

# VIETNAMESE SECONDARY TEACHERS' RESPONSES TO EMERGENCY ONLINE TEACHING

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## ABSTRACT

Early 2020 witnessed one of the greatest pandemics in the history of human beings. All aspects of life have changed since then. In Vietnam, due to the unexpected pandemic, most schools nationwide have been occasionally closed for up to four months, leading teachers to a new way of teaching: online teaching. This study aimed at investigating how Vietnamese secondary teachers reacted to such a sudden change. The study employed sequential explanatory mixed method with the survey and the in-depth interview as the main instruments. The findings of the study revealed that Vietnamese secondary teachers used a mass variety of ways to maintain their teaching from sending exercises through Zalo and email to online meetings. In light of teachers' view, their remote teaching was not very effective due to a lack of skills and knowledge. It was also found that secondary teachers of English in Vietnam need pedagogical, financial support, and resources to better implement their online teaching. The study recommends that the peer mentoring method and an immediate change in pre-service teacher education should be conducted as an effective way to help teachers overcome their challenges in the new teaching context. In addition, instant financial help from the government should be provided.

**Keywords:** teacher education, online teaching, peer mentoring

## INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 pandemic which began in early 2020 has been seriously changing the world in all aspects. The educational systems worldwide have faced many challenges when there has been an abrupt shift from normal teaching to remote teaching. In Vietnam, schools have been occasionally closed as a solution to prevent the widespread of the Coronavirus. The sudden change in the teaching context requires teachers in general and secondary teachers of English, in particular, to quickly adapt themselves to the new teaching context. This has been the first time in history when online teaching is widely conducted in Vietnam.

The study was conducted in the centre of Vietnam in order to better understanding what secondary teachers of English have done to maintain their teaching in a new context. In addition, the research also provides information on what should be implemented to support teachers in their remote teaching.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *New teaching context in Vietnam*

Coronavirus pandemic has forced the educational system in Vietnam to experience lots of changes. Remote teaching has been occasionally used when the pandemic has become serious. The sudden change in the mode of teaching results in numerous challenges for both the government and practitioners. Teachers need to maintain their teaching by so-called online teaching. Teachers various ways for their teaching from tools to conduct online meetings like Zoom, MS team or Google Meet to emails, Zalo (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021).

### ***Previous studies***

Recently, lots of studies have captured teachers' response to the COVID-19 pandemic. A recent study in 13 European countries revealed that teachers and students quickly adapted to new changes and a mix of synchronous and asynchronous interaction and assessment methods are currently employed (Tartavulea et al., 2020). Yet, it was also found that such a combination of synchronous and asynchronous interaction and assessment methods is quite limited with tools for online meetings which do not allow much interaction.

Similarly, in Asian countries, online teaching mode has been quickly applied in education. In Sri Lanka, the educational setting has very limited resources with a lack of access to the internet and teaching equipment. Therefore, teachers have to make use of any resources they had to maintain their teaching from tools like Zoom to open access social networks such as Facebook and Zalo (Chandrasinghe et al., 2020). In China, teachers utilised both synchronous and asynchronous online teaching modes to keep their students moving ahead (Gao & Zhang, 2020). In Vietnam, university language lecturers employed both online courses on LMS or MOODLE and online meetings conducted by Zoom, MS Team, and Google Meet for their remote teaching (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021).

Indeed, there should be further studies on how teachers at different levels react to the sudden change in the teaching mode. In Vietnam, teachers from primary schools to universities have to experience many challenges when conducting sudden remote teaching. Research in this field will provide better insights into what the government can do to support teachers and what teachers themselves do to cope with the situation.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***Research questions***

The study aimed at answering the following research questions:

1. What did secondary school teachers of English in Vietnam do to maintain their teaching?
2. How effective was online teaching in the view of secondary teachers of English in Vietnam?
3. What kinds of support should be provided?

### ***Research approach***

Mixed method with sequential explanatory strategy was selected for the study. In the study, the quantitative phase was conducted and based on information gathered from the quantitative phase, the second phase, the qualitative one was implemented to support and explained data obtained from the first phase.

### ***Instrument***

The survey was utilised as the main instrument to gather quantitative data, followed by the in-depth interview. The survey consisted of four main parts. The first part seeks demographic features like genders, and qualifications. The second part is about how ready the teachers were to cope with the abrupt change. The third part of the survey focuses on tools and teaching strategies used; the fourth part answers the question "What support do teachers of English need to have?" and the final part is teachers' own evaluation of their online teaching. In this paper, the information of the third part was employed. The in-depth interview was designed to further explain data from the survey.

### ***Sample population***

Invitation to take part in the survey was sent to 180 secondary teachers of English, and 147 of them responded to the invitation. 135 of them were females while 12 of them were males. 27 of them had Master's degrees while the rest had Bachelor's degrees.

### ***Validity and reliability***

In order to ensure the validity and reliability of the research is met, a pilot study with 10 teachers was carried out. After the pilot, the items of the survey and the interview were edited for better comprehensibility and better serving the research.

## **FINDINGS**

### ***1. What did secondary school teachers of English in Vietnam do to maintain their teaching?***

As shown from the survey, secondary teachers of English in Vietnam used various ways to maintain their teaching. 39.5% made use of virtual classes (Google Classroom, Blackboard, Moodle, etc.); 38% used online meeting (Zoom, Google Meet, Messenger, MS Team); and 23% used social media (Facebook or Zalo) for online teaching.

Ten teachers interviewed responded that in the first time of closure, their schools just required them to maintain their teaching in any way they could. They utilized what tools they knew to help their pupils review lessons. Seven out of ten teachers replied that they sent documents or exercises to pupils through email or Zalo. The rest used online meetings with Zoom.

*"Q: What did you do to maintain your teaching during lockdown?"*

*A: I sent exercises to my pupils using Zalo group.*

*Q: Did your school require you to use specific tools/ platform for virtual classes or online teaching?"*

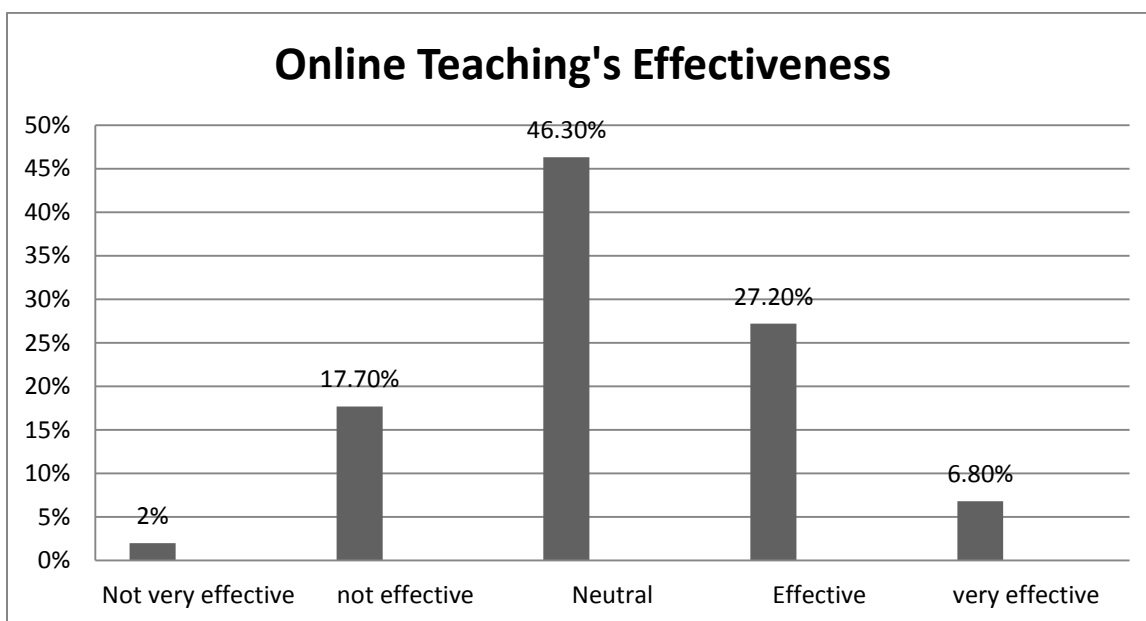
*A: During the first time of COVID-19 outbreak, we just used what we had. But later on, we were trained to use Zoom for online meetings. Yet, just a few teachers can organise online meetings because they lack IT skills and we teach in the countryside, our pupils do not have conditions for that (online meetings). Luckily, we can organise some activities on VinEDU.*

*(Interview with Teacher 2)*

In the second, third, and fourth times of school closure, secondary schools had better preparation and experience. In Vietnam, VinEdu was widely used in 57 provinces for nearly 3 million pupils in 2018. Yet, before the COVID 19, VinEdu had been used as a tool for schools to communicate with parents though it has other functions such as assigning exercises to pupils, sharing information, and so on. Currently, VinEdu can be used as a platform where schools can organise virtual classes for their pupils. In some cities like Danang city, the second semester final exams were conducted online on VinEdu.

**2. How effective was online teaching in the view of secondary teachers of English in Vietnam?**

Only 27.2% of the secondary teachers of English thought that their remote teaching was effective while 46.3% had no idea. 17.7% disagreed that their online teaching was effective. As opposed to 6.8% of teachers who strongly believed that their remote teaching was efficient, 2% of those surveyed responded that they strongly disagreed with the statement that their remote teaching was effective.



**Figure 1:** Online Teaching's Effectiveness in View of Secondary teachers of English

Further explanations were obtained from the interview. When asked about why nearly half of the secondary teachers of English had neutral ideas about the effectiveness of their online teaching, all ten teachers shared very similar ideas that the time for online teaching was from 1 to 2 months, so they could not estimate the effectiveness of their teaching. In addition, the purpose of their online teaching was to keep their pupils not forgetting their knowledge and getting on well with their study when everything returned normal. After the time of closure, teachers were required to arrange time to backup their pupils' knowledge; therefore, it is quite hard for them to evaluate how effective their remote teaching is.

The effectiveness of online teaching was also revealed through teachers' responses to the item "How useful was your online teaching?". 27.9% of teachers thought their online teaching was not very useful for their pupils while 32% supposed their remote teaching was very useful for their pupils. 20.1% had no idea, and 20% believed that it was useful.

Interestingly, as shown from the survey, reasons for the unusefulness and ineffectiveness comes from pupils' learning condition and teaching conditions rather than online lessons. In teachers' views, their pupils do not have computers and even smartphones for learning. Learning online is quite difficult if pupils use smartphones that do not have enough functions for online learning. In addition, according to 20% of teachers surveyed, their pupils live in rural and mountainous areas where internet connection is of low quality. Besides, fees for internet connection are a burden for poor families.

Another reason for the ineffectiveness of online teaching and learning is that designing an online lesson takes much time. The sudden switch from normal teaching to online one forced teachers to react quickly, so it was a challenge for secondary teachers of English to arrange a time for an efficient online lesson. Less motivation for online learning was also listed as a reason. Pupils at secondary schools are used to interesting offline English lessons, so they found it less motivated when taking online lessons in which real interactions are limited.

Lack of skills and knowledge also prevents secondary teachers of English from delivering effective online lessons. 30% of participants listed knowledge and skills as reasons for their ineffective online teaching. The sudden change to online teaching mode made secondary teachers of English unable to equip themselves with enough skills and knowledge for online teaching even though 100% of them took part in "Technology in Education" training organised for teachers of English in the National Language Project 2020.

When being asked why online teaching is inefficient, interviewed teachers suggested similar reasons.

*"Q: As revealed from the survey, the online teaching was ineffective. What's your opinion?"*

*A: In my opinion, there are many reasons for that, but in my school, not all pupils have equipment for online learning and internet connection is not stable.*

*Ah, we do not have enough IT skills and pedagogical knowledge for that.*

*Q: Have you participated in "Technology in Education" training course?"*

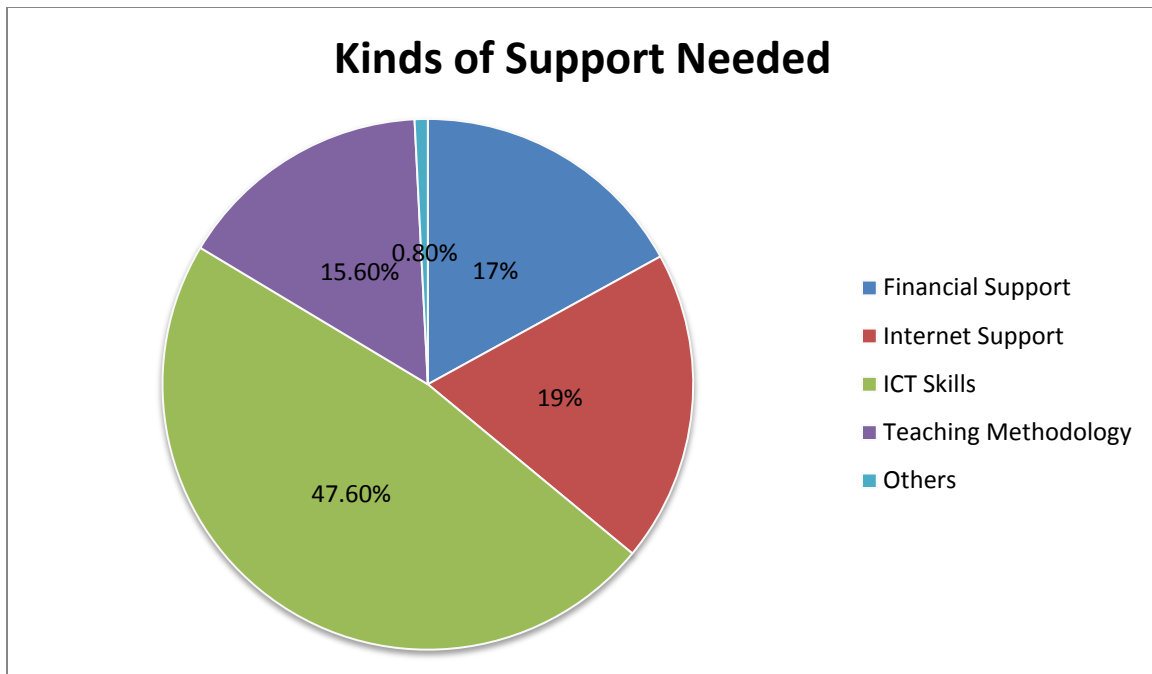
*A: Yes, most of my colleagues had chances to attend this course. But, the course taught us how to integrate technology in education in normal situation, and we did not learn about tools to deliver online meetings like Zoom or Google Meet. I have to learn myself and just know how to use Zoom a little."*

*(Interview with Teacher 4)*

It can be concluded that the online teaching implemented by secondary teachers of English is not effective due to various factors from both teachers and pupils. The fact that pupils do not have sufficient equipment for online learning and they lack motivation for online learning causes challenges for teachers to have effective remote teaching. Secondary teachers of English also have their own issues such as lack of knowledge and skills, bad facility for teaching that keep them from delivering efficient online lessons.

### **3. What kinds of support should be provided?**

In order to answer the question "What kinds of support should be provided?", 6 questions were used. 5 questions are designed with the 5 scales from not very helpful to very helpful; 1 question provides options for choosing.



**Figure 2:** Kinds of Support Needed

As seen from the figure, nearly half of secondary teachers of English in Vietnam wished to be provided with ICT skills (47.6%). Internet support was next with 19%, followed by financial support with 17%. Teaching methodology was selected by 15.6% of teachers surveyed. In other words, the most necessary support is ICT skills.

The answer to the question of why financial support was not the major support that secondary teachers in Vietnam wanted is found in the interview. According to teachers interviewed, they actually need money for investing in their teaching facility at home, but they understood the situation in Vietnam that the budget for education was quite limited.

*"Q: What support do you want to get for your online teaching?"*

*A: I want to have ICT training. I do not know how to use tools for my online meetings. I also need help for designing the lessons.*

*Q: How about financial help?"*

*A: Oh, of course I need that, but in Vietnam can we get money for that? I do not think so, especially when we are facing lots of financial difficulties now. Money should be reserved for COVID-19 prevention.*

*Q: It is surprising that only 15.6% of teachers wished to get teaching methodological support. What do you think are the reasons?"*

*A: I do not know."*

(Interview with Teacher 7)

**Table 1:** Support for Effective Online Teaching

| <b>N</b> | <b>Items</b>   | <b>Not very Useful</b> | <b>Not Useful</b> | <b>Neutral</b> | <b>Useful</b> | <b>Very Useful</b> |
|----------|--|------------------------|-------------------|----------------|---------------|--------------------|
| 1        | Lesson plans for online teaching                           | 0%                     | 1.4%              | 23.1%          | 46.9%         | 28.6%              |
| 2        | Suggestions for online games and short activities          | 0%                     | 1.4%              | 23.1%          | 46.9%         | 28.6%              |
| 3        | Webinars about online teaching and ideas                   | 0%                     | 3.4%              | 21.1%          | 53.1%         | 22.4%              |
| 4        | Video observations of online lessons                       | 0%                     | 4.1%              | 27.2%          | 44.9%         | 23.8%              |
| 5        | Guidance about online safety and child protection policies | 0%                     | 2%                | 24.5%          | 40.8%         | 32.7%              |

As revealed from the table, secondary teachers of English in Vietnam found it very useful if they could get such supports as lesson plans for online teaching, suggestions for online games and short activities, webinars about online teaching and ideas, video observations of online lessons, guidance about safety and child protection policies. Nearly 50% of teachers supposed that those supports were very useful for their online teaching while around 25% considered they were very useful. In other words, teachers really need methodological support for their remote teaching.

## **DISCUSSION**

Findings of the research show that secondary teachers of English in Vietnam make use of available tools, knowledge, and skills to deal with the abrupt change in the teaching mode from normal teaching to emergency remote teaching. A similar situation is found in many countries such as Sri Lanka, China, Latvia, and Vietnam, where such a sudden change has been applied (Borup & Avmenova, 2019; Balasopoulou et al., 2020; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021; Mohamad et al., 2020; Gao & Zhang, 2020; Richardson et al., 2020; Schleicher, 2020; Tafazoli, 2021). Teachers all over the world have made use of available tools like Zoom, Google Meet, MS Team, social networks like Facebook, and Zalo to maintain their teaching. Despite their efforts, online teaching is not very effective due to the lack of preparation (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021).

Methodological, ICT support, and financial supports are what teachers wish to have for their better online lessons. According to Nguyen and Nguyen (2021), teachers should be equipped with instant support and financial aid. In addition, continuous training should be provided to update teachers with quick changes in the teaching mode (Tafazoli, 2021).

## **CONCLUSION**

In order to increase the effectiveness of online teaching conducted by secondary teachers of English in Vietnam, the Ministry of Education and Training needs to consider some solutions to support teachers both in methodology and ICT skills. First of all, training on how to design and deliver online courses should be provided. The training should focus more on the methodology for conducting an online course for secondary pupils with specific strategies and models. Secondly, it is recommended that initiatives and creativity should be conducted to facilitate the process of fully online emergency teaching. For example, the peer mentoring method can be

used as a way for teachers to help each other deal with difficulties arising during their online teaching (Nguyen, 2017; Vo et al., 2020) In addition, policymakers should consider issuing more coherent policies on the delivery of online teaching to ensure the consistent quality of online teaching. Finally, it is advised that the English teacher education programme should be revised so that pre-service teachers of English will have better knowledge and skills for online teaching later.

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