature of learning, and traditional orientation of English language learning)?

2. Are there any significant differences between males’ and females’ beliefs about English language learning?
Literature Review

Learners’ Beliefs, Teacher-Centered and Learner-Centered Instructions

According to Wenden (1998b) and Flavell (1987), learners’ belief was considered as a part of metacognitive knowledge. To be specific, it is “the ability to use the knowledge to plan, monitor, and evaluate their language learning. The learners’ metacognition influences the degree of autonomous behaviors toward learning” (Abhakorn, 2014, p.47). Learners directly influence their language learning process (Cotterall, 1995). If students hold negative beliefs on the way they learn a language, they might receive poor achievement (Horwitz, 1988). Generally speaking, learners’ belief in language learning has a profound effect on learning process (Dörnyei, 2005; Kalaja & Barcelos, 2003; Rad, 2010), learners’ motivation and behavior (Cohen & Dörnyei, 2002; Cotterall, 1995), language achievement (Alsamaani, 2012; Fazilatfar et al., 2015; Sakui & Gaies, 1999; Ren & Bai, 2016), and their learning behavior or learning styles (Cotterall, 1995; Sakui & Gaies, 1999; Wenden, 1991).

As for teacher-centered instruction, according to Brown and Lee (2015), has existed for centuries in which teachers control everything in the class. Students do not have opportunities to ask questions, they just speak when being asked. Meanwhile, a learner-centered approach appeared by the end of the twentieth century, which provides students with chances to actively participate in their learning process.

Students’ Beliefs about English Language Learning

There are various studies investigating learners’ beliefs in English language learning. The role of teachers and the focus on grammar are the two remarkable points found from previous studies (Abdul Rahman, 2005; Ambigapathy, 2002; Amuzie & Winke, 2009; Jantrasakul, 2004; Jaliyya & Idrus, 2017; Nguyen & Habok, 2021). A majority of researchers recognized that focusing on grammar and depending too much on teachers might limit students’ communicative ability and their learning achievement. In fact, teacher was considered as a crucial role in learning process of students, especially in Asian contexts. To be specific, Thai students had a misconception about learning English language when their principal purpose of learning English was to pass the examinations at school, so they believed that teachers would show them how to learn effectively for the tests (Jantrasakul, 2004). Thai students then preferred to be receivers while they considered their teachers as providers. Similarly, when it comes to non-English major students in the Vietnamese context, teacher's role was significant in pupils’ learning English as they believed that teachers would provide guidance, explanation, and correction (Nguyen & Habok, 2021). Also, Ambigapathy (2002) and Abdul Rahman (2005) reported that Malaysian students in their studies were required to learn grammatical skills and
rules, which were then tested throughout school and national examinations. As a result, communicative competence was abandoned. In the same vein, Indonesian students faced the problem of English communication anxiety due to examination-driven learning approach (Jaliyya & Idrus, 2017).

Meanwhile, students’ beliefs in self-efficacy, self-motivation, and self-regulated learning have a big effect on their learning English (Amuzi & Winke, 2009; Macaro, 2001; Ren & Bai, 2016). For instance, Ren and Bai (2016) found that hard-working was believed to be a factor influencing Chinese students’ learning English achievement. Students' self-motivation, including activities, didactic materials, learners’ interests, and their autonomy should also be encouraged. As for self-regulated learning, Amuzi and Winke (2009) interviewed EFL students about the differences in learning and teaching English between their home countries and the States. Indonesian and Korean students shared the same cultural language teaching that the examination-driven teaching was dominant. They received the information from teachers and worked on grammar rules instead of practicing speaking with their peers or teachers. On the contrary, the researchers found a different result when those Asian students studied in America where learners were allowed to express their opinions and provided with varied group activities. By doing so, students had more opportunities to use English in a natural way. It could be recognized that self-directed and self-regulated learning processes enable students to achieve language learning goals. As Macaro (2001) mentioned, learners usually performed better when they were proactive in language learning.

When it comes to the nature of English language learning, Turkish students believed that practicing with native speakers and audio materials was helpful for learning English (Jiménez, 2018). The researcher also found that exploring new things and adopting several learning styles helped students perform well in English. Regarding learners’ beliefs in traditional orientation, Sakui and Gaies (1999) found that Japanese students did not prefer using L1 translation in English classrooms.

To sum up, teachers’ roles and language mechanics are important in teaching the English language. However, the teacher-centered approach, in some cases, makes students depend on them and affects their beliefs about how to learn language and limits their language achievements. Meanwhile, the nature of learning in making connections to how a language is used in real communicative events and the factors of self-efficacy seem to be neglected.
Students’ Beliefs between Males and Females

The differences between males and females regarding language beliefs have been widely explored in various learning contexts. In Malaysia, a study investigated 107 university students about their language learning beliefs, between males and females (Nikitina & Furuoka, 2007). They revealed that gender-related significant differences in learning beliefs were minimal. They just found that female students rated higher for language learning tools such as audio materials and CD recordings than males did. It means that females thought it was much greater importance to employ learning tools than males. Nguyen and Habók (2021) found that male learners’ perspectives tended to be more teacher-centered than those of female learners. In Daif-Allah’s study (2012), he explored the overall beliefs of 250 Saudi university students. He postulated that males and females held similar beliefs about language learning with regard to the difficulty and the nature of language learning, but there was a significant difference among genders when it comes to beliefs about motivation and expectations. Particularly, females were more likely to enjoy practicing English in the language lab and prefer repetition and memorization than males did. Also, females showed much higher confidence in their learning abilities than males.

Research Method

Participants

A total of 121 EFL Vietnamese learners consented to take part in the study (71 males and 50 females). Table one below presents detailed information about the participants’ profiles.

Table 1. Participants’ Demographic Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>English proficiency level self-rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>58.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All of them were students studying undergraduate degrees at three different universities in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam (32 freshmen, 51 second-year students, 26 juniors, and 12 seniors). To understand learner proficiency levels, they were also asked to self-rate from poor to excellent. It seems that most participants are at medium and good levels, as 83.5% rated themselves at medium and higher levels.
Instruments
The questionnaire includes two parts, namely students’ background information and students’ beliefs (Appendix). First, to get demographic information of participants, questions related to genders, English proficiency, and class levels were asked. The students’ beliefs questionnaire contains 29 items in which 24 items of them adopted from Cotterall (1999) and Horwitz (1988) concerning students’ beliefs in their self-efficacy, students’ and teacher’s roles, the nature of English language learning. Particularly, self-efficacy refers to students’ learning abilities, which affects how they think, feel, behave, and inspire themselves (Albert Bandura, 1994) while nature of language learning relates to different aspects of learning English facilitating their learning process such as learning new vocabulary, grammar rules, practicing or loving learning English. Also, learners’ expectations adopted from Sakui and Gaies (1999)’s questionnaire (five questions) are used to explore learners’ perspectives toward traditional teaching method which involves in L1 translation. A total of 29 questions were based on a 5-Likert scale ranging from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree). To avoid misunderstandings, all questions were written in both English and Vietnamese.

Data Collection
This study applies a quantitative method (survey questions) to collect data. The researchers used Google Form to collect data, and students finished the survey on a regular class session. The first author introduced the purpose of the study and guided students on how to answer the questions if there was any confusion. The entire data collection process took students approximately 20 minutes to finish.

Data Analysis
To examine students’ beliefs in English language learning, mean scores of all items were calculated and descriptive statistics were analyzed. The students’ beliefs regarding each item were categorized based on three general language learning strategies developed by Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995). To be specific, "high" means from 3.5 to higher; "medium" is from 2.5 to 3.4; and lower than 2.5 is categorized as "low". These belief levels provided a criterion to compare between different categories. To investigate any significant differences between male and female learners’ beliefs, overall mean values of each group were counted for males and females; an independent sample T-test was then conducted to compare the mean scores of different groups between the two genders. To gain a deeper insight into the noticeable differences between groups, mean scores of each item in each group were also counted, and independent sample t- tests were carried out.
Findings

Finding 1. Students’ Beliefs about English Language Learning

To answer the first research question, overall mean scores of all five factors related to students’ learning beliefs were calculated and presented in Table two.

Table 2. Mean Scores of All Five Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students’ self-efficacy</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher’s role</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ role</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature of learning</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional orientation of English language learning</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total learning beliefs</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen from Table 2, the overall mean score of five aspects of English learning beliefs was 3.61, $SD = .55$, which suggests a high level of belief or respondents show strong agreement with general learning beliefs. Learners only rated medium for the traditional orientation of English language learning while they rated high for the other factors. This finding suggests that participants hold little interest in traditional beliefs of learning English and support the importance of their own self-efficacy, teacher’s and learners’ roles, and the nature of learning. To interpret how learners rated these factors, the following sections provided further descriptions of five categories.

Self-efficacy of English Language Learning

First, the mean scores in self-efficacy indicating how much students' beliefs about their learning abilities (from strongly disagree to strongly agree) were calculated, and the results are presented in Table three.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Self-efficacy of English Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I believe that I will ultimately learn to speak English very well.</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that I have the ability to learn English successfully.</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that I know my strengths and weaknesses in English learning.</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that I know how to study English.</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I set my goals for learning English.</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that I am confident about checking my work for mistakes.</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 shows that 83% of self-efficacy items were reported at a high level, with mean scores being above 3.5 which indicates that Vietnamese undergraduates believe that they have ability to produce the results that are wanted. Specifically, most students set the aim for learning English ($M=4.05$, $SD=.63$) and reckon that they can learn English successfully ($M=4.01$, $SD=.58$). Also, participants revealed that they were aware of learning methods and acknowledged their strengths and weaknesses ($M=3.75$, $SD=.73$; $M=3.74$, $SD=1.17$, respectively). When it came to double-checking their errors, students, on the other hand, expressed a lack of confidence ($M=3.18$, $SD=.87$).

**Descriptive Statistics for Teachers’ Roles in English Language Learning**

Table 4 shows that most students agreed that teachers’ main roles are to tell them what to do ($M=3.98$, $SD=.80$); give comments on pupils’ learning to encourage their confidence ($M=3.83$, $SD=1.18$) and deliver feedback to enhance learners’ progress ($M=3.74$, $SD=1.12$). Nonetheless, learners were not likely to agree that teacher was the person who determined their success or gave them chances to practice English ($M=3.38$, $SD=1.06$; $M=3.31$, $SD=1.03$, respectively).

**Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for Teachers’ and Students’ Roles in English Language Learning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I believe that teacher feedback helps me learn English effectively.</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that teacher comments on my learning encourage confidence.</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that my language success depends on what the teacher does in the classroom.</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that opportunities to use the language should be provided by the teacher.</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that the role of the teacher is to tell me what to do.</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that the role of a teacher is to set my learning goals.</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of students’ role, participants ranked those items higher than teachers’ roles. Students, interestingly, believed that their own efforts determined their success in learning English ($M=4.31$, $SD=.85$). Participants also shared that they thought learners’ major roles are to acknowledge their weaknesses ($M=4.05$, $SD=.68$), establish their learning goals ($M=3.88$, $SD=.79$) and seek for opportunities to practice English ($M=3.83$, $SD=1.22$). Table 5 presents the descriptive statistics for students’ role in English language learning.
Table 5. Descriptive Statistics for Student Roles in English Language Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I should find my own opportunities to use/practice the language.</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that my language success depends on what I do outside the</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>1.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>classroom.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that the role of a learner is to know which aspects of</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English he/she wants to improve.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that the role of a learner is to set his/her learning</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>goals.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that the role of the learner is to look for solutions to</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>his/her problems.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that my own effort plays an important role in successful</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>language learning.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nature of English Language Learning (Motivation)

As for the nature of English language learning, Table 6 shows that learners support the traditional learning strategies in which repetition and practice are considered as good ways to learn English \((M = 3.92, SD = 1.36)\). Many students also revealed that listening to English programs on TV was very useful when learning English \((M = 3.83, SD = 1.22)\). Most respondents reported that they considered learning English as a matter of grammar and lexical learning \((M = 3.78, SD = 1.12; M = 3.69, SD = 1.06, respectively)\). Therefore, students are likely to spend a huge amount of time on memorizing new vocabulary and practicing grammar rules. However, participants revealed that knowing about English-speaking countries was not important in learning English as they ranked it at a medium level \((M = 3.4, SD = 1.1)\).

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics for Nature of English Language Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I believe that those who love to talk will learn English better.</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that the most important part of learning English is</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>learning new vocabulary.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that learning English is mostly a matter of learning</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grammar rules.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that listening to tapes and watching English programs on</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>television are very important in learning English.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that it is useful to know about English-speaking countries</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to speak English.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that in learning English, it is important to repeat and</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>practice a lot.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Traditional Orientation to Learning English (Expectation)**

In general, the respondents viewed traditional orientation to English learning as less important than other aspects of students’ beliefs because they ranked them quite low at a medium level ($M < 3.5$). Students do not prefer L1 translation in English classes or thinking in their mother tongue ($M < 3.05$). Most respondents do not consider learning English as a matter of translation into L1 ($M = 3.08, SD = .98$). To sum up, they do not share the same view with the traditional orientation of learning English and L1 is not supported in English classroom.

**Table 7. Descriptive Statistics for Traditional Orientation to Learning English**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I believe that to understand English, it must be translated into Vietnamese.</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that to say something in English, I think of how I would say it in Vietnamese and then translate it into English.</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that learning a word means learning the Vietnamese translation.</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that learning English is mostly a matter of translating from Vietnamese.</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that in English classes, I prefer to have my teacher provide explanations in Vietnamese.</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>.86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Finding 2. Vietnamese Males’ and Females’ Beliefs about English Language Learning**

To answer the second research question, which asks whether there is a significant difference in learning English beliefs between male and female respondents, the mean scores of each statement in five categories, namely self-efficacy; teacher’s role, students’ role; motivation, and expectation, were calculated and presented in Table 8.

**Table 8. Comparison of Mean Ratings in Five Aspects of Learning Beliefs by Males and Females**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>d</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall self-efficacy</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>2.869</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall teacher’s role</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.243</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall students’ role</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>.351</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall motivation</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>.263</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall expectation</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>-.803</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall learning beliefs</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>.018</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Significant at the level of .05

There is no significant impact of gender on Vietnamese students’ general beliefs about learning English ($p > 0.05$) while significant differences between females and males were found in beliefs about self-efficacy and expectation.
Regarding descriptive statistics, male students rated higher than female students in most of learning beliefs except for expectation. Learners reported a medium level of beliefs in expectation while they showed high level for the other aspects. In other words, Vietnamese students in this study considered traditional orientation to learning English less important than self-efficacy, teacher’s role, learners’ role, and their motivation ($M < 3.5$). Using an adjusted alpha level, the independent sample $t$-test reported a statistically significant difference in the means of self-efficacy and expectation for males and females; meanwhile, no significant differences were found in other teacher’s role, learners’ role, and motivation ($p > .05$). To gain insight into subscales, a series of $t$-tests comparing mean scores of males and females on each item of these two aspects was conducted, as shown in Tables nine and ten.

Table 9 suggests that there was a statistically significant relationship between male and female participants on half of the items related to self-efficacy ($p < .05$). This finding emphasizes that males have a stronger belief in their ability to speak English well than females.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>d</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I believe that I will ultimately learn to speak English very well.</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>2.137</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>.035*</td>
<td>1.0923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that I have the ability to learn English successfully.</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>1.164</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>.247</td>
<td>.58406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that I know my strengths and weaknesses in English learning.</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>2.897</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>.005*</td>
<td>1.1294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that I know how to study English.</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>2.468</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>.015*</td>
<td>.71842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I set my goals for learning English.</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>1.918</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>.057</td>
<td>.62357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that I am confident about checking my work for mistakes.</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>-1.701</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>.484</td>
<td>.87437</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Significant at the level of .05

Also, male participants show better awareness of their advantages, disadvantages, and methods for learning English than females do. However, no significant differences were found in learners’ beliefs about other items. It seems that both men and women show the same attitudes in their ability to succeed, confidence to check mistakes or setting aims for their learning.
Table 10. Comparison of Mean Ratings in Traditional Orientation to Learning English (Expectation) by Males and Females

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>d</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I believe that to understand English, it must be translated into Vietnamese.</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>-2.795</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>.006*</td>
<td>.78825</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that to say something in English, I think of how I would say it in Vietnamese and then translate it into English.</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>-2.483</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>.014*</td>
<td>1.1876</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that learning a word means learning the Vietnamese translation.</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>-2.238</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>.027*</td>
<td>.77249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that learning English is mostly a matter of translating from Vietnamese.</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>-2.076</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>.040*</td>
<td>.06644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that in English classes, I prefer to have my teacher provide explanations in Vietnamese.</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>-2.245</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>.027*</td>
<td>.84874</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Significant at the level of .05

Discussion

Learners’ Beliefs about English Language Learning

In general, participants reported the highest mean score in their beliefs about the learners’ role, which was greater than that of the teachers’ role. It seems that Vietnamese English-majored students in this study seem to be active in learning English. This finding is not in line with a previous study of Nguyen and Habok (2021) which postulated that Vietnamese learners in their study relied on teachers in learning English from guiding them to correct their errors. It could be explained that participants in Nguyen and Habok’s study were not majored in English, and their proficiency in English was not high, so they preferred a teacher-centered approach. While respondents in this study majored in English, indicating a higher level of proficiency, they were less reliant on instructors. Additionally, participants ranked the role of teachers lower than their self-efficacy. According to previous studies, self-efficacy and students’ confidence in English language learning have positive impacts on student learning process (Jiménez, 2018; Kim, 2012; Tanaka & Ellis, 2003; Genç et al., 2016). In particular, Amuzie and Winke (2009) indicated that ESL students studying in the States with learner-centered orientation performed better when they studied in their home countries, where teacher-centered was dominant. In fact, teacher-centered approach has enjoyed widespread popularity in EFL contexts (Abdul Rahman, 2005; Ambigapathy, 2002; Jantrasakul, 2004), especially in Vietnamese institutions. However, students in this study seem to not prefer this teaching approach. Therefore, the learner-centered approach should be encouraged when teaching high proficiency learners, and teachers might give students opportunities to self-correct their mistakes and self-improve their learning.
process. In short, language teachers might consider their pupils’ preferred learning approaches and use suitable methods for varied learner groups in English classrooms. Teachers are supreme authorities who always provide knowledge and ask students what to do for learning English, which seems inappropriate in English classes at high educational levels.

As for the nature of English language learning, participants ranked highest for practicing and repeating English. Vietnamese learners in this study believed that practice was the most important factor to study language well. Indeed, repetition and practice are the two effective principles of language learning emphasized by Nation and Macalister (2021). They indicated that language teachers should provide plenty of opportunities for students to meet materials again in the same form (verbatim repetition) and in different ways (varied repetition), then practice regularly. Furthermore, vocabulary and grammar were also ranked high. In other words, learners assumed that the nature of learning English was to acquire grammar and lexical resources. Facilitators, hence, may provide learners with several opportunities to use English and pay attention to these two aspects of the language when teaching Vietnamese students, especially in the four language skills. As Nation and Macalister (2021) mentioned that language-focused meaning is one the important strands of language learning. This important issue should be included in each language skill lesson. For example, vocabulary and grammar should be inevitable sections in speaking, listening, reading, and writing classes because these knowledge help learners learn and practice English skills effectively.

Besides, respondents thought that watching English channels was an effective way to improve their English. This finding is in line with Jiménez’s (2018), who found that Turkish students liked practicing with native speakers and using audio materials to learn English. Meanwhile, they revealed that learning about English speaking countries seemed unnecessary, as learning a language did not mean exploring countries whose mother tongues were English. Additionally, students wanted instructors to use target language all the time since using L1 language is a phenomenon in English classes in Vietnam. Therefore, language teachers may switch to using English as the dominant language in the L2 classes. For example, teachers might provide more English authentic materials and activities (play recordings, organize English clubs, watch English channels, or involve native speakers (Celce-Murcia, 2014). When it comes to traditional orientation in language learning, students did not support the translation methods when learning English. This exploration supports the finding of Sakui and Gaies’ (1999) study that Japanese students neglected using L1 translation in English classrooms. Hence, teachers may encourage the target language usage and support learner-centeredness in L2 classes.
English Learning Beliefs of Male and Female Students

Generally, the results suggested that gender has little effect on learners’ beliefs in learning English. This finding is consistent with Nikitina and Furuoka’s study (2007) which postulated that gender-related differences were little in learning beliefs. It could be argued that differences in language learning beliefs are determined by pupils' culture and prior learning experiences rather than gender role (Politzer, 1983; Wharton 2000).

However, significant differences among genders were found in their beliefs about self-efficacy and expectations. Male students, in particular, demonstrated greater confidence in their ability to learn English than female students. Males thought that they acknowledged their strengths and weaknesses and knew how to study English, compared to females. These findings were not in line with Daif-Allah’s study (2012) as he found that females believed in their ability to learn English well than males did. In terms of expectations, female participants in the current study preferred traditional orientation in learning English related to L1 translation than males did. This finding is similar with Daif-Allah’s study (2012) which revealed that females enjoy traditional teaching methods such as practicing English in the language lab, repetition, and memorization.

The differences found by the current study regarding self-efficacy and expectations between males and females support the statement emphasized by Alsamaani (2012), Amuzie and Winke (2009), and Bassano (1986) that EFL students have different beliefs about English language learning, which might depend on educational background, learning strategies, and language proficiency. Thus, these differences might be due to different language proficiency. Language teachers might pay attention to those factors when teaching English to males and females.

Implications

According to the findings, there are some implications that EFL language teachers, especially Vietnamese language teachers, may consider applying to their teaching. As for teaching methods, alternative teaching approaches are encouraged to apply to English language classes at high levels instead of traditional teaching and teacher-centered approach. In particular, student-centered instruction should be supported since it encourages students’ role and communicative skills in L2 classrooms (Brown & Lee, 2015). Task-based language teaching (TBLT) is a good example that should be encouraged in teaching English for Vietnamese English-majored students at tertiary level. TBLT, “the use of tasks at the core of language teaching” (Ellis, 2003, p. 46), is the major approach in learner-centered instruction because tasks encourage pupils to use language throughout activities (Bygate et al., 2001).
Tasks carried out in the whole class, groups, and pairs, which allow learners to interact with their partners and teachers in the classroom (Lin, 2009). Thus, TBLT aids learners to enhance communication and social interaction in a natural way (Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2011). Moreover, TBLT focuses on purposeful and functional language use throughout real-life tasks in the classroom for students to practice (Ellis, 2009). This teaching approach provides more opportunities for students to be involved in their learning in which they work with their classmates through pair and group activities, and teachers will be supporters in classrooms. Then teachers could create a supportive and relaxing learning atmosphere in English classrooms. Moreover, it is helpful for facilitators to modify the course syllabi in order to meet students’ learning preferences. For instance, teachers provide some more activities to help learners improve their English, such as organizing English clubs and peer tutoring. It is possible to recognize that classroom practices should be linked to theory with sociocultural elements of language learning that deal with communicative use. As Musa et al. (2012) indicated, language learning should be a set of language skills as well as meaningful interactions. Additionally, as the study suggested significant differences in learning beliefs between males and females regarding self-efficacy and learning expectations, language instructors should be flexible in tailoring their teaching methods based on gender domination.

**Conclusion**

This study sheds light on students’ beliefs about English language learning in the Vietnamese context (i.e., self-efficacy, students’ role, teacher’s role, expectation and nature of learning language), which has been rarely investigated in previous Vietnamese studies in full of learning factors. As the findings showed, students had a high awareness of their self-efficacy in learning English, especially, they believed in their learning abilities, and actively set their goals for learning English. Also, they were more active in their learning process and were more enthusiastic about learning because their role in learning English was reported to be greater than that of teachers. As for motivation in learning English, students postulated that learning vocabulary and grammar, repetition, and practice were essential. In addition, listening to English channels was considered an effective learning tool. Finally, the way of L1 translation was not supported when speaking or learning English or using Vietnamese in an English class was not supported by participants. Besides, no significant difference in overall learning beliefs was found between males and females in the current study. However, there were statistical differences in their beliefs in self-efficacy and traditional orientation in learning L2 language. Particularly, males were more likely to believe in their efficacy than female students, while females showed higher ratings for learning expectations of traditional methods than males.
This study bears some research limitations and suggestions for future researchers who are interested in this research area. Future researchers might consider expanding the number of participants to generalize the contribution more widely. Another issue worth noting is that only quantitative method was used in the current study. Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) emphasized that observation and in-depth interviews of qualitative methodology would be helpful to collect reliable results. Therefore, future researchers could combine other research tools, like interviewing students and teachers, to find out more about the reasons for their learning preferences.

References


**Appendix**

**Part I: Demographic Information**

Year:

English proficiency: Very poor, Poor, Medium, Good, Excellent

Gender:

**Part II: Questionnaire**

Students’ beliefs about English Language Learning

(Adopted from Cotterall, 1999; Horwitz, 1988; Sakui & Gaies, 1999)

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of these statements about your belief on language learning by circling the number which matches your answer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Self-efficacy of English Language Learning**

1 I believe that I will ultimately learn to speak English very well.
2 I believe that I have the ability to learn English successfully.
3 I believe that I know my strengths and weaknesses in English learning.
4 I believe that I know how to study English.
5 I set my goals for learning English.
6 I believe that I am confident about checking my work for mistakes.

**Teacher’ Role in English Language Learning**

7 I believe that teacher feedback helps me learn English effectively.
8 I believe that teacher comments on my learning encourage confidence.
9 I believe that my language success depends on what the teacher does in the classroom.
10 I believe that opportunities to use the language should be provided by the teacher.
11 I believe that the role of the teacher is to tell me what to do.
12 I believe that the role of teacher is to set my learning goals.
Students’ Role in English Language Learning
13 I should find my own opportunities to use/practice the language.
14 I believe that my language success depends on what I do outside the classroom.
15 I believe that the role of a learner is to know which aspects of English he/she wants to improve.
16 I believe that the role of learner is to set his/her learning goals.
17 I believe that the role of the learner is to look for solutions to his/her problems.
18 I believe that my own effort plays an important role in successful language learning.

Nature of English Language Learning
19 I believe that those who love to talk will learn English better.
20 I believe that the most important part of learning English is learning new vocabulary.
21 I believe that learning English is mostly a matter of learning grammar rules.
22 I believe that listening to tapes and watching English programs on television are very important in learning English.
23 I believe that it is useful to know about English-speaking countries in order to speak English.
24 I believe that in learning English, it is important to repeat and practice a lot.

Traditional Orientation to Learning English (Expectation)
25 I believe that to understand English, it must be translated into Vietnamese.
26 I believe that to say something in English, I think of how I would say it in Vietnamese and then translate it into English.
27 I believe that learning a word means learning the Vietnamese translation.
28 I believe that learning English is mostly a matter of translating from Vietnamese.
29 I believe that in English classes, I prefer to have my teacher provide explanations in Vietnamese.
A Paradigm Shift in Teaching and Learning due to the COVID-19 Pandemic: Areas of Potential and Challenges of Online Classes

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**Abstract**

With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the face-to-face classes were replaced by the online classes. It is essential to explore their areas of potential and challenges from teachers’ and students’ perspectives. Therefore, the present mixed methods study attempts to disclose the teachers’ and students’ perceptions of the online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic in the EFL context of Iran. For this purpose, for the quantitative part, a total of 200 female students and 25 female teachers were selected using a random sampling method. For the qualitative part, a sample of 20 students and 5 teachers were chosen through a random sampling method. The required data were gathered by distributing a questionnaire and administering a focus group discussion. They were analyzed through calculating percentage and a content analysis approach. Findings showed that the participants had mixed feelings about online classes. Some participants preferred them as they were comfortable and they could effortlessly learn at their speed, whereas some considered it boring due to unengaging presentations. The analysis also demonstrated that online learning was a completely new challenge due to the lack of reliable devices and erratic internet connection. The qualitative findings yielded three areas of potential: flexibility, efficacy, and promoted motivation, as well as three challenges: extra workload, lack of face-to-face interactions, and difficulty in assessing students’ ability. Finally, based on the findings, a range of implications is suggested for different stakeholders.

**Keywords:** The COVID-19 pandemic, Online classes, Teachers, Students, Iranian context, Areas of potential, Challenges

**Introduction**

In response to the unprecedented crisis due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, educational institutions were shut down for an unspecified duration. In Iran, the education policymakers faced an untoward situation, with the government ordering the closure of all schools, colleges, and universities. Their last resort was to start online classes to maintain the connection between teachers and students through virtual collaboration. Czerniewicz et al. (2019) support and encourage people to find ways of virtual human connection in these trying times where social distancing is not an option but an obligation.
Online business meetings and presentations have been in vogue for a long time, but online classes for students were a new move for institutionalized education. In developing countries, such as India, Pakistan, Burma, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh, to name a few, the virtual method of teaching was a path less trodden (Adnan & Anwar, 2020; Mondol & Mohiuddin, 2020). The challenges ranged from insufficient knowledge of the internet to using an online platform for educators and students alike. So the almost immediate decision to switch from a physical classroom to online teaching raised questions and apprehensions regarding its implementation and efficacy. The challenges were mainly due to the lack of practice, an almost sudden start, and connecting students from diverse geological locations (Chakraborty et al., 2021; Morrison & Sepulveda-Escobar, 2021). The challenges include even more complexities concerning reliable Internet connectivity, smart devices, quality in teaching and learning, understanding nuances of an online platform-scheduling meetings, file sharing, using breakout rooms, recording sessions, and the use of chatroom. Despite the overwhelming challenges, teachers have come to grips with the reality of the current scenario, and with the help of online resources, peer learning and their own trials and errors have successfully conducted online classes. Incorporating online classes has added some areas of potential and challenges to prepare students to work in any environment. Moravec (2020, p. 39) states:

“Knowmadic workers work with context rather than following a strict structure. In today's society, the jobs that educational institutes prepare students for are slowly diminishing. In fact, knowledge and innovation-based work, which needs people to function contextually in a ubiquitous manner, are constantly replacing them. These workers are known as knowmads, and they add value across different establishments through their expertise.”

Since this method of teaching was relatively new, doubts loomed regarding the efficacy of the online classes. The stakeholders got divided with a section raising concerns and another waiting expectantly to feel modernity in learning. The teachers, however, initially found the online platforms demanding but slowly adapted themselves to them. Moreover, the number of participants also increased strikingly. This trajectory of the circumstances made educators look for suitable methods of instruction while the students made themselves available for the new pedagogy. This study researches the new teaching method and its challenges and tries to present some ideas to enhance online teaching and learning in situations similar to the prevailing one the world is facing. Therefore, the present study aims
to disclose the areas of potential and challenges of the online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic from teachers’ and students’ perspectives.

**Literature Review**

The COVID-19 pandemic outbreak worldwide has created big problems for the economy, trade and commerce, and tourism for an indefinite period (Jnr & Noel, 2021). And due to the subsequent lockdown and closure of educational institutes, billions of students are now forced to attend schools or universities online for their lessons.

A UNESCO report in 2020 claims that an overwhelming number of students, almost 1.38 billion learners, have been kept away from face-to-face classes due to the worldwide shutdown of educational institutions. In other words, 80 percent of the world’s learners were not attending schools or universities. In this crisis, only online education has given a ray of hope to get back on track and continue imparting education. Recently, there has been numerous research into addressing the difficulties and opportunities of online classes.

**Shift from Face-to-face Classes to Online Mode of Education**

Czerniewicz et al. (2019) mention that universities are now conducting online lectures, exams, and assessments on a large scale due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which reflects that the world is always ready to shift and adapt to alternative methods in times of emergencies and, people previously adopted these methods in times of political crisis or natural disasters. Similar findings in other research report a school with limited resources that have moved to accept remote learning as the new normal in this emergency (Han & Yi, 2021; Hodges et al., 2020). Overall, online classes are not region-specific but a global step considering the COVID-19 pandemic. In just a few months of lockdown, UNESCO (2020) reported that the pandemic impacted around 1.38 billion learners. Arkorful and Abaidoo (2015) note that online learning is productive and fosters understanding and concept assimilation. Baum (2020) finds two contrasting points related to the institutions. He stresses that people already used to the online mode of working will quickly adapt while educational policymakers might face a unique challenge trying to figure out this new method of communication and teaching.

**Previous Studies - Problems in Life and Education Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic**

These new issues have challenged global interaction and collaboration among educational institutions and have brought growth to a visible standstill. In this regard, Moravec (2020) thinks that the absence of our progress is visible due to the unexpected disconnection in global
educational engagements. He further mentions that emergencies are always unforeseen, and since changes are the norm of society, we must always be prepared for them. He insists on students displaying even more resilience in these new situations and contexts (Moravec, 2020). Today, the efficacy of online learning has been demonstrated for many scholars and it is no longer an alien topic. For example, Cao et al. (2020) discussed the psychological effects of the pandemic on medical students in Hubei Province of China. Their findings showed that the students’ psychological health was heavily affected when they encountered public health emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic. In general, they found three key reasons for the students’ anxiety symptoms: a) economic issues; b) disruption in daily chores; and c) academic hurdles. They suggested support from the family, community, educational institutes, and the government to help the students overcome their anxiety in these trying times. Additionally, Bao (2020) mentions six instructional approaches to summarise online teaching experiences for educators and recommended five impactful policies for online education: a) powerful connection between online instructional plan and student training; b) effective delivery of instructions; c) providing scaffolding to students by teachers and assistants; d) fostering participation to improve learning; and e) have a contingency plan to overcome unexpected problems of online platforms. Further, Chick et al. (2020) showed how technology helped medical students to continue their education online. They proposed the flipped classroom model, online sessions to solve doubts, online conferences instead of in-class lectures, and the use of surgical videos to impart practical knowledge. Finally, Hew and Lo (2018) discovered that flipped classroom speeds up learning in medical classrooms. Their emphasis was on showing pre-recorded videos before in-class lectures because of the massive effectiveness in the students' comprehension.

In the literature, some studies have explored the areas of potential and challenges of the online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic. In a study, Mondol and Mohiuddin (2020) investigated the university teachers’ and university students’ perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of the online course during the COVID-19 pandemic in Bangladesh. Their findings evidenced that the online classes had both advantages (e.g., comfortable) and disadvantages (e.g., frequent internet disconnections). Additionally, Adnan and Anwar (2020) examined the higher education students’ attitudes toward online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic in Pakistan. Their findings evidenced that the participants did not feel satisfied with the online classes owing to the inaccessibility to the internet due to technical and financial issues, the lack of face-to-face interactions, and the absence of socialization in the traditional classes. Further, Naik et al. (2021) explored the teachers’, students’, and parents’ perceptions of the areas of potential and challenges of the online courses in India. Their findings revealed
that the participants preferred traditional classes over the online classes. They highlighted some challenges, including lack of facilities, infrastructure, technical tools, and internet access are the major drawback for conducting online sessions. Finally, Chakraborty et al. (2021) conducted a survey to disclose the under-graduate students’ opinions about the different aspects of online courses during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their results evidenced that they learned better in the traditional classes than the online classes and the online classes were found more stressful. The participants, however, appreciated the use of the software and the online learning materials.

What can be inferred from the above-reviewed studies is that they suffer from two noticeable limitations. The first limitation is that they have used quantitative designs and the qualitative aspect of the issue has remained unexplored. The second limitation is that the teachers’ and students’ perceptions of the areas of potential and challenges of the online courses during the COVID-19 pandemic have not been researched in the Iranian EFL context. To bridge these gaps, the present study is intent on exploring the areas of potential and challenges of the online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic quantitatively and qualitatively.

**Method**

**Setting and Participants**

The design of the present study was an explanatory mixed method. That is, the qualitative data were used to supplement the quantitative data. The reason for choosing a mixed-methods design was reaching triangulation. According to Riazi (2016), triangulation is a strategy to gain a deeper understanding of the topic under research by using different approaches and techniques. Therefore, to further our understanding of the areas of potential and challenges of online courses during the COVID-19 pandemic from the teachers’ and students’ perspectives, a mixed-methods design was used. For these purposes, the following research question was investigated:

**RQ.** What are teachers’ and students’ perceptions of the areas of potential and challenges of the online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The present study was run at a high school in Borujerd City, Iran. For the quantitative part, the researchers selected a total of 200 students and 25 teachers using a random sampling approach. The random sampling approach includes selecting a group of participants from a population by giving them an equal chance to be selected. The students include just females and their age ranged from 15 to 18. The teachers entailed females and aged from 35 to 64. For the qualitative part, 20 students and 5 teachers were selected from the participants who took
part in the quantitative part. The participants’ pseudonyms have been given at the end of their statements below. It should be noted that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers, and students attended classes online. To run the classes, they used the learning management system named Student Educational Network (SHAD).

The first researcher went to the office of the high school and detailed the present study’s objectives for the school principal. The school principal agreed to the researchers to run the study in the setting of the school. He let the first researcher have access to the phone numbers of the students and the teachers. The researchers contacted the students and teachers and asked if they were willing to participate in the current study. For the participants who agreed to participate willingly in the study, they sent a digital format of written consent via email, What’sApp, and Telegram. The participants signed it and returned it to the researchers. It is worth noting that the researchers informed the participants that they could withdraw from the study as they wished. They ensured the participants that their responses would remain confidential, and they kept them informed about the results.

**Instruments**
The researchers used two instruments to gather the required data. The first instrument was a questionnaire to measure the participants’ perceptions of the areas of potential and challenges of the online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic. The questionnaire was designed and validated by Mondol and Mohiuddin (2020). It includes three sections. The first section consists of five Dichotomous and one Importance question addresses the participants’ personal experiences with the online courses. The second part entailing five items arranged on a 5-point Likert scale deals with the areas of potential and challenges of online classes. The third part comprising two open-ended questions encourage the participants to express their opinions about the advantages and disadvantages of the online classes. It should be underlined that the researchers recruited two well-experienced translators to translate the contents of the questionnaire into the participants’ mother tongue. Then, they gauged the reliability of the questionnaire by running a pilot study. The results of Cronbach’s alpha indicated that the questionnaire enjoyed a high level of reliability (0.89). For the validity, they used an expert’s judgment strategy. In doing so, they invited two associate university professors in Applied Linguistics to comment on the face and content of the questionnaire. Based on their comments, some modifications in terms of grammar and lexicon were made in regard to the language of the items of the questionnaire. For instance, the items including hard to understand words and expressions were replaced with easier ones.
The second instrument was a focus group discussion. In doing so, the researchers invited the students and teachers to two online classes run on the Adobe Connect platform. The first researchers started the discussion and encouraged the participants to express their perceptions of the areas of potential and challenges of online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The following guiding questions/prompts were used to run the focus group discussion:
- What do think about online classes?
- What have the areas of potential of the online classes been during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- What have the areas of potential of the online classes been during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- What are your suggestions to improve the quality of the online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic?

To extract the intended concepts, the first researcher used questions and prompts during the discussion. It should be stressed that the focus group discussion lasted two hours and was run in the participants’ mother tongue (Persian). The reason for this was to allow the participants to express their views with ease. The focus group discussion was recorded via voice-recorder such that it can be analyzed later. Afterward, the researchers recruited two professional translators to translate the participants’ responses into English.

**Data Collection Procedures**

The researchers took some distinct steps to run this study. Firstly, they reviewed the literature meticulously and selected the questionnaire. Secondly, they recruited two well-experienced translators to translate the questionnaire into the students’ mother tongue. Thirdly, they ran a pilot study to measure the reliability and validity of the questionnaire. Fourthly, after obtaining informed consent from the participants, they sent a digital format of the questionnaire to the participants via email, WhatsApp, and Telegram. The participants’ responses were collected in a dataset. In the final step, they run the focus group discussion on the Adobe Connect Platform.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

Since the collected data included both quantitative and qualitative, the data analysis procedures were governed by the two approaches. Regarding the quantitative data, the
researchers examined if the collected data included any cases with missing data using SPSS 22. Next, they calculated the mean (M), standard deviation (SD), and percentage of all the items of the questionnaire. For the collected qualitative data, the researchers used a content analysis approach. According to Mackey and Gass (2016), the researchers use content analysis to make sense of the contents of the interactions among the participants. As recommended by Dörnyei (2007), the first researcher went through three steps: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. In the first step, the first researcher read the transcripts so much so that he could understand their meanings. In the second step, he tried to extract the major themes and excerpts. In the third step, he tried to put the participants’ perceptions under the extracted theme. It should be underlined that the researchers measured the reliability and validity of the findings. Regarding reliability, they recruited two coding analysts to code the data independently. They coded the data independently and the results of the inter-rater reliability measured through Cronbach’s alpha yielded (0.95) which was regarded acceptable for the present study’s objective. Concerning the validity, they used a member-checking strategy. For this purpose, they invited half of the teachers and students to examine if the findings matched their intended meanings. In general, they reported a high level of correspondence.

Findings

Quantitative Findings

As noted above, the research question explored the areas of potential and challenges of online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the following section, at first, we present the results concerning the students’ perceptions of online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic. Then, we report the students’ perceptions of online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Students’ Perceptions of Online Classes during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Perceptions of online classes as an alternative to traditional classes

The findings displayed that the sudden outbreak of a deadly virus worldwide and the government's immediate decision to hold online classes have made the students express mixed feelings regarding their effectiveness and reasonability. The students' responses were divided when asked if online classes were the only solution in an emergency like this. Most of the respondents had a positive take on it, but a few were not clear about their understanding.
Among them, 32% fully agreed, 25% agreed, and 22% were neutral, while only 12% disagreed and 9% strongly disagreed. Hence, as reported in Figure 2, 57% of the participants were in favor of online classes. When asked about better facilities for online sessions, almost 92% strongly agreed to the proposition, and 8% agreed (Figure 3).

Nobody was neutral or disagreed with the proposition that shows students face complexities regarding internet connectivity, especially in under-developed countries.
Perceptions of cost-effective data packages for online classes

The second proposition was regarding cost-effective internet packages either from the service provider or the educational institutes. The response from the students is reported in Figure 4. 82% of the students considered it extremely important, 16% of the students voted it very important, while only 2% of the students thought it was not important at all.

Figure 3. Affordable Data Packages for Students by Institutes or Service Providers

Overall, the students made it clear that the online classes needed a significant amount of data, and it is usually not possible for parents to afford it.

Teachers’ Perceptions of Online Classes during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Interest in delivering online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic

The teachers received a short training before starting the online classes. As shown in Figure 5, when asked about their experiences, almost 83% of the teachers said they were coping well, while the remaining 17% said they were still not comfortable with the system because of various reasons, including stress due to the pandemic.
Appreciating the importance of affordable data packages for students

Since the online classes were relatively expensive due to the amount of data needed to conduct them, the teachers favored the proposition to provide their students with cost-effective data packages, either through the operator or the institutions. As presented in Figure 6, 76% of the teachers voted it extremely important, 22% of the teachers voted it very important, and only 2% of the teachers considered it somewhat important.
Perceptions of the delivery of online classes as the only way to impart education during the COVID-19 pandemic

When teachers were asked if they considered the online classes as the only solution in situations like the COVID-19 pandemic, 45% of the teachers strongly agreed, 50% of the teachers agreed, 4% remained neutral, and only 1% of the teachers showed disagreement (Figure 7).

Figure 6. Online Classes as an Alternative during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Although the teachers acknowledged the significance of online learning, they still unanimously said they need more training and practice to get acquainted with the system.

Relationship between stable and reliable internet connection and effective delivery of online classes

Teachers believe that there is a strong connection between the effective conduction of online classes and a stable internet connection. As observed in Figure 8, 78% of the teachers strongly agreed with the idea, while 13% of the teachers agreed, and only a few, comprising 9% of the teachers, disagreed.
The teachers, in general, suffer due to weak internet and hence the response of teachers make it clear that the online classes can only be successful with more stable internet connectivity. A few teachers also agreed to have online classes in normal circumstances, while the majority remained opposed to it, perhaps due to their lack of technical knowledge.

**Qualitative Findings**

The participants’ words were subjected to a content analysis approach. The findings yielded some recurring themes: three areas of potential, including flexibility, efficacy, and promoted motivation, as well as three challenges, including extra workload, lack of face-to-face interactions, and difficulty in assessing students’ ability. The first theme that emerged from the participants was ‘flexibility’. This was considered an advantage for the online courses. The participants underlined that in the online courses they do not have time and place limitations. In this regard, one of the students stated:

*As opposed to the face-to-face classes, we do not have to commute to the school. We save lots of time and money. Our classes can be made up at an agreed time with all students. It is really cool to me. (Maryam)*

To support the flexibility of the online classes, one of the teachers commented:

*In comparison with the traditional classes, online courses encourage school students to learn to plan, monitor, and even evaluate their own learning distantly and independently. They can learn at their own pace. (Rezvan)*

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**Figure 7. Reliable and Stable Network for Online Classes**

![Graph showing the relation between network connectivity and conduction of online classes.](chart.png)
‘Efficacy’ was another recurring theme that gained huge attention from the participants. This was regarded as another advantage of the online courses. In this regard, one of the teachers quoted:

*Using modern technologies in online courses can aid me to present more interesting and informative materials. For instance, I use video and audio clips in my teaching. Or sometimes, I show colorful pictures, maps, and diagrams, which all make my teaching more useful for the students. In reality, they get more involved in the course materials.* (Neda)

Corroborating with the preceding statement, a student stressed that in the online courses, their level of engagement is considerable. She commented:

*The efficiency of online learning is more than the traditional classes, I feel. The very reason is that I have better control over my learning. In addition, we have more diverse tasks and activities which are presented in more exciting ways.* (Shirin)

The other theme extracted from the participants’ responses was ‘promoted motivation’. They underlined that in the online courses they have higher motivation to teach and learn compared to the traditional classes. This was found as another advantage of the online classes. In this regard, one of the teachers quoted:

*Through modern social technologies, we have easy access to other colleagues to ask our questions or share our experiences. Also, when we are doing research, via new app messengers, we can collect our data without being forced to meet the participants in person. This all makes me motivated to improve my professional competence and performance.* (Zahara)

Consistent with the previous remark, Azam, a student, stated that:

*In the online classes, we have access to unlimited sources. We can benefit from the audio and video materials presented in an amazing way by our teachers. We can solve our problems when we face questions by contacting our teachers and peers. That is why I believe that learning in online courses is quite interesting.* (Azam)

The other recurring theme that extracted from the participants’ responses was ‘extra workload’. This was perceived as a challenge with the online classes. One of the teachers opined that the roles of teachers in online classes have dramatically shifted. To this, she wrote:

*In online classes, I do not have any noticeable influence on the students’ behavior. I think that my role has diminished as a materials presenter. In addition, I have to put more time and energy into preparing the materials and presenting them in different ways* (Fatemeh).
Resonated with the previous statement, Shirin, a student, remarked that:

Well, in the online classes the workload is really too much. I have to work 24/7 to do the assignments. For example, I have to read the passages, summarize and send them to my teacher. (Shirin)

The succeeding theme was ‘lack of face-to-face interaction’ which was considered as a challenge with the online classes. The students express disdain with the lack of face-to-face interactions because they cannot learn from their peers. In this respect, Akram, a student, said:

It is really hard that we cannot interact with our classmates freely. When I like to respond to my classmates’ views, I have to ask my teacher to activate my microphone. In this way, we cannot learn from one another. (Akram)

Resonating with the previous remark, one of the teachers believes that the lack of face-to-face interactions in the online classes does not let the students take advantage of their peers’ help and collaboration. She commented:

Well, in online classes, the students have less interaction with their peers, and I cannot use pair or group work activities. Since students do not have enough interactions, they cannot practice language skills well. This may cause the language skills, such as listening and speaking. (Bahar)

‘Difficulties in assessing the students’ learning’ was another prevalent theme that caught the participants’ attention. This was another challenge with the online classes. In this respect, Zeinab complained:

Designing and administering online tests is really difficult for me. It is more time-consuming, and I should use newly designed apps and platforms correctly. Plus, I cannot provide enough feedback on my students’ responses. (Zeinab)

In line with the previous participant, another teacher expressed disdain with the online classes because most of the students tend to take closed-ended tests. In this respect, Sara quoted:

One of the common problems in online assessment is that most students like close-ended questions, such as multiple-choice, matching, fill in the blank, and so on. You know, these types of questions are not so effective to measure the students’ higher levels of learning. (Sara)

In consistent with the previous statements, Raha, a student, remarked that:

In online assessment practices, we cannot demonstrate our abilities well. You know what, most of the students get their desired scores to use other illegal sources like
their friends and parents. This has made most of the students do not study hard for the tests because they know that they can handle them through cheating. (Raha)

Discussion
As noted above, the research question investigated teachers’ and students’ perceptions of the areas of potential and challenges of the online courses. The findings evidenced that online classes have had both advantages and disadvantages. Some participants found them comfortable and easy to learn based on their own pace. However, some others have found them boring due to the unengaging presentations. Aligned with the study’s results, it may be argued that the advantages of the online classes should be strengthened while at the same time the negative points should be ameliorated. Further, based on the findings, it may be argued that it is necessary to address the obstacles of online classes and provide the required facilities and orientation to have them as an appropriate alternative to face-to-face classes in emergencies. As Azizi (2022) argues, online classes can lead to promising learning if their potential be verified and strengthened as well as their weaknesses be identified and reduced.

The second part of the research question explored what the teachers’ and students’ perceptions are of the areas of potential and challenges of the online courses. The qualitative findings yielded three areas of potential: flexibility, efficacy, and promoted motivation, as well as three challenges: extra workload, lack of face-to-face interactions, and difficulty in assessing students’ ability. The study’s results indicated that online classes should be viewed with two sides that simultaneously bring about areas of potential and challenges. In line with the study’s findings, it may be argued though the online classes are flexible, efficient, and motivating, they are also demanding in terms of workload, face-to-face interactions, and assessment administrations.

The results of the study are in congruent with those of Mondol and Mohiuddin (2020), indicating that online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic in Bangladesh brought about both advantages and disadvantages for university teachers and university students. Additionally, the study’s findings are in consistent with those of Adnan and Anwar (2020), reporting that their participants were not satisfied with online classes owing to the inaccessibility to the internet, technical and monitory issues, the lack of face-to-face interactions, and the absence of socialization in the traditional classes. However, in contrast with the study’s findings, Naik et al. (2021) found that Indian teachers, students, and parents preferred traditional classes over online classes. They highlighted some challenges, including lack of facilities, infrastructure, technical tools, and the internet access are the major drawback for conducting online classes. Finally, the results of the study are in congruent with those
Chakraborty et al. (2021), revealing that university students asserted that they had learned better in the traditional classes than the online classes because they were found more stressful.

One possible explanation for one of the areas of potential of the online classes, flexibility, is that the students who might have had problems attending the face-to-face classes due to time and place limitations can join the online classes without any limitation (Arumugam et al., 2021; Davis et al., 2019). Along with the study’s results, it may be argued that the flexibility of the online classes may lie in this reality that even in temporary conflicts like health issues and transportation problems the participants could pace with their path to graduation. The study findings lend support to the results of Hislop and Ellis (2004). They found that their participants felt satisfied with the online courses since they assured them that their classes would not be cancelled for a trip, bad weather, and traffic jams.

Another possible explanation for the study’s findings may be associated with the efficacy of the online classes. The participants may have benefitted from the advanced technological systems to check and manage their messages, tasks, and assignments more effectively (Ice et al., 2007). Additionally, in alignment with Wasilik and Bolliger (2009), the study’s findings may be explained from this dimension that by using the modern technologies in online teaching, the teachers might have designed, developed, and presented more high-quality course materials. Moreover, as Santilli and Beck (2005) stress, the study’s finding can be justified from this perspective because the available, easy interaction and communication between teachers and students might have made the online classes more efficient. Likewise, in line with the study’s results, it is argued that a large part of the efficacy of the online classes may be associated with the preparation of course materials. According to Davis et al. (2019), vis-à-vis the traditional face-to-face classes, the preparation, planning, and modification of course materials might have been done better and easier in the online classes. In this respect, the study’s findings are in line with those of Ulmer et al. (2007), and El Mansour and Mupinga (2007), revealing that the individuals who experienced distance education asserted that it was more effective to promote students’ learning.

As the findings demonstrated, one of the challenges was difficulties in assessing students’ learning. A possible reason for the study’s findings, as Everson (2009) stresses, is that in the online assessments, designing, implementing, and grading high-quality tests might have been demanding and complex for teachers. Another equally significant reason for the study’s results may be that most teachers are not fully equipped with the required digital literacy assessment, and they might not have been equipped with required skills to provide useful feedback on their students’ performance. Also, the study’s findings may be explained from this perspective that since teachers have had more constraints in their face-to-face
communications with their students, it might have been highly challenging to remove a misinterpretation of test purposes, provide the best feedback, and grade their responses appropriately (Bailie, 2015). Further, the results of the current study can be justified in this perspective that in online assessments, as Davis et al. (2019) highlight, the students might have perceived the items with “right answer” as fairer. In consequence, this attitude may have pushed implicitly the teachers toward objective evaluations. The objective assessments, in turn, may have restricted the opportunities of the students to learn more cognitively complicated topics, which call for problem-solving and critical thinking skills. Additionally, the last issue that may have made the online assessment more complicated was the cheating issue. The reason for this may be the reality that to get a higher score or pass a course, the students may have tempted to use their textbooks, Google, and other sources to answer test items. As a result, this may have jeopardized the reliability and validity of the assessment practices.

The study’s findings are in congruence with those of Brandon (2020), underlining that students should have free access to online learning materials such that they could use their time efficiently during the COVID-19 pandemic. As Zayapragassarazan (2020) asserted, a flexible, student-centred approach should be implemented in online classes to provide students with a variety of learning activities. In this way, it can be hoped that the learning outcomes for students are useful and interesting. To close, even though online classes have been used for a long time across the world, they have been recently practiced in Iran with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the concerned authorities to take urgent steps to make the required improvisations and corrections. In this way, online classes can be a viable alternative for the traditional classes in the impasse resulting from unpredictable crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conclusion
As mentioned above, the present study purported to explore teachers’ and students’ perceptions of the areas of potential and challenges of online courses during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study’s results revealed that online classes have both potential and challenges. The findings evidenced that the areas of potential of the online classes include flexibility, efficacy, and promoted motivation. And the challenges entailed extra workload, lack of face-to-face interactions, and difficulty in assessing students’ ability. To be adopted to the online classes, there is a need of a radical departure from the traditional modes of education. However, online classes privilege some advantages and suffer from some limitations. To
alleviate the limitations, the voices of teachers and students should be considered. This can lead to solving the challenges and humanizing the practices to achieve more promising results. It can be concluded that the COVID-19 pandemic has affirmed that educational reform is required, and future education should include a combination of both face-to-face classes and online classes.

Some implications are suggested considering the findings of the study. First, the government should address internet connectivity in all parts of the country. It should take the required steps to make high-speed internet available in cities and villages. By developing infrastructural modifications, the uninterrupted internet should be accessible for ease of online learning. Second, the education officials should admit that online education will continue to stay, and it will be an integral part of future educational programs. As such, they must equip their organizations with modern technologies such as learning management systems to facilitate online education. Third, the officials of universities should hold online training workshops for teachers, staff, and students to make them familiar with the requirements of online classes. Fourth, students and parents should adapt their mind-set to online classes, and they should play their role in making online classes successful. For this purpose, for example, they can supply the required new technology devices to attend online classes and use them. Fifth, teachers need to improve their professional competence by accommodating the required digital literacy to run online classes. For example, they need to learn how run their classes interactively. In the online sessions, the teachers and students should discuss the contents in an interactive way. Last but not least, teachers and students should be properly prepared and trained so that the future classes can be held in a blended format. That is, they should know how to use new technologies and electronic learning and teaching materials to present some percent of the syllabus via online classes and the remaining syllabus via face-to-face classes.

Some suggestions for further research are recommended about the limitations imposed on the present study. As the participants of the present study were chosen from one state high school, the findings cannot be generalized easily unless more studies are conducted with larger samples in other parts of the country. Additionally, as the current study was carried out in a school setting, more studies can explore the areas of potential and challenges of online courses in higher education centers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, as this study used a questionnaire and a focus group interview to collect the data, future studies can use other data collection instruments like observation to gain a more accurate insight into the topic under study. Finally, since the present study was cross-sectional, a longitudinal study
can be carried out to disclose the areas of potential and challenges of online classes over a period.

References


