

An Investigation on Current Situation of Studying the English Course of Non-English Major Undergraduates at Thanh Hoa University of Culture, Sports and Tourism

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ABSTRACT: This study surveys the current situation of English learning among non-major undergraduates at Thanh Hoa University of Culture, Sports and Tourism (TUCST) – a local university, aiming to identify key barriers and suggest solutions to enhance their language proficiency. A cross-sectional descriptive study with a self-report questionnaire was used to collect data from over three hundred full-time students. The data were processed using descriptive statistics and Pareto analysis to identify priority causes. The results show that most students are aware of the importance of English; however, their performance is generally at an average level, with scores are around the 5–7 point. Listening and speaking skills are weaker than reading and writing skills. Self-study activities are irregular and of low duration, and participation in additional courses is limited. Learning materials are heavily dependent on internal textbooks. The survey identifies several objective and subjective factors that affect students' learning outcomes. Based on these findings, the study proposes recommendations for undergraduates, lecturers, and TUCST.

KEYWORDS: English Learning, Foreign Language, Undergraduates, TUCST, Non- English major.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the context of globalization, learning and mastering English has become a matter of great societal concern. The rapid growth of English language centers, catering to the learning needs of various groups from children to working adults, highlights the importance of this foreign language. English is not only a tool that creates more job opportunities in a competitive economy, but also helps individuals expand their international communication skills, enhance business effectiveness, and meet essential requirements for studying abroad. As a global language, English continues to assert its indispensable role in education, career development, and international integration.

By 2022, English became an official language in 67 sovereign countries and 27 territories. Many administrative units have declared English as the official language at the local or regional level.

According to the EF EPI 2024, Vietnam's English proficiency index ranks 63rd out of 116 countries, with a score of 498, indicating a "low" level of proficiency. This ranking marks a drop of 5 positions from 2023, where Vietnam ranked 58th. It is also significantly lower than the best ranking Vietnam achieved in 2019, which was 52nd. In the Asia region, Vietnam ranks 8th in English proficiency with 498 points, following Singapore (609 points), the Philippines (570 points), Malaysia (566 points), and others



Figure 1.1. EPI Ranking 2024 (Image: EF)

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According to Statista (2025), approximately 1.53 billion people worldwide speak English as their native or second language, slightly more than the 1.18 billion people who speak Chinese at the time of the survey. Hindi and Spanish occupy the third and fourth positions among the most spoken languages.

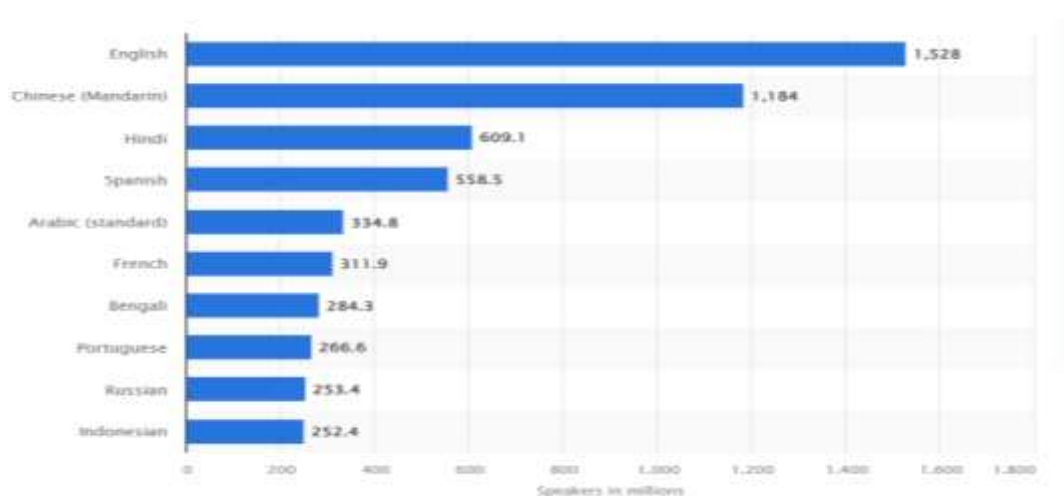


Figure 1.2. The most spoken languages worldwide in 2025 published by S. Galan, April 14th, 2025.

On November 13, Education First Vietnam (EF Vietnam) officially announced the Global English Proficiency Index 2024 (EPI 2024). This is a prestigious report that evaluates and ranks English proficiency worldwide, published annually since 2011, covering over 110 countries and territories.

In the context of globalization, English is the “key” to improving job opportunities and income. Empirical evidence shows that English proficiency is linked to higher salaries in developing economies, though it is important to note the potential risk of increased inequality if it is not implemented inclusively. In Vietnam, the Ministry of Education and Training is finalizing a plan for 2025–2035, with a vision for 2045, aiming to make English the second language in schools. The goal is for 100% of high school students to learn English as a second language (levels 1–3) by 2035, with expansion in preschools, and by 2045, English will be taught in levels 4–6 across all public schools, ensuring that all children benefit (Vietnam Government Electronic Newspaper, 2025). Academic reviews of bilingual education show that early access can support language development, literacy, and academic achievement if designed appropriately for age and context.

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In recruitment processes, especially for positions requiring communication with international partners or working in a global environment, a lack of English skills can result in candidates missing out on opportunities from the first stage. In many cases, a job application (CV) is immediately rejected simply because it doesn’t meet the language criteria set by the employer. Even if invited for an interview, candidates may face difficulties if they cannot clearly and confidently present ideas, answer questions, or articulate career goals in English. Beyond communication skills, English plays an important role in accessing modern work tools, specialized software, technical machinery, and professional literature – all of which are increasingly prevalent and almost always in English. Therefore, English is not just a skill but a competitive advantage and a key factor in creating a personal mark and asserting competence in the modern workplace. Individuals with strong English skills are highly valued, given opportunities for career advancement, and are entrusted with important roles within organizations.

TUCST is a public university within the national education system, managed by the People's Committee of Thanh Hoa Province and under the professional management of the Ministry of Education and Training. The university currently offers 22 undergraduate programs, 16 regular and part-time university transfer programs, as well as 1 doctoral program and 3 master’s programs. English is considered a compulsory subject to meet the graduation requirements of all programs and training systems at the university.

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In the more than 14 years since the university was upgraded to a full university, it has continuously innovated teaching methods to improve the quality of English education for students. However, the process still faces many limitations, leading to results that do not meet the expectations of employers. The level of graduates' proficiency is uneven, with some only meeting the graduation requirements but unable to use English effectively in their work.

For these reasons, the research team has focused on studying English learning among non-major students in the regular undergraduate program at TUCST. The goal is to understand the current status, conditions, and challenges of English learning among non-major students at the university, identify factors affecting the quality of English learning, and propose recommendations to improve the quality of English education at TUCST.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, the authors use both qualitative and quantitative research methods to address the research objectives.

Qualitative Research: The authors will identify the key content areas for analysis and design the survey questionnaire. Afterward, in-depth interviews with experts will be conducted to assess the relevance of the questions and gather expert feedback. This will allow for adjustments to the indicator questions before moving on to the next stage of quantitative research.

Quantitative Research: This is the main research phase, which will be carried out by collecting data through the survey questionnaire. With the total number of full-time students at TUCST determined as the population size, the authors will determine the sample size using the following formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$$

- n: sample size.
- N: population size
- e: acceptable margin of error

Commonly used error margins are: ± 0.01 (1%), ± 0.05 (5%), ± 0.1 (10%), with ± 0.05 being the most commonly applied.

Specifically, for this study, the total number of students at TUCST is approximately over 5,000, with over 1,300 full-time undergraduate students, which represents the identified population size. Therefore, the minimum required sample size for the study, with a margin of error (e) of ± 0.05 , is 305 samples. To ensure scientific accuracy, representativeness, and precision of the data, the research team will collect over 350 survey responses from non-English major students.

The collected data will be processed using SPSS software, and various charts such as Pie Charts, Histogram Charts, Scatter Charts, and Pareto Charts will be used to identify existing issues. Based on the findings, the research will propose recommendations to improve the quality of English learning among non-major students at TUCST.

III. FINDINGS

The research team distributed the survey link to non-English major students at the university. The survey contained 18 questions, and a total of 352 valid responses were collected. The data was cleaned, coded, and processed from second, third, and fourth-year students. First-year students were not included in the sample as they had not yet enrolled in any English courses at the time of the survey. The results obtained are as follows:

A. Data analysis

Out of the 352 valid responses, 270 were from female students, accounting for 76.7%, and 82 responses were from male students, making up 23.3%.

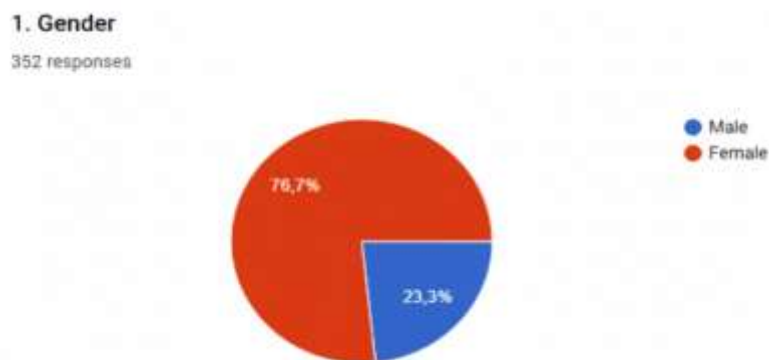


Figure 3.1. Gender distribution breakdown

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Second-year students accounted for 143 responses, making up 40.6%, while third-year and final-year students contributed 86 responses (24.4%) and 123 responses (34.9%), respectively.

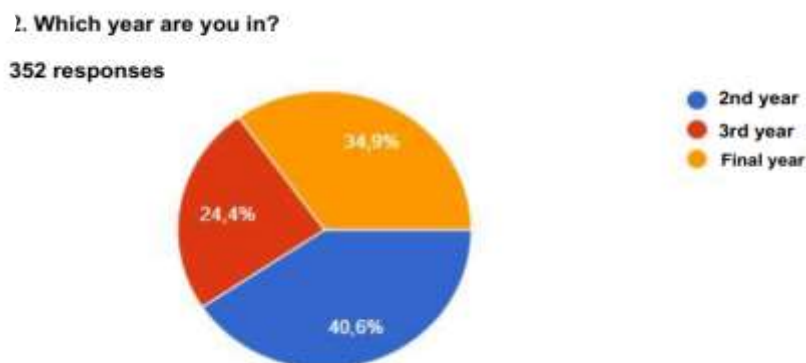


Figure 3.2. Student distribution by year of study in the survey

B. Awareness of the necessity of learning english and the english proficiency of tucst students

The survey results show that a large majority of non-English major students at TUCST recognize the importance of English, with 338 responses (96%) affirming its necessity, while only 14 responses (4%) indicated that English is not really necessary. This reflects a generally high awareness among students about the significance of English. However, the presence of a certain proportion of students who do not fully appreciate the role of this foreign language indicates the need for additional support measures and communication strategies to raise more comprehensive awareness about the role of English in education, career, and international integration.

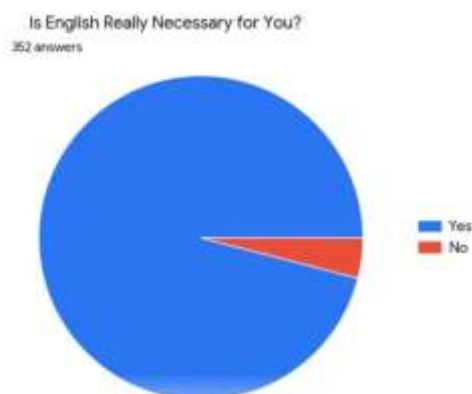


Figure 3.3. Proportion of students who believe english is necessary

The survey results on the quality of English learning at TUCST, based on the average scores of English courses, indicate that the results are at a relatively good level. The most frequent score among non-English major students is 5, accounting for approximately 26.4% (Mode: 5; Mean = 6.22). Scores in the "good" range (8-9) are relatively low, at around 19.2%. There is still a noticeable occurrence of students retaking exams due to poor scores, with scores below 4 accounting for about 24%.

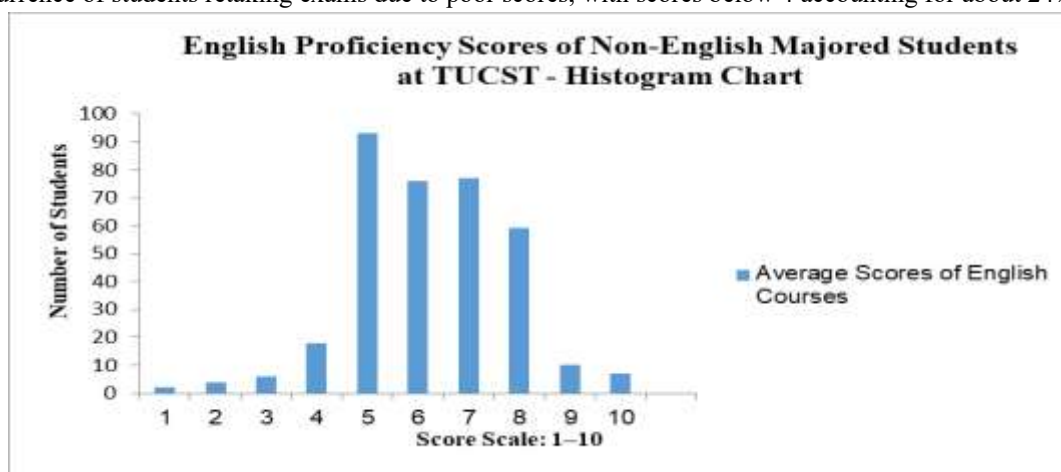


Figure 3.4. English scores of non-major students at TUCST

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C. Skills that non-English major students at TUCST perceive as their weakest

Among the necessary skills, listening and speaking are considered the weakest by the majority of non-English major students at TUCST, with 82.1% acknowledging difficulties in these areas. Writing follows with 9.4%, while students appear most confident in their reading skills. This indicates that students face greater challenges in receptive skills (listening) and productive skills (speaking), which require immediate verbal responses. Therefore, adjustments in the curriculum and teaching methods are needed, with a greater focus on listening and speaking practice to help students improve their overall English communication skills.

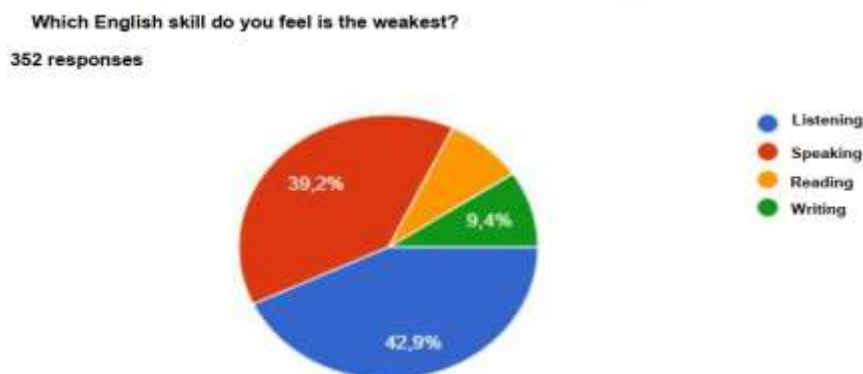


Figure 3.5. Proportion of English skills weaknesses among students

D. Do students at TUCST study English outside of their program?

Studying English at language centers

The research results show that 86.1% of non-English major students at TUCST have never attended or are not currently attending additional English courses at language centers. This reflects the reality that the majority of non-English major students primarily access and study English through the university's core curriculum, rather than seeking supplementary opportunities outside of it.

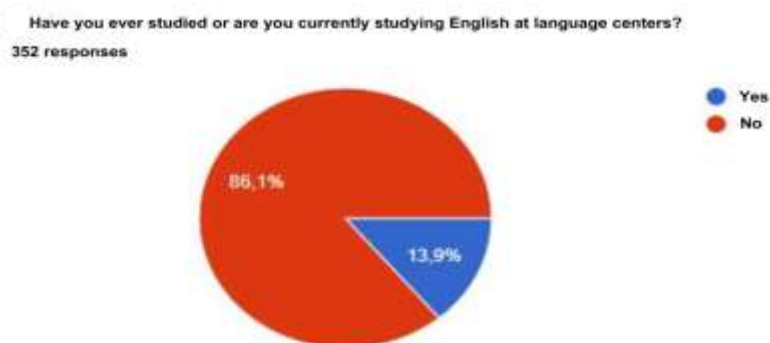


Figure 3.6. Proportion of students who have studied or are currently studying English at a language center

Although the proportion of students attending language centers is relatively low, even among those who have participated, the improvement in English proficiency is not particularly remarkable. Specifically, the majority of students (73.5%) reported only a moderate level of improvement, while a small percentage assessed the improvement as "Definitely not" (4.1%). In contrast, only 22.5% of students felt that their English proficiency had improved "Very probably" or "Definitely".

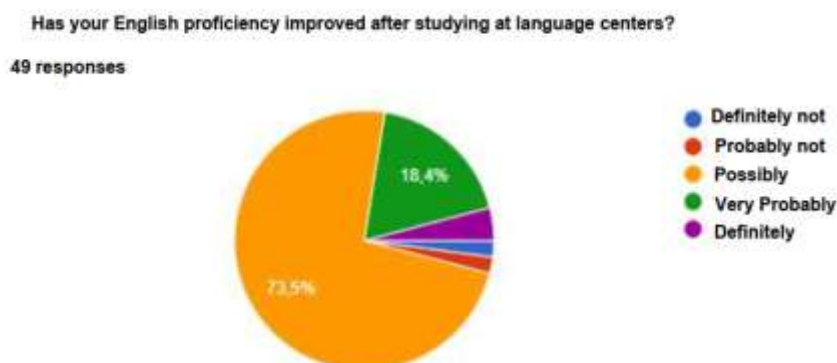


Figure 3.7. Student evaluation of English proficiency improvement after studying at a language center

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Self-studying English

The daily self-study of English among non-English major students at TUCST is still relatively low. Only 46.3% of students reported dedicating time to self-study, while 53.7% admitted they do not maintain this habit. This reflects that more than half of the students either lack awareness or have not developed the habit of regularly self-studying a foreign language, relying instead on in-class learning.

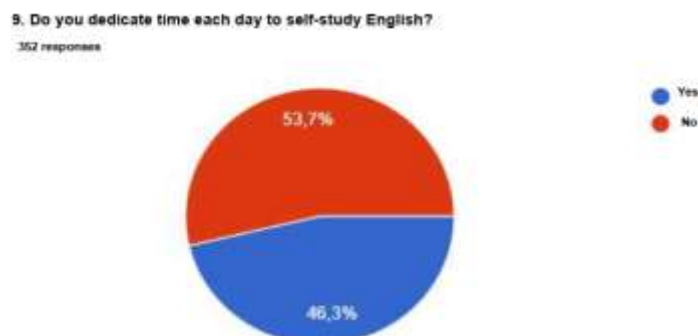


Figure 3.8. Proportion of students who dedicate time to self-study English daily

Moreover, the survey results on students' self-study at home show that the level of self-study is low. The majority of students only spend less than 30 minutes per day (47.2%) or between 30 minutes and 1 hour (41.7%) on self-study. The proportion of students dedicating more time to studying English is quite limited, with only 7.4% studying for 1 to 2 hours and just 3.7% spending over 2 hours per day. Although some students maintain the habit of self-study, the intensity of their study is still low, making it difficult to see significant improvement in their English proficiency.

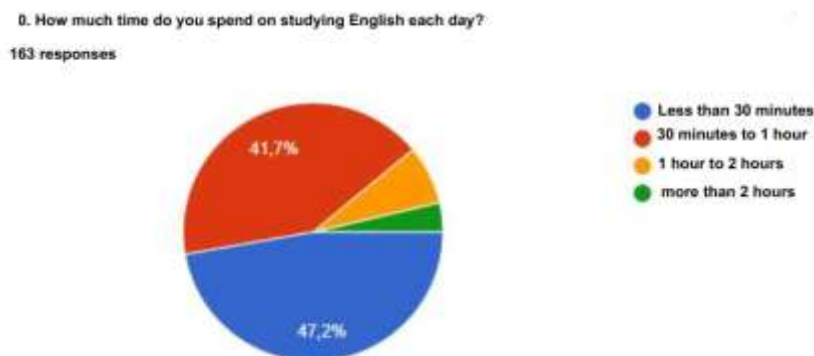


Figure 3.9. Distribution of English study time among students

E. Materials used by students at TUCST to study English

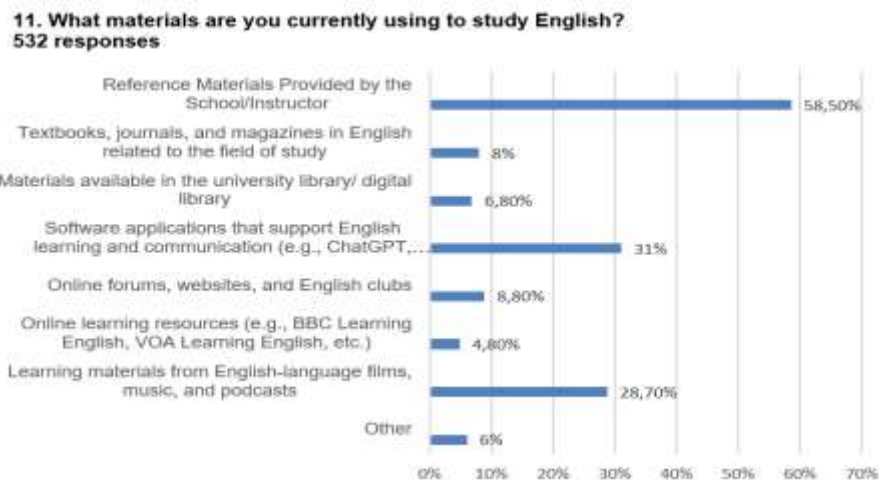


Figure 3.10. English learning materials of students

The survey shows that non-English major students at TUCST use various sources for learning English, but they primarily rely on materials provided by the university/teachers (38.4%). Additionally, 20.3% of students use learning software and apps (such as

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ChatGPT, Duolingo), and 18.8% learn through movies, music, and podcasts, indicating a trend of combining technology and entertainment in language learning. Other sources include forums, clubs, specialized books and journals, online learning materials (BBC, VOA), and libraries. This highlights the need to supplement and diversify the available learning materials at TUCST, as the current resources do not fully meet the students' needs.

F. Student evaluation of the English lecturers and teaching activities at TUCST

Students rate the enthusiasm of the English teachers at TUCST very highly, with 65.9% considering the teachers very enthusiastic, 31.5% rating them as average, and only 1.6% feeling the teachers are not enthusiastic. This suggests that teachers should continue to foster their enthusiasm in teaching to enhance the learning experience and motivate students to study English. The enthusiasm of teachers typically has a positive impact on students' language learning outcomes.

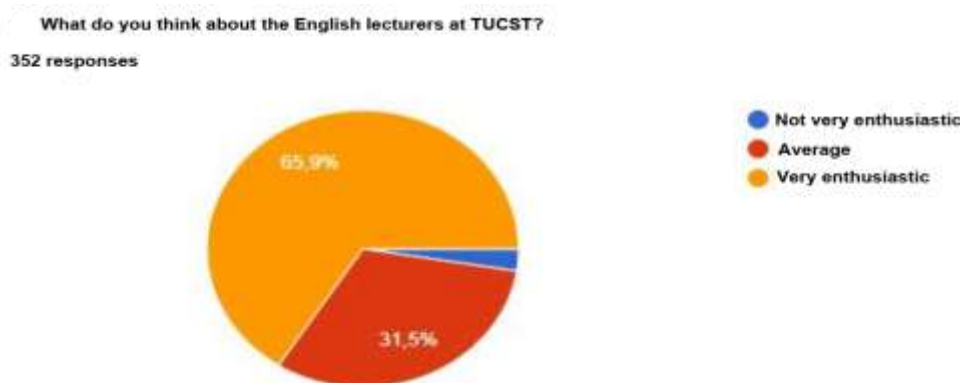


Figure 3.11. Student evaluation of the English lecturers at TUCST

Students evaluate the effectiveness of English teaching activities at TUCST as average. Some students rate it as "Good," with 12.8% considering it "Very good" and 38.9% rating it as "good." 42.6% rated it as "Acceptable" effectiveness. Meanwhile, 5.7% of the students surveyed rated the teaching activities as "Poor," with 3.7% rating it as "Poor" and 2% considering it "very poor"

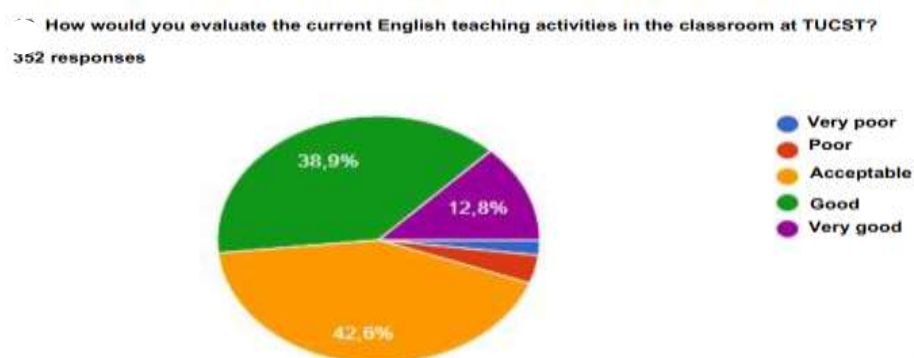


Figure 3.12. Student evaluation of the effectiveness of English teaching and learning activities at TUCST.

When asked to self-assess their ability to absorb English learning at TUCST, the research results are as follows: 37.5% rated their self-learning ability as good, 13.6% rated it as excellent, and 41.5% rated it as average. The remaining 4.3% rated their self-learning ability as poor, and 3.1% rated it as very poor.

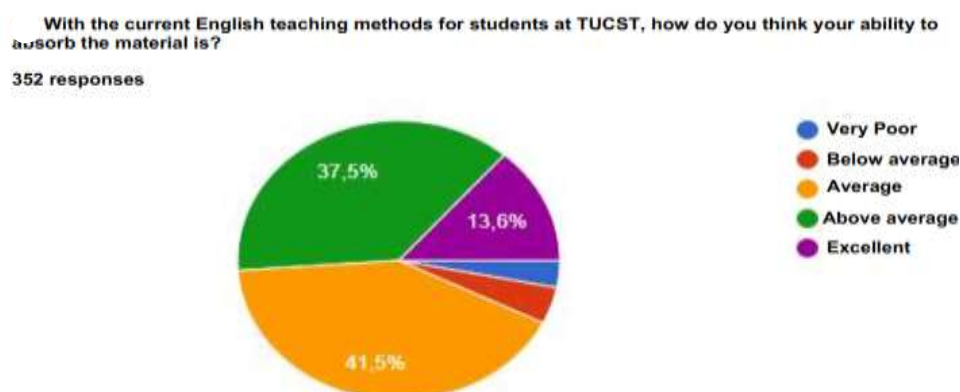


Figure 3.13. Student self-assessment of English comprehension ability

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G. Causes of ineffective English learning among TUCST students

The causes of ineffective English learning were advised by experts (management staff, English lecturers) to design the questionnaire. In the questionnaire, there was an "Other" option where students could add additional reasons. Based on the collected data, using the Pareto 80/20 chart, the results are shown in the figure below.

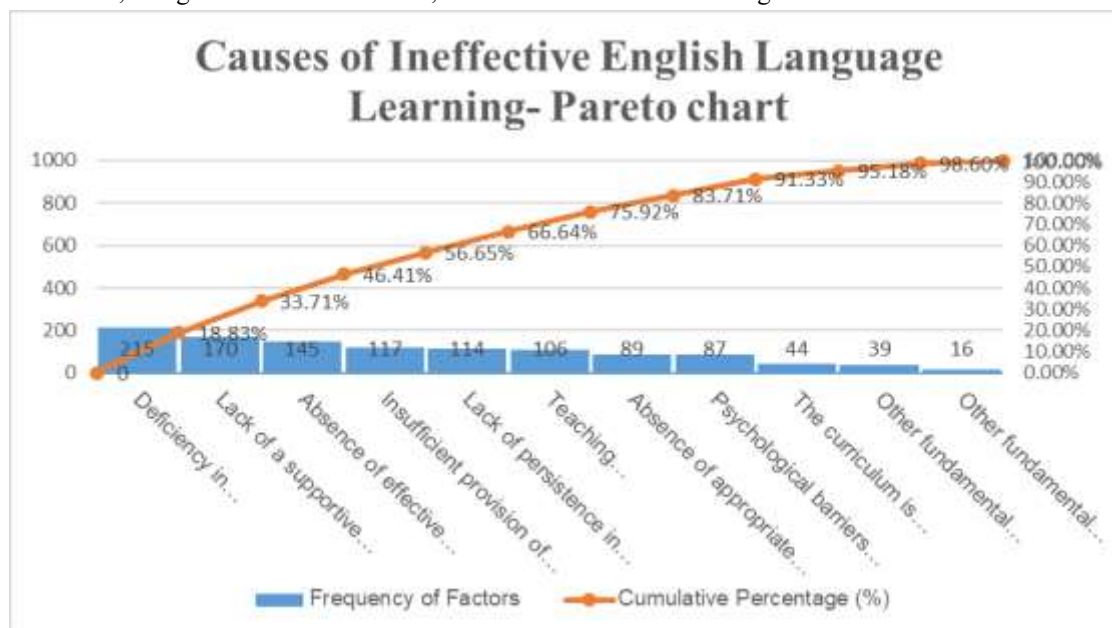


Figure 3.14. Pareto chart of the causes of ineffective English learning among TUCST students

Through the analysis of the Pareto chart on the causes of ineffective English learning among non-major students at TUCST, nine key factors can be identified, including: (1) Weak foundation in basic English, (2) Lack of an environment for learning, communication, application, and skill enhancement, (3) Absence of an appropriate English learning method, (4) Insufficient provision of necessary equipment for English education, (5) Lack of perseverance in learning English, (6) Teaching methods do not engage students effectively, (7) Lack of motivation and clear learning goals, (8) Reluctance to learn or use English, (9) The training curriculum is not suitable for students' abilities. Based on the Pareto principle, to improve at least 50% of the learning effectiveness, it is necessary to prioritize addressing the first four critical causes.

H. Readiness to participate in additional English courses at TUCST

To improve the quality of English teaching and learning at TUCST, as well as at higher education institutions in general, organizing supplementary English courses can be considered an effective solution. However, the participation in these courses is voluntary, so the implementation's effectiveness largely depends on the needs and aspirations of the learners. Survey results show a relatively high readiness to participate, with 60.2% indicating that they might participate, and 29.8% stating that they will definitely participate. Only 9.9% said they would not participate.

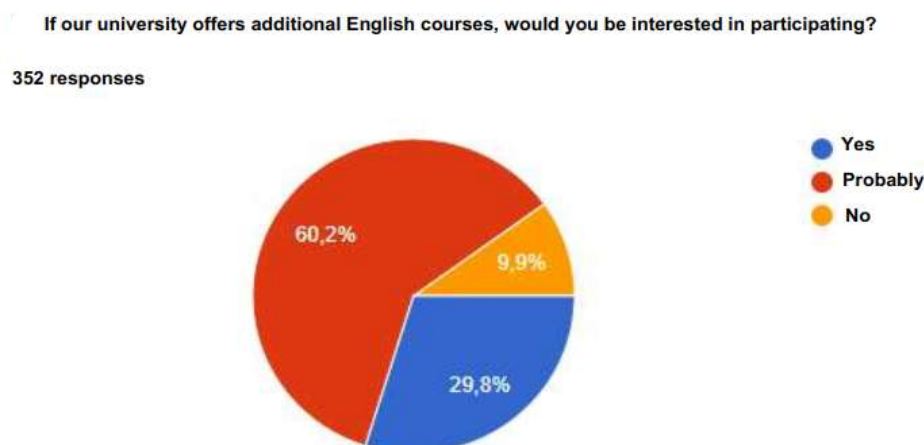


Figure 3.15. Intention to participate in additional English courses organized by TUCST

IV. CONCLUSION

A. Implications

Based on the research results presented in Section 3, the research team draws the following implications:

First, students at TUCST have a high awareness of the necessity of learning English.

Second, the quality of English learning among non-major students at TUCST is at an average level, with a Mode of 5 and a Mean of 6.22.

Third, students at TUCST consider the "listening" and "speaking" skills to be the two weakest skills among the four skills.

Fourth, a significant number of students have turned to English centers, but the effectiveness of these centers is rated as average (73.5% rated it as average).

Fifth, students at TUCST have a relatively low awareness and time dedicated to self-learning English (46.3% do not have self-learning awareness, and the group with self-learning awareness spends less than 1 hour).

Sixth, the available materials provided by the school for learning English do not fully meet students' needs, fulfilling only 38.4% of their demands.

Seventh, students rate the teaching staff highly (65.9% rate teachers as very enthusiastic), and the English teaching and learning activities at TUCST are rated as average (42.6% rate them as average). Students' ability to absorb English teaching and learning activities at TUCST is also at an average level (37.5% rate it as average).

Eighth, there are 9 causes, both external and internal, leading to ineffective English learning among students at TUCST. Specifically: (1) Weak foundation in basic English; (2) Lack of an environment for learning, communication, application, and skill enhancement; (3) Absence of an appropriate English learning method; (4) Insufficient provision of necessary equipment for English education; (5) Lack of perseverance in learning English; (6) Teaching methods do not engage students effectively; (7) Lack of motivation and clear learning goals; (8) Reluctance to learn or use English; (9) The training curriculum is not suitable for students' abilities. To improve 50% of the English learning effectiveness for non-major students, the school needs to focus on addressing 4 out of the 9 causes listed, with priority given to causes (1) through (4).

Finally, students at TUCST are willing to participate in courses organized by the school to improve the quality of English, with a relatively high readiness to participate (60.2% will participate).

B. Recommendations

In recent years, the learning of English among non-major students at TUCST has become a pressing issue. Although English is a compulsory subject, in reality, most students still face many difficulties in applying the language to communication and work. The phenomenon of "learning a foreign language but being unable to use it" is quite common, leading to the consequence that the English proficiency of students upon graduation remains limited. In the context of an increasingly competitive labor market and deep international integration, this directly affects students' employment opportunities as well as their ability to adapt after graduation. Based on the awareness of the above situation and causes, the research team proposes several innovative solutions to improve the quality of English teaching and learning, contributing to enhancing the foreign language skills of non-major students at TUCST.

Undergraduates

Undergraduates need to continue raising their awareness of the necessity and importance of learning English. Learning should have clear objectives: learning to cope, learning for grades, and learning to gain knowledge that will enhance future proficiency. When learning English, it is important to recognize that the purpose is personal, for work, and to access knowledge.

Learners should have clear goals, effective learning methods, and a concrete, long-term study plan. Goals should be set by writing down what they wish to achieve from learning English, then creating a daily study schedule and applying mind maps for more effective learning. Students should not hesitate to ask questions to friends and teachers while learning English. Whether in class or self-learning, always ask about things they do not know or understand, and seek explanations from lecturers or peers with a higher level of English proficiency.

Students need to be proactive in self-study, complete homework assignments, and prepare new lessons before class to ensure effective learning. Before attending class, students should complete assigned exercises to reinforce the current lesson's knowledge and also prepare the next lesson by writing it down in their notebooks, noting down new vocabulary, and looking up meanings of unfamiliar words in the new unit. The results of learning will be directly proportional to the time students spend on self-study and independent research.

Lecturers

Effective teaching methods that are easy to understand and closely aligned with the curriculum of the university are essential. Each lesson should include illustrative examples, images, dialogues, and opportunities for students to practice. Teachers should actively ask questions and engage in English communication with students about the lesson content. Lecturers should present questions related to the topic, discuss, and communicate in English with students to improve their listening and speaking skills.

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Providing images, short stories, short films, or dialogues with cheerful, humorous, and easy-to-understand content related to the lesson can reduce pressure during learning, combining both fun and education. Students should also be encouraged to discuss in groups the images, films, or dialogues they have just seen.

Teachers need to build trust with students, especially those who are struggling. It is important to help students realize that learning English is a long process that requires gradual knowledge accumulation and consistent practice as keys to success. Creating a comfortable learning environment is crucial, where teachers do not scold or reprimand students for not completing tasks. Instead, they should be friendly and provide solutions to the problems students cannot answer. Teachers should give extra attention to weaker students by asking them more questions in a gentle manner.

Assessing and evaluating the results of English learning should accurately reflect each student's actual abilities, while also raising the school's output standards. It is important to be honest with test results and evaluations, classify scores to accurately assess students' proficiency, and from there, provide tailored materials and additional support for students who haven't achieved good results.

TUCST

Conducting an English placement test to properly assign students to classes based on their proficiency level is essential. Each class should be divided according to students' English proficiency, which can be determined by their scores on the placement test. Based on these results, solutions should be provided for students who have not yet reached the required level, emphasizing the need for more study, and for those who have reached the required level, offering opportunities to further improve their skills.

The university should offer additional English courses for students who have weak foundations in the language or those who need to supplement their knowledge. Additionally, there should be courses or programs designed to enhance specific skills, particularly "listening" and "speaking."

Upgrading teaching and learning equipment is necessary. Equip classrooms with devices for listening and reading practice, and create a self-study area for students who are learning English.

Creating an English-learning environment that is close to students is crucial. Teachers should be friendly, engage with students, discuss course content, and eliminate the barrier between teachers and students, fostering a communication environment where they interact with each other in English.

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