



Unveiling obstacles in virtual English education: echoes from Vietnamese learners

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ABSTRACT

After the COVID-19 pandemic, online learning in Vietnam has been paid more attention to. Consequently, this current qualitative study was conducted to investigate problems in English online classes in the Vietnamese context. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from six EFL students learning in a tertiary institution in the Southwest of Vietnam. The current study found some challenges the students often faced when learning online, categorized by three groups, namely teacher-related challenges, student-related challenges, and teacher-and-student living condition-related challenges. Regarding teacher-related challenges, teachers' lack of abilities to use ICT tools and their attitudes towards teaching online negatively affected the EFL students' online learning. Regarding student-related challenges, students' resistance to the transmission from face-to-face learning to online learning and their low motivation played the role of barriers to their performance in online learning. For the final dimension, teacher-and-student condition-related challenges, insufficient teaching and learning devices, low internet connection, or noise did not allow the students to maximize their learning progress.

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Introduction

The global community has been markedly influenced by the emergence of a novel coronavirus termed COVID-19. This virulent agent has precipitated an epidemic of a highly communicable malady primarily manifesting in the respiratory system, with transmission vectors comprising of droplets produced from the respiratory system of infected individuals during coughing or sneezing (Van Doremalen et al., 2020). This potent pathogen has the capacity to induce grave illness, inclusive of fatality. The advent of COVID-19 has engendered

a protracted state of paralysis for the global society, inducing profound economic, socio-cultural, and educational ramifications, particularly observable within Vietnam.

Pertaining to socio-economic factors, measures to inhibit the proliferation of infections necessitate restrictions on the mobility of people and commodities. Concerning education, and notably English instruction and acquisition, the virus' pervasive spread has mandated a transition from traditional in-person pedagogical activities to a predominantly digital format across most educational strata. This adjustment has engendered complications impacting the educational outcomes of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. To maintain the integrity of English instruction within the Vietnamese milieu, it is imperative to comprehend and address the aforesaid issues. Hence, the present qualitative research endeavors to scrutinize challenges encountered in virtual English classrooms, echoing the perspectives of Vietnamese students.

Online education or home-based learning is a constituent of the overarching framework of distance learning. Chun et al. (2016) construe distance learning as an instructional paradigm where learners engage with diverse resources via information and communication technology in a virtual classroom where physical separation exists between the instructor and learners. Amid a pandemic, employing a distance learning model is rational. Implementing learning through digital interfaces like Zoom, Google Meet, or Google Classroom is becoming increasingly prevalent within the Vietnamese context. These platforms can be accessed via multiple electronic devices including smartphones, tablets, or personal computers. The synergy between digital technology and internet-driven technology facilitates the establishment of a viable learning milieu for EFL instructors and their students.

However, the efficacy of online classrooms is strongly contingent upon the availability and quality of information technology infrastructure, specifically robust internet connectivity. In circumstances where technical issues arise from inadequate internet infrastructure, the process of teaching and learning may be disrupted due to compromised interaction between educators and learners (Allen & Seaman, 2007). Furthermore, English instruction differs from other subjects as it necessitates a high degree of interaction between educators and students (Putri, 2015). Hence, fostering an interactive learning environment is a complex task for English educators (Kyei-Blankson et al., 2019). Various challenges in online English classrooms have been highlighted in prior research (e.g., Widayanti & Suarnajaya, 2021; Nugroho et al., 2021; Hijazi & Alnatour, 2021). Summarily, despite the necessity of transitioning from conventional face-to-face educational methods to digital learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, issues inherent to online learning cannot be circumvented.

In terms of challenges related to educators, according to Ahmad (2016), virtual learning does not facilitate adequate pedagogical practices. For instance, the utilization of insufficiently efficient Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools hampers EFL educators' capacity to optimally supervise listening examinations. Moreover, when EFL educators exemplify speech patterns in specific contexts, students may encounter difficulties in replicating their instructor's speech. Consequently, the anticipated learning outcomes may be sub-optimal. Additional hurdles relate to educators' adaptability to sudden transitions from traditional to digital pedagogical methods. In online classes, educators must develop new skills pertinent to technologically driven pedagogy (Sandholtz et al., 1997). However, the window of opportunity for skill acquisition may be constrictive, making this transition challenging for educators not prepared for online instruction (Peeraer & Van Petegem, 2010).

Conversely, some educators may demonstrate proficiency in employing ICT tools in language instruction. They may utilize a plethora of online applications in their teaching process. Nevertheless, over-reliance on ICT tools is cautioned against, as these are merely supplemental resources in language instruction and cannot supplant the role of educators (Van et al., 2021).

Pertaining to student-related challenges, the shift to digital learning environments may pose barriers to students' educational engagement. Burnes (2015) notes that resistance to change can be anticipated if the individual perceives the change to have a significant impact on their life. Given the magnitude of the shift from traditional to online learning, without structured programs to sensitize students to the potentiality of such changes, students may grapple with adapting to new learning environments and methods. The issue of enhancing students' self-regulation in digital learning is of paramount importance as it facilitates decision-making regarding their learning objectives, planning, monitoring, and self-assessment of their academic performance (Vonderwell, 2004).

In contrast to traditional face-to-face learning environments where educators can more easily gauge students' strengths and weaknesses, digital learning diminishes direct interaction between educators and students, thereby offering fewer opportunities for performance evaluation. Consequently, students' readiness and autonomous learning become increasingly significant (Basri, 2023). Moreover, students who struggle to acclimate to the altered learning environment may encounter difficulties. The ability to adapt to these changes can significantly influence students' engagement and academic outcomes within the digital classroom (Sinaga & Pustika, 2021). However, adaptive capacities may vary among students, thereby not all students may experience online learning positively.

For challenges related to living conditions, according to the study conducted by Wahab and Iskandar (2020), the lack of essential learning equipment such as smartphones, tablets, or personal computers, can inhibit EFL students from participating in their classes. Furthermore, some students may struggle to engage in classes due to inconsistent internet access. These issues are predominantly observed within middle or lower socio-economic classes, who may not have the financial capacity to procure sufficient devices or reliable internet services (Tao & Gao, 2022).

Apart from the direct influence of students' living conditions on their online learning experiences, Nashruddin et al. (2020) found that students residing in rural areas may lack stable internet access. Additionally, factors such as ambient noise and familial disruptions can affect EFL students' online learning experiences (Teo et al., 2022). For instance, students may face challenges when their study environment is disturbed by external noise, whether it emanates from their surroundings or is inadvertently produced by their educators. Despite the noted challenges, online learning provides a safe space for educational engagement and development. However, these challenges necessitate attention to enable the formulation of appropriate remedial strategies. Accordingly, the current study seeks to examine the challenges perceived by EFL students in online learning. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the research question: "What challenges are faced in English online classes?"

Method

Research design

The present study adheres to the qualitative research paradigm, utilizing semi-structured interviews as a principal data collection instrument. Employing semi-structured interviews in the context of a qualitative inquiry enables the research team to attain a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of participants' perspectives, thereby facilitating rich, descriptive data and the potential for emergent themes (Drever, 1995). This investigative approach is particularly suited to the nature of the study's scope and sample size. In this investigation, the participant pool is modest in size, encompassing six individuals, rendering a qualitative research design optimally appropriate. The small sample size is conducive to an intensive and in-depth exploration of individual experiences, perceptions, and interpretations, which are at the core of qualitative research methodologies. Thus, the decision to undertake a qualitative study is deemed to be not only suitable but also efficient and effective for the realization of the research objectives.

Setting and participants

The respondents of this inquiry comprised EFL learners enrolled in a higher educational establishment located in the Southwest region of Vietnam. The selection of participants adhered to a comprehensive procedural process. Initially, teacher-researchers who were concurrently serving as EFL lecturers sent an electronic communication to a random selection of their classes, which included thirty English-major students. This communication extended an invitation to participate in the study and ensured a comprehensive understanding of the study's objectives. The email also emphasized that the data garnered would be exclusively utilized for the present research and safeguarded the confidentiality of participants' personal information. Furthermore, prospective participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the interview process at any juncture, should they experience any discomfort. A week subsequent to the initial communication, a second email was dispatched to signify the closure of the recruitment phase. Subsequently, the researchers assessed the responses and established contact with the students who expressed a willingness to partake in the project. Although ten students initially consented to participate, personal circumstances, such as health or familial concerns, reduced the final participant count to six students. Consequently, the final respondent group for this investigation comprised six EFL students, denoted pseudonymously as Andy, Ben, Chen, Daisy, Eliza, and Feng, attending a tertiary institution in the Southwest of Vietnam. The gender distribution of the participant pool included four female students (Chen, Daisy, Eliza, and Feng) and two male students (Andy and Ben).

Data collection

To facilitate participants' swift, comprehensive, and accurate articulation of their thoughts, the interviews were conducted in Vietnamese, their native language. Prior to initiating the interviews, the researchers sought the participants' consent to record and document their responses. Each interview spanned a duration exceeding one hour, with the initial fifteen minutes typically dedicated to discussing the participants' emotional states, aiming to foster a comfortable ambiance before embarking on the formal interview process. To delve into the factors underpinning the challenges experienced in English online classes, the principal

interview question posed was, "What factors precipitated challenges in your English online classes?" In cases where responses were perceived as incomplete or nebulous, supplementary queries were deployed to stimulate more insightful disclosures.

The utilization of semi-structured individual interviews endowed the researchers with the latitude to probe deeper with additional, detailed inquiries, thus enabling a thorough exploration of the students' perceptions. Subsequent to the interviews, the transcribed Vietnamese conversations were forwarded to the interviewees for verification, ensuring there were no misinterpretations or inaccuracies in the recorded notes. For data analysis purposes, these Vietnamese transcripts were subsequently translated into English. The English translations were then rigorously vetted by an expert in the realm of translation and interpretation to confirm their fidelity. The resultant analysis was structured according to thematic areas in alignment with the study's existing framework, encompassing teacher-related challenges, student-related challenges, and teaching-and-learning condition-related challenges.

Data analysis

In relation to the procedures for data analysis, the research team initially engaged in a thorough review of the interview transcripts to familiarize themselves with the participants' insights concerning the challenges encountered in the realm of online learning. Armed with this data, a comprehensive review of existing literature was undertaken to establish correlative themes within the data. Consequently, the identified challenges were organized into three primary thematic categories: student-related challenges, teacher-related challenges, and challenges related to the living conditions of both teachers and students. These previously mentioned themes were color-coded for clarity, with teacher-related challenges designated in red, student-related challenges in blue, and challenges related to teaching-and-learning conditions in yellow. Subsequently, excerpts corresponding to the same code were aggregated.

In the subsequent phase of the analysis, the research team sought the expertise of a senior researcher specializing in applied linguistics to validate the classification of the excerpts within the correct themes. If an excerpt was determined to be appropriately analyzed, it was retained as is. However, excerpts judged to be incorrectly classified necessitated further discussion between the team and the inter-coder to ensure their accurate placement within the appropriate thematic category. Nevertheless, the volume of such excerpts was minimal due to the research team members' extensive experience in data analysis, particularly qualitative data.

Findings and discussion

Teacher-related challenges

It is incontrovertible that English pedagogy and learning bear significant correlation with the ICT competence of English teachers. Echoing concerns raised by Sandholtz and associates (1997), the participants in the present study expressed apprehensions regarding their teachers' ICT proficiency in the realm of online learning. One of the male respondents, Ben, articulated:

At times, I perceive a lack of proficiency in my teacher's utilization of certain online platforms. When issues arise, they appear uncertain about resolving them, even when the problems are seemingly trivial (Ben; Male, Interview).

The Vietnamese government had made considerable strides to incentivize EFL teachers to incorporate ICT into their instructional methods (Dang, 2011). Nonetheless, the integration of ICT into language teaching is not without its complexities. According to Peeraer and Van Petegem (2010), various factors influence EFL teachers' adoption of ICT, including age, gender, access to computers, frequency of computer use, ICT proficiency, confidence in ICT use, and attitudes towards ICT. As such, in the absence of robust professional development training on ICT, some teachers may fall short in delivering effective online instruction.

Ben offered conjecture on his teacher's proficiency with ICT, commenting,

I wouldn't venture to label my teachers as indolent, but they do appear somewhat antiquated in their methods. They seem more comfortable with traditional pedagogical approaches, primarily utilizing paper-based resources for in-class activities. Thus, such a sudden transition may have induced a sense of disorientation (Ben; Male, Interview).

Sandholtz et al. (1997) posited that the shift from traditional in-person pedagogy to virtual instruction in the realm of EFL necessitates the acquisition of innovative competencies by educators. Hastily implementing modifications to instructional methodologies without due prudence would impede instructors from effectively delivering lessons in online learning environments. Consequently, this shortfall in adaptability would result in instructors falling short of students' anticipated outcomes.

In contrast to Ben's perception, Daisy, a female participant who appreciated her teacher's ICT skills, voiced concern over a different issue. She noted that while her teacher adeptly employed online applications, the excessive use of such tools often led to a disorganized lesson structure. She elucidated,

My instructor is quite the savant when it comes to ICT. He integrates up to four or five different online applications into a single lesson. While initially engaging, the novelty soon wanes, leaving me feeling overwhelmed and fatigued (Daisy; Female, Interview).

As Van et al. (2021) posit, while ICT serves as an efficacious tool for teaching and learning English, it should be used judiciously. The goal of ICT use should be to facilitate the transmission of knowledge, not to supplant the teacher's role in the learning environment. Overreliance on ICT in English classrooms can, as the above excerpt highlights, lead to adverse learning circumstances. EFL teachers should strategize on the most effective deployment of ICT, contemplating considerations such as the optimal number of applications to be used, the ideal duration for ICT uses in a single lesson, and so forth. Additionally, given the diverse needs of different students, it is essential to administer diagnostic assessments to ascertain their specific needs and preferences in the online learning context.

Interestingly, another challenge related to teachers surfaced in the following excerpt by Feng:

I sense a strong disinclination towards online teaching in my instructor, as evidenced by his frequent complaints. While I understand the fatigue associated with prolonged periods at home, his negativity tends to dampen my motivation for learning (Feng; Female, Interview).

As indicated in the preceding passage, the dispositions of educators towards online teaching and learning can pose a substantial barrier to the achievement of successful outcomes in online education. Wijnen et al. (2021) observe that teachers' attitudes towards the utilization of ICT tools exert significant influence on the academic achievements of students within virtual learning environments. In the absence of favorable dispositions towards online instruction, EFL teachers may experience a notable decline in both their patience and motivation to impart knowledge. Consequently, the manifestation of their grievances becomes increasingly prevalent and deliberate.

Similar to traditional teaching and learning environments, EFL teachers continue to play a pivotal role in the online classroom. Thus, it is evident that when EFL teachers grapple with online teaching, the learning experiences of their students are adversely affected. As per the experiences shared by the EFL students participating in the current study, teacher-related challenges such as inadequate ICT skills and negative attitudes towards online learning and teaching contributed to less than satisfactory online learning experiences.

Student-related challenges

The experiential dimensions of English acquisition in a physical classroom contrast starkly with those in a virtual setting. In traditional classrooms, students have direct, face-to-face interaction, facilitating a clear understanding of the teacher's attentional focus. However, such cues can be challenging to discern in an online format facilitated via camera-based interaction. This difference has significant implications for the interaction between EFL teachers and their students, which is considered a vital determinant of the quality of English instruction and learning. Similar to EFL teachers, a number of students in this study felt unprepared when confronted with online learning. Hence, the shift from conventional learning to a virtual modality was a jarring transition for many. Andy, a male student, shared,

The novelty of online learning was initially a challenge for me to navigate (Andy; Male, Interview).

As Burnes (2015) articulates, change often encounters resistance, which is a natural response. For a transformation to be successful, it must be perceived as viable (Cunningham et al., 2005). Hence, it is crucial to augment students' understanding of the benefits of online learning prior to initiating such a change. Andy's narrative underscores that the lack of preparatory sessions to familiarize students with online learning contributed to difficulties in the online learning environment. Further, the quality of online instruction needs to be enhanced to meet students' needs; otherwise, the preference for traditional, face-to-face classrooms may persist. As a result, the potential benefits of online classes may not be fully realized.

Online learning creates a somewhat opaque learning milieu, where students can remain virtually invisible if there are no regulations mandating camera use. While preserving student privacy, the practice of turning off cameras exacerbates classroom management challenges for teachers, as it is harder to ascertain whether students are actively engaged, learning, or, in fact, sleeping. Supporting this interpretation, Chen, a female student, disclosed,

My classes typically begin at 7.00AM, when I often struggle to stay awake. Fortunately, my teacher doesn't insist on camera usage, which allows me to catch up on sleep during the initial 15-30 minutes of the lessons... I recognize that this practice is not conducive to learning, but I occasionally find it difficult to resist the temptation... (Chen; Female, Interview).

Vonderwell (2004) identified student self-regulation as a critical factor determining the effectiveness of online learning. Accordingly, students should be trained in self-regulation before transitioning to online learning. Moreover, strategies for managing online classrooms should be developed to assist teachers in ensuring student engagement. Also, the transition to online learning necessitates adaptability from EFL students to modify their learning habits (Sinaga & Pustika, 2021). However, when students' adaptability to disruptions is limited, their learning outcomes may suffer. The students in the present study reported a strong preference for the traditional, face-to-face learning environment and thus struggled to embrace the alternative modality of online learning. Feng shared,

The radical shift to online learning has been a challenging adaptation for me, given its marked divergence from my previous educational experiences... I have not participated extensively in online learning activities, and I anticipate a dip in my academic performance this semester. However, I do not attribute this to any shortcomings on my part (Feng; Female, Interview).

Further, Ben, a male student, expressed skepticism about his teacher's capabilities in online instruction, leading to negative experiences in his online learning journey. Ben stated,

I was immediately disillusioned with one of my teachers when she shared her entire screen at the outset of the course instead of just the PowerPoint presentation... Consequently, I did not have a positive experience in her online class (Ben; Male, Interview).

Rempel et al. (1985) suggest that the efficacy of a collaborative relationship can be impaired when trust is insufficiently developed or undermined. Likewise, in the absence of trust fostered through teaching and learning performances, outcomes may be unsatisfactory. Ben's experiences reveal that an erosion of trust can hamper learning progress, as a lack of trust impedes the transformation of relationships into knowledge or the realization of one's full learning potential (Curzon-Hobson, 2002). The mistrust observed here stemmed from inadequate online teaching abilities, underscoring the need for professional development training to enhance teachers' technical skills.

In summary, the paradigm shift from a traditional learning environment to an online platform has introduced several challenges for EFL students. Specifically, their academic performance may be compromised if they are resistant to change, lack motivation, or demonstrate limited adaptability to sudden changes. Additionally, mistrust in teachers' abilities can contribute to negative experiences in online learning. These conclusions are drawn based on the findings of the current study.

Living condition-related challenges

Acquiring knowledge via online modalities or home-based learning is frequently impeded by environmental distractions, such as construction noise, familial conversations, television programs, and other related disturbances. These factors generate a significant amount of noise, detrimentally influencing students' online learning experiences. As posited by Teo et al. (2022), the pervasive noise in students' surroundings makes it challenging to maintain concentration during online learning and assessment activities. Eliza, a female student, expressed,

While I engage in my learning, my parents concurrently awaken and indulge in watching television news to stay informed. Although this creates a somewhat noisy environment, I am unable to request them to discontinue... (Eliza; Female, Interview).

Iqbal et al. (2021) suggest that parents should assume responsibility for mitigating the auditory interference to facilitate effective online learning for their children. The implementation of a home-based noise reduction system could be an advantageous approach, potentially allowing parents to keep abreast of current affairs whilst ensuring an effective learning environment for their children.

Moreover, noise disruptions can originate from the educators themselves. The opportunity to work from home can enable teachers to attend to family responsibilities; however, familial issues, such as children's crying or familial disputes, can inadvertently interrupt the online class. Daisy shared,

My teacher, a dedicated family man, often has his active and adorable son making appearances during his classes. Regrettably, when the child cries, the class is inevitably affected... (Daisy; Female, Interview).

Noise is a significant factor influencing students' performance in online learning (Esra & Sevilen, 2021). The stay-at-home orders may provide EFL teachers with an ideal opportunity to attend to their family members. However, it is crucial to bear in mind their primary obligation as educators. EFL teachers are thus advised to minimize potential distractions in their home environment to maintain their focus on teaching.

The inadequacy of learning devices was also highlighted by the students as a barrier to their online learning. Ben and Daisy articulated,

My laptop, a decade-old device, is no longer adequate for my online learning needs. However, my parents' financial constraints prevent the purchase of a newer model. Consequently, I strive to extract the maximum learning value, refraining from complaining about my outdated device (Ben; Male, Interview).

I use my economically priced smartphone for online learning. The term 'smartphone' does not necessarily imply advanced capabilities... Hence, it offers limited utility for my online learning needs." (Daisy; Female, Interview).

Effective online learning for EFL students is contingent upon the availability of efficient learning tools (Ahmad, 2016; Wahab & Iskandar, 2020). This study was conducted in the Mekong region, characterized as an economically disadvantaged area (Garschagen et al., 2012). Many rural families cannot afford to invest in high-end devices, making financial assistance essential. However, with the pandemic-induced strain on the state budget, the expected support might be insufficient.

Poor internet connectivity was another demotivating factor for students' online learning. Andy and Feng expressed,

My frequently unstable network connection results in gaps in my lesson comprehension. This necessitates seeking assistance from my teacher or peers, which can sometimes be bothersome (Andy; Male, Interview).

The issues I encounter are not with my phone but rather my erratic wireless network connection. It is immensely frustrating when a weak connection prevents me from comprehending my teacher's discourse (Feng; Female, Interview).

A reliable internet connection is critical for effective online learning (Nashruddin et al., 2020). According to Huy (2019), inhabitants of the Mekong delta experience difficulties with internet connectivity, primarily due to the high costs associated with limited network capacity.

In addition, the economic limitations of the EFL students in this study were evident in their learning privacy. Specifically, Eliza depicted her study space as follows:

Establishing a private learning space is particularly challenging, given the solitary computer in my household, which isn't specifically allocated to me. There are instances when my parents require immediate access to the computer, resulting in unavoidable interruptions to my learning (Eliza; Female, Interview).

Eliza's account indicates her learning focus is compromised due to inadequate study space. Zhong (2008) contends that EFL students' performance can be adversely affected by spatial constraints. Therefore, to facilitate online learning, it is encouraged that EFL students' parents create a conducive learning space that safeguards their children's privacy. For instance, devising alternative solutions to manage urgent matters could prevent disruptions to their children's online learning.

Conclusion

The current investigation identified numerous obstacles that EFL students typically encounter in the context of online learning, which were categorized into three distinct clusters. These encompassed challenges related to instructors, obstacles that were student-centric, and difficulties tied to the living conditions of both teachers and students. Pertaining to the teacher-related challenges, instructors' inadequacy in harnessing ICT tools, coupled with their attitudes towards virtual teaching, had detrimental effects on EFL students' online learning experience. With regard to the student-related challenges, students' resistance to the transition from conventional face-to-face instruction to online learning, their diminished motivation in the digital learning environment, their limited adaptability, as well as the emergence of their skepticism in their instructors' abilities, were identified as impediments to their online learning performance. Lastly, as per the living condition-related challenges, the inadequacy of educational devices, subpar internet connectivity, the absence of privacy or designated learning spaces, and environmental noise served to impede students' optimization of their learning advancement.

In light of the findings from this study, it is advisable to devise remedial strategies targeted at bolstering teachers' capabilities in utilizing ICT tools. Specifically, facilitating training sessions focused on honing their proficiency in deploying ICT resources in their (virtual) classrooms would be highly beneficial. Furthermore, EFL teachers should be cognizant of their pivotal role in influencing their students' learning outcomes, irrespective of the mode of instruction (online or offline). Exhibiting positive attitudes towards their pedagogical responsibilities is of utmost importance. Consequently, the presence of instructors who display negative attitudes towards their students or their teaching duties is unequivocally unacceptable.

Regarding the students, there needs to be an enhancement in their awareness of the unpredictable future they are likely to encounter, which could potentially include challenges like online learning. Accepting online learning as a viable alternative in situations that preclude conventional face-to-face interactions with their instructors is crucial. This, in turn, necessitates that the instructors devise appropriate teaching methodologies to elevate the standard of online education.

Moreover, in the event of an unforeseen predicament necessitating a shift from traditional to online learning, it is anticipated that policymakers respond promptly and effectively to provide the best conditions for online learning. As such, astute strategies that

can foresee and prepare for worst-case scenarios should be in place. The better the preparatory measures, the more suitable the proposed solutions will be.

This qualitative research involved the participation of six learners, providing significant and valuable insights. Nevertheless, the resulting findings do not possess the capacity to generalize the entirety of the challenges experienced in the context of online English education within Vietnam. In addition, the utilization of semi-structured interviews only served to gather students' self-reports. Consequently, these findings may not accurately depict the comprehensive state of occurrences within the virtual classrooms. In light of the identified limitations, it is advisable that subsequent studies consider expanding the sample size and diversify the data collection methodologies, possibly incorporating tools such as questionnaires or classroom observations. Further, to enhance the depth of understanding for those intrigued by this subject, future research may benefit from gathering data from EFL instructors. Moreover, the question concerning how Vietnamese policy-makers have strategized to confront potential challenges post the global management of COVID-19 represents an area worth further exploration.

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