

Improve the quality of English learning for Vietnamese students today

Tran Thi Quy Thu

Ho Chi Minh City University of Industry and Trade

ABSTRACT

In fact, the ability to communicate in English is a major barrier for Vietnamese students today. The vast majority of students who have learned English from elementary school, middle school, high school, and university continue to study and take extra classes at international English centers, but quite a few students when applying for a job, they do not meet the English language skills requirements set by businesses and agencies. Some students even after graduating cannot maintain a conversation for more than 3 minutes. This situation poses challenges for improving the quality of human resources and international integration. In order to contribute to improving the quality of English learning for Vietnamese students, this article analyzes the situation, causes and proposes some solutions and recommendations.

KEYWORDS: Improving quality, learning English, students, Vietnam.

1. ASK A PROBLE

English is the official language of more than 53 countries and territories, the official language of the EU and the 3rd most used language in the world after Chinese and Spanish. It is estimated that about 1 billion people in the world speak English, including 67 countries that use English as an official language and 27 countries that use English as a second language (Quang Trung University, 2023).

English is considered a global communication tool, the "key" to accessing the vast amount of knowledge of world civilization. Therefore, understanding and using English fluently will help learners access diverse knowledge and information from global sources (Minh Thi, 2023).

Since 1986, English has begun to become the main foreign language in general education. However, nearly 40 years have passed, foreign language education in Vietnam has not prospered. In the list of countries proficient in English, Vietnam ranks 41st. Although it is mid-range compared to the world, it does not really meet investment expectations. Specifically, the national foreign language project from 2008-2020 (Prime Minister, 2008) costs nearly 10 billion VND but is ineffective. According to a report by Education newspaper, in the 2016 national high school exam, the number of papers scoring from 9 to 10 accounted for only 0.52%, the average score was 3.48, in 2017 the average score was 4.6, 2018 was worse: 3.9. There are many reasons for this incompetence, but the most important reason is the wrong learning method, the second reason is that the purpose of learning is also misunderstood. The current situation of learning English in Vietnam is confusing. Outdated textbooks, teacher qualifications and examination methods based on reading and writing are three major problems that need to be resolved (Nguyen Xuan Quang, 2016).

2. CURRENT STATUS OF VIETNAMESE STUDENTS LEARNING ENGLISH

One of the current worrying situations in university education is that the number of students lacking basic and specialized English knowledge (for non-language specialized schools) is very high even though There have been many innovations in teaching and learning methods in many universities and colleges.

According to recent information, many scientific conferences on basic and specialized foreign language training at universities and colleges have taken place. One of the issues discussed at the conferences is the current state of foreign language learning by students, that the teaching and learning of foreign languages (especially English) is becoming "alarming". Students lose a lot of knowledge about vocabulary, grammar and even "lose their roots" in English right from high school.

In the current situation, in fact, to get a desired job in all fields, one of the "prerequisite" conditions is indispensable, which is to have foreign language capital - English. This has also been contributing to promoting foreign language teaching and learning at Universities and Colleges, which has always become "hot", especially in recent years. Since then, innovations in book preparation, curriculum, teaching and learning methods have been continuously implemented with the aim of improving foreign language proficiency for students so that after graduating with specialized knowledge, the acquired industry knowledge combined with foreign language capital will help students easily find jobs and meet the strict requirements of many employers.

However, besides the students who have good achievements in the IELTS and TOEFL exams and are able to communicate fluently with foreigners, the majority of students do not have a good grasp of both basic and specialized knowledge. Knowledgeable but unable to communicate. This situation has been happening in most university and college training sectors, from engineering to humanities, military security and even sectors that have more or less contact with English. For the engineering sector, it seems that students rarely have to interact or work much with English, so their learning stops mostly at the level of grasping basic knowledge. And in fact, in many schools in this field, students only have to study English for one year, so they are less "interested" in this subject, leading to low results and a high rate of retakes and retakes.

Although incoming students have different levels of English proficiency, the general situation is that the quality is still low and students are still neglecting to study this subject. Even students admitted to university are block D, but the results of this subject are not high because the curriculum and exams have many innovations different from high school and there is not enough time to hone all skills. The problem of limited time for learning English, the program has many new points and higher requirements than high school is also one of the reasons leading to the limited quality of English of Vietnamese students (Mai Thi Thu, 2011).

Thus, students' English learning in general still has many limitations and learning is sometimes just about coping with exams. Faced with such a reality, it is not difficult to find the cause of the above situation. Some main reasons can be reviewed as follows:

Firstly, the duration of English training is not enough to train all graduates to be able to communicate fluently to meet the needs of employers. Reality shows that both lecturers and students at these schools do not have enough time to fully train and absorb knowledge.

According to survey data at 18 universities in Vietnam, the average score of first-year students ranges from 220-245/990 TOEIC points, and with this score, students need about 360 hours of training (480 periods), to achieve 450-500 TOEIC points - the score that many businesses consider the minimum level for them to accept applications. However, according to survey data from the Department of Higher Education, schools usually only have about 225 English lessons for students (Thanh Ha, 2008). The short amount of time is not enough for lecturers and students to fully teach and absorb all four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, and the number of students in a class is large.

Second, the level of students is not uniform and there is a large difference in English ability among them. Usually a class will include levels from beginner (including students learning English for the first time) to intermediate (students who have studied English for seven years); Students from the city mostly have better English skills than those in the provinces and rural areas due to being approached from a young age and receiving more investment. Such multi-level classes will cause many difficulties for lecturers, making it difficult for them to manage all students, thereby hindering both teaching and learning. When first-year students enter school, there are those who do not know anything about English and must receive basic training from the beginning. Besides, many students have advanced English proficiency, so if they were also trained like elementary students, it would be a waste of time.

Third, the situation of learning English at high school has led to a consequence that when entering universities and colleges, many students encounter major obstacles with this subject. The English learning program in high school is too heavy. From grade 6 to grade 12, there are 16 lessons per school year with different topics. The program content is overloaded compared to the allowed time, not enough for instructors to convey all 4 skills to students, who mainly only learn grammar and vocabulary, and rarely practice listening and speaking skills.

Fourth, English training at non-specialized schools is often rushed and focuses more on specialized English while not many students can fully grasp the basic knowledge. Therefore, students cannot communicate because they do not have basic knowledge of sentences and words.

In short, the current situation of learning English in non-language schools is worrying. It is common for students to learn a foreign language but not be able to use it. Therefore, the general situation is that students' ability to use English when graduating will be very limited and in the current working environment, it is difficult to meet the needs of employers. Therefore, with awareness of the causes and current status of students learning English, a more appropriate innovative solution will have to be proposed...

3. SOME SOLUTIONS TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF ENGLISH LEARNING OF VIETNAMESE STUDENTS.

From the recognition of the above situation, universities need to promote measures to innovate teaching methods suitable to the conditions of teaching English to students who meet the output standards according to the foreign language competency framework.

Raise awareness about the need to innovate English teaching methods

There are many solutions to innovate foreign language teaching and learning methods in the current trend, but generally focus on three methods. First of all, for the role of schools, it is necessary to approach, absorb and motivate lecturers to apply the achievements of the fourth industrial revolution in teaching. Schools need to have policies and solutions to encourage lecturers and students to change teaching and learning methods, apply modern media and technology in lectures and learning styles to achieve the highest efficiency. The role of the teacher needs to be changed, the traditional way of transmitting knowledge is shifted to the role of a guide, supporting and inspiring learners. Students need to change their perception of the importance of foreign languages in the current context of globalization. Effective use of information technology applications in learning. Access reputable open learning resources to learn and practice more skills for innovation and independent thinking.

Teaching and learning foreign languages needs to be practical and applicable, considering foreign languages as a tool for communication and substantive learning, avoiding the situation of learning to cope, learning for degrees and certificates. It is necessary to build an English-speaking community, create an environment where people like to speak English, like to read English, a learning society, create a widespread movement, those who know a lot teach those who know a little, not only students, but also adults and the entire population can learn foreign languages (Hoang Trung, 2018).

In the coming time, universities need to focus on educating management staff, lecturers and students to deeply understand the meaning of innovation. Along with that, it is necessary to encourage everyone to clearly see that the innovation process cannot avoid difficulties and stumbles, but if each person struggles with the idea of being afraid of difficulties and suffering, they can build their own attitude and motivation. Resolutely change old ways and working habits. At that time, the desired effectiveness of innovating teaching methods will be achieved.

Closely combine teaching methods, suitable for each student

Reality shows that there is no optimal teaching method and no medicine that can cure all diseases. Therefore, it can be affirmed that closely combining methods in teaching and learning in the direction of promoting the advantages and limiting the disadvantages of each method, suitable for each type of student is the guiding motto for continuous teaching and learning, throughout the process of innovating English teaching and learning at universities in the coming time. Specifically:

Combining traditional teaching methods and communication methods: Doing this well not only limits passive learning, but also helps students master and fluently use English knowledge in communication skills. To achieve the above purpose, the traditional method should only be applied to subjects in the first few lessons according to the determined English teaching program or content that needs in-depth analysis of phonetics, vocabulary, grammar. In particular, instead of explaining knowledge, lecturers should take advantage of the accumulated English capital of subjects at lower levels to suggest and guide students' answers. In addition, lecturers should combine communication methods to enhance students' initiative and creativity when participating in real communication contexts.

Apply many forms of active teaching methods, such as: techniques of using mind maps; project classroom model or flipped classroom method. With limited time, content, and English learning programs; For students of uneven quality, the use of the above forms will highly promote students' positivity, self-study, and self-research.

For mind mapping techniques and project-based teaching, before implementation, the lecturer determines the topic; Organize the class into groups with similar English abilities; Assign project design and implementation tasks to groups. For the flipped classroom model, before each lesson, the lecturer will ask students to watch the

lecture video. At class time, lecturers organize discussions in many different forms, comment, evaluate, answer students' questions, and summarize key knowledge. After that, the lecturer will add more in-depth knowledge to the lecture. In this way, teachers change the traditional teaching method "Study in class, do homework at home" to the modern "Study at home, do homework in class".

Active learning is changing teaching and learning in high schools and universities. Through training, instructors use active learning strategies and determine which activities can stimulate learner initiative. Accordingly, learners will participate more and experience learning English in an exciting way.

Thanks to that, lecturers can achieve the goals of the English teaching program, and learners become more cooperative, productive and creative in professional English activities. Thus, learners in the process of improving their English skills can still form professional experiences and realize the position of English in future career development (Phong Minh, 2023).

Improve students' English self-study ability

Solutions to improve self-study ability in class such as using the target language in easy-to-understand language so that students become familiar with the English language; Set up and maintain vocabulary books to record and store new words and related information; Use admin and exit slips to reflect on lessons/ exercises learned; Using the Think-Pair-Share technique helps students think, discuss and share about lesson content. Solutions to improve self-study capacity outside of class such as project teaching, applying information technology, using learning diaries.

Building a community English model at universities such as organizing English clubs, English corners, themed English competitions and Galas, extracurricular activities throughout the school and classrooms with a friendly environment. Natural English communication schools such as: Chasing pictures, catching words, Messengers, English quizzes, Diversity, Breaking the silence, Hot seats... Organizing English teaching via social network Facebook, Build an open reading library model in the classroom...

In addition to the above methods, universities need to continue to promote research and application of information technology and modern audio and visual aids to innovate teaching methods; Enhance extracurricular English classes through organizing cultural exchanges to improve students' communication skills; Gradually build an English learning resource center according to the smart school model to create a favorable environment for research and learning English for both lecturers and students.

Innovating English teaching methods at universities is a scientific issue and very necessary in the current situation. However, successful innovation requires the attention and efforts of the entire management team, lecturers and students in the spirit of: resolutely fighting against stagnant and conservative ideology; overcome difficulties; dare to think, dare to do, continuously strive to improve; Synchronize many solutions suitable to the actual conditions of each training facility.

4. CONCLUSION

Learning a foreign language needs to be practical, considering foreign language as a tool for communication and substantive learning, avoiding the situation of learning to cope, studying for degrees and certificates. It is necessary to build an English-speaking community, create an environment where people like to speak English, like to read English, a learning society, create a widespread movement, those who know a lot teach those who know a little, not only students, but also adults and the entire population can learn foreign languages. Universities, especially technology universities, can import foreign programs in English to teach and organize activities and discussions in English. Some subjects such as Mathematics and Natural Sciences can be taught in English in schools. Thereby, increasing the effectiveness of foreign language learning.

In addition, each person's foreign language learning goals are different, so it is necessary to diversify teaching models towards high schools teaching basic content with high practical application. Students who need to use foreign languages in studying, researching or studying abroad can go to specialized training centers outside of school. It is necessary to consider building an independent, reputable testing center, possibly inviting experienced international accreditation organizations to evaluate the quality of foreign language teaching centers in Vietnam today, ensuring Objective, not letting the quality get loose or loose. Centers must be accredited and ranked when participating in teaching activities. Universities need to consider solutions to innovate methods of training and fostering lecturers. Lecturers must be standardized and trained according to reality, appropriate to the requirements of each educational level. Innovate methods of training lecturers using technology, reducing traditional training

methods that are not practical. At the same time, enhance socialization and create motivation for lecturers to self-study to improve their knowledge.

REFERENCES

1. Mai Thi Thu (2011). Current status of students learning English, <https://truyenhinhk29a2.wordpress.com/2011/09/13/th%E1%BB%B1c-tr%E1%BA%A1ng-h%E1%BB%8Dc-ti%E1%BA%BFng-anh-c%E1%BB%A7a-sinh-vien-hi%E1%BB%87n-nay/>
2. Minh Thi (2023). The role of English for students in the trend of globalization, <https://baochinhphu.vn/vai-tro-cua-tieng-anh-doi-voi-hoc-sinh-trong-xu-the-toan-cau-flower-102230724182831392.html>
3. Nguyen Xuan Quang (2016). 3 challenges in teaching and learning English in Vietnam, <https://vnexpress.net/3-thach-thuc-trong-day-va-hoc-tieng-anh-o-viet-nam-3490098.html>
4. Hoang Trung (2018). Teaching and learning foreign languages: Teachers - students must change, <https://lsvn.vn/day-va-hoc-ngoai-ngu-thay-tro-phai-thay-doi.html>
5. Phong Minh (2023). How to improve the quality of English teaching in schools? <https://giaoducthudo.giaoducthoidai.vn/lam-sao-nang-chat-day-hoc-tieng-anh-trong-truong-hoc-26363.html>
6. Thanh Ha (2008). Why can't graduates speak English? <https://tuoitre.vn/vi-sao-sinh-vien-ra-truong-khong-noi-duoc-tieng-anh-291136.htm>
7. Prime Minister (2008). Decision No. 1400/QĐ-TTĐ, Approving the Project "Teaching and learning foreign languages in the national education system in the period 2008 - 2020"
8. Quang Trung University (2023). The importance of English in modern life, <https://qtu.edu.vn/tam-quan-trong-cua-tieng-anh-trong-cuoc-song-hien-dai/>