



ENGLISH TEACHING REFORM IN VIETNAM: RESPONSES OF NON-ENGLISH MAJORED STUDENTS TOWARD THE TARGET ENGLISH LEVEL OF THE CEFR-V

Hoang Yen Phuong^{a1}, Thi Thanh Quyen Tran^b

^a School of Foreign Languages, Can Tho University, Can Tho, VietNam.

^b Can Tho University, Can Tho, Vietnam.

APA Citation:

Hoang Yen Phuong, Thi Thanh Quyen Tran (2021). ENGLISH TEACHING REFORM IN VIETNAM: RESPONSES OF NON-ENGLISH MAJORED STUDENTS TOWARD THE TARGET ENGLISH LEVEL OF THE CEFR-V, *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 17(2), 1189-1204

Submission Date: 23/02/2021

Acceptance Date: 18/05/2021

ABSTRACT

Various efforts and measures have been implemented to enable Vietnamese citizens to communicate and work with foreign partners. An important one is the implementation of the CEFR-V (a Vietnamese version of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) to stipulate target English levels for Vietnamese students by the end of each educational level. The target for undergraduates is Level 3 of English in the CEFR-V. The current study was conducted with 268 non-English majored students in a large university in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam to reveal whether it is an ambitious goal. Descriptive statistics reveal that the participants had positive perceptions of the current English-for-non-major program, especially of the teachers and learning resources. However, only two-thirds of the participants perceived that they could possibly gain the target English level. Findings suggest that greater efforts should be made in the program but the more important agent to bring a positive change is the students themselves.

Keywords: CEFR-V, English teaching reform, target proficiency, English for non-majors, Vietnamese undergraduates.

1. Introduction

¹ Corresponding author.

E-mail address: phyen@ctu.edu.vn

Vietnam has recently become more integrated into the global economy, which results in the great demands for proficient users of English. However, Phan, Vu, and Bao (2014) noticed that Vietnam is still anchored in Kachru's (1992) Expanding Circle in which English is considered as 'a foreign language' (p.241). In that context, English language teaching is still considered a hindrance (Pham 2010). English language education in the country is generally considered as failing to meet 'the demand for competent English-speaking people' due to 'its low quality' (Hoang 2010, p.15). After receiving full membership to the WTO (2006) and discussing the official ASEAN Economic Community blueprint (2007), the Vietnamese authorities have made different efforts to improve the English proficiency level of its citizens in the context of regional and global economy integration. Two most outstanding ones are the implementation of the National Foreign Language Project (NFLP) and adoption of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Accordingly, students of all levels in the entire national education system are expected to reach specific target levels of foreign language proficiency.

At tertiary level, university non-English majored graduates are expected to reach Level B1 in the CEFR or Level 3 in the Vietnamese version of the CEFR (CEFR-V). In reality, Vietnamese students vary greatly from each other in terms of English entry levels, learning motivations and expectation, exposures to English, and so on. Therefore, it is important to investigate students' perceptions about the extent the current English program helps them reach the target English level. The findings are expected to help related stakeholders namely university authorities, English lecturers and students to have feasible solutions to reach the target.

1.1. Literature review

English teaching reform in Vietnam

Since the implementation of "Đổi mới" policy in Vietnam in 1986, reforming the educational system has always been a great concern of the government. The growing integration of Vietnam into the regional and global economy after "Đổi mới" has created the greater demand for work skills and competence (Nguyen & Hamid, 2020). It has also called for more proficient users of English among the labour workforce. Unfortunately, English teaching and learning in Vietnam was generally considered as failing to meet 'the demand for competent English-speaking people' due to 'its low quality' (Hoang, 2010). To improve the situation, on 30 September 2008, the Prime Minister signed Decision No. 1400/QĐ-Ttg to launch the National Foreign Language Project (NFLP) aiming "to renovate thoroughly the tasks of teaching and learning foreign languages within the national education system." (MOET, 2008, p. 2)

Among the reforms initiated with the NFLP, the most remarkable one is the adoption of the Common European Framework of References for Languages (CEFR) to build a national framework of foreign language competence. The CEFR, officially published in 2001 by the Council of Europe, has

become a standard for language teaching worldwide (Figueras, 2012), particularly in non-English speaking Asian countries as Vietnam (CEFR-V), Japan (CEFR-J), China (CSE), Thailand (FRELE-TH), and Malaysia (CEFR-M).

In Vietnam, the CEFR-V outlines the major strategies and goals of the foreign language sector in the national education system from 2008 to 2020 and is used to standardise the English learning outcomes of all levels of education. With the adoption of the CEFR, Vietnamese authorities hoped to build a more concrete platform to initiate curricular as well as language testing reforms, with higher levels of learning outcomes. The target standard of English language competence is expected to advance among young Vietnamese learners of English to help them compete for jobs in the global and the regional market (Doan and Hamid, 2019).

The adoption of the CEFR in Vietnam has been considered as a “quick-fix” solution to restructure the foreign language teaching and learning system (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). In terms of content, the CEFR-V is actually the translation of the CEFR into Vietnamese with very few modifications (Pham, 2017; Pham, 2018). Accompanied with the CEFR-V is the VSTEP (Vietnamese Standardized Test of English Proficiency). Students can register for the test in the language testing centers authorized by the MOET.

In addition to the CEFR, the Prime Minister signed Decision No. 1982/QĐ-Ttg in 2016 to issue the Vietnam National Qualification Framework (VNQF) which consists of 8 levels. The first five levels are for primary to higher secondary level and also for Technical and Vocational educated people while level 6 to 8 are for Bachelor, Masters and PhD degree holders. There is a strong connection between the VNQF and CEFR-V when English competence is regulated as one of the compulsory qualifications of Vietnamese degree holders from Level 4 to Level 8. Table 1 shows the Vietnam’s curriculum of English language learning which stipulated the target English level students should obtain based on six-levels of the CEFR-V.

Table 1: *The target English proficiency level*

Education level	CEFR-V	CEFR
Primary	Level 1	A1
Lower secondary & Vocational Colleges	Level 2	A2
Upper secondary & University Graduates	Level 3	B1
Master and Doctorate Graduates	Level 4	B2
High School Language Teachers	Level 5	C1
	Level 6	C2

As shown in Table 1, all non-English majored university students are expected to reach Level 3 (B1) of English by the time of graduation. However, in a meeting of representatives from the MOET, universities and government, it was reported that the government’s targets for language proficiency were

too ambitious (Nguyen and Hamid, 2015). In fact, the CEFR-V shows to be adopted following the ‘top-down’ approach. Therefore, teachers and learners have had no chance to say their voice in this policy-making (Pham, 2017). In this case, teachers are considered only as implementers of the policy and not as players of key roles in the centralized language planning processes (Poon, 2000; Waters, 2009). Therefore, the implementation of the CEFR in Vietnam faces the risk of some mismatches between the expectations of adopters (government officials) and the implementers (teachers). This, in turn, may result in students’ inability to reach the target English proficiency.

English language teaching and learning in Vietnam

Foreign language is a compulsory subject in Vietnamese universities. Although students can choose different languages such as English, French, German, Chinese, Korean, etc. as a foreign language to study, most of the students choose English. English language teaching in Vietnam has witnessed the utilization of various teaching models in which Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is the most recent one. According to Hoang (2013), although receiving some success at some levels of education in Vietnam, CLT does not seem to work in tertiary level for different reasons such as the lack of English speaking environment, students’ little exposure to English, large classes, or passing exams is students’ only motivation to learn English. In addition, language educators have figured out other problems affecting English language teaching and learning in higher education in Vietnam namely lack of authentic context for language study (To, 2010), traditional form focus instruction rather than interactive teaching approaches, hierarchical relationship between teachers and students (Tran, 2013), the majority of low English level students when entering university (Nguyen, 2007).

With the implementation of the NFLP, better conditions for learning and teaching English have been created, especially in urban areas of Vietnam (Nguyen & Hamid, 2020). The results, however, seem not to meet the expectations of related stake-holders. For instance, Foley’s study (2019) reported a claim by a Vietnamese university department head that only one in five non-English majored students could achieve B1 level in 2015 and another university had to lower the requirement to A2 level due to the teachers’ poor English, lack of resources and outdated teaching methods with a heavy focus on traditional grammar. Likewise, Nguyen, Warren and Fehring (2014) found that different factors affect the efficacy of non-major English teaching and learning in Vietnamese higher education. These hindrances include uninteresting teaching style, insufficient time for communicative activities, grammar-driven teaching, unreasonable time-management, unclear instructions, large class sizes, teachers’ limited ability in classroom organization, unequal students’ English levels, inadequate lesson preparation, teachers’ limited use of teaching aids and technology, and students’ lack of confidence in using oral English in in-class activities. Furthermore, according to Duong Tam and Tu Anh (2018), many students blame the universities for ineffective English courses which make them to study English in language centers to get their target English proficiency.

Although various aforementioned studies have been conducted to explore the ambition of Vietnam in improving its citizen's English proficiency, the implementation of CEFR-V and the current context of English language teaching and learning in the Vietnamese higher education, there are few studies exploring Vietnamese university students' perceptions on whether Level 3 of CEFR-V is a feasible target English proficiency. This study, thus, is an attempt to fill such a gap. Results from this study significantly inform teachers, curriculum developers, policy makers about the feasibility of that target from the authentic voices of non-majored-English students in a large Vietnamese university, which is also a good reference for other EFL stakeholders in Asian countries currently implementing the CEFR framework in their national English education system.

1.2. Research questions

This study was conducted with 268 students at a central university in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam to answer the following research questions:

1. What are students' perceptions of the English-for-non-majored program at the university?
2. What are students' perceptions of the extent the English-for-non-majored program help students reach the target level of English proficiency?

2. Method

The current study employed a mixed method approach to find out the answers for the two research questions because it is considered as scientifically rigorous research technique, providing comprehensive, informative, balanced and useful research results (Johnson et al., 2007). Specifically, quantitative data was collected by means of a questionnaire while semi-structured interviews served as qualitative data to triangulate the results.

The participants include 268 students (134 males, 134 females) who have been following the English-for-non-majors Program (ENMP). This program consists of 3 General English courses (XH023, XH024, XH025), aims to develop students' English proficiency to reach Level 3 of the CEFR-V. However, depending on the results of the English placement test, students can be exempted from the whole ENMP, one or two courses.

The convenient sampling method was utilized to recruit participants. From September 3 to 10, 2020, the researchers went to 6 out of 10 classes of the General English 3 course (XH025) to invite students to participate in the study. After the students answered the anonymous questionnaire, two students in each class were invited to join individual interviews voluntarily.

The students come from different disciplines, 169 students (63.1%) major in social and humanity fields, 99 students (36.9%) major in technology and natural sciences. Among them, 118

students (44%) are exempted from XH023 and XH024, 38 students (14.2%) are exempted from XH023, and 112 students (41.8%) have to follow the whole ENMP.

With regard to research instruments, the questionnaire consists of two main parts. Part 1 asks for students' demographic information whereas Part 2 has 31 items, adapted from Bayram and Canaran (2019)'s questionnaire to explore students' perception about the ENMP and the extent it helps students reach the target English level (See Table 2). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient value was .93, strongly ensuring the reliability of the questionnaire and the results obtained from it.

Table 2. Clusters of the ENMP questionnaire

Clusters	Total Items (31)	Item no.
Students' general perception about the ENMP	4	1,2,3,4
The ENMP learning environment	4	5,6,7,8
The ENMP teachers	3	9,10,11
The learning materials in the ENMP	8	12,13,14,15,16,17,18,19
The online resources in the ENMP	5	20,21,22,23,24
The extent the ENMP helps students gain Level 3 of the CEFR-V	7	25,26,27,28,29,30,31

The questionnaire was designed following the five-point Likert scale (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree). Cronbach's alphas for these six clusters were .70, .71, .84, .84, .89 and .92 respectively, proving its high levels of suitability and reliability.

The interview consists of 4 questions to explore indepth insights of the students regarding the ENMP. The interviews were administered online and permitted for audio recorded via Zoom, lasting approximately from 30 to 45 minutes each.

Both questionnaire and interview were conducted in Vietnamese to make ease for students' understanding and conveying their insights due to the modest level of their English proficiency. The interview transcriptions then were translated into English for this research. The quantitative data were analysed using SPSS software while thematic analysis was employed to provide deeper information on how students perceived the program.

3. Results

3.1 Students' perceptions of the ENMP

Students' perceptions regarding the ENMP are classified into 5 clusters namely general evaluation, learning environment, teachers, learning materials and online resources.

The first cluster includes four items asking the student participants for their general evaluation of the ENMP program. In general, the students had more positive evaluation of the program ($M = 3.75$, $SD = .60$) than the norm of 3, $t(267) = 20.57$, $p = .000$.

Table 3: The students' general evaluation of the ENMP

I think ...	Completely Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Completely Agree (%)
... the ENMP encourages students to learn English.	0	4.5	19.8	52.6	23.1
... the division of the program into 3 courses is appropriate.	1.1	7.1	26.5	52.6	12.7
... the length of the whole ENMP is sufficient.	1.9	7.5	25.7	51.5	13.4
... the ENMP supports students in learning other courses in their field of study.	1.5	6.0	25.0	55.2	12.3

Table 3 shows that the students had the highest agreement on “*I think the ENMP encourages students to learn English*”, with a total of agreement of 75.7%. Meanwhile, the two items that received quite similar percentage of agreement are “*I think the division of the program into 3 courses is appropriate.*” and “*I think the length of the whole ENMP is sufficient.*” with 65.3% and 64.9% respectively. The last item in the cluster “*I think the ENMP supports students in learning other courses in their field of study.*” received 55.2% of agreement. In short, most of the participants perceived positively about the extent the ENMP motivated them to learn English as well as the current structure of the program. However, only more than half of the students found the ENMP helpful to them in learning other subjects.

The second cluster consists of four items revealing the students' perceptions toward the learning environment in the ENMP. One sample t-test reveals that the participants had more positive evaluation of the learning environment ($M = 3.45$, $SD = .69$) than the norm of 3, $t(267) = 10.50$, $p = .000$.

Table 4: Students' perceptions of the ENMP learning environment

I think ...	Completely Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Completely Agree (%)

... the classrooms in the ENMP have enough light for learning	1.1	3.7	14.2	65.3	15.7
... the number of students in each class is appropriate.	3.4	11.2	25.4	50	10.1
... the classrooms in the ENMP are large and airy.	3.4	21.3	25.4	38.4	11.6
... the classrooms in the ENMP are well-soundproofed.	5.6	30.2	28.7	27.6	7.8

Table 4 reveals that the item about lightning received the highest percentage of agreement (81.0%), while the one about the number of students per class and the classroom physical environment received the second and third highest percentages (60.1% and 50% respectively). Only 35.4% of the participants thought that the classrooms were well-soundproofed. In general, while students perceived positively about the learning environment in the ENMP, the aspect of soundproofing needs to be improved so that students can avoid being disturbed by the neighboring sound, which may intervene their learning.

The third cluster with three items focuses on teachers in the ENMP. One sample t-test shows that the participants had much more positive evaluation of the teachers ($M = 4.12$, $SD = .60$) than the norm of 3, $t(267) = 30.43$, $p = .000$.

Table 5: Students' perceptions of the ENMP teachers

I think ...	Completely Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Completely Agree (%)
... ENMP teachers support me to learn English.	0	1.1	10.4	57.8	30.6
... ENMP teachers have fair assessment.	0.7	1.5	13.1	57.5	27.2
... ENMP teachers apply good teaching methods.	0.4	0.7	15.3	55.6	28

Table 5 shows that compared to the two previous clusters, this cluster received much more positive agreement of the participants with the percentages of agreements, ranging from 83.6 to 88.4% for the three items. In short, teachers in the ENMP can be considered as the highlight of the program.

Cluster 4 investigates the students' perceptions toward the learning materials used in the ENMP. Similar to the previous clusters, one sample t-test with this cluster shows that the participants had more

postive evaluation of learning materials ($M = 3.70$, $SD = .52$) than the norm of 3, $t(267) = 21.81$, $p = .000$.

Table 6: Students' perceptions of the learning materials in the ENMP

I think ...	Completely Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Completely Agree (%)
... the lessons in the ENMP support one another.	0.4	3.7	17.9	62.3	15.7
... the textbooks are appropriate to students' English levels.	0.4	4.5	17.9	60.4	16.8
... the textbooks in the ENMP are motivating.	0	7.8	29.5	47.8	14.9
... the supplementary materials support the lessons in the textbooks.	1.1	4.9	32.1	53.4	8.6
... the textbooks are contemporary and up-to-date.	0	6	32.1	48.5	13.4
... the supplementary materials help me to understand the lessons in the textbooks better.	1.5	5.6	33.2	51.1	8.6
... the textbooks supply students with enough knowledge and skills to gain Level 3 of the CEFR-V.	0.7	4.5	35.1	51.9	7.8
... the textbooks used in the ENMP are interesting.	0.4	9	32.1	47.8	10.8

In Table 6, the eight items in Cluster 4 are ranked in the order of agreement percentages. The two items that received the highest level of agreement are “*I think the lessons in the ENMP support one another.*” and “*I think the textbooks are appropriate to students' English levels.*” with 78% and 77.2% respectively. Meanwhile, the motivation level of the textbooks, the support of the supplementary materials and the newness of the textbooks are ranked next with 62.7%, 62% and 61.9% respectively. Finally, the last three items are “*I think the supplementary materials help me to understand the lessons in the textbooks better.*”; “*I think the textbooks supply students with enough knowledge and skills to gain Level 3 of the CEFR-V.*”; and “*I think the textbooks in the ENMP are interesting.*”

The final cluster with five items explores the online resources used in the ENMP. One sample t-test shows that the participants had more postive evaluation of the online resources ($M = 3.51$, $SD = .74$) than the norm of 3, $t(267) = 11.18$, $p = .000$.

Table 7: Students' perceptions of the online resources in the ENMP

I think ...	Completely Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Completely Agree (%)
... online assignments in the ENMP help students to learn English better.	3.4	10.1	27.2	54.2	14.2
... online assignments in the ENMP are helpful for students to review what they have learned	3	9.7	27.6	46.6	13.1
... online assignments in the ENMP provide students with flexibility when reviewing their lessons.	2.2	7.5	31.7	49.3	9.3
... online assignments contribute to helping students to gain Level 3 of the CEFR-V.	3.4	9.3	40.3	37.7	9.3
... the interface of the online resources is user-friendly.	0.7	10.1	43.3	35.1	10.8

Table 7 reveals that the participants perceived the most positively about the extent online assignments helps them to learn English better, with 68.4% of agreement. Meanwhile, the impact and flexibility of the online assignments on students' lesson reviews received the second highest agreement with 59.7% and 58.6% respectively. Finally, the two items that gained the lowest agreement in this cluster are "I think online assignments contribute to helping students to gain Level 3 of the CEFR-V." and "I think the interface of the online resources is user-friendly." with 47% and 45.9% respectively.

Qualitative data gained from individual interviews yield similar findings with the quantitative ones. All twelve students interviewed had positive general evaluation of the ENMP. All respondents highly appreciated the teachers and learning materials in the ENMP. They all said that the teachers were very helpful in supporting to learn. One respondent said: "I find my teacher is very caring and supportive to our class. She is willing to answer any of our questions regarding the lessons. That helps us become more confident in learning English." Eight of the twelve respondents suggested that the learning environment should be upgraded so that they can avoid being distracted by the neighboring classes. The most ideal English classroom in their opinion is a language lab where they can practice English skills with modern devices and in a comfortable air-conditioned atmosphere. One respondent mentioned: "I think the condition of learning English here is better than in high school. But, the university may consider allowing us to learn in an even better environment where we can feel comfortable practising English with each other. I think one of the reasons many students chose to learn English in outside language centers because these centers can provide them with the infrastructure they like."

In addition, ten out of the twelve respondents recommended that the online resources should be enhanced in term of user-friendliness and compatibility with the test format. This is because they thought they would learn more with online resources when the platform is upgraded. One student especially suggested that: “*In order to prepare students well for the Level 3 of English proficiency, I think the online resources should include more assignments which are compatible to the proficiency test. For example, the platform of the online resource should also resemble the VSTEP test, so that after the ENMP we can confidently register for the VSTEP and gain the expected English language level 3 of the CEFR-V.*”

3.2 Students’ perceptions of the extent the ENMP helps them reach the target English level

Students’ perceptions regarding the extent the ENMP helps them reach Level 3 of the CEFR-V consist of seven items which cover the four global skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and three components of the language knowledge (vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. One sample t-test reveals that the participants had more positive evaluation of the extent that the program can help them get the target English level ($M = 3.61$, $SD = .60$) than the norm of 3, $t(267) = 15.86$, $p = .000$.

Table 8: Students’ perceptions of the extent the ENMP helps them to gain Level 3 of the CEFR-V

I think ...	Completely Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Completely Agree (%)
... the ENMP helps students improve their writing skills to reach Level 3 of the CEFR-V.	1.1	2.6	32.5	50	13.8
... the ENMP helps students improve their reading skills to reach Level 3 of the CEFR-V.	1.1	2.6	33.6	50.7	11.9
... the ENMP helps students improve their speaking skills to reach Level 3 of the CEFR-V.	1.1	3.0	36.9	48.1	10.8
... the ENMP helps students improve their listening skills to reach Level 3 of the CEFR-V.	1.1	4.1	36.2	43.7	14.9

... the ENMP helps students enlarge their grammar knowledge to reach Level 3 of the CEFR-V	1.5	4.5	39.2	47	7.8
... the ENMP helps students improve their pronunciation to reach Level 3 of the CEFR-V	1.9	5.2	39.2	48.1	5.6
... the ENMP helps students enlarge their vocabulary knowledge to reach Level 3 of the CEFR-V	1.5	6.0	41.8	44	6.7

Table 8 shows that among the four global skills, the two skills of writing and reading received the highest percentages of agreement (63.8% and 62.6% respectively) whereas speaking and listening skills had 58.9% and 58.6% of agreement. Thus, only more than half of the students perceived that they could gain Level 3 of the CEFR-V. The proportions are quite similar to the knowledge of grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary with 54.8%, 53.7% and 50.7% respectively.

Interviews with the respondents revealed that only six of them thought that they could gain the Level 3 of the CEFR-V. For these students, they already had a strong background of English when they entered the university. They were also exempted from at least one course in the ENMP. Another common thing among these students is that they invested a lot of time and efforts in English learning. Beside learning in class, these students also spent time to do online assignments given by their teachers, watched English video clips or movies, and followed different English pages where they could practice English skills with people from all over the world. One student claimed that *“I spend a lot of time on learning English. Beside the lessons in class, I try to finish all the assignments that my teacher gives me. I love learning English and I believe in the saying “practice makes perfect”, so everyday I spend about 30 minutes to watch different clips on Youtube. That helps me improve my listening skills, enlarge my vocabulary, and I learn a lot of new information from these clips. I have tried several mock tests of VSTEP and my scores are from Level 3 and above. I intend to take a VSTEP test right before my graduation so that I can use the certificate in my job application.”*

Two out of six students left almost had no time for learning English. They only learned English when they were in the classroom. Outside the classroom, they spent time to learn other courses in their study fields namely computer sciences and aquaculture. In addition, they spent about 20 hours a week on working part-time to support themselves. For these two students, learning English in the classroom was already a struggle. One student confided *“I feel that there are so many exercises and assignments to do. I have tried my best to finish the exercise right in class because I usually have no time to learn English at home. I have to do a part-time job to earn money to pay tuition fee and living expenses. I guess English may be important for me in the future but I seem to have no choice. I think Level 3 of the CEFR-V is difficult for me to gain because I have not invested much in English learning so far.”*

The other four students shared one common thing that they did not feel motivated to learn English outside the classroom. All their expectation for the ENMP was passing the exams to be qualified to graduate as regulated by the university. Therefore, they just completed the tasks that their English teachers assigned in a reluctant manner.

4. Discussion

The study reveals that although the students had positive perceptions of the ENMP, only less than two-thirds of the participants thought that it can help them to gain the Level 3 of the CEFR-V. Among the 5 clusters of the ENMP, teachers and learning materials received the highest agreement from the student participants whereas learning environment received the lowest. Among the language skills, writing was the most positively perceived while listening the lowest. However, there is no big difference of agreement between the four skills. For the language knowledge, half of the participants agreed that the ENMP helps them gain grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary at Level 3 of the CEFR-V.

The current study reveals similar findings with the previous study by Nguyen and Hamid (2020). Students have been provided with better conditions for learning and teaching of English. The classrooms are not as crowded as before and there are other resources such as supplementary materials and online platform to provide them with more opportunities to get exposed to English outside the classroom. This is also a good model for other institutions and universities to apply in their EFL contexts in terms of the facilities and infrastructures to support undergraduates' English learning and teaching.

Some of this study's findings are different from those in Nguyen, Warren and Fehring's (2014) study. Students in the current study appreciated their teachers for their teaching methods and assessment. This could be thanks to the sound strategies to reinforce the strength of the staff members' pedagogies from university to school and department levels through seminars, regular meetings, and professional development policies. That partly explains why approximately two-thirds of the participants perceived that the ENMP could help them to gain the expected English outcome of Level 3 in the CEFR-V. This finding particularly emphasizes the importance of the teaching staff in implementing appropriate, effective teaching and assessment methods, contributing to the potential of reaching the English target proposed by the MOET.

However, approximately one-thirds of the participants perceived that the ENMP seemed not work for them, which is compatible with what Hoang (2013) stated in his study. Interviews with the participants in this group reveal that some of them did not have the environment to speak English outside the classrooms and the only motivation to come to the classroom was to pass the exam. In addition, their entry English level was lower than their peers, a similar situation found in Nguyen (2007), which partly explains why they have less positive perceptions of the extent the ENMP can help them to gain Level 3 of the CEFR-V.

Findings from this group are also compatible with Duong Tam and Tu Anh's (2018) when a group of students blamed the university for ineffective English courses while they themselves should take more responsibility for learning English. This remarks the importance of students' learning autonomy in English learning, which can be done in different ways. Despite this ENMP integrated online learning resources with the hope to develop students' learning autonomy (Baru et al., 2020), these resources should be more user-friendly and aligned with the VSTEP test format.

5. Conclusions

The current study reveals that the target of Level 3 of English in the CEFR-V is feasible for two-thirds of the students investigated. It implies that Vietnamese students vary greatly from each other in terms of English entry levels, learning motivations, expectation, and exposures to English. Therefore, although the university have provided them with adequate conditions in terms of learning environment, teachers, learning resources and online resources, not all students perceived that the ENMP could help them reach Level 3 of English in the CEFR-V.

This study argues that more actions should be implemented to increase the proportion of students gaining the expected English outcomes. First and foremost, even better conditions for learning English should be created, especially for the two aspects of learning environment and online resources. The classroom must be better soundproofed and create comfortable environment for students to learn. In addition, online resources should be upgraded to be friendlier to the users and online assignments should be more aligned with Level 3 of the CEFR-V. That does not mean the aspects of teachers and learning materials can be neglected. In fact, teachers should always update new teaching techniques to involve all students in the lessons, especially the weaker ones. Moreover, the learning materials (in house-textbooks and supplementary materials) should be revised to become more attractive to trigger students' external motivation in English learning. In short, Level 3 of the CEFR-V is not a too ambitious goal of the Vietnamese government. However, measures should be taken so that students are provided with optimum conditions to reach that goal.

From a broader perspective, the potential success of Level 3, CEFR-V for Vietnamese undergraduates illustrate a positive prospect for other non-English speaking Asian countries in implementing and adapting the CEFR framework to improve their citizens' English proficiency. However, this study is limited to get the teacher participants involved, future studies are encouraged to investigate deeply into teachers' insights to better inform knowledge in the field.

References

Baru M, Tenggara WN, and Mataram MU (2020) Promoting students' autonomy through online learning media in EFL class. *International Journal of Higher Education* 9(4): 320-331.

- Bayram I, Canaran Ö (2019) Evaluation of an English preparatory program at a Turkish foundation university. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies* 15(1): 48-69.
- Doan LD, Hamid MO (2019) Economics of English: Examining the demand for English proficiency in the Vietnamese job market. *RELC Journal*. doi:10.1177/0033688219863166.
- Duong Tam & Tu Anh (2018) Sinh viên chê cách dạy tiếng Anh ở trường đại học (Students disparage English teaching at university). VNetExpress. Retrieved on May 7, 2021 at <https://vnexpress.net/sinh-vien-che-cach-day-tieng-anh-o-truong-dai-hoc-4002548.html>
- Figueras N (2012) The impact of the CEFR. *ELT Journal* 66(4): 477-485.
- Gainsborough M (2010) Vietnam: Rethinking the state. London: Zed Books. doi:10.1017/S0022463413000507
- Foley J (2019) Issues on the initial impact of CEFR in Thailand and the region. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics* 9(2): 359-370.
- Hoang VV (2010) The current situation and issues of the teaching of English in Vietnam. *Ritsumeikan Languages and Cultures Journal* 22(1): 7-18.
- Hoang VV (2013) The role of English in the internationalization of higher education in Vietnam. *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies* 29(1): 72-80.
- Johnson BR, Onwuegbuzie AJ and Turner LA (2007) Toward a definition of mixed methods research. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research* 1(2): 112-133.
- MOET (2008) Decision No. 1400/QĐ-TTg Approval of the Project “Teaching and learning foreign languages in the national educational system for the 2008-2020 period”. Hanoi, September, 2008.
- MOET (2014) Circular No. 01/TT-BGDĐT Issuing Six-level framework for foreign language proficiency in Vietnam. Hanoi, January, 2014.
- Nguyen HT, Warren W, and Fehring H (2014) Factors affecting English language teaching and learning in higher education. *English Language Teaching* 7(8): 94-105.
- Nguyen TV (2007) Foreign language teaching and learning at the University of Engineering and Technology, Vietnam National University, Hanoi. *VNU Scientific Journal - Foreign Language* 2007(23): 138-142.
- Nguyen VH, Hamid, MO (2020) The CEFR as a national language policy in Vietnam: insights from a sociogenetic analysis. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 1-13.
- Rogers EM (2003) *Diffusion of innovations (5th ed.)*. New York: Free Press.
- Pham THN (2017) Applying the CEFR to renew a general English curriculum: Successes, remaining issues and lessons from Vietnam. In Fergus O’Dwyer et al. (eds.), *Critical, constructive assessment of CEFR-informed language teaching in Japan and beyond*, 97-117. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pham THN (2018) General English proficiency or English for teaching? The preferences of in-service teachers. *RELC Journal* 49(3): 339-352.
- Poon S (2000) Colonialism and English education at the University of Hong Kong, 1913-1964.

Steiner-Khamsi G (2004) *The global politics of educational borrowing and lending*. Teachers College Press.

To TTH (2010) How do Vietnamese students prepare for study in English speaking universities overseas? *VNU Scientific Journal - Social Science and Humanity* 2010(26): 230-237.

Tran TT (2013) Is the learning approach of students from the Confucian heritage culture problematic? *Educational Research for Policy and Practice* 12(1): 57-65.

Waters A (2009) Managing innovation in English language education, state of the art review. *Language Teaching* 42(4): 421-458.

AUTHOR BIODATA

Phuong Hoang Yen is currently an English lecturer at the School of Foreign Languages, Can Tho University, Vietnam. She carries studies on language teaching approaches, students' learning autonomy, self-regulated learning strategies and teachers' professional development.

Tran Thi Thanh Quyen has been an English lecturer at the School of Foreign Languages, Can Tho University, Vietnam since 2012. She is currently a PhD student at Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne, Australia. Her research interests include flipped classroom instruction, active learning, blended learning, learning autonomy, learning engagement, English as a foreign language, English as a medium of instruction. She has experience in conducting qualitative and quantitative research, from its conception to execution.