Chapter 3
Strategies and Supports for More Effective English Teaching:
Pre-Service and In-Service Teachers' Voices

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ABSTRACT

Vietnamese English teachers (VETs), especially those working in high schools, are under public pressure because of their poor performances in national English proficiency assessments. As Le suggests, this is widely seen as the main reason why Vietnamese English learners have poor learning outcomes. Research shows, however, that it is the effectiveness of instruction that plays a crucial role in determining the success of language students. Given this dilemma, it is necessary to investigate what VETs think can help improve their teaching. Little is known about this in the Vietnamese context. To bridge this gap, this study investigates perspectives of a range of pre-service and in-service VETs on issues related strategies and supports for more effective English language teaching. Data were collected through questionnaires, individual interviews, and focus group interviews, and were analyzed thematically. The findings are expected to be of great benefit not only to pre-service and in-service VETs but also to other stakeholders.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Vietnamese English teachers (VETs) generally have low English proficiency as measured by the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) (Dudzik & Nguyen, 2013; Dang et al., 2013; Trao & Ngoc, 2015) and, as Le (2007), Nhung (2018) and Hung (2023) suggests, this is widely seen by public as the major reason why Vietnamese learners have poor English learning outcomes.

The context in which English teachers work in Vietnam needs to be understood in its full complexity to appreciate that English proficiency levels of Vietnamese teachers are only one of many issues relevant to and impactful on the success of their students. Basing proficiency requirements for teachers on CEFR scales (Appendix 5) has no relation to the actual level of English proficiency required to teach well in Vietnam's schools (i.e., the proficiency level that is "fit for purpose") (Nhung, 2018). Rather than focusing on external, standardized measures of English proficiency as the key benchmark for evaluating English teacher competence in Vietnam, there are other equally important factors that should be considered, for example, the effectiveness of instruction[1] . Effectiveness of instruction, however, depends largely on the teachers' perceptions of what it really is (Hung, 2023). Without a doubt, teachers' perceptions of effective teaching and their beliefs about teacher efficacy influence the actions that they take in the classroom (i.e., the way they behave, the teaching methodologies they use etc.) (Borg, 2001; Farrell, 2007), which consequently affect their learners' learning and academic achievement (Dembo & Gibson, 1985; Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2000; Ghasemi & Hashemi, 2011). Thus, to help VETs with their quality of teaching issues, it is necessary to research how *they* perceive their own situations and what *they* say can help improve their teaching.

Published research to date on the perceptions of VETs has focused mainly on investigating teacher's perceptions about specific issues that are related to their knowledge of the language (Nguyen, 2015; Nguyen, 2007; Huong & Hiep; 2010; Nguyen, 2016 etc.) or English language teaching and learning in general (Hien, 2006; Nguyen et al., 2011; Le, 2011 etc.). Little has been researched about how VETs perceive factors/difficulties/challenges (FDCs) that may impact on their teaching or type of support/strategies/practices (SSPs) that can effectively help them become/ remain effective throughout their ELT career. This study is designed to bridge this gap by investigating the voices of a range of pre-service and experienced VETs. The findings are expected to be of great benefit not only to pre-service and in-service VETs but also to other stakeholders (i.e., teacher educators, teacher mentors, school managers, and policy makers) in their roles of preparing VETs for successful ELT careers.

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