

An investigation into Vietnamese Teachers' and Students' perception of English as a lingua franca

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SUMMARY OF THE DISSERTATION

The spread of English around the world has been the reason for a substantial amount of attention to research in applied linguistics and English language teaching (ELT). Based on the increasing popularity of English in Vietnam seen through a number of foreign language governmental policies and grassroots initiatives, this research was conducted in the hope of contributing to existing literature in English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) in Vietnam. Specifically, the project investigates Vietnamese teachers' and students' perceptions of ELF through three research questions:

- What kind of English do Vietnamese students need?
- What kind of English do Vietnamese teachers prefer to teach and Vietnamese students prefer to learn?
- To what extent is the kind of English that students need related to the preferred kind of English chosen by Vietnamese teachers and students?

The study was conducted in College of Foreign Languages, Hue University, Vietnam with the participation of 25 teachers and 106 students. The research employed a direct approach with two main instruments of data collection: online questionnaires and Skype interviews, which were available in both English and Vietnamese.

The data reveals that there is an existing paradox in English teaching and learning in Vietnam, between what happens inside and outside the classroom, between what students really need and what teachers and students prefer. On the one hand, the participants acknowledge the spread of English and its increasingly important role in Vietnam. They claim that English has brought a number of opportunities to their life and the country. They also express their agreement on the role of English as an effective means of communication among people from different first language backgrounds. On the other hand, the participants strongly oppose the idea that in the current time of globalisation, ELT should re-consider their orientation towards native standards. Rather than regarding themselves as legitimate users of English, both student and teacher participants are in favor of language standardization ideology and native speaker (NS) ownership of English.

Similar to the findings of some previous ELF studies in other countries, a considerable amount of contradictions and ambiguity in the participants' perceptions of ELF emerges in this research project. This illustrates the fact that ELF is still a controversial topic in the field of applied linguistics and ELT. Especially, given different constraints in academic environments, particularly standardized tests, and the lack of descriptions and accepted norms for ELF, it requires much time and effort for ELF to be considered as a "legal" alternative to English as a Foreign Language inside classrooms.

ISSUES OF POTENTIAL FOR IMPACT.

This research was carried out in response to the rising concern in the application of ELF to language classroom around the world as well as in Vietnam. Although the results found in this project show that Vietnamese teachers' and students' perceptions of ELF appear to be complex and contradictory, the main findings can have some potential impact on pedagogical issues:

- Firstly, it is necessary that teachers should raise students' awareness of their potential use of English and orient them to make the most suitable and feasible choice for their language study, as Jenkins (2006) states, "the choice needs to be made in full knowledge of the sociolinguistic facts" (p. 155). In the case of Vietnam, teachers and students should understand that the incoming establishment of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) community in 2015 definitely has a major influence on the use of English in the country. This influence is remarkably highlighted with ASEAN's language policy spelling out the use of English as the working language among its member countries (Kirkpatrick, 2012),

- While NS English is still the only adopted option in classrooms and there has been no commonly accepted model for ELF to be taught, at least both teachers and students should be aware that there are other varieties of English in use. One important goal of English teaching and learning, therefore, is to equip students with communicative strategies rather than an inflexible focus on linguistic correctness and NS norms. Furthermore, it should be made clear to students that the so-called NS model is an "ideal" one. Different factors need to be considered in order for an L2 learner to achieve what is known as native-like competence.

- Although there is not a likelihood that teachers can teach all varieties of English in classrooms, it is personally believed that they should encourage their students to explore different English varieties and various situations in which they are used. This can be done by take-home assignments or out-of-class activities. As Pham and Ton (2010) suggest, the exposure to real interaction in English enables students to "value, in their own way, the many local, regional, and global norms" (p. 59). Through this, students are empowered with sufficient knowledge to make their judgment and decide on what is really useful for them in English learning. In addition, regarding the availability of only English as a Native Language teaching material, teachers can make use of the media such as Youtube, where a number of clips of English interactions are shared for non-commercial purposes.

- Last but not least, teachers' awareness of ELF should also be increased. Noticeably, when information on ELF is sparsely available in the teacher education program, it is suggested that the subject should be implemented into pre-service and in-service trainings. As Seidlhofer (2004, p.28) points out, "teachers will need a more comprehensive education which enables them for their own teaching contexts and to adapt their teaching to the particular requirements of their learners".

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