FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND VIETNAMESE

CURRICULUMS FOR VIETNAMESE UNDERGRADUATE ENGLISH MAJORS: VOICES FROM KEY STAKEHOLDERS

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ABSTRACT: This study delves into the challenges and opportunities for improvement in the curriculums designed for undergraduate English majors in Vietnam, as identified by administrators, lecturers, and students. By conducting semi-structured interviews with 60 key stakeholders from 20 universities that offer English language training programs, this research provides valuable insights into the existing training programs within these institutions. The administrators highlight critical challenges such as limited resources, faculty capacity, bridging the gap between academia and industry, assessment practices, and student engagement. The lecturers emphasize difficulties in specialization, the importance of self-study, teaching approaches, curriculum design, relevance, individualized learning, assessment methods, and professional development. Students stress the need for a balanced curriculum, improved guidance, and a stronger academic focus. Furthermore, recommendations for future research include comparative analysis, longitudinal studies, technology integration, and curriculum evaluation. The findings contribute to the ongoing discussions on enhancing English language education in Vietnam and offer valuable insights to educators, policymakers, and researchers dedicated to improving the quality of English language education in Vietnam and similar educational contexts.

KEY WORDS: Undergraduate English Majors; Stakeholder perspectives; Curriculum development; qualitative research; English education in Vietnam.

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1. Introduction

English language education equips Vietnamese undergraduate students with the language proficiency and communication skills needed to thrive in the global job market and foster intercultural competence. Over the years, the curriculums designed for Vietnamese undergraduate English majors have undergone significant development and refinement to meet these objectives. However, it is crucial to assess the effectiveness of these curriculums and identify areas for improvement to ensure their alignment with the evolving global landscape and the needs of students.

This study's primary objective is to explore key stakeholders' perspectives, including university administrators, lecturers, and students, on the effectiveness of the curriculums for Vietnamese undergraduate English majors. By capturing the insights and experiences of these stakeholders, valuable information can be obtained regarding the challenges faced and areas that require attention and enhancement.

The study begins by presenting the viewpoints of university administrators, who perceive the curriculums as highly effective in developing language proficiency and communication skills. These administrators emphasize the importance of collaboration with English language centres, cultivating intercultural competence, and enhancing practical communication skills. They also highlight the significance of providing adequate teaching materials, resources, and academic support services to optimize the learning environment for English majors. Subsequently, lecturers' perspectives shed light on various challenges, such as difficulties in specialization, the need for self-study, teaching and learning approaches, curriculum design, and relevance to real-world contexts. Lecturers advocate for explicit guidance, personalized support, and a shift towards a more comprehensive and academic-focused curriculum to cater to the diverse needs of students.

The study also incorporates students' voices, who express concerns about the imbalance between

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language skills and academic language studies, literature, and translation. They advocate for a more balanced curriculum, improved program distribution, and a shift towards independent learning approaches that promote critical thinking and engagement with specialized fields within the English language discipline. By examining the perspectives of administrators, lecturers, and students, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced and areas for improvement within the curriculums for Vietnamese undergraduate English majors. These insights can guide curriculum developers, educators, and policymakers in making informed decisions to enhance the quality and effectiveness of English language education in Vietnam.

The subsequent sections of the study will delve into the key challenges and areas for improvement identified by these stakeholders, discuss their recommendations, and provide suggestions for further research to contribute to the ongoing development of curriculums for Vietnamese undergraduate English majors.

Research aims and Objectives

This study endeavours to examine the perspectives and experiences of key stakeholders concerning the curriculums designed for Vietnamese undergraduate English majors, with the ultimate goal of improving the quality and effectiveness of English language education in Vietnam.

The research objectives of this study can be summarized into three main areas. Firstly, the study aims to assess the perceptions of key stakeholders regarding the curriculums' effectiveness in developing language proficiency and communication skills. This assessment will evaluate how well the curriculums align with language learning objectives and their ability to promote practical language use in real-world contexts.

Secondly, the study seeks to identify and analyze the key challenges and areas for improvement identified by these key stakeholders. This analysis will explore various aspects, including curriculum content, instructional approaches, assessment methods, and available resources. By comprehensively understanding these challenges, the study aims to pinpoint specific areas that require attention and enhancement.

Lastly, the study aims to gather and analyze recommendations from these critical stakeholders on enhancing the curriculums. These recommendations will consider the needs and demands of the global job market and the development of intercultural competence. By incorporating these valuable insights, the study intends to provide actionable recommendations to inform curriculum improvement efforts and ensure the curriculums' relevance to students' future career prospects and ability to navigate intercultural communication.

This study aspires to contribute to the ongoing development of English language education in Vietnam by addressing these research objectives. The findings and insights garnered from this research will not only inform curriculum improvement. However, they will also be of great value to educators, policymakers, and researchers dedicated to advancing the quality and effectiveness of English language education in Vietnam and similar educational contexts.

Research Questions

From the research objectives, three research questions were developed as the following:

RQ1. How do key stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of the curriculums for Vietnamese undergraduate English majors in terms of developing language proficiency and communication skills?

RQ2. What are the key challenges and areas of improvement identified by key stakeholders regarding the curriculums for Vietnamese undergraduate English majors?

RQ3. What are the recommendations provided by key stakeholders for enhancing the curriculums for Vietnamese undergraduate English majors, considering the needs and demands of the global job market and the development of intercultural competence?

These research questions served as the foundation for the study and guided the selection and analysis of the 20 curriculums from the universities in Vietnam. By addressing these research questions, the study aims to provide relevant, rigorous, and comprehensive insights into the alignment, effectiveness, and quality of the English- majored curriculums in Vietnam.

2. Literature review

The foundation of this study on English language education in Vietnamese universities rests upon a conceptual framework composed of several theoretical frameworks. These frameworks provide a theoretical basis to explore and evaluate the curricula used in English language education.

Firstly, the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) framework, emphasizing the significance of communication in language learning (Dos Santos, 2020), was employed to analyze the curricula's promotion of speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. The focus was on assessing whether the curricula facilitated meaningful interactions and authentic language use, enabling students to communicate effectively in real-world contexts.

Secondly, the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) framework, as described by Ellis (2021), guided the evaluation of the curricula's incorporation of task-based activities. This evaluation aimed to determine if the curricula encouraged students to use English for practical purposes and solve authentic problems. By assessing the extent to which the curricula promoted the application of language skills in relevant and meaningful contexts, the study sought to gauge the effectiveness of TBLT principles.

The Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) framework, integrating language learning with subject content (Rafailovna, 2022), examined whether the curricula incorporated English instruction within other academic disciplines. This analysis aimed to determine if the curricula facilitated the acquisition of language skills while learning other subjects, enabling deeper integration of language and content knowledge.

The study also assessed technology integration in language learning through the Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL) framework. The effectiveness of technological resources in facilitating English language acquisition and providing self-access opportunities was assessed by evaluating the curricula's utilization of digital tools, online resources, and interactive platforms (Zainuddin, 2023).

Learner Autonomy, as advocated by Little (2022), was analyzed to determine if the curricula encouraged students to set goals, reflect on their progress, and take responsibility for their language development. This assessment aimed to identify whether the curricula empowered students to become active and independent learners.

The curricula were also evaluated concerning their inclusion of intercultural competence, as per the Intercultural Competence framework. This analysis assessed whether the curricula provided opportunities for students to understand and appreciate different cultures and develop skills for effective communication in diverse contexts (Gong, Lai, & Gao, 2022). The focus was on fostering intercultural understanding and communicative abilities within the curricula.

Furthermore, the study examined the assessment methods employed in the curricula through the lens of Assessment for Learning principles. The evaluation aimed to determine if the curricula aligned with the principles of formative assessment, providing feedback and opportunities for improvement rather than solely focusing on summative evaluation (Duan, Goodell, Li & Li, 2022). The emphasis was on promoting continuous learning and growth.

Lastly, the role of teacher professional development within the curricula was considered. This analysis assessed whether the curricula supported ongoing training and provided opportunities for teachers to enhance their knowledge and pedagogical skills in English language education, thereby facilitating effective language instruction (Kilag & Sasan, 2023).

By incorporating these theoretical frameworks, the study aims to gather the experiences and perspectives of 60 key stakeholders, including administrators, lecturers, and students. The examination will encompass various aspects of English language education, ultimately contributing to understanding the curricula's strengths and weaknesses. The findings will provide valuable insights to improve the quality of English language education in Vietnamese universities.

3. Research methodology

This qualitative research employed a semi-structured interview approach to explore the curriculums for Vietnamese undergraduate English majors comprehensively. Insights were gathered from 60 key stakeholders, including university administrators, lecturers, and students. The interviews were designed to delve into various aspects, such as the effectiveness of the curriculums, challenges encountered, areas for improvement, and recommendations for enhancement.

Thematic analysis was utilized as the primary method to examine and interpret the interview data. This analytical approach enabled the identification of recurring patterns, common themes, and key findings from the stakeholders' perspectives. By employing thematic analysis, the research aimed to uncover the underlying issues and provide a comprehensive understanding of the curriculums' strengths and areas that require attention.

The sample size of 60 key stakeholders ensured a diverse representation from different universities and roles, offering various viewpoints and experiences. This approach aimed to capture a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the curriculums for Vietnamese undergraduate English majors.

Throughout the research process, ethical considerations were diligently followed. These considerations included obtaining informed consent from participants, ensuring their anonymity and confidentiality, and safeguarding the security of the collected data. Adhering to ethical guidelines was essential in maintaining the trust and privacy of the stakeholders involved.

Overall, the research sought to provide a holistic view of the curriculums for Vietnamese undergraduate English majors by integrating the perspectives of university administrators, lecturers, and students. Through a qualitative approach, the study aimed to uncover valuable insights and generate recommendations to enhance the quality and effectiveness of these curriculums.

4. Results and discussions

The findings from the semi-structured interviews conducted with key stakeholders involving 20 universities and their respective curriculums in Vietnam underwent a comprehensive thematic analysis. The analysis process involved organizing and categorizing the data based on the three research questions posed in the study.

RQ1. How the key stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of the curriculums for Vietnamese undergraduate English majors in terms of developing language proficiency and communication skills

The effectiveness of the curricula for Vietnamese undergraduate English majors in developing language proficiency and communication skills is perceived differently by key stakeholders, including university administrators, lecturers, and students. While administrators generally view the curricula as highly effective, lecturers and students highlight specific areas that require improvement.

University administrators highly value the curricula for their ability to foster language proficiency and communication skills among students. They emphasize the importance of collaboration with English language centres or institutes to enhance the curricula and provide additional resources and support to students. Administrators prioritize equipping students with strong reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills, recognizing their essentiality for effective communication and preparing students for successful careers in the global job market. They also stress the significance of developing intercultural competence and practical communication skills beyond mere language proficiency.

On the other hand, lecturers express concerns about the imbalance between language skills and other areas of study within the curricula. They argue that the curricula excessively emphasize language skills and advocate for a more balanced approach, including theoretical language study, literary culture, and translation. Some lecturers feel that the heavy focus on language skills has led to English majors being primarily perceived as language learners rather than academic researchers of the English language. They observe similarities between the teaching methods in English language majors and language centres, which may diminish the value of pursuing a degree in English language studies. Lecturers call for a re-evaluation of the curriculum to address these concerns. They also acknowledge students' challenges when selecting a specialization due to a lack of peer guidance and influence.

Students believe that the curricula in English Language studies in Vietnam tend to prioritize language skills over academic language studies, literary culture, and translation. They perceive the programs as resembling English as a foreign language course rather than academic research programs, leading to unjustified comparisons with language centres. Students express dissatisfaction with the teaching approach, which they find similar to that of language centres and inadequate for their post-graduation needs. While they acknowledge the importance of language skills in the initial years, they advocate for more emphasis on specialized fields such as linguistics, creative writing, literature, and translation in later years. The students also highlight the need for more apparent program distribution, better guidance, and a more independent learning approach that includes extensive reading, summarizing, and writing assignments.

In conclusion, the perception of key stakeholders regarding the effectiveness of the curricula for Vietnamese undergraduate English majors in developing language proficiency and communication skills varies. While administrators generally view the curricula as highly effective and emphasize collaboration with language centres, lecturers and students raise concerns about the imbalance between language skills and other areas of study. They advocate for a more balanced approach, improved guidance, and a stronger academic focus to enhance the learning experience and align more closely with the nature of the field. These insights highlight the importance of continuous improvement and dialogue among stakeholders to meet the evolving needs of English majors and provide them with a comprehensive and enriching education.

RQ2. The key challenges and areas of improvement identified by key stakeholders regarding the curriculums for Vietnamese undergraduate English majors

The curriculums for Vietnamese undergraduate English majors have been subject to various challenges and identified areas for improvement, as highlighted by key stakeholders, including university administrators, lecturers, and students. University administrators have emphasized limited resources, faculty capacity, bridging the academia-industry gap, assessment practices, and student engagement as significant challenges. They stress the importance of additional resource investments, providing faculty professional development opportunities, establishing partnerships with industries, and improving assessment practices to enhance the curricula.

On the other hand, Lecturers have identified several challenges related to specialization, self-study, teaching and learning approaches, curriculum design and content, relevance to real-world contexts, individualized learning and support, continuous assessment and feedback, professional development for teachers, collaboration and communication. To address these challenges, they recommend explicit guidance for students, resources to support self-study, a shift towards critical thinking-oriented approaches in teaching, comprehensive curriculum design, and increased collaboration among stakeholders.

Students have raised concerns about the excessive focus on language skills in the curricula, the lack of program distribution and guidance, and the teaching approach itself. They advocate for a more balanced curriculum encompassing various aspects of the English language field, independent

learning opportunities, extensive reading and writing assignments, and a stronger academic focus. The curriculums can be enhanced by incorporating these suggestions and improvements to promote students' language proficiency, academic depth, and practical communication skills. Achieving this will require collaboration among stakeholders, adequate resource allocation, implementing innovative approaches, bridging the academia-industry gap, and continuous evaluation to ensure the effectiveness and relevance of the curricula in preparing students for successful careers in the English language field.

RQ3. The recommendations provided by key stakeholders for enhancing the curriculums for Vietnamese undergraduate English majors, considering the needs and demands of the global job market and the development of intercultural competence

Stakeholders have provided valuable recommendations for enhancing the curricula of Vietnamese undergraduate English majors, aligning them with the needs of the global job market and the development of intercultural competence. These recommendations revolve around several key areas:

First and foremost, stakeholders emphasize the importance of integrating practical skills into the curricula. This includes focusing on real-world communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, and digital literacy. By incorporating these competencies, students will be better equipped to meet the demands of the global job market.

Secondly, stakeholders recommend establishing collaborations with industries and organizations. This collaboration can provide students with opportunities for internships and industry-based projects, allowing them to gain practical experience and exposure to real-life work environments. Such experiences will enhance their employability upon graduation.

Fostering intercultural competence is identified as a vital aspect of the curricula. Stakeholders stress the significance of promoting cultural awareness, sensitivity, and adaptability. This can be achieved by exposing students to diverse perspectives and facilitating cross-cultural experiences, helping them develop the skills needed for effective communication in diverse contexts.

Stakeholders also recognize the importance of language proficiency exams and certifications. They suggest aligning the curricula with these exams and providing resources and support to help students prepare effectively. By doing so, students can improve their language proficiency and increase their chances of success in language proficiency exams and future career opportunities.

Integrating technology into the curricula is deemed essential by stakeholders. They recommend leveraging online resources, language learning platforms, multimedia content, and communication tools to enhance language learning and intercultural communication. Integrating technology also aids in developing students' digital literacy skills, which are essential in today's interconnected world.

Research and critical analysis skills are emphasized as essential areas to focus on. Encouraging students to conduct independent research, engage in academic inquiries, and analyze language-related topics cultivates their analytical thinking and problem-solving abilities. This deepens their understanding of the field and prepares them for further academic pursuits or professional endeavours.

Lastly, stakeholders stress the need for continuous professional development for English language instructors. Providing opportunities for teachers to enhance their pedagogical skills, stay updated with the latest teaching methodologies, and improve their language proficiency ensures the delivery of high-quality education to students.

Implementing these recommendations will strengthen the curricula for Vietnamese undergraduate English majors, equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge to thrive in the global job market and contribute to a more interconnected and inclusive society.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the insights provided by key stakeholders in the field of Vietnamese undergraduate English majors have shed light on the challenges and areas for improvement within the curricula.

Administrators, lecturers, and students have all contributed valuable perspectives that, when considered, can significantly enhance the quality and effectiveness of English language education.

The challenges identified by administrators, such as limited resources, faculty capacity, bridging academia and industry, assessment practices, and student engagement, underscore the need for strategic investments, professional development, integration with industry, and student-centred approaches. By allocating resources effectively, providing opportunities for faculty training, fostering partnerships with industry, improving assessment methods, and implementing engaging strategies, administrators can create a more conducive learning environment that caters to the evolving needs of students.

The observations and suggestions made by lecturers regarding specialization, self-study, teaching approaches, curriculum design, relevance to real-world contexts, individualized learning, assessment, professional development, and collaboration emphasize the importance of a balanced, comprehensive, and student-centred curriculum. By offering guidance in specialization, promoting independent learning, encouraging critical thinking, integrating practical elements, providing personalized support, implementing continuous assessment, supporting teachers' professional growth, and enhancing collaboration, lecturers can contribute to a more enriching educational experience for students.

The perspectives of students, highlighting the need for a balanced curriculum, precise guidance, academic depth, and a scholarly mindset, reinforce the importance of fostering a holistic learning environment. By re-evaluating the curriculum's emphasis on language skills, providing transparent program distribution and guidance, incorporating specialized fields, promoting independent learning, and cultivating research-oriented attitudes, educational institutions can better equip students with the skills and knowledge necessary for their academic and professional journeys.

Collaboration among administrators, lecturers, and students is essential in achieving these improvements. Regular communication, inclusive decision-making processes, and active student involvement in shaping their education can foster a supportive and participatory learning community. Moreover, seeking feedback from stakeholders, conducting curriculum reviews, and incorporating innovative pedagogies can ensure continuous improvement and responsiveness to the field's evolving needs.

By acknowledging and addressing these challenges and implementing the suggested improvements, the curricula for Vietnamese undergraduate English majors can be transformed into comprehensive, student-centred, and industry-relevant programs. Ultimately, this will empower students with the necessary language skills, critical thinking abilities, and academic depth to thrive in their future careers and make meaningful contributions to the broader English language field.

Limitations and suggestions for further study: This study has limitations in terms of its specific context and sample size, potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, reliance on self-reported data and subjective viewpoints may introduce bias. The perspectives of other stakeholders, such as employers, were not included. Moreover, practical strategies for implementing curriculum changes were not explored. To address these limitations, future research should consider conducting comparative analyses across universities or regions, engaging a broader range of stakeholders, conducting longitudinal studies, exploring the integration of technology and blended learning, focusing on teacher training and professional development, investigating student engagement and motivation, and conducting comprehensive curriculum evaluations with continuous feedback. These research directions will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of curricula for Vietnamese undergraduate English majors and inform improvements in education and preparation for students' academic and professional endeavours.

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Chương trình đào tạo cử nhân ngôn ngữ Anh cho sinh viên Việt Nam: quan điểm của những người có liên quan

Tóm tắt: Nghiên cứu này khám phá các thách thức và cơ hội để cải thiện chương trình đào tạo dành cho sinh viên chuyên ngành Ngôn ngữ Anh tại một số trường đại học tại Việt Nam, dựa trên ý kiến của các quản lý, giảng viên và sinh viên. Bằng việc tiến hành phỏng vấn nửa cấu trúc với 60 cá nhân đến từ 20 trường đại học đang đào tạo chuyên ngành Ngôn ngữ Anh, nghiên cứu này cung cấp cái nhìn đáng giá về các chương trình đào tạo hiện có. Các nhà quản lý nhấn mạnh các thách thức quan trọng như tài nguyên hạn chế, năng lực của giảng viên, việc kết nối giữa lý thuyết và thực tế, phương pháp đánh giá và sự tham gia của sinh viên. Các giảng viên nhấn mạnh khó khăn trong việc chuyên môn hóa, tầm quan trọng của tự học, phương pháp giảng dạy, thiết kế chương trình, tính liên quan, học tập cá nhân hóa, phương pháp đánh giá và phát triển chuyên môn. Sinh viên nhấn mạnh sự cần thiết của một chương trình học cân đối, hướng dẫn cải thiện và tập trung hơn về học thuật. Ngoài ra, các đề xuất cho nghiên cứu tương lai bao gồm phân tích so sánh, nghiên cứu dài hạn, tích hợp công nghệ và đánh giá chương trình học. Các kết quả đóng góp vào cuộc thảo luận liên quan đến cải thiện giáo dục tiếng Anh tại Việt Nam và cung cấp những thông tin quý giá cho giáo viên, nhà hoạch định chính sách và nhà nghiên cứu tận tụy muốn nâng cao chất lượng giáo dục tiếng Anh tại Việt Nam và các ngữ cảnh giáo dục tương tự.

Từ khóa: sinh viên chuyên ngành ngôn ngữ Anh; quan điểm của các bên liên quan; phát triển chương trình đào tạo; nghiên cứu định tính , đào tạo tiếng Anh ở Việt Nam.