

Beyond TOEIC: Vietnamese Students' Perceptions of English Course Relevance for Workplace and Test Goals

ABSTRACT

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At Vietnamese universities, general English courses are expected to prepare non-English-major students for both TOEIC requirements and real-world communication. This study examined how students perceive the relevance of these courses to their test goals and future workplace needs. A study was conducted to explore how students view the relevance of these courses for tests and future work. A descriptive survey design was employed to gather data via a questionnaire featuring Likert-scale items (Cronbach's alpha = .969) and open-ended questions from 286 non-English majors across various faculties. Descriptive statistics and thematic coding were used to analyse the data collected from respondents, supplemented with informal classroom observations. Survey responses show a misalignment between students' goals and the support they expect, especially in speaking and writing. There are also concerns about skill development and engagement related to AI tools for writing practice. According to the findings, more balanced instruction is necessary to help students succeed in exams and prepare for their future careers. Educators and curriculum developers can benefit from this study in developing English programs focused on TOEIC for non-majors.

Keywords: English course relevance, TOEIC preparation, students' expectations, Vietnamese EFL context

1. Introduction

The importance of English proficiency has grown in Asian countries, particularly Vietnam, where graduates are expected to meet academic and professional criteria. For this demand, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) launched the National Foreign Languages Project (NFLP). Although the project was scheduled to be completed by 2020, it has continued to undergo reform, including the introduction of the Vietnam Foreign Language Framework (VFLF). Under these changes, universities are encouraged to develop courses in line with English benchmarks and the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) to meet graduation requirements.

At many universities, including the research site, students are required to achieve Level 3 proficiency on a six-level national scale. It is common for most students to submit their scores from international exams, of which the TOEIC is the most accessible and widely used. TOEIC is preferred due to its practicality, cost-effectiveness, and credibility as a gateway to employment. In this sense, general English courses now serve a number of functions, including the development of fundamental language skills, the preparation for testing, and the support of professional communication. Even if curriculum changes match English education with international norms, little research has examined how students experience these courses. Instead, syllabus design, policy implementation, or teachers' viewpoints take front stage above students' experiences. When this misalignment takes place in institutions where only general English is the official language of instruction, it becomes more worrying.

At the research site, a Vietnamese university of technology, students follow an integrated-skills coursebook aligned with the CEFR. Although this methodology may provide consistent foundations for instruction, it may not always align with the students' anticipated learning outcomes. These challenges raise questions about how students evaluate their English learning. As a result, this study examines how non-English majors view the importance of general English courses, especially for TOEIC preparation and workplace communication, to evaluate whether the course supports their goals and how it may be improved.

Taking a closer look from the students' point of view, this study examines how relevant they find their English courses and what implications this has on a broader scale. By focusing on what students really think and need, the study provides practical suggestions for teachers, course designers, and university leaders to improve learning and connect it to real-life experiences. These insights go beyond the classroom, offering ways for universities to rethink how English is taught and tested to better align with students' goals and national education plans.

Although these reforms aim to standardise proficiency outcomes, their impact varies across institutions, especially where TOEIC acts as both an exit requirement and a measure of institutional accountability. In practice, this creates tensions between curriculum intentions, assessment policies, and students' actual classroom experiences. It is therefore important to understand how students perceive these courses not only from a pedagogical perspective, but also from an institutional perspective, to provide insight into how national benchmarks are incorporated into daily classroom pedagogy.

2. Literature Review

English Course Relevance, Curriculum Alignment, and Students' Expectations

In language education, relevance involves how materials, teaching methods, and learning outcomes meet students' real-world needs. While Hutchinson and Waters (1987) argue that students are more motivated when instruction matches their goals, Graves (2000) and Richards (2001) underline the need of designing language courses around the learners' context.

In Vietnam, general English classes are often the only structured language education that non-majors receive. These courses are expected to serve multiple purposes, including assisting students in meeting graduation requirements as well as preparing them for workplace communication (Nguyen & Hamid, 2015; Nguyen & Gu, 2020). However, accommodating this wide range of expectations in a single curriculum is far from simple. When learners are not meaningfully involved in curriculum design, their priorities can remain unaddressed (Eslami, 2010; Kaur, 2007).

The textbooks used by Vietnamese universities tend to be globally marketed and may not fully reflect local or institutional demands. As Tomlinson (2023) and Robinson (1991) point out, materials that overlook learners' particular contexts run the risk of reducing engagement and efficacy. Moiiinvaziri (2014) observed a similar mismatch in Iran, where general English courses lacked explicit emphasis on speaking and test preparation, which caused discontent among students. In addition, other researchers, such as Mallik and Alam (2018), advocate more responsive curriculum development, especially when learners' voices are included. For any reform to be practical, institutional constraints and learners' diversity must also be considered (Nation & Macalister, 2010).

To understand students' expectations more fully, the current study draws on Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) Target Needs Framework, which defines learners' needs across three dimensions: necessities (e.g., test requirements), lacks (e.g., weak speaking skills), and wants (e.g., increased confidence or fluency). Figure 1 illustrates how this framework has been adapted for the Vietnamese university context.



Figure 1. Adapted version of Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) Target Needs Framework, contextualised for Vietnamese EFL students

By connecting learners' goals with curriculum expectations, this study builds on prior research while integrating classroom observation to offer a more grounded understanding of students' experience.

TOEIC Washback and the Impact of Test-Driven Goals

TOEIC has had a significant impact on Vietnamese higher education, particularly for students who do not major in English. Since it is a graduation requirement and a job requirement, it influences the measurement and instruction of English proficiency. This test impact, often referred to as washback (Bailey, 1996; Cheng & Curtis, 2012), can shift students' attention toward what is easily assessed rather than what supports long-term language growth. In test-driven environments, students tend to give priority to measurable results rather than instructions. In spite of offering the structure and motivation, it may result in the development of surface-level learning strategies and the decrease of language use as a means of communication (Pan, 2005; Ryan & Weinstein, 2009; Shohamy, 2014). In addition, students may focus more on memorising or practising test-taking techniques rather than practical language skills.

A misalignment exists between institutions' goals and students' expectations. According to Pham and Bui (2019), many students believe their English lessons fail to prepare them for professional life. In addition, Nhan (2013) contends that test-based exit policies can lead to a delay in graduation or a decrease in student self-esteem. In addition to Vietnam, other Asian countries also face similar concerns when English exit tests determine curriculum priorities (Pan, 2015; Su, 2005; Tsai and Tsou, 2009), suggesting that Vietnam's tensions reflect broader regional patterns rather than isolated institutional problems.

Barriers to Proficiency and Structural Challenges

Many Vietnamese students enter university with limited confidence in listening and speaking, even with years of English instruction. This is the consequence of grammar-heavy instruction in secondary schools, where communicative competence is sometimes overlooked (Tran, 2013; Pham & Bui, 2019). At the university level, large class sizes, limited contact hours, and mixed-ability groups present further challenges for differentiated instruction.

Due to assessment pressures, classroom practices often place a high priority on receptive skills, particularly grammar, reading, and vocabulary, despite the fact that many programs follow the CEFR and support integrated skills. Consequently, students tend to focus more on performance on exams than on deeper engagement, according to Ngoc and Iwashita (2012) and Tran (2013). TOEIC provides clear standards for communication, but these standards may not always reflect the communication demands of employers or the reality of everyday life. As a result of focusing on test scores, students may achieve strong results, but lack the confidence to use English effectively in everyday situations. Therefore, teaching should be closely aligned with the academic goals of students, and daily communication should be a priority so that they can receive the best possible education.

Across higher education systems in Asia, similar tensions have been observed when test-based policies interact with local curriculum demands. Studies conducted in Taiwan (Pan, 2015; Tsai & Tsou, 2009) and Iran (Moiinvaziri, 2014) indicate that standardised proficiency requirements often influence classroom practices more than curriculum objectives. A similar pattern can be observed in the Vietnamese context, where exit benchmarks based on TOEIC can influence both teaching priorities and the expectations of the institution regarding the quality of the

program. Therefore, it is important to place the student voice within this broader regional context in order to clarify how policy-level decisions affect learning.

Building on the literature above, this study focuses on how learners perceive the alignment between their English courses and personal goals in a TOEIC-oriented context. In addition, it considers the challenges students encounter and how they experience instructional support across different language levels.

In this study, the following questions will be addressed:

1. What are university students' primary goals for learning English?
2. How relevant do students believe their English courses are to these objectives?
3. Which English skills do students feel are adequately or insufficiently supported?
4. What suggestions would students make for improving their English learning experience?

The following figure summarises how the study's research questions are derived from key theoretical constructs and aligned with data collection and analysis strategies.

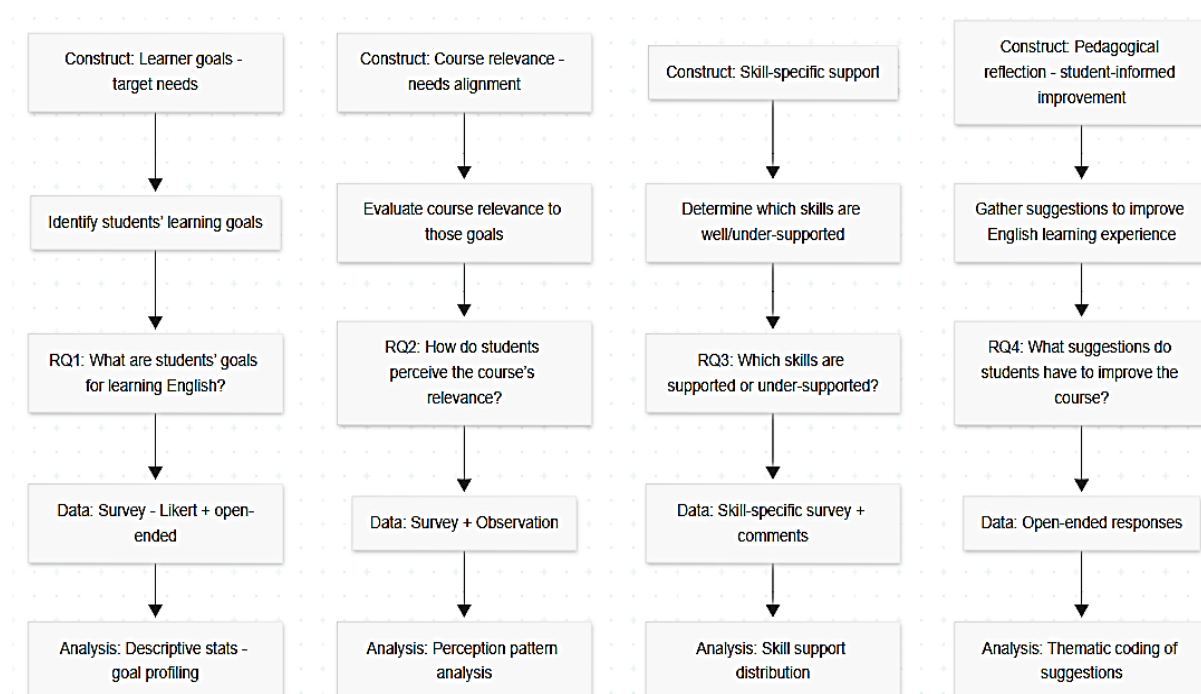


Figure 2. Mapping of Constructs, Objectives, Research Questions, Data Collection Methods, and Analysis Approaches

3. Methodology

Research Design

This study implemented a descriptive, survey-based design to explore how students perceive the relevance of their general English courses with regard to TOEIC preparation and workplace communication. Instead of testing a hypothesis, it recorded students' priorities, perceived instructional gaps, and ideas for improvement. The survey included both Likert-scale items and open-ended questions, and informal classroom observations by the teacher-researcher were used to provide contextual insight into participation patterns and instructional emphasis.

Context and Participants

The research was conducted at a public university of technology in southern Vietnam, where general English is compulsory for all undergraduates. The program follows a CEFR-aligned, integrated-skills syllabus. A total of 286 students participated, drawn from a range of faculties and academic years. Most were non-English majors actively preparing for TOEIC, which serves as a graduation requirement at the institution.

Instruction during the study period was based on *Voices*, a CEFR-oriented coursebook. According to university policy, students can submit TOEIC certificates (Listening and Reading) in early semesters to bypass general English classes, even though graduation still requires the four-skill TOEIC. As a result, this policy influences how and when students engage with different skills throughout their degree program.

Instruments and Data Collection

The questionnaire was developed using frameworks for needs analysis developed by Hutchinson and Waters (1987), Moivaziri (2014), and Malik and Alam (2018). It has three parts.

The first part collected basic background information and asked students to choose their main reasons for learning English. They could select more than one motivation, including meeting TOEIC requirements, improving workplace communication, preparing for academic study, or learning out of personal interest. The second part contained five Likert-scale items (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) that examined how well students felt the course supported their goals—for example, support for TOEIC preparation, academic and workplace literacy, real-life communication, and overall relevance to their learning needs. The third part focused on instructional support. Students rated how much support they received for listening, reading, speaking, writing, and grammar/vocabulary using a simple three-point scale (not supported enough, moderately supported, most supported).

In two open-ended questions, students were asked to express what they found most useful in the course, as well as what improvements they would like to see. The five Likert-scale items demonstrated strong internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .969$).

To complement the survey, the teacher-researcher also kept informal observation notes throughout the semester. These notes captured general patterns of participation, chances for interaction, and the balance between receptive and productive skills during lessons. No formal observation tool was used; the notes served as contextual background to help interpret the survey results.

The survey was administered online via Google Forms and stayed open for two weeks. Students were told what the study was about, and consent was included at the start of the form. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. The goal was simply to keep things open and pressure-free, so they'd feel at ease sharing their thoughts in their own way.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the Likert-scale items and identify broad patterns in students' perceptions. To examine whether students with different learning goals perceived course support differently, Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated between their stated

goals (TOEIC, workplace, academic, and personal) and the five course alignment items. Open-ended responses were analysed using inductive thematic coding to identify recurring issues and suggestions. Observation notes were then used to cross-check how students' self-reported perceptions aligned with visible classroom practices.

4. Findings

Before presenting the survey results, internal consistency was checked for the five Likert-scale items related to course alignment. The analysis returned a Cronbach's alpha of .969, suggesting that students responded in a consistent and meaningful way across the items. The findings indicate that participants share a common understanding of course support and relevance.

RQ1: Students' English Learning Goals

The survey first asked students to select their main reasons for learning English, choosing from four common options: meeting TOEIC requirements, improving communication for work, preparing for academic study, and pursuing personal interest. Respondents could select more than one.

As shown in Table 1, the most commonly selected goal was improving communication for future employment (86.4%). This was followed by passing the TOEIC test for graduation (65%), academic purposes (53.1%), and personal motivation (32.9%). These findings reflect a blend of extrinsic and intrinsic motivations. Although institutional requirements remain a major driver, many students find English as a tool for future career success. This highlights a dual orientation: students are planning to meet immediate targets and preparing for longer-term goals.

Table 1. Students' Learning Goals (N = 286)

Learning goals	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Improve communication for future job	247	86.4
Meet TOEIC requirements for graduation	186	65
Prepare for academic study	152	53.1
Support personal interest	94	32.9

RQ2: Students' Perceptions of Course Support

Students were asked to evaluate how well the general English course supported their learning goals. Five statements covered such topics as TOEIC preparation, academic literacy, practical communication, and overall relevance.

Table 2. Perceptions of Course Alignment with Learning Goals

Learning goals	Mean	95% CI
Improves TOEIC-related skills	3.81	[3.68, 3.93]
Prepares for academic/workplace reading and writing	3.81	[3.68, 3.94]
Reflects real-life speaking and listening	3.77	[3.64, 3.90]
Stays relevant to English learning goals	3.74	[3.61, 3.87]
Provides enough TOEIC-style practice	3.64	[3.51, 3.77]

Based on Table 2, the two highest-rated areas were "Improves TOEIC-related skills" and "Prepares for academic/workplace reading and writing," each receiving a mean score of 3.81 out of 5. This rating indicates how useful the course was for improving test preparation and academic language development. However, the lowest-rated item indicates that although students appreciated the general skill emphasis, they found the course lacked direct alignment with the TOEIC. Despite CEFR-aligned syllabuses, students require more exposure to the test's structure and rhythm.

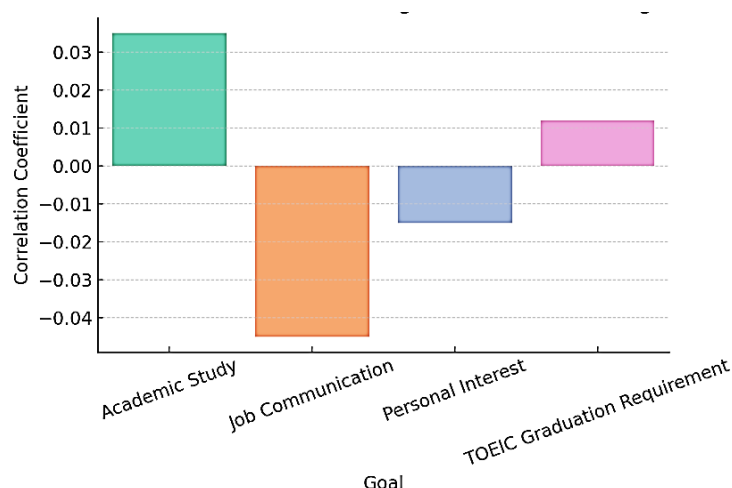


Figure 3. Correlation Between Course Alignment and Learning Goals

To explore whether students with different goals perceived the course differently, correlations were calculated between their stated goals and the five course alignment items. As shown in Figure 3, all correlations were weak, ranging from -0.045 to $+0.035$ (workplace communication: $r = -0.045$; TOEIC preparation: $r = 0.035$; academic study: $r = 0.018$; personal interest: $r = 0.012$).

Overall, these results indicate that students, regardless of their individual motivations, had broadly similar views about course support. Concerns about skill balance, limited practice with productive skills, and the need for more TOEIC-related preparation appeared consistently across groups rather than differing by learning goal.

RQ3: Students' Perceptions of Instructional Emphasis across Language Skills

To examine how students experienced skill instruction in the classroom, they rated five areas—listening, reading, speaking, writing, and grammar/vocabulary—on a three-point scale: not supported enough, moderately supported, or most supported.

As illustrated in Figure 4, Reading and Grammar/Vocabulary were the most positively rated, likely because they were regularly reinforced through textbooks, reviews, and test preparation. With regard to Listening, students reported a roughly equal number of positive and negative experiences. However, over half of the students rated Speaking and Writing as insufficiently supported skills. While these productive skills are included in the integrated-skills syllabus, little structured practice occurs in class.

The results reveal that test-focused environments place a high priority on receptive and form-based skills while ignoring expressive skills. A teaching imbalance is not the only cause of this

imbalance. The problem reflects deeper problems with the design of assessments and the management of classrooms.

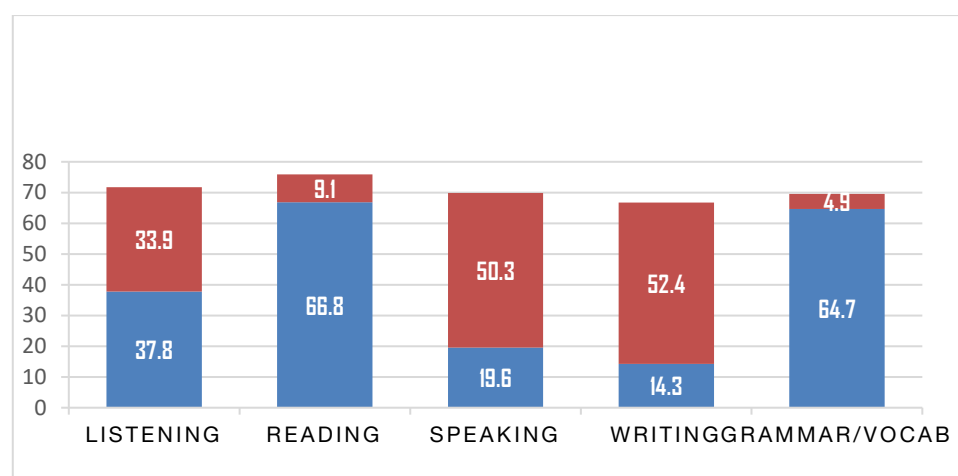


Figure 4. Students' Perceptions of Skill Support

RQ4: Students' Voices on Course Strengths and Suggestions

To better understand how students experienced the course, two open-ended questions invited them to reflect on (1) the most valuable aspects of their English classes and (2) suggestions for improvement. The responses were thematically coded and grouped into eight recurring focus areas, summarised in Table 3.

It has been noted that students often praise the course for the teacher's support, enthusiasm, patience and clarity. One student said, "My teacher's dedication and thorough approach of explaining things motivated me to learn throughout the class."

Others appreciated structured grammar and vocabulary reviews, real-life discussion activities, and collaborative group work—all of which contributed to a more engaging and enjoyable learning environment.

When asked how the course could be improved, many students expressed a desire for more structured practice in speaking and listening. Several mentioned that current lessons focused more on reading and grammar, with limited opportunities to practise real-time communication. Some learners also asked for more TOEIC-format mock tests, clearer test-taking strategies, and additional resources like handouts, videos, and mobile apps.

Structural concerns also emerged. A number of students highlighted time limitations, fast lesson pacing, and large class sizes as barriers to receiving personalised attention or feedback. Importantly, students were not simply asking for more materials or easier lessons. Many of their comments reflected thoughtful engagement with their learning process and a desire for instruction that was both practical and motivating.

Table 3. Summary of Open-Ended Responses

Focus Area	What Students Found Useful	What Students Suggested For Improvement
<i>Teacher Support</i>	Clear explanations, supportive atmosphere	Slower pace, more individual feedback

<i>Grammar Vocabulary</i>	Helpful review sessions	More applications in real-life contexts
<i>Skill Development</i>	Exposure to different skills	More structured tasks for speaking, writing, and listening
<i>Interactive Learning</i>	Group work, pair discussions	More peer interaction time
<i>TOEIC Preparation</i>	Language foundation for the test	More mock exams, strategy training
<i>Learning Materials</i>	Handouts, videos, websites	More TOEIC-targeted and digital resources
<i>Course Structure</i>	Effective reviews, organised lessons	Extended classroom time
<i>Personal Engagement</i>	Opportunities to participate	Smaller class sizes, more speaking turns

Overall, the comments presented here illustrate what students value most about the course and areas where they believe they are not receiving adequate support. In addition to preparing for exams, learners also want to interact with their instructors, receive more precise explanations, and have the opportunity to apply their knowledge and skills. In their feedback, it appears that the course delivery and teaching quality have equal significance with the material.

5. Discussion

This study explored how non-English-major students at a Vietnamese university perceive the relevance of their general English course, particularly in relation to TOEIC preparation and real-world communication. The findings reveal that although students generally held positive views of the course, their priorities and perceived demands show a more complex picture than standardised curricula often account for.

RQ1- Students' Learning Goals and Shifting Motivations

In general, most students are motivated to learn English by both extrinsic and intrinsic factors. While many students emphasised their motivation for meeting TOEIC requirements to complete their graduation requirements, others emphasised their motivation for future employment and academic success. These findings are in line with those of Nguyen and Hamid (2015), who discovered that Vietnamese students tend to approach English pragmatically, seeing it as both a certificate and a tool.

This dual focus reflects a broader tension: students must meet immediate benchmarks while also preparing for future communication needs. For course designers, this raises an important issue: how can we support both goals without one overshadowing the other?

RQ2 & RQ3– Course Relevance, Skill Support and Learners' Engagement

Most students found the course to be helpful for reading-based assignments and academic writing. Correlation analysis showed that these perceptions were consistent across students with different learning goals, with all coefficients close to zero. This suggests that the instructional approach shaped students' experiences more strongly than their individual motivations did.

Such patterns suggest a familiar type of misalignment. Although the CEFR-based curriculum promotes integrated skill development, students experience a reality where test-oriented

instruction still dominates. Importantly, this experience was not limited to test-focused students but was shared broadly across the cohort, indicating that structural factors, such as assessment design and time allocation, shape classroom practices more powerfully than individual student preferences.

Additionally, students had different perceptions regarding the adequacy of listening support. It can be explained by Moivaziri's study (2014), which indicates that students may perceive listening differently due to the method of instruction and the identity of the teacher. When test preparation takes precedence, opportunities for interaction naturally diminish. If the assessment process does not reflect students' need for productive skills, they may not prioritise them, resulting in a surface-level engagement.

RQ 4 – Course Strengths and Suggestions for Improvement

There were concerns raised by students regarding the balance between skills and assessments. In addition, the teacher's approachability, enthusiasm, and ability to explain complex concepts in an understandable way positively influenced their experience. In other words, while the course content may seem limited, the course delivery makes a significant impact. According to Tomlinson (2023), the effectiveness of teaching materials depends on how they are implemented in the classroom. In this way, a teacher's personal touch can help overcome structural challenges.

When asked for suggestions, students were clear and consistent. Many wanted more structured opportunities to practise speaking and listening, especially in formats that resembled TOEIC tasks. Others asked for more mock tests, strategy training, and digital resources to support their self-study. Many responses also pointed to broader constraints—such as large class sizes, fast pacing, and limited feedback—as ongoing challenges to participation.

What stands out in these responses is not a desire to simplify the course but a request to make it more relevant and responsive. Students appeared to understand their learning gaps and offered practical solutions. This reflects what Hutchinson and Waters (1987) describe as learners' "lack"—the space between what students are expected to do and what they feel equipped to do. Addressing these gaps does not require a complete curriculum overhaul but thoughtful adjustments that allow interaction, strategy-building, and more personalised instruction.

These findings suggest that while learners appreciate structured, CEFR-aligned instruction, they also want more room for active language use. If communicative tasks are consistently under-prioritised in assessments, students may disengage from precisely the skills they need most in their future lives.

6. Implications

This study provides practical implications for improving general English instruction in test-oriented university contexts.

Rebalancing Assessment to Reflect Skill Development

At the research site, 60% of the course result is based on midterm and final exams, which focus mainly on reading and grammar. This has resulted in less emphasis on productive skills in the

classroom and in assessments. To address this imbalance, institutions may consider reallocating part of the grade to include performance-based tasks such as presentations, group discussions, or writing assignments. Even assigning 20–30% of the total grade to these areas would send a stronger signal of the importance of these skills as well as encourage more consistent student engagement across the board.

Creating More Flexibility for Teachers

Despite the appreciation for their instructors' efforts, students in the study expressed frustration with the one-size-fits-all curriculum. To align policy with practice, it may be considered to allow teachers more flexibility in designing classroom activities and incorporating TOEIC-style activities into classroom activities. Within the current framework, small adjustments can facilitate more communicative and engaging learning environments, such as providing practice workshops or allocating more time for peer interaction.

Supporting Participation in Large Classes

Students repeatedly mentioned class size and time pressure as obstacles to active participation. It may not be feasible to reduce class size, but there are alternative methods for encouraging more interaction. By incorporating small-group projects, peer feedback exercises, or asynchronous speaking assignments via online platforms, students have a greater opportunity to practice and receive feedback.

Aligning Curriculum with TOEIC Progression

The current program tends to prioritise receptive skills in the early semesters, while productive skills are delayed until later stages or left to self-practice. However, many students now prepare for TOEIC Listening and Reading in their second or third year, and submit their scores well before graduation. It would be beneficial to integrate speaking and writing earlier in the curriculum, through scaffolded, low-stakes tasks, in order to better reflect real-life communication needs and reduce skill gaps. Additionally, learners at different stages could benefit from optional TOEIC preparation modules, writing clinics, or guided speaking workshops.

Rethinking Institutional Policy and Assessment Design

The findings show that some of the challenges students face cannot be solved at the classroom level alone. While individual teachers can adapt their classroom practices, more meaningful change requires institutional support and clearer alignment between curriculum goals and assessment practices.

A key issue is the current role of TOEIC as both a graduation requirement and a measure of programme quality. When one test carries this much weight, it naturally pushes teaching and learning toward test performance rather than communicative ability. Institutions may need to reconsider how proficiency is assessed so that productive skills are valued alongside standardised test scores. Options such as portfolio-based assessments or workplace simulation tasks could offer alternative ways for students to demonstrate readiness for professional communication.

In addition, universities might consider offering structured preparation modules to complement rather than replace TOEIC as an exit benchmark. This approach would give students access to test-taking strategies without reducing opportunities for authentic language use.

Curriculum flexibility is another area for reconsideration. Allowing departments to allocate even 20–30% of course time for context-responsive activities would give teachers more space to address gaps in speaking and writing while still maintaining programme coherence.

Finally, programme success should be evaluated beyond test pass rates. Tracking outcomes, such as students' confidence in workplace communication and employer feedback, would provide a more realistic picture of how well the programme supports learners' long-term goals.

Overall, as a result of the tensions identified in this study, it is necessary to reconsider how proficiency is defined and assessed at the institutional level so that policy decisions can be better aligned with the students' communication needs in real-world situations. This also fits within ongoing national efforts under the NFLP and CEFR-oriented reforms, highlighting the need to revisit test-based exit policies so they support, not limit, students' broader communicative development.

Encouraging Responsible and Reflective AI Use

As students increasingly turn to AI tools for writing support, institutions may need to move beyond restriction and consider guidance. Incorporating short reflection tasks, such as asking students to edit or explain AI-generated output, can promote academic integrity while building critical digital literacy. More in-class writing activities and personalised feedback could also help shift focus back to students' authentic language development.

7. Conclusion

This study explored how non-English-major students at a Vietnamese university view their general English courses, especially in terms of preparing for the TOEIC and future work. Although students appreciated the structured focus on grammar and reading, they felt that speaking and writing were not given enough attention. This reveals a clear gap between what the course provides and what students actually need to succeed.

Even though the program follows CEFR guidelines, some important skills still seem to be left out, especially in how students are assessed. That said, the students weren't passive. They engaged with the course, shared honest feedback, and gave down-to-earth ideas for how things could improve: more speaking, better balance, clearer links to real communication.

Of course, this was just one university, and classroom observations weren't formally coded, so there are limits to how far the results can be applied. But the concerns students raised, like skill imbalance, test pressure, and limited space for real use of English, are likely common in other places too.

Research in the future could expand on these questions by investigating how students at other universities perceive these issues. This could include incorporating teachers' perspectives or observing how learners utilise AI tools in their English learning journeys. Even within systems

heavily influenced by standardised testing, these approaches could foster the development of more flexible, student-centred teaching methods.

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