

Vietnamese EFL high school teachers' perceptions of difficulties when implementing competency-based English teaching curriculum and their proposed solutions

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ABSTRACT: This study aims to examine the perceptions of Vietnamese English as a foreign language (EFL) high school teachers regarding the implementation of the competency-based English teaching curriculum (CETC) in the Mekong Delta region of Vietnam. Utilizing a qualitative approach, this study sought to delve into the challenges high school EFL teachers faced while implementing the CETC in Vietnam. Semi-structured interviews with 10 teachers were conducted to gain insights into their experiences, specifically targeting their perceptions of difficulties and their suggestions for potential solutions derived from these experiences. The findings reveal teachers' perceptions of their perceived difficulties related to student-related factors (low English proficiency, and limited self-directed learning abilities), teacher-related factors (traditional teaching methods, inadequate language and pedagogical skills, and insufficient training), and institution-related factors (large class sizes, limited teaching time, and inadequate facilities). In addition, the teachers recommended strategic solutions for a better implementation of the CETC including providing constructive feedback, promoting collaborative learning, enhancing teachers' language and pedagogical proficiency, reducing class sizes, and improving facilities. Accordingly, the study contributes to the understanding of CETC implementation and provides practical implications for teachers, students, and policymakers in Vietnam and other similar contexts.

KEYWORDS: competency-based language curriculum; difficulties; EFL; implementation; perceptions; suggestions

1. Introduction

Amidst Vietnam's global integration, the historical interplay of language and politics significantly impacts the choice of language instruction and foreign languages studied in Vietnamese education (T. T. Le and Chen, 2018). With its ascent as a key market economy, English has become prevalent as the primary foreign language in Vietnamese schools, aiding Generation Z in securing employment opportunities and fostering effective communication in professional environments (Barhate and Dirani, 2022). Yet, shortcomings in English language education have led to underachievement and deficits in proficiency, necessitating curricular innovations to bolster language competence (Do et al., 2022). The proposed solution to these shortcomings was the implementation of a Competency-based English

Teaching Curriculum (CETC) in Vietnamese schools. This progressive pedagogical approach was introduced in the late 2010s and early 2020s in response to the rising global integration of Vietnam, wherein English language proficiency was identified as a critical skill. Prior to this, traditional teaching methods that focused more on rote learning and grammar instruction had been dominant, which were not as effective in developing comprehensive English language skills in students (B. P. Hung, 2019). The decision to introduce the CETC was influenced by the English Language Education Policy that the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MOET, 2008) released in 2008, which aimed to improve English language education in the country. This policy document underscored the importance of communicative competence in English (MOET, 2008). The policy advocated for the adoption of communicative language teaching (CLT) methods, which eventually paved the way for the CETC. The implementing guidelines for the CETC were outlined in this same policy document. The document emphasized that the focus of English language instruction should be on developing students' communicative competence, incorporating four main skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The policy also advised on the necessity of ensuring that English language instruction should be based on real-life situations to better prepare students for actual communication. The implementation of the CETC, however, has not been without its challenges. While the new approach was designed to provide a more practical, engaging, and effective method for teaching English, issues relating to resources, teacher training, and actual implementation in the classroom environment have arisen (Duong and DeJaeghere, 2022). These factors have influenced the effectiveness of the CETC, thereby highlighting the need for continued refinement and development in its application. Thus, the historical context of English language instruction in Vietnam, along with the current emphasis on communicative competence, have shaped the introduction and implementation of the CETC. These factors continue to influence the ongoing development and success of English language education in the country.

However, research gaps exist in understanding how Vietnamese EFL teachers implement the CETC and perceive its viability, especially in public high schools within the Mekong Delta region of Vietnam. Investigating teacher perceptions of difficulties and causality regarding CETC implementation can illuminate curriculum adoption issues and fill existing research gaps (C. D. Cao et al., 2022). Yet, the perception of Vietnamese EFL high school teachers on CETC implementation remains unexplored. This study intends to address this gap, contributing to the successful adoption of the CETC and providing practical recommendations informed by teachers' experiential insights. It advances a bottom-up educational improvement strategy, utilizing teachers' expertise to refine CETC initiatives. By integrating teachers' input, this study aims to inform policy formulation, professional development programs, and resource allocation. It strives to provide an extensive understanding of CETC implementation in Vietnam, facilitating evidence-based strategies to enhance English language education. The research question guiding this study is, "*What are the Vietnamese EFL high school teachers' perceptions of difficulties and proposed solutions in implementing the CETC?*".

2. Literature review

2.1. Competency-based English teaching curriculum

Competency-based education (CBE), alternatively known as mastery learning or individualized instruction, aims to cultivate requisite skills for real-world professional or personal contexts, thus ensuring high-quality education and fostering the practical application of academic learning (Egbert and Shahrokini, 2019). The central tenet of CBE, competence, is regarded as benchmarks for individual performance and accomplishment, enabling learners to navigate personal, social, and professional

challenges (Bajis et al., 2020). Its comprehensive and context-specific approach aligns with the exigencies of modern society and occupational practice, enhancing professional competencies, professional identity, adaptability, and lifelong learning while fostering workforce skills, personalized learning, and employability (Hodge et al., 2020). CBE empowers learners with practical application skills, responsibility, critical thinking, and data analysis abilities, thereby preparing them for flexible and adaptable future careers, and promoting teacher-student interaction and academic rigor (Evans et al., 2020). As a critical element of educational reforms worldwide, CBE is extensively adopted across vocational education, language education, and numerous disciplines globally (Griffith and Lim, 2014).

2.2. Key challenges of CBE in the context of Vietnam

Drawing from Windschitl (2002), four principal challenges underpin the execution of educational reform initiatives, such as CBE: conceptual, pedagogical, cultural, and political dilemmas. The understanding of these challenges is crucial in the present Vietnamese educational landscape as it embarks on substantial reforms. To grasp the essence of CBE, practitioners and policymakers must first navigate through its theoretical complexities. This conceptual conundrum entails comprehending the fundamental principles and objectives of CBE, and how it dovetails with the broader goals of educational reform in Vietnam.

The pedagogical challenge entails a shift from traditional teaching methods to designing sophisticated, competency-driven curricula. This leap is not merely a procedural alteration; it represents a significant shift in how educators perceive their roles and responsibilities. Indeed, the transformative potential of CBE relies heavily on educators transitioning from being primary information providers to facilitators of learning (Chacko, 2014). Utilizing a diverse range of teaching strategies, such as project-based learning and communities of practice, helps actualize this shift in the Vietnamese context.

Cultural challenges exist as educators and learners alike grapple with changing roles, expectations, and the general shift towards a more learner-centered paradigm. The CBE approach espouses realistic tasks and materials, mirroring professional competencies (Camacho and Legare, 2016), requiring a considerable culture shift in traditional classrooms.

Politically, opposition from various stakeholders, including educators, administrators, parents, and even students, must be carefully addressed. The structural and systemic changes that CBE implementation entails might be met with resistance (L. T. Thao and Mai, 2020). It is incumbent on educational leaders to foster a culture of acceptance, cooperation, and mutual understanding, crucial for effective CBE transition.

2.3. Research gap and research questions

Existing literature offers a limited examination of Vietnamese EFL teachers' perspectives regarding the adoption of the CETC, particularly within the context of public high schools in the Mekong Delta region. Scholars have explored broader concepts related to CBE in different contexts (Egbert and Shahrokini, 2019; Hodge et al., 2020), but the focus on teachers' views within Vietnam is lacking. Teachers play a pivotal role in education reform and their perceptions can offer significant insights into the complexities of implementing such curricula (L. T. Thao and Mai, 2020). Therefore, understanding their perceptions towards the CETC can lead to more nuanced understanding of the challenges and potential solutions in adopting this progressive pedagogical approach.

Moreover, despite the rising adoption of the CETC in Vietnam, there is a paucity of research focusing on EFL teachers' experiences and perceptions of the CETC, particularly in public high schools

within the Mekong Delta region. This study aims to fill this gap by investigating teachers' viewpoints on the challenges and proposed solutions in implementing the CETC in their classrooms. The research question guiding this study is, "What are the Vietnamese EFL high school teachers' perceptions of difficulties and proposed solutions in implementing the CETC?". This study, therefore, seeks to address the gap in understanding the unique experiences and insights of Vietnamese EFL teachers in the Mekong Delta region as they navigate the shift to a competency-based teaching curriculum.

3. Data and methods

3.1. Research design

This study draws upon constructivist grounded theory to explore Vietnamese EFL high school teachers' perceptions concerning the implementation of the CETC. Particularly, the study adopts the principles of the constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2017; Glaser et al., 2007). This approach assumes that knowledge is not discovered, but is socially constructed by individuals in their interactions with their world. By using open-ended, semi-structured interviews, the study aims to construct an understanding of CETC implementation that is grounded in teachers' perceptions and experiences.

The theoretical framework is congruent with the qualitative methodology employed in this study as described by Creswell and Poth (2016), emphasizing the interpretation of participants' narratives and experiences. These approaches also align with the use of inductive probing through semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions, which allow for tailored questioning aligned with the research objectives and encourage participants to provide detailed insights (Adeoye-Olatunde and Olenik, 2021). By using constructivist grounded theory, this exploratory study aims to provide a deep and nuanced understanding of the CETC implementation process, as perceived and experienced by Vietnamese EFL high school teachers. This research endeavor aspires to illuminate potential challenges, underlying causes, and potential solutions to guide future policy and practice in English language education in Vietnam.

3.2. Participants

10 teachers coming from high schools in the Mekong Delta region, South Vietnam were invited to participate in this study. **Table 1** displays the demographic information of the participants.

Table 1. Demographic data of participants.

Teacher No.	Pseudonyms	Gender	Qualification	Age	Year of teaching experience	Year of birth
1	Mr. Le	Male	Master	44	22 years	1979
2	Ms. Truong	Female	Bachelor	50	27 years	1973
3	Ms. Vo	Female	Bachelor	52	29 years	1971
4	Ms. Nguyen	Female	Master	42	18 years	1981
5	Ms. Phuong	Female	Master	47	24 years	1976
6	Ms. Pham	Female	Master	41	14 years	1982
7	Ms. Tran	Female	Bachelor	24	1 year	1999
8	Ms. Hoang	Female	Bachelor	51	25 years	1972
9	Ms. Huynh	Female	Master	26	3 years	1997
10	Ms. Ha	Female	Master	52	32 years	1971

Table 1 shows teacher participants' various levels of educational qualifications, from Bachelor's degrees in English Language Teaching (ELT) to Master's degrees in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). In terms of their career trajectories, the teachers were at different stages. The group included both early-career teachers, with less than five years of experience, and seasoned veterans, with over 20 years of teaching experience. This wide range of experience levels provided a diverse range of insights and perspectives on the implementation of the CETC. The recruitment process was facilitated

through a purposeful sampling technique. The researchers initially reached out to several high schools in the Mekong Delta region, explaining the research objectives and asking for volunteers who had experience with the 2018 General English Education Curriculum (GEEC). The GEEC, which was promulgated by the Vietnamese MOET (2008), is a curriculum grounded in the principles of CBE. The original intention was to recruit a sample that was representative of the diversity of the teacher population in terms of gender, teaching experience, and educational qualifications. However, due to practical constraints, such as availability and willingness to participate in the study, the final sample comprised one male (10%) and nine female teachers (90%). While this gender imbalance could potentially introduce a bias into the research, it should be noted that the focus of the study was on the experiences and challenges in implementing the CETC, which are not necessarily gender-specific. Therefore, the disproportionate gender ratio in the sample does not necessarily undermine the validity of the findings. As for the years of teaching experience, the selection of teachers was purposefully done to encompass a broad spectrum of teaching experiences. The teaching experience of the participants ranged from one year to 32 years. This wide range of teaching experience was intended to capture the diverse perspectives of teachers at different stages of their careers. Early-career teachers might face different challenges compared to their more experienced counterparts, and these differences could provide valuable insights into the nuances of implementing the CETC. The deliberate selection of teachers with various years of teaching experience thus contributed to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the implementation process. Importantly, all the teachers had experience utilizing the Global Success 10 and the ILearn Smart World textbooks, which were specifically designed to complement the CBE approach. They were teaching various levels, from beginner to advanced English language learners, further adding to the richness of the data. Therefore, the participants of this study were well-positioned to provide a broad and deep understanding of the experiences and challenges involved in implementing the CETC, given their diverse backgrounds, qualifications, and teaching experiences.

The decision to conduct interviews with 10 participants aligns with the principles of qualitative research, which prioritize depth and complexity over breadth and generalizability. This number was deemed sufficient for this grounded theory approach for several key reasons. Firstly, grounded theory necessitates an iterative process of data collection and analysis until a point of saturation is achieved. In this case, saturation was reached with 10 teachers, as new data no longer introduced novel insights or themes. Secondly, the focus of the study was to delve into the participants' experiences and perceptions in a thorough manner. 10 participants allowed for intensive exploration and the collection of rich data for analysis while maintaining the feasibility of data collection, transcription, and analysis procedures in terms of time and resources. Thirdly, these 10 participants presented a wide range of educational qualifications, teaching experiences, and career stages, offering diverse perspectives on CETC implementation. Finally, the grounded theory approach is not centered on the quantity of participants, but rather on the richness of data and the development of theory rooted in these data. Thus, the primary aim was not to generalize findings but to construct a theory based on the information gathered from the participants.

3.3. Data collection

The design and formulation of the interview questions were informed by a multitude of principles. Foremost, they were framed to be open-ended and exploratory enabling participants to freely express their thoughts, feelings, and experiences (Kostere and Kostere, 2021). Moreover, the questions were specifically crafted to align with the research objectives, seeking to probe deeply into teachers' perceptions of CETC implementation.

The initial interview guide was developed based on an extensive literature review and prior empirical studies involving teacher perceptions and experiences in English language education reform (Vongxay, 2013). The questions were then subjected to multiple revisions, undergoing three rounds of expert review and feedback. Experts in English language education reviewed the questions for content validity, ensuring that the questions would elicit the information necessary to address the research objectives. Moreover, as part of the study, the questions for the interview guide were initially developed and validated in English, considering the standard guidelines for interview protocol development and the universal academic discourse, which is predominantly English. However, to ensure the authenticity of the responses and to make the interviewees comfortable, the pilot and actual interviews were conducted in Vietnamese, the mother tongue of the participants. To ensure the accuracy and equivalence of the translations, the researchers adhered to the process of forward and backward translation. The interview guide, initially developed in English, was translated into Vietnamese by a bilingual researcher who is a native speaker of Vietnamese and fluent in English. This translation was then independently back-translated into English by a different bilingual researcher unaware of the original English version. The back-translated version was then compared with the original English version to identify and resolve any discrepancies or conceptual misalignments. This rigorous process aimed to ensure that the Vietnamese version of the interview guide was semantically and conceptually equivalent to the original English version.

Following this, a pilot activity for the interview was conducted with two teachers who met the participant criteria but were not included in the study. The feedback received from this pilot testing led to further refinement of the interview guide. Particularly, their feedback allowed the researchers to evaluate the clarity of the interview questions, the logical flow of the guide, and its overall comprehensiveness. The teachers provided critical insight into the appropriateness and precision of the language used in the interview questions. Their responses revealed if the terminology and phrasing used were clear, culturally appropriate, and unambiguous. Consequently, some questions were reworded to improve clarity and ensure they were readily understood by the participants. The pilot interviews also tested the logical flow of the interview guide. The teachers' responses indicated that the sequence of questions facilitated a natural and productive conversation about their experiences with the CETC. Based on their feedback, several questions were rearranged to create a smoother narrative arc and promote more comprehensive answers. Lastly, the pilot testing highlighted any potential gaps in the interview guide. As experienced teachers, the pilot participants were able to identify any important areas that the original interview guide may have overlooked. Their feedback led to the inclusion of several new questions that added depth and comprehensiveness to the final interview guide.

The finalized set of interview questions sought to explore the following areas: 1) teachers' overall experience in the implementation of the CETC; 2) the challenges teachers faced during the implementation; 3) the perceived causes of these challenges; 4) the strategies teachers used to overcome these challenges; 5) the perceived effectiveness of these strategies; and 6) teachers' recommendations for improving the implementation of the CETC.

Each approximately one-hour-long interview was conducted in Vietnamese to allow participants to express themselves clearly and without restrictions. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using thematic analysis, following the approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2022). To ensure participant confidentiality, pseudonyms were used during the data analysis process. The themes were then grouped to represent perceptions, causes, and potential solutions related to CETC implementation. The use of these methods aligns with best practices in qualitative research and is widely accepted for eliciting rich and comprehensive insights.

3.4. Data analysis

The qualitative data obtained from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-step thematic analysis approach, including 1) familiarization with the data, 2) generating initial codes, 3) searching for themes, 4) reviewing themes, 5) defining and naming themes, and (6) writing up.

Firstly, the researchers engaged in an active familiarization process with the data. This step involved repeatedly listening to the recorded interviews and reading the interview notes to develop a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences. This process of immersion allowed the researchers to gain a deep sense of the data before beginning the formal analysis. Next, the recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. This transcription was done by the research team to maintain the fidelity of the participants' responses. The transcriptions were done in the participants' native language, Vietnamese, to honor the authenticity of their words. Following transcription, the data were subjected to initial coding. This step involved breaking down the data into manageable parts and labeling these parts based on their content. The initial coding was conducted by two independent researchers, enhancing the rigor and validity of the process. After coding independently, they compared and discussed their codes to ensure consistency and agreement, reconciling any discrepancies through discussions and mutual consensus. This collaborative process minimized bias and contributed to the reliability of the coding process. The initial coding generated numerous codes representing different aspects of the participants' experiences in CETC implementation. These initial codes were then grouped together based on patterns of shared meaning. These clusters of codes formed the basis for the themes that represented broader concepts evident in the data. These themes were defined and labeled descriptively to capture the essence of the underlying patterns. The identified themes were then reviewed and refined to ensure that they were aligned with the research question and accurately represented the data. In cases where the researchers were uncertain about the meaning of certain responses, they reached out to the participants via email or phone for clarification. Following this, the Vietnamese transcriptions were translated into English to facilitate a wider understanding and dissemination of the findings. Two independent experts proficient in both Vietnamese and English were enlisted to verify the accuracy of these translations, ensuring that the original meaning of the participants' words was preserved. Finally, the analysis and interpretation phase centered on identifying the difficulties and potential solutions related to CETC implementation as perceived by the teachers.

Notably, the decision to manually code the data in this study, rather than using computer-assisted software, was driven by the desire to stay closely connected to the data. Manual coding enabled the researchers to delve into the nuances, contexts, and subtleties of the data that might be overlooked when using coding software. Given the cultural and contextual specifics of this study in the Vietnamese context, this approach allowed for a flexible and adaptable coding scheme, fostering more reliable and valid coding. Manual coding also aligns with the grounded theory approach, emphasizing theory generation from data rather than imposing pre-existing theoretical frameworks. While this method was more labor-intensive, it ensured a comprehensive understanding of the data, a crucial aspect of qualitative research.

4. Findings and discussions

Prior to delving into a comprehensive discussion of the interview findings in relation to previous studies, **Figure 1** is employed to provide a succinct overview of the results garnered from this study.

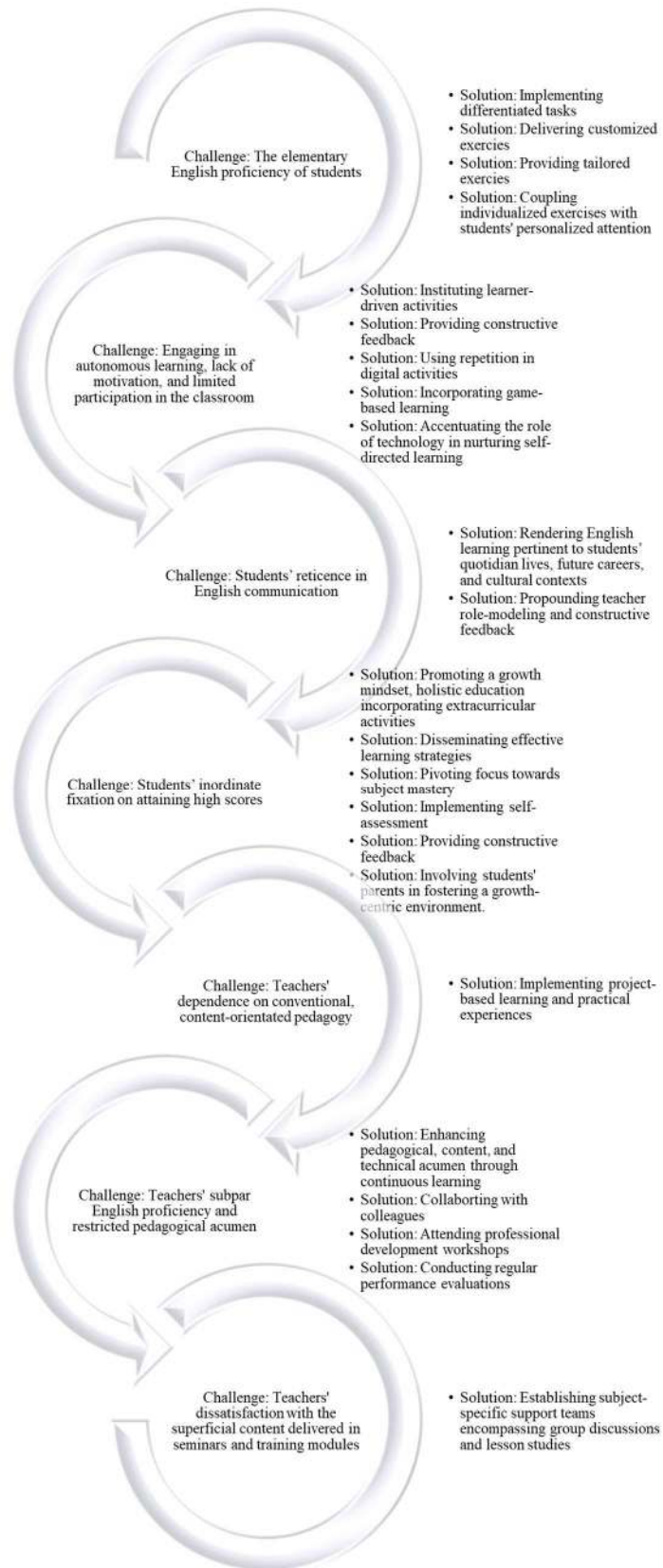


Figure 1. Summary of the findings.

4.1. Vietnamese EFL high school teachers' perceptions of their perceived difficulties in implementing the CETC

4.1.1. Student-related factors

Teachers identified a plethora of student-related complications obstructing the successful enactment of the CETC, encompassing issues such as deficient English proficiency, scarce self-directed learning capabilities, and attenuated self-assuredness.

Notably, a majority of the teachers ($n = 9$ out of 10) emphasized the elementary English proficiency of students, exacerbated by gaps in cultural cognition, as significant barriers. For instance, Ms. Nguyen explained, *"Many of my students have rudimentary English skills at the start of the course, which, combined with a lack of cultural understanding, greatly hinders their meaningful interaction with the curriculum."* Ms. Ha expressed her concern, stating, *"It is disheartening to see a considerable number of students with limited English skills and little cultural awareness, which severely hampers their ability to engage with the curriculum."* These shared concerns align with previous research highlighting the crucial impact of initial English proficiency and cultural understanding on second language acquisition (Saito et al., 2019; Taguchi and Roever, 2017). English as a second language requires more than basic linguistic comprehension for effective engagement with academic content. Students need a strong command of the language to grasp complex concepts, participate in intellectually stimulating discussions, and connect with the curriculum for deep understanding and knowledge assimilation (Yulia et al., 2020). Moreover, the deficit in cultural cognition, encompassing an understanding of cultural contexts and nuances in the English language, further compounds this challenge. Language learning encompasses not only linguistic competence but also the acquisition of cultural knowledge related to the language (Kim, 2020). Without such knowledge, students struggle to fully grasp context-specific aspects of English, including idioms, metaphors, and culturally embedded references. Consequently, the intertwined issues of limited English proficiency and lack of cultural cognition significantly impede Vietnamese students' meaningful interaction with and benefit from the English curriculum.

Moreover, over half of the teachers ($n = 6$ out of 10) emphasized the students' challenges in engaging in autonomous learning, lack of motivation, and limited participation in the classroom. For example, Mr. Le explained:

"A significant portion of my students struggle with independent learning. They often lack motivation and show minimal participation in class activities." Ms. Huynh added, *"A notable group of students face difficulties with independent learning. They frequently lack motivation and demonstrate minimal engagement in classroom activities. It is evident that they struggle to take ownership of their education and fail to fully embrace the process."*

These challenges align with existing literature on EFL pedagogy (Hyland and Hyland, 2019; Thohir, 2017). In the Vietnamese educational context, learning has traditionally been teacher-centered, with students playing a passive role and relying heavily on rote memorization rather than active involvement or critical thinking (Thanh, 2010). Consequently, students often lack the necessary skills and self-confidence for independent learning. Furthermore, motivation plays a crucial role in active learning and engagement. Vietnamese students may lack motivation due to a perceived lack of relevance between the curriculum and their personal interests or future aspirations (T. T. H. Phan, 2011). Moreover, an excessive focus on test scores rather than mastery of the subject can diminish their enthusiasm for active participation (L. X. Mai and Thao, 2022). The combination of these factors contributes to their struggles with self-directed learning and limited engagement in classroom activities.

Additionally, a majority of the teachers ($n = 6$ out of 10) identified challenges related to students' reticence in English communication, stemming from various factors such as public speaking anxiety, limited vocabulary, and grammatical proficiency. Ms. Truong noted, "*My students often exhibit apprehension when it comes to verbal communication in English due to restricted vocabulary and insufficient grammatical skills.*" Ms. Hoang keenly observed, "*My students often hesitate to speak English due to limited vocabulary, grammar challenges, and fear of making mistakes. These factors undermine their confidence in engaging in spoken English conversations.*" The students' hesitancy in English discourse, driven by public speaking anxiety, restricted vocabulary, and grammatical limitations, aligns with existing empirical research on learners' anxiety in EFL contexts (Hanifa, 2018). These linguistic constraints can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, the pedagogical approach in Vietnam often prioritizes reading and writing skills over speaking and listening, leading to a lack of practice and proficiency in oral communication (Tieocharoen and Rimkeeratikul, 2019). Secondly, the typical classroom environment in Vietnam may not offer sufficient opportunities for students to expand their vocabulary and enhance their grammatical skills in authentic communicative contexts due to large class sizes and time constraints (C. Mai, 2016). Lastly, the high-stakes, form-focused nature of language assessments may discourage students from taking risks and experimenting with new vocabulary or complex grammatical structures during verbal communication (Van Ha et al., 2021). The combined impact of these factors can instill apprehension among students, impeding their potential to become proficient English speakers.

Furthermore, half of the teachers ($n = 5$ out of 10) observed students' inordinate fixation on attaining high scores, often compromising the development of communicative prowess, thereby reinforcing the exam-centric approach entrenched in the extant educational system, and invariably detracting from the acquisition of pragmatic language skills. Ms. Phuong noted, "*A considerable proportion of students are disproportionately engrossed in securing high scores, often at the expense of fostering their communicative competencies.*" Ms. Vo perceptively noted, "*Students prioritize high scores over developing communicative skills, hindering language proficiency and real-world applicability. Academic pressure overshadows nurturing effective communication and interaction abilities.*" The teachers' critique of the prevailing exam-centric pedagogical paradigm poses a foundational challenge to the CETC's core emphasis on communicative competency (Bemoussat and Bouyakoub, 2019). An obsessive focus on securing high grades, often to the detriment of developing their communicative abilities, is a pattern deeply rooted in the educational culture and societal expectations prevalent in Vietnam. The educational system in the country traditionally places significant emphasis on examination results as the primary metric of academic achievement, leading students to prioritize rote learning and mastery of test-taking techniques (L. X. Mai and Thao, 2022). Such an environment cultivates a pedagogical landscape that heavily incentivizes the pursuit of high scores, often overshadowing the development of more practical competencies such as communication skills. Furthermore, societal expectations, fueled by the parents' and the community's emphasis on academic performance, reinforce this score-centered mindset (D. P. Thao and Boyd, 2014). Consequently, this disproportionate obsession with grades inhibits students from engaging deeply with the learning process and compromises the development of communicative competencies, which are essential for the real-world application of the English language.

4.1.2. Teacher-related factors

The study lucidly outlined a multitude of pedagogue-centric hindrances to the successful implementation of the CETC, predominantly ingrained traditional instructional methodologies, mediocre English language competency and pedagogical insight, and deficiently robust training programs.

The majority of teachers ($n = 8$ out of 10) conceded to dependence on conventional, content-orientated pedagogy, subsequently encountering difficulties in facilitating an encompassing, competency-directed learning atmosphere. These teachers typically adhered strictly to pedagogical schemas, disregarding the cultivation of communicative aptitudes. Ms. Pham addressed, *“I frequently find myself gravitating towards conventional, content-oriented pedagogy, consequently grappling with the facilitation of a competency-driven learning atmosphere.”* Ms. Phuong reflected, *“Balancing content-focused teaching with learner-centered approaches is challenging. I aim to engage students as active participants, not just recipients of information. Continual improvement of my pedagogical approach is essential for fostering students’ skills and competencies.”* The predisposition of teachers towards traditional, content-focused pedagogical methods harmonizes with prevalent observations in the comprehensive literature. Scholarly evidence posits that the transition from entrenched pedagogical approaches to a more competency-centric methodology can prove to be an intricate endeavor for teachers due to a spectrum of factors, including but not limited to, established pedagogical patterns and beliefs (Gulzar, 2014). The predilection that a large number of Vietnamese teachers tend to lean towards traditional, content-oriented pedagogy arises from the longstanding influence of Confucian educational values that emphasize knowledge transmission from teacher to student, leading to an emphasis on rote memorization and the mastery of content (Hang et al., 2015). Furthermore, the lack of exposure to and training in contemporary, learner-centered pedagogical approaches can constrain teachers’ capacity to shift towards a more competency-oriented approach (T. A. Nguyen et al., 2023). Moreover, external pressures from standardized testing and the societal emphasis on exam results further reinforce content-oriented teaching (L. X. Mai and Thao, 2022). These factors combined, contribute to a learning atmosphere where the acquisition of knowledge is prioritized over the development of practical competencies and skills, thereby impeding the establishment of a truly competency-driven educational environment.

A significant proportion of teachers ($n = 7$ out of 10) acknowledged their subpar English proficiency and restricted pedagogical acumen, thereby hindering their capacity to foster effective communicative environments, and subsequently impacting students’ learning motivation detrimentally. Mr. Le confessed, *“Honestly, my insufficient English proficiency and restricted pedagogical understanding impede my capacity to nurture an effective communicative environment, which reciprocally impacts my students’ motivation to learn adversely.”* Ms. Nguyen candidly confessed, *“My English limitations and pedagogical knowledge hinder creating an effective learning environment, affecting student motivation. I acknowledge these challenges and commit to self-improvement for a better atmosphere and support for my students’ learning journey.”* Insufficient pedagogical competency in English and limited pedagogical knowledge can indeed present as formidable barriers to the creation of an effective communicative environment, a contention that is well-substantiated in the academic literature (Abraham et al., 2022). Many Vietnamese teachers grapple with limitations in their own English proficiency and a lack of deep understanding of effective pedagogical strategies, which in turn hamper their ability to create a fruitful communicative environment. This predicament stems from several factors. First, teachers themselves may not have been exposed to robust language learning environments during their formative educational years (Van Canh, 2020). As a result, their own language skills might not be sufficiently developed to facilitate high-quality English instruction. Second, a lack of continuous professional development opportunities may leave teachers ill-equipped with the necessary pedagogical skills to employ effective communicative teaching methods (D. M. Hung and Thuy, 2021). These limitations can detrimentally impact classroom dynamics, stifling open communication, and in turn, can dampen students’ motivation to learn. When students perceive that their instructors are

struggling with the language or instructional methods, it may instigate feelings of uncertainty and discourage active participation, thereby adversely affecting their learning outcomes.

Simultaneously, a subset of teachers ($n = 3$ out of 10) articulated dissatisfaction with the superficial content delivered in seminars and training modules, with teachers advocating for more comprehensive, bespoke training centered on the intricacies and methodological nuances of the CETC. Ms. Tran expressed discontentment, stating, “*The seminars and training modules frequently suffer from a lack of depth. We necessitate more comprehensive training that delves into the complexities and methodological nuances of the CETC.*” Ms. Vo voiced his dissatisfaction, expressing, “*Seminars lack depth, requiring comprehensive training on CETC intricacies. Educators need deep understanding and effective methodologies to address diverse student needs.*” The discontent resonates with academic research emphasizing the critical need for professional development that is tailored, continuous, and deeply engaged with the complexities of the teaching practice (Fernández-Batanero et al., 2022). The perceived inadequacy of seminars and training modules available to Vietnamese teachers stems from a perceived lack of depth and comprehensiveness in these resources. These educational aids often fail to sufficiently delve into the complexities and intricate nuances of the CETC. This deficiency can be attributed to the prevalent one-size-fits-all approach to teacher training, which may not effectively cater to individual needs, contexts, and levels of understanding (Moore et al., 2023; C. D. T. T. Tran, 2021). For instance, the technical, methodological, and philosophical underpinnings of the CETC may be superficially addressed, rendering the teachers unequipped to navigate the intricate complexities they encounter in real-world classroom scenarios. Consequently, teachers may find themselves ill-prepared to enact the principles and practices of the CETC effectively, underscoring the need for training modules that provide a more rigorous and in-depth exploration of this pedagogical approach.

4.1.3. Institution-related factors

The research underscored a range of institutional obstacles in the successful implementation of the CETC, including excessive class sizes, limited instructional duration, insufficiently equipped facilities, a dearth of English-speaking and reading culture, scarcity of assessment resources, and the form-centric nature of high-stakes tests.

All participants ($n = 10$ out of 10) reported grappling with challenges posed by large class sizes, indicating constraints in providing individualized attention and effectively managing group work. Additionally, time limitations were ubiquitously acknowledged, with educators underscoring the necessity for protracted periods to prepare pedagogical resources and interact with students. Ms. Vo expressed, “*Substantial class sizes pose a significant hurdle, inhibiting the provision of individualized attention to each student.*” Furthermore, he asserted, “*The duration allocated for English instruction is glaringly insufficient. A need exists for extended periods to prepare pedagogical resources and foster interaction with students.*” In a similar vein, a significant proportion of teachers ($n = 8$ out of 10) raised concerns over infrastructural deficiencies, citing the scarcity of essential facilities. Ms. Hoang articulated, “*Our institution is bereft of the requisite facilities for efficacious English pedagogy.*” The aforementioned impediments resonate with the comprehensive literature highlighting these elements as formidable barriers to efficacious language instruction (Blatchford and Russell, 2019). The hindrances posed by extensive class sizes, insufficient instructional duration, and inadequate facilities can significantly impact the quality of English education in Vietnamese institutions. First, the substantial class sizes can impede the provision of individualized attention to each student, a crucial factor in learner-centered pedagogies that can effectively cater to students’ unique learning needs and styles (Blatchford, 2003). Second, the limited duration allocated for

English instruction restricts the time available for comprehensive lesson planning, preparation of pedagogical resources, and fostering meaningful interaction with students—all crucial elements for effective teaching and learning (Hien and Loan, 2018). This time scarcity can result in a rushed curriculum delivery, potentially overlooking students' understanding and limiting their opportunity for practice and feedback. Lastly, the dearth of requisite facilities can compromise the efficacy of English pedagogy. The absence of basic amenities like reliable internet connectivity, audio-visual aids, and sufficient learning materials can significantly hamper the delivery of interactive, technology-aided, and resource-intensive English lessons (T. N. Le et al., 2022). Hence, these institutional factors form substantial barriers to achieving desired outcomes in English language instruction in Vietnamese educational contexts.

Half of the teachers ($n = 5$ out of 10) reported challenges in cultivating an English-speaking and reading culture, attributing it to the dearth of resources and restricted exposure. Ms. Nguyen expressed regret, stating, "*Establishing an English-speaking and reading culture presents as a formidable challenge due to the scarcity of resources and limited exposure.*" Ms. Pham expressed her regret, stating, "*Limited resources hinder creating an English-speaking and reading culture. Scarce exposure and access to diverse reading materials pose challenges.*" The aforementioned issues have also been reported in the academic literature as hurdles to the cultivation of an immersive English learning environment (Linake, 2021). Cultivating an English-speaking and reading culture within Vietnamese educational contexts is a complex task, primarily due to resource scarcity and limited exposure to the language (H. N. Nguyen and Nguyen, 2022). The scarcity of resources refers to a lack of accessible and diverse English reading materials, such as books, magazines, and digital content that cater to various proficiency levels and interests. This dearth can impede the development of English language skills, especially reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition, which are crucial for both conversational and academic purposes. Simultaneously, limited exposure to English in day-to-day life can undermine attempts to foster a comprehensive English-speaking environment. Without ample opportunities to practice English in real-world settings, students might find it challenging to build their oral fluency, listening comprehension, and cultural understanding of English-speaking communities (Tweedy, 2012). Consequently, this limited immersion can also impact students' motivation to learn, as they might struggle to see the relevance of their English studies to their immediate contexts. Thus, these circumstances render the establishment of an English-speaking and reading culture in Vietnam a daunting challenge.

Lastly, more than half of the teachers ($n = 6$ out of 10) illuminated assessment-related obstacles, critiquing the scarcity of materials for evaluating students' language competencies and the predominant focus on linguistic knowledge in high school English evaluations. Ms. Truong elucidated, "*There is a paucity of materials adequately capable of evaluating students' language competencies. Moreover, high school English evaluations predominantly focus on linguistic knowledge, exacerbating the issue further.*" Ms. Hoang provided further insight, stating, "*Scarcity of comprehensive assessment tools hinders measuring students' language competencies. High school evaluations focus on linguistic knowledge, neglecting other vital skills.*" The assessment-related challenges reflect a critical disjunction between the stated objectives of language learning, emphasizing communication skills, and the extant assessment practices that prioritize linguistic knowledge (Waddington, 2021). The issue of inadequate evaluative materials for Vietnamese students' language competencies is a significant concern, as it can hinder both instruction and learning (X. M. Le and Le, 2022). Ideally, assessment materials should be designed to holistically evaluate a student's abilities in English, including areas such as reading, writing, listening, speaking, and cultural understanding. However, a paucity of such comprehensive materials in Vietnam means that teachers may

struggle to accurately gauge and foster their students' full spectrum of English language competencies. The issue is further compounded by the fact that high school English evaluations in Vietnam are predominantly focused on linguistic knowledge, such as grammar and vocabulary (P. M. Tran and Tanemura, 2020). While these areas are undoubtedly important, an overemphasis on them can lead to an unbalanced curriculum that inadequately prepares students for the practical uses of English in real-life contexts. Therefore, these factors together create a significant barrier to achieving effective implementation of the CETC in Vietnam.

4.2. Vietnamese EFL high school teachers' suggested solutions in implementing the CETC

4.2.1. Student-related factors

In regard to challenges pinpointed within the ambit of CETC deployment, teachers proposed interventions purporting to bolster students' English proficiency, nurture autonomous learning, enhance motivation, and de-emphasize the obsession with grades.

To augment language proficiency, a majority of teachers ($n = 9$ out of 10) championed differentiated tasks catering to a diverse array of student needs, personalized attention, fostering supportive interaction, and lucid instructional delivery. Ms. Nguyen postulated, "*Bespoke exercises, tailored to individual students' needs, coupled with personalized attention and nurturing a supportive interaction milieu, could substantially enhance English proficiency.*" Ms. Huynh proposed her idea, stating, "*To me, customized exercises, personalized attention, and a supportive environment enhance English proficiency. Tailored exercises address individual needs, while personalized attention monitors progress and offers guidance. A supportive interaction milieu fosters confidence and language development.*" The emphasis on differentiated tasks, as propounded by Ms. Nguyen, aligns with the tenets of differentiated instruction which advocate for customizing teaching and learning to address divergent learner needs (Harris et al., 2022). Customized exercises, designed to cater to the unique learning needs and proficiencies of individual Vietnamese students, present a highly promising strategy for enhancing English language competence. This approach acknowledges the diversity of learners and their varying skill levels, learning styles, and progress rates. By providing tailored exercises, teachers can better engage students, meet them at their current level of understanding, and guide them to higher levels of proficiency in a more targeted and efficient manner (Zou and Xie, 2018). Coupling these individualized exercises with personalized attention further ensures that each student's specific difficulties are addressed and their strengths are fostered. Additionally, cultivating a supportive interaction milieu, where students feel comfortable and encouraged to use English in the classroom, can significantly boost their confidence and motivation to learn (Khalil et al., 2019).

To fortify autonomous learning, several teachers ($n = 7$ out of 10) proposed instituting learner-driven activities, providing constructive feedback, repetition in digital activities, and incorporating game-based learning, accentuating the role of technology in nurturing self-directed learning. Ms. Truong enunciated, "*Instituting learner-driven activities, delivering feedback, repetition in digital activities, and incorporating game-based learning can substantially fortify autonomous learning.*" The recommendation to foster autonomous learning through means like learner-driven activities and game-based learning resonates with extensive findings emphasizing the role of autonomy in language acquisition (Ho, 2020). Mr. Truong's strategy, involving technological application, is particularly pertinent in the context of 21st-century learning, wherein digital tools are progressively seen as effective means to support autonomous learning (Rapanta et al., 2021). Establishing learner-centered activities is crucial for fostering autonomous learning, particularly in the Vietnamese context. Such activities place the responsibility for learning in the hands of the students, empowering them to take charge of their own educational journey (Yu, 2020). This enhances their

problem-solving skills, decision-making abilities, and their overall capacity to manage their learning processes. Delivering constructive feedback is integral to this approach, as it provides students with valuable insight into their progress, helps them identify areas for improvement, and boosts their confidence (Aslam and Khan, 2020). The integration of repetition in digital activities assists in solidifying knowledge, leading to better long-term retention of English language concepts. Additionally, incorporating game-based learning can make the learning experience more engaging and enjoyable for Vietnamese students (Yukselturk et al., 2018). This not only boosts their motivation but also aids in their understanding and application of language skills, thereby greatly strengthening autonomous learning.

To bolster learner motivation, half of the teachers ($n = 5$ out of 10) underscored the need to render English learning pertinent to students' quotidian lives, future careers, and cultural contexts, propounding teacher role-modeling and constructive feedback. Ms. Pham stated, "*Rendering English learning pertinent to students' quotidian lives and future careers, amalgamated with teacher role-modeling and constructive feedback, can enhance motivation.*" The suggestion, as advocated by Ms. Pham, is a core tenet of motivational theory in education (Kashefian-Naeeni et al., 2018). Moreover, teacher role-modeling and feedback are recognized strategies in the literature to bolster motivation (Morgenroth et al., 2015). Contextualizing English learning within the daily experiences and future career aspirations of Vietnamese students has been identified as an effective strategy to heighten their motivation. This approach helps students to appreciate the practical relevance and utility of English language skills, thereby nurturing their interest and encouraging their active participation in learning (Apple et al., 2020). Furthermore, the role of teachers as models is critical. By demonstrating proficiency in English and showcasing a positive attitude toward the language, teachers can inspire students and influence their learning behaviors (Batubara et al., 2020). This is particularly crucial in Vietnam, where English is often viewed as a foreign language with little relevance to everyday life usage. The addition of constructive feedback further reinforces this process. Through timely and meaningful feedback, teachers can guide student progress, rectify misconceptions, and recognize achievements, thereby creating a positive and motivating learning environment (Sallang and Ling, 2019).

Lastly, to address students' fixation on grades, half of the teachers ($n = 5$ out of 10) suggested promoting a growth mindset, holistic education incorporating extracurricular activities, disseminating effective learning strategies, pivoting focus towards subject mastery, implementing self-assessment, providing constructive feedback, and parental involvement in fostering a growth-centric environment. Mr. Le recommended, "*Promoting a growth mindset, implementing holistic education incorporating extracurricular activities, and pivoting focus towards subject mastery can help to redirect students from an exclusively grade-focused approach.*" Addressing students' fixation on grades through promoting a growth mindset and holistic education, as suggested by Mr. Le, resonates with research delineating the efficacy of such approaches in modifying student attitudes toward learning (Wragg et al., 2022). A growth mindset, as opposed to a fixed mindset, encourages students to view learning as a dynamic process, where skills and knowledge can be acquired and improved over time with effort and perseverance (Yao et al., 2021). This mindset can prove transformative for Vietnamese students, who often place an unhealthy emphasis on grades (Vu, 2020), diverting attention away from the process of learning. Introducing holistic education that incorporates extracurricular activities can further contribute to this shift. It fosters a more rounded approach to education, enabling students to develop a range of competencies beyond academic skills. This is particularly beneficial in Vietnam, where traditional education systems often place undue focus on academic achievement to the exclusion of other forms of development. Finally, pivoting focus towards subject mastery rather than solely on grades, encourages students to immerse themselves deeply in the

learning process, thereby developing a thorough understanding of the subject matter (Kibler et al., 2018). This approach can reduce the excessive focus on grades and engender a more intrinsic interest in learning, leading to more sustainable and meaningful educational outcomes for Vietnamese students.

4.2.2. Teacher-related factors

The study additionally elucidated teachers' strategies to alleviate difficulties in implementing the CETC, such as advocating for practical experiences, facilitating self-improvement, fostering collegial collaboration, encouraging workshop participation, and regular teacher proficiency evaluations.

To mitigate the preoccupation with academic achievement and traditional pedagogical approaches, a majority of teachers ($n = 8$ out of 10) championed project-based learning and practical experiences. Ms. Tran advocated, "*Project-based learning and practical experiences can effectively bridge the schism between theory and practice.*" Ms. Ha passionately advocated, "*I believe project-based learning and practical experiences can bridge the gap between theory and practice. By incorporating real-world projects and hands-on activities, students can apply their knowledge in authentic contexts, develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and collaborate effectively.*" In the wider scholarly discourse, the emphasis teachers placed on project-based learning and practical experiences as a counterbalance to traditional pedagogies and achievement obsession resonates with numerous studies highlighting these approaches as effective methodologies for enhancing student learning (Boss and Larmer, 2018). In the Vietnamese educational context, traditional pedagogical methods often prioritize theory over practice, creating a rift between academic learning and real-world application (Dao and Newton, 2021). Project-based learning and practical experiences can serve as effective tools to bridge this gap. These approaches enable students to apply the theoretical knowledge they have acquired in the classroom to solve complex, real-world problems, thereby deepening their understanding of the subject matter (Boss and Larmer, 2018). By engaging in projects that require the practical application of theories, students can experience firsthand the relevance and applicability of what they have learned. This not only enhances their grasp of the theoretical underpinnings but also cultivates critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and creativity. In effect, these methodologies forge a more cohesive and meaningful learning experience, particularly important in the Vietnamese context where enhancing students' practical skills and competencies is increasingly seen as essential for their future success.

Furthermore, a significant proportion of participants ($n = 6$ out of 10) advocated for enhancing pedagogical, content, and technical acumen through continuous learning, collaborative engagement with colleagues, attending professional development workshops, and regular performance evaluations. Ms. Vo suggested, "*Continuous learning, collaborative engagement with colleagues, participating in workshops, and regular evaluations can enhance pedagogical, content, and technical acumen.*" Ms. Pham added, "*These practices keep us updated, promote idea exchange, provide practical strategies, and facilitate self-improvement. By embracing these strategies, we can deliver quality education to our students.*" The suggestions are consonant with established principles of professional development in teaching. Scholarship has frequently emphasized the importance of these elements in fostering educator growth and effectiveness (Koh et al., 2017). In the Vietnamese educational setting, the rapid changes in the landscape of teaching and learning, fueled by globalization and technological advancements, necessitate continuous learning and development among teachers (T. K. T. Phan, 2023). Continuous learning, collaborative engagement with colleagues, participation in workshops, and regular evaluations can significantly enhance a teacher's pedagogical, content, and technical acumen (Kong and Lai, 2023). In the context of Vietnam, where educational reforms are being implemented and new teaching methodologies are being introduced (L. T. Thao and Mai, 2020), such strategies are essential for ensuring teachers' competencies and effectiveness.

Notably, the establishment of subject-specific support teams encompassing group discussions and lesson studies was suggested by several teachers ($n = 5$ out of 10). Ms. Hoang suggested, “*Group discussions and lesson studies can significantly improve teaching outcomes.*” Ms. Tran proposed her suggestion, stating, “*Group discussions foster collaboration, critical thinking, and effective communication skills. Lesson studies promote professional growth and adaptation to student needs. These approaches create an engaging classroom environment that deepens understanding and improves teaching.*” The proposal to establish subject-specific teams, involving group discussions and lesson studies, mirrors approach found in the Japanese model of “Lesson Study”, which has garnered global recognition for its impact on enhancing teaching practice (Nashruddin and Nurrachman, 2016). Group discussions and lesson studies are powerful strategies for enhancing teaching outcomes in the Vietnamese context, as they foster a collaborative and reflective culture among teachers (Huong et al., 2021). Group discussions encourage teachers to share ideas, experiences, and strategies, fostering mutual learning and growth. These dialogues also promote problem-solving and critical thinking, equipping teachers with the skills to address the challenges they encounter in the classroom. On the other hand, lesson studies provide a structured approach to improving instruction. Teachers collaboratively plan a lesson, observe its implementation, and then discuss and reflect on the outcomes. This process enables them to analyze and improve their instructional practices, based on evidence from actual classroom experiences. Both strategies foster a sense of collective responsibility among teachers, promoting consistent improvement in teaching quality, which can subsequently enhance students’ learning outcomes.

4.2.3. Institution-related factors

To alleviate institutional challenges in the CETC deployment, teachers proffered several suggestions.

Regarding substantial class sizes, half of the participants ($n = 5$ out of 10) proposed an optimal number of around 30 students and endorsed strategies like peer correction for larger classes. Mr. Le proposed, “*An optimal class size of about 30 students, employing strategies like peer correction for larger classes, can mitigate issues related to substantial class sizes.*” Ms. Phuong put forth her proposal, stating, “*Maintaining an optimal class size of 30 students or less can mitigate challenges. In larger classes, peer correction fosters collaborative learning and empowers students to take ownership of their language skills.*” The proposed suggestions align with several studies indicating the impact of class size on the quality of student learning (Toro et al., 2019). An optimal class size of about 30 students can alleviate issues associated with large class sizes in the Vietnamese context, as it facilitates a more personalized and engaging learning experience (P. T. H. Cao, 2018). With fewer students, teachers are able to devote more time and attention to each individual, ensuring that their unique learning needs and challenges are effectively addressed. This setting also allows for a more interactive and participatory classroom atmosphere, which can enhance students’ motivation and engagement. In scenarios where class sizes exceed this optimal number, strategies like peer correction can be employed. Peer correction encourages students to learn from and support each other, promoting collaborative learning and self-correction (Sippel, 2019). It helps in reducing the teacher’s burden of monitoring and correcting all students’ work individually, making it a pragmatic strategy for managing larger classes while also fostering a sense of shared responsibility and mutual learning among students.

For time constraints, some participants ($n = 4$ out of 10) recommended blending home self-study with classroom instruction, along with augmenting weekly class periods. Ms. Pham recommended, “*Blending home self-study with classroom instruction, and augmenting weekly class periods can effectively utilize time.*” Ms. Ha offered her recommendation, stating, “*Students take responsibility for learning outside class, freeing up time for interactive activities. Additional instructional time allows in-depth discussions and personalized*

support. This approach [blended mode] maximizes learning outcomes and student growth.” The recommendation mirrors the burgeoning interest in blended learning which can effectively utilize time in the Vietnamese context (T. N. Le et al., 2022; Tong et al., 2022). Additionally, augmenting weekly class periods can provide more time for varied learning activities, practical application of concepts, and in-depth exploration of topics (T. Nguyen, 2018). This can enhance learning outcomes, especially in language acquisition where repeated exposure and practice are critical. It also allows for more time for feedback and revision, which can significantly improve learning efficacy.

The necessity for adequately equipped facilities, such as speakers, stable Wi-Fi, and projectors, was underscored by half of the teachers ($n = 5$ out of 10). Ms. Tran stated, “*Speakers, stable Wi-Fi, and projectors are quintessential for effective teaching.*” Mr. Vo emphasized the importance of essential teaching resources, stating, “*Access to speakers, stable Wi-Fi, and projectors is essential for effective teaching. For instance, stable Wi-Fi enables access to online resources and digital tools.*” The idea reflects the consensus that suitable technological infrastructure can significantly enhance teaching and learning experiences (Taghizadeh and Hasani Yourdshahi, 2020). In the Vietnamese context, tools like speakers, stable Wi-Fi, and projectors are essential for effective teaching, especially in modern pedagogical approaches that increasingly rely on digital resources (T. D. Nguyen, 2022). Such tools also enable offline/online assessments, real-time feedback, and facilitate virtual collaboration among students (MacCallum et al., 2017). These tools collectively enhance the learning experience, promote student engagement, and support varied teaching strategies.

The teachers ($n = 4$ out of 10) also advocated for a vibrant English-speaking milieu through activities like English clubs, competitions, and language-based events to foster regular English practices. Ms. Vo suggested, “*Activities like English clubs, competitions, and language-based events can significantly bolster English practices.*” Ms. Huynh suggested an array of activities that can greatly enhance English language practices, stating, “*I recommend organizing English clubs, competitions, and language-based events to boost English language practices.*” The advocacy is consistent with language acquisition theories emphasizing the need for immersive, authentic experiences in language learning (X. M. Le et al., 2023). In the Vietnamese context, activities such as English clubs, competitions, and language-based events play a crucial role in bolstering English language practices. Engaging in these activities provides students with opportunities to use English in authentic and meaningful contexts outside the classroom (Manuas, 2022). In fact, these extracurricular activities not only enhance English language skills but also promote cultural awareness, confidence, and a sense of belonging among students, ultimately enriching their overall language-learning journey.

Lastly, some of the teachers ($n = 4$ out of 10) proposed assessment methods encompassing communicative abilities rather than solely linguistic knowledge, incorporating alternative formats and aligning with international English tests like IELTS. Ms. Hoang proposed, “*Assessment methods should encompass communicative abilities, incorporate alternative formats, and align with international English tests like IELTS.*” Mr. Le proposed a comprehensive approach to assessment methods, stating, “*Incorporating alternative formats like presentations and group discussions provides a holistic evaluation of their language proficiency. Besides, aligning with international English tests like IELTS prepares students for global standards and motivates their language development.*” The proposal echoes call for more authentic, communicative-based assessments in language learning literature (Butler et al., 2021). In the Vietnamese educational context, it is of paramount importance to ensure that assessment methods encompass not only linguistic knowledge but also the communicative abilities of students. By incorporating assessments that focus on students’ practical skills in utilizing English for authentic communication, a more comprehensive and

accurate evaluation of their language proficiency can be achieved (Heritage et al., 2020). The inclusion of alternative formats in assessments, such as oral presentations, group discussions, and project-based tasks, enables students to demonstrate their language competencies in diverse contexts, fostering the development of creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. Through the adoption of assessment methods that emphasize communicative abilities, incorporate alternative formats, and align with international benchmarks, Vietnamese students can cultivate a well-rounded repertoire of language skills, thereby equipping themselves more effectively for future academic and professional pursuits.

5. Conclusions

This study has addressed the scarcity of research on the implementation of the CETC in Vietnamese EFL high schools, particularly in the Mekong Delta region. By adopting a qualitative approach and conducting in-depth interviews with experienced teachers, the study has provided rich and nuanced data on the difficulties encountered, the underlying causes, and potential solutions for implementing the CETC. The findings of this study have highlighted student-related factors, i.e., low English proficiency, limited self-directed learning abilities, and a focus on achievement rather than communication skills. Teacher-related factors include difficulties related to instructional approaches, English language and pedagogical skills, and training opportunities. Institution-related factors encompass class sizes, teaching time constraints, facilities, English-speaking and reading culture, resources for testing communication skills, and assessment practices. The recommendations provided by teachers in this study offer practical implications for various stakeholders including teachers, students, and policymakers. These recommendations emphasize student-centered and communicative approaches, continuous professional development for teachers, adequate resources and facilities, an English-speaking and reading culture, and comprehensive assessments that evaluate communication skills.

This research offers critical insights for stakeholders in Vietnamese English language education, presenting valuable findings on the CETC implementation difficulties and pragmatic strategies to ameliorate these issues. Recommendations, inclusive of student-centered pedagogy, technology integration, collaborative learning, and a supportive learning milieu can bolster instructional efficacy, with the study championing sustained professional growth for teachers. Urging curriculum developers to consider identified CETC implementation hurdles, the findings stress the importance of curriculum alignment with competency-based and communicative language teaching tenets advocating for diversified, comprehensive teaching materials and the inclusion of real-life contexts and intrinsic motivation in curriculum design. It is to ensure that the pedagogical practices, assessment methods, learning objectives, and teaching resources employed in classrooms are in concordance with the principles and goals of competency-based and communicative language teaching. Administrators are alerted to institutional factors affecting CETC implementation such as class size, instruction time, and facilities, underlining the necessity for pertinent reforms. Policymakers are provided with valuable insights to inform decisions, fostering investments in teacher training, infrastructure, comprehensive assessments, and resources. Finally, this research extends the literature on the CETC implementation in Vietnamese English education encouraging further exploration of this domain, thereby serving as a basis for comparative, longitudinal research and innovative pedagogical approaches.

Despite this study's insights, focusing on this specific region might not encapsulate the experiences and difficulties of EFL teachers in other Vietnamese regions. Subsequent studies should consider a larger, geographically diverse participant pool for a more holistic understanding of CETC implementation. Additional research is necessitated to understand action research's impact on teachers' perceptions,

pedagogical practices, and student outcomes. Furthermore, another limitation of this study is the significant gender imbalance among the sample, with only one male participant out of ten. This imbalance potentially constrains the breadth of perspectives and experiences, potentially skewing the findings towards female-centric issues and impeding the applicability across a more diverse demographic. Future research should strive for a balanced gender representation, consider focusing specifically on male teachers' experiences, and adopt a mixed-method approach to capture a broader range of insights and validate the role of gender in the implementation of CETC, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon.

Author contributions

Conceptualization, TAN and MDV; methodology, TAN; software, TTAH; validation, TAN, YHP and TTL; formal analysis, TTP; investigation, MDV; resources, THN; data curation, TTL; writing—original draft preparation, TAN; writing—review and editing, TAN; visualization, TTAH; supervision, YHP; project administration, TAN; funding acquisition, TAN. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflict of interest

No conflict of interest was reported by all authors.

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