Challenges Vietnamese EFL Students Faced When Learning and Meeting the Requirements of B1 English Language Proficiency

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Abstract—Learning and meeting the requirements of English language proficiency focused on the Western model of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) are required as essential learning outcomes of higher education programs for English as a foreign language (EFL) learners. However, university students may face difficulties in the process of learning and meeting the requirements of their English language proficiency. To address this gap, this descriptive study was conducted to explore the challenges Vietnamese EFL students encountered in learning and meeting the requirements of their English language proficiency. Participants were sixty Vietnamese EFL students majoring in Odonto-stomatology (Oral maxillofacial surgery) from a university in the Mekong Delta. Two core research instruments were utilized in this study consisting of a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. Results revealed that the challenges university students faced when learning and meeting the requirements of B1 English language proficiency were significant. It was challenging for university students to achieve level B1 English language proficiency within the CEFR of Vietnam in terms of test-related, candidate-related, and environment-related challenges. The findings of this study could assist students in being aware of their linguistic knowledge and necessary skills so that they have abilities to apply appropriate ways for learning and meeting the requirements of the standards of level B1 English language proficiency in the context of Vietnam.

Index Terms—challenges, English language proficiency, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), Vietnamese EFL students

I. INTRODUCTION

With its globally present nature, English plays a paramount role all over the world (Crystal, 2008; Tamimi Sa'd, 2018). As Vietnam integrates into the world in all aspects, the demand for using English has also increased (Huynh, 2020). Therefore, the educational system in Vietnam has applied The Foreign Language Proficiency Assessment Exam with the global scale to assist learners in achieving their personal aims including employee recruitment, higher positions, salary increase, entrance and graduation requirements for master's educational programs, and the admission of Vietnamese EFL students for university training programs (Truong, 2016). In the real context of the present study, Vietnamese EFL students have to complete four General English modules for their university curriculum. However, students can choose to take the test of the standards of level B1 English language proficiency instead of following the four General English modules in university.

Pham (2019) proved that reaching an English B1 level certificate is a huge challenge for Vietnamese EFL learners. Particularly, they faced difficulties in the competence of reaching knowledge connected with language skills and meeting the proficiency of English level B1 (Nguyen, 2003). Realizing the challenges Vietnamese EFL students encountered in learning and meeting the requirements of B1 English language proficiency, the study on "Challenges Vietnamese EFL students faced when learning and meeting the requirements of B1 English language proficiency" was carried out to figure out the difficulties the students face when they learn and reach the proficiency of English level B1 and gain the students' perceptions of the challenges in their learning process. For these reasons above, this present study seeks the answer for the research question as follows:

What are Vietnamese EFL students' perceptions of challenges in learning and meeting the requirements of B1 English language proficiency?

It is hoped that the research will contribute insights that can support Vietnamese EFL students to improve their English language proficiency based on the standards of the CEFR in Vietnam. Additionally, English language educators might gain a real perspective on applying and implementing the standards of CEFR in Vietnam. More specifically, they can learn about the considerable challenges that Vietnamese EFL students face in learning and meeting the requirements of English language proficiency at the B1 level. It is, therefore, necessary to examine this relatively under-researched issue to contribute to a better understanding of how students deal with the obstacles in the process of learning and meeting the standards of English language proficiency.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Description of the Western Model to Assess English Language Proficiency

The Western-based model to assess English language proficiency is known as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) which was designed in 2001 by the Council of Europe. It is created to evaluate the competence of the English language proficiency level of learners. According to the Council of Europe (2001), learners are evaluated on their English language proficiency level through four language skills including listening, speaking, reading, and writing with six reference levels: A-Basic Learner (including A1 Post Beginner: 'Breakthrough' and A2 Pre-intermediate: 'Way stage'); B-Independent Learner (including B1 Pre-1st Certificate: 'Threshold' and B2 1st Certificate: 'Vantage'); and C-Proficient Learner (including C1 Advanced: 'Effective Operational Proficiency' and C2 Proficiency: 'Mastery'; not native-speaker competence).

According to the Council of Europe (2001), the core purpose of the CEFR is to assist learners to demonstrate their levels of language proficiency in existing standards, tests, and examinations. Therefore, it is convenient for learners in comparison with other systems of qualification.

B. Description of the Common European Framework Reference for Languages in Vietnam (CEFR-V)

In 2008, the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) issued Decision 1400 associated with the instructions of Project 2020 for fundamental change in the foreign language education operation in the period from 2008 to 2020, which stipulates a national framework for Vietnam based on the Common European Framework Reference for Languages (CEFR) with detailed descriptions of reference levels from A1 (Basic Learners) to B1 (Independent Learners). The national framework named the Common European Framework Reference for Languages in Vietnam (CEFR-V) is adapted and implemented for curriculum development, course materials update, teaching plans, and assessment. According to the Official Dispatch No. 792/BGDĐT/NGCBQLGD dated on February 25th, 2014 (MOET, 2014), the purpose of the CEFR-V requires that students who leave schools will achieve a minimum level of English language proficiency. As for Vietnamese EFL students in university, the requirements of English language proficiency level after completing the university program is level 3 (B1) of CEFR-V. This level is approximately at the Threshold level of CEFR in the Western-based model in which language learners achieve the fundamental functions in a particular language. For students who major in English Studies, English Translation and Interpretation or English Teacher Education, it is C1, or Effective Operational Proficiency level. Masters students of all majors are required to achieve B1 of English language proficiency before entering their master's program. Additionally, Doctor of Philosophy candidates have to reach B2 of English language proficiency before starting to follow their Ph.D. track.

On the other hand, to meet the requirements of the MOET, it is reported that the government's targets for English language proficiency were ambitious (Hamid & Jahan, 2015; Nguyen et al., 2016; Pham, 2017). The survey of this study figured out that only one of five learners reached target levels. Besides that, Nguyen and Hamid (2020) indicated reasons for not achieving the English language proficiency related to teacher professional development 'lack of resources and out-dated teaching methods much focus on traditional grammar approach'. Therefore, the MOET has planned a number of policies to implement innovations in English language teaching and learning through 2025.

Focused on the descriptions of the model of CEFR-V, this research paper looks into difficulties of learning and meeting the requirements of B1 English language proficiency of Vietnamese EFL students to help them reach level 3 of CEFR-V (B1). To attain this level, university students have to clearly understand the framework of the test. Besides that, learners also must have background knowledge related to various topics to support their developing language skills for the test. Finally, learners should utilize strategies to help them attain their target scores in the examination.

C. Challenges in Learning and Meeting the Requirements of English Language Proficiency

Relevant studies shed light on obstacles which learners faced in learning to reach the English language proficiency. According to Tomlinson (2014), a teacher might have difficulty in teaching English to help students achieve their target English language proficiency. This relates to candidates' factors. Particularly, candidates with different levels in a classroom will be a challenge for the teachers since they are multileveled. Moreover, Truong and Dang (2017) articulated that the biggest challenge for learning and meeting the requirements of B1 English language proficiency was an environment for using and practising English in the Vietnamese EFL context. Additionally, Le (1999) stated that students lack motivation to learn English due to lack of a real context for using English to communicate. Importantly, Mai (2014) figured out that students lack real-life scenarios to practise English speaking outside the classroom. This viewpoint is similar with the results of Pham's (2019) study.

In conclusion, it is well evidenced that there are three striking factors which affect learners having difficulty in learning and meeting the requirements of B1 English language proficiency: the test, candidate, and environment.

D. Previous Studies on Attaining English Language Proficiency of Learners

A few researchers have conducted studies related to attaining English language proficiency of learners. Kanokrat (2015) investigated English Learning Strategies that first-year English majors utilized in the process of learning English to achieve their targets of English language proficiency in Thailand. The core purpose of the study was to figure out English language learning strategies popularly used by these students. In this study, six direct and indirect language learning strategies were listed. The findings of the study showed that there was a difference between the students' application of English language strategies and their levels of English language proficiency. In particular, English

language strategies used depended on the level of English language proficiency of students. Therefore, it is concluded that the main factor affecting students' English language proficiency was learners. Additionally, Wee (2003) provided the understanding of implementing and promoting policy in language education based on CEFR. She reflected that the graduate students who failed to reach the level expectation of language proficiency competence focused on the Western-based model of CEFR: "the university could not compete in the market [of foreign language education in Vietnam]". Further, she gives emphasis to the difficulties rather than the opportunities generated by the CEFR on four main features including the lack of reliable and valid standards of the CEFR, the lack of the model of CEFR awareness and comprehending of language teachers, the policy of CEFR, and the commercial nature of the CEFR framework.

Back to the context of Vietnam, Duong and Trinh (2016) had a perspective of CEFR-V policy and practice in a higher education institution in the Mekong Delta. This study provides a general viewpoint of the national project on foreign language improvement. In specific, a national framework of CEFR with six levels is formed to evaluate teachers and students' English language proficiency. From 2015, this project is conducted with aiming at enabling Vietnamese EFL students in non-English major classes to reach level 3 (B1) of this CEFR-V model. With a general picture of Vietnam, it is very challenging for many tertiary institutes to attain targets of English language proficiency because of the policies and practices of the CEFR-V model. The results of this study showed that there are two proposed pedagogical practices involving student orientation and enhanced activities. Furthermore, students claimed that instructional quality of CEFR-V is complicated. Vietnamese EFL students expressed their perspectives that they need more essential materials for preparing and meeting the requirements of B1 English language proficiency including material selections, facilities and test formats. With test formats, students hope that they can expose practice tests explicitly with corresponding learning curriculum and test formats. Particularly, the purpose of implementing CEFR-V is to help students develop English speaking skills in a real context. It meant that English language proficiency has to be attached to communication context. To become involved with students' classroom performance, the practices of the CEFR-V model should be community-based and use enhanced activities to guide students in self-directed learning and co-operative and problem-based learning. Therefore, these might assist students in improving their lifelong learning strategies. In addition, the low level of English language proficiency of Vietnamese EFL students is also a challenging feature which affects learning and meeting the requirements of B1 English language proficiency.

In Truong and Dang's (2017) study, EFL students' perspectives of achieving the standard-based proficiency level at a central university in Vietnam are presented. Data were collected through qualitative and quantitative methods using a questionnaire and an in-depth interview respectively. Participants of the study were 105 Vietnamese EFL students in a central university in Vietnam. Results revealed that most EFL students had a positive perception of reaching the B1 English language proficiency level as required in their training curriculum. The highlighted point of this study was specific activities for assisting students to be able to attain the standard-based English language proficiency based on the CEFR model in Vietnam. Additionally, Vietnamese EFL students faced challenges in learning and meeting the requirements of B1 English language proficiency involving the size of class, laziness of students, time limitation for students to learn, lack of facilities, abundant activities designed by the lecturers, using L1 in the classroom, lack of self-confidence and students' passiveness.

From the findings of these studies above, it is considered that English language proficiency of learners plays a crucial role in students' professional development. Considering the difficulties in learning and meeting the requirements of B1 English language proficiency for students also is an important point to assist them to have experience for achieving their target scores for the CEFR-V examination. In the real context of a public university in the Mekong Delta, the results of the present study might contribute to the literature and provide valuable insights for Vietnamese EFL students in non-English major classes in terms of achieving B1 English language proficiency level.

III. METHODS

A. Participants and Context

Participants were 60 Vietnamese EFL students at pre-intermediate level (female =24; male =36) majoring in Odonto-stomatology (Oral maxillofacial surgery) at a public university in Vietnam. Their ages are from 19 to 22 years old. Their average number of years of learning English was 12 years. At the time of conducting this study, they have just finished the second term of the second-year of the university program at school. It means they completed four modules of General English at university and their language proficiency was reported to be appropriately B1 level on the CEFR in Vietnam.

B. Measurement Instruments

With an effort to investigate challenges Vietnamese EFL students faced when they learn and meet the requirements of B1 English language proficiency in their university curriculum, a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview were designed to measure students' perceptions of challenges they had in the process of learning and meeting English standards.

(a). Questionnaire

The items of the questionnaire were mainly adapted from Truong and Dang (2017). The time for conducting the survey questionnaire was from 20 to 22 April 2023. A total of 60 questionnaires were collected for the final analysis phase. The structure of the questionnaire included two central parts. The first part of the questionnaire addressed the demographic information of the participants involving gender, age, major, and years of learning English. The second part of the questionnaire presented three Clusters with 35 items that were developed to probe the real subject of the present study which aims to find out difficulties in learning and meeting the requirements of B1 English language proficiency of learners. The form of the questionnaire was a Likert scale with responses ranging from '1' (Strongly Disagree) to '5' (Strongly Agree). Before giving the questionnaire to the participants, the researcher had an orientation for completing this questionnaire survey. Each participant had a 15-20 minute time required to complete this questionnaire. Table 1 describes the reliability of the questionnaire.

TABLE 1
THE RELIABILITY OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.86	35

(b). Interview

Interviews were a supporting tool for collecting the qualitative data. The questions of the interview mainly focused on main research objectives. However, some further questions for participants were proposed if necessary. The contribution of participants' ideas could provide more qualitative responses. Additionally, participants who participated in the interview could provide answers naturally and be more comfortable.

The interview participants involved in the present study were 7 second-year students who major in Odonto-stomatology (Oral maxillofacial surgery) including 3 males and 4 females in two different classes in the School of Odonto- stomatology in university.

1. Design of the Interview

With the primary aim of confirming the results from the questionnaire and getting further information in relation to the challenges university students faced when learning and meeting the requirements of B1 English language proficiency, interviews were done after the implementation of the questionnaire. The interview consisted of five questions. Firstly, question 1 elicited information on the general challenges university students faced when learning and meeting the requirements of B1 English language proficiency. Secondly, questions 2, 3, and 4 were designed to confirm and find out more university students' attitudes towards the challenges related to test, candidate, and environment factors that students faced in learning English. Lastly, question 5 was set to give implications of learning English to meet the requirements of B1 English language proficiency for university students.

2. Administering the Interview

The interview was done after the analysis of the questionnaire. Seven out of sixty Vietnamese EFL students were chosen for the interview. Each individual was interviewed in around 10 to 15 minutes. All the participants' responses were recorded and transcribed. After that, they were translated into English.

After finishing the interview with the 7 participants, the results of the interview revealed that all of the interviewees reported they met challenges when learning and meeting the requirements of B1 English language proficiency. Moreover, the findings of the interview confirmed that most of the university students had common challenges in learning and meeting the requirements of B1 English proficiency related to test, candidate, and environment.

IV. RESULTS

A. Challenges EFL Students Faced When Learning and Meeting the Requirements of B1 English Language Proficiency

TABLE 2
THE MEAN SCORE OF CHALLENGES EFL STUDENTS FACED WHEN LEARNING AND MEETING THE REQUIREMENTS OF B1 ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

	One-Sample Statistics			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Mean	60	3.7	.42	.10

A One-Sample T-test was run to check whether there was a difference between the mean score of challenges university students faced when learning and meeting the requirements of B1 English language proficiency (M=3.7) and a test of 4.0. The result showed that the difference was not statistically significant (t = -2.73; p = .016). It is concluded that Vietnamese EFL students have considerable difficulties in the process of learning and meeting the requirements of B1 English language proficiency.

B. Test-Related Challenges EFL Students Faced When Learning and Meeting the Requirements of B1 English Language Proficiency

TABLE 3
OVERALL MEAN SCORE OF EFL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF TEST-RELATED CHALLENGES WHEN LEARNING AND MEETING THE REQUIREMENTS OF B1 ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

	N	Min	Max	M	SD
Test-related	60	1.13	5	3.36	.73
Valid (listwide)	60				

Table 3 shows the overall mean score of EFL students' perceptions of challenges related to test factors when learning and meeting the requirements of B1 English language proficiency. The first Cluster of the questionnaire presented challenges related to testing that students faced when learning and meeting the requirements of B1 English language proficiency. The overall mean score of this Cluster was M = 3.36, SD = .73 which presented for 'neutral' level based on a five-scale questionnaire. It is concluded that Vietnamese EFL students did not face significant challenges related to testing when learning and meeting the requirements of B1 English language proficiency.

TABLE 4
EFL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF CHALLENGES RELATED TO TEST WHEN LEARNING AND MEETING THE REQUIREMENTS OF B1 ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

Items of Cluster 1 (Test-related)	N	Min	Max	M	SD
1. Being difficult to remember meaning of new words	60	1.00	5.00	3.46	1.30
2. Being difficult to pronounce and then remember the new words	60	1.00	5.00	3.80	1.32
3. Not guessing the meaning of new words in reading texts	60	1.00	5.00	3.33	1.11
4. Being difficult to combine words together	60	1.00	5.00	3.66	1.17
5. Not recognising the word's part of speech	60	1.00	5.00	3.40	1.45
6. Not understanding and using verb tenses and forms	60	1.00	5.00	3.46	1.18
7. Not recognising and using unfamiliar structures	60	1.00	5.00	3.53	1.18
8. Not understanding and identifying the types of sentences	60	1.00	5.00	3.13	1.40
9. Not guessing new words in the contexts	60	1.00	5.00	2.93	1.33
10. Not scanning the text for specific information	60	1.00	5.00	2.73	1.22
11. Not skimming the text for general information	60	1.00	5.00	2.93	1.22
12. Not predicting the content of the texts	60	1.00	5.00	2.93	1.22
13. Not summarizing the content of the texts	60	1.00	5.00	3.40	1.12
14. Having a lot of new vocabulary and phrases in the listening activity	60	2.00	5.00	4.13	.99
15. Finding difficulties to get general understanding of the spoken text from the first time	60	2.00	5.00	4.20	.86
Valid N (listwise)	60				

Table 4 represents the common obstacles EFL students faced when learning and meeting the requirements of B1 English language proficiency. Overall, challenges related to testing from university students' perspectives were insignificant. Particularly, the most common challenges that university students had when learning and meeting the requirements of B1 English language proficiency involve language skills in the test. In listening skills of the test, the amount of vocabulary and phrases represented in the test might pose a challenge for them to comprehend during listening activities, with this question reaching the mean score of 4.13. Additionally, they also faced difficulty in getting general understanding of the spoken text from the first time in the listening skill with a mean score slightly high (M=4.20, SD =.86). Besides that, university students found it difficult to pronounce and remember new words and combine words together, with the mean score 3.80 and 3.66, respectively. In the design of the test, unfamiliar structures were also a challenge for candidates to understand with M = 3.53, SD = 1.18. However, it is obvious that scanning the text for specific information is not a big challenge for university students when they take B1 English language proficiency test (M = 2.83, SD = 1.12).

The results of the semi-structured interview concentrated on the Cluster 1 with the overall mean score in the questionnaire (M= 3.36). One student stated as follows:

"I practice and do many B1 examinations in listening skills on the Internet, but I cannot improve my listening ability because in listening tests, there are a lot of new words and phrases".

Another idea: *"I have a lot of challenges related to test in my learning English at university. For listening skills, it is hard for me to understand new words and unfamiliar structures. Moreover, it is very difficult for me to get general information in listening assignment from the first time; for reading skills: I cannot guess the meaning of new words in reading texts".*

According to other interviewees, they shared their own challenges in the following: *"I often face challenges related to listening and reading skills because in my viewpoints, these skills consist of new words and phrases. It is challenging for me to conquer the language proficiency".*

From mentioned challenges above, it seems that they nearly had similar perspectives on challenges related to testing. Among four skills of English language proficiency, listening and reading are considered as the most challenging skills for students to attain B1 English language proficiency.

C. Candidate-Related Challenges EFL Students Faced When Learning and Meeting the Requirements of B1 English Language Proficiency

TABLE 5
OVERALL MEAN SCORE OF EFL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF CANDIDATE-RELATED CHALLENGES WHEN LEARNING AND MEETING THE REQUIREMENTS OF B1 ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

	N	Min	Max	M	SD
Candidate-related	60	2.28	5	4.03	.40
Valid (listwide)	60				

Table 5 above shows the overall mean score of Vietnamese EFL students' perceptions of difficulties related to candidate in learning and meeting the requirements of B1 English language proficiency. The overall mean score of Cluster 2 was M = 4.03, SD = .40 which was significantly high. This meant that university students faced significant challenges in this area when learning and meeting the requirements of B1 English language proficiency. Particularly, Table 6 shows Vietnamese EFL students' perceptions of detailed challenges related to candidate that they encountered in learning and meeting the requirements of B1 English language proficiency.

TABLE 6
EFL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF CHALLENGES RELATED TO CANDIDATE WHEN LEARNING AND MEETING THE REQUIREMENTS OF B1 ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

Items of Cluster 2 (Candidate-related)	N	Min	Max	M	SD
16. Having limited time of practising at class	60	2.00	5.00	4.26	.88
17. Being hard to understand well when speakers speak too fast	60	1.00	5.00	4.26	1.03
18. Being hard to understand well when speakers speak with a variety of accents	60	1.00	5.00	4.20	1.14
19. Stopping listening when I have problems in understanding	60	3.00	5.00	3.86	.74
20. Not coming up with the words like how to express your thoughts	60	3.00	5.00	4.00	.53
21. Not knowing the appropriate use of words	60	3.00	5.00	4.13	.63
22. Getting trouble in sentence structures	60	1.00	5.00	3.26	1.27
23. Lacking of ideas to write	60	2.00	5.00	3.80	.94
24. Lacking of coherence, consolidation of knowledge when writing	60	2.00	5.00	4.13	.74
25. Lacking of using formal transitional and cohesive devices in your writing	60	2.00	5.00	3.53	.91
26. Lacking of self-confidence	60	3.00	5.00	4.26	.88
27. Feeling shy or afraid to speak or express your ideas	60	2.00	5.00	4.00	1.06
28. Often having mistakes on grammatical points with your speaking performance	60	4.00	5.00	4.53	.51
29. Lacking of vocabulary to speak	60	3.00	5.00	4.40	.73
Valid N (listwise)	60				

It is clear from the Table 6 above, the most challenge that students met when learning and meeting the requirements of B1 English language proficiency was with grammatical mistakes. Specifically, they have mistakes on grammatical points with their speaking performance (M = 4.53, SD = .51). Besides that, the second biggest challenge students faced was that when students speak on a detailed topic, they do not have enough vocabulary to express their ideas with M = 4.40, SD =.73. Additionally, students have difficulties in lacking self-confidence (M = 4.26, SD = .88). Looking at the details, there are two items which got the same mean score of 4.26. Students stated that they have time limitations for practising. Similarly, they perceived that they have difficulties comprehending when speakers speak too fast. However, it can be seen that having trouble with sentence structures is the smallest challenge related to candidate with M = 3.26, SD = 1.27.

The results from the interview explore more about higher education students' perceptions of challenges related to candidate in their attaining the standards of English language proficiency B1 level. An interviewee said *"To attain the standard-based English language proficiency B1 level, I faced many challenges related to myself such as lack of knowledge related to structures and lack of vocabulary. In learning English to meet the requirements of B1 English language proficiency at university, I recognize that my knowledge related to grammatical points is not enough, especially complex structures. Moreover, I lack vocabulary to write or express ideas in my writing performance"*. Likewise, another interviewee had a similar view, *"I think it is very challenging for me to present my ideas in writing skills because the amount of vocabulary I have. In addition, I face to interview or talk to foreigners; I do not have much vocabulary to communicate with them"*. Results from the interviews revealed that university students faced significant

challenges in achieving the standards of English proficiency B1 level including lack of vocabulary to write or express ideas, lack of time for practice, lack of knowledge related to grammatical structures, and lack of self-confidence in speaking performance.

D. Environment-Related Challenges EFL Students Faced When Learning and Meeting the Requirements of B1 English Language Proficiency

TABLE 7
OVERALL MEAN SCORE OF EFL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF ENVIRONMENT-RELATED CHALLENGES WHEN LEARNING AND MEETING THE REQUIREMENTS OF B1 ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

	N	Min	Max	M	SD
Environment-related	60	2.28	5	3.77	.27
Valid (listwide)	60				

Table 7 above presents the overall mean score of Vietnamese EFL students' perceptions of difficulties related to environment in learning and meeting the requirements of B1 English language proficiency. The overall mean score of Cluster 3 was M = 3.77, SD = .27 which was significantly high. This meant that university students' obstacles related to environment when learning and meeting the requirements of B1 English language proficiency were considerable. In particular, Table 8 presents Vietnamese EFL students' perceptions of detailed challenges related to environment that they had in learning and meeting the requirements of B1 English language proficiency.

TABLE 8
EFL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF CHALLENGES RELATED TO ENVIRONMENT WHEN LEARNING AND MEETING THE REQUIREMENTS OF B1 ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

Items of Cluster 3 (Environment-related)	N	Min	Max	M	SD
30. Listening poor quality CDs and CD players	60	1.00	5.00	3.80	1.26
31. Not using dictionary effectively to improve writing skills	60	3.00	5.00	3.97	.718
32. Visual aids do not affect to learning vocabulary	60	2.00	5.00	3.50	.630
33. Not applying social sites in language classroom	60	2.00	5.00	3.83	.691
34. English videos do not improve speaking skills	60	1.00	5.00	3.76	1.17
35. Mock tests do not help to do the actual tests well	60	3.00	5.00	3.80	.714
Valid N (listwise)	60				

Table 8 illustrates specific challenges related to environment that Vietnamese EFL students encountered in the process of learning and meeting the requirements of B1 English language proficiency. From the Table above, it is clear that most participants claimed that they did not use dictionaries effectively to improve their writing skills (M = 3.97, SD = .718). The second challenge that they faced in the classroom is that they lack support from their teachers in applying social sites with the mean score of 3.83 and SD = .691. Moreover, the poor quality of CDs and CD players and the design of mock tests are also two obstacles of Vietnamese EFL students, with M = 3.8, SD = 1.26 and M = 3.8, SD =.714, respectively. Furthermore, English videos are perceived to not improve speaking skills of students in the process of learning and meeting the requirements of B1 English language proficiency (M = 3.76, SD = 1.17). Finally, it is considered that these participants also have problems with learning vocabulary through visual aids (M = 3.5, SD = .630).

Additionally, these interviewees also expressed their ideas through the results from the interviews. Participants' perceptions of the challenges related to environment included the following:

"Some challenges related to facilities and environment such as lack of environment to practice English speaking, the quality of CDs, the format of mock tests and the outdoor noise sources". In some cases, the students revealed that: "Students at my university lack of environment to practice speaking with native speakers and foreigners to improve and develop their speaking ability".

In specific, the main feature in gaining the required standard level today relates to insufficient facilities that exert an influence on learning English language by Vietnamese EFL students. The quality of lessons in class is not effective if the class is not equipped adequately with facilities. For instance, headphones used for listening classes are not good enough; therefore, students cannot complete the listening section in the lesson.

In conclusion, the challenges university students faced when learning and meeting the requirements of B1 English language proficiency are very significant. It is challenging for university students in achieving the standards of English language proficiency B1 level within the CEFR of Vietnam including candidate-related, test-related, and environment-related challenges. On the other hand, the most crucial element is that learners should try their best to be able to attain the expected achievement because the aim is realistic and it affects their future substantially. Furthermore, from the existing challenges, students suggested detailed plans for developing their English language proficiency in the future.

V. CONCLUSIONS

This study investigated challenges when learning and meeting the requirements of B1 English language proficiency among 60 Vietnamese EFL students. Particularly, it explored which challenges affect the process of learning and meeting the standards of B1 English language proficiency. Employing exploratory factor analysis, it is concluded that

Vietnamese EFL students encountered significant challenges in the learning and meeting the requirements of B1 English language proficiency. Nevertheless, university students faced candidate-related challenges and environment-related challenges more than test-related challenges. Due to challenges that the students encountered in learning and meeting the requirements of B1 English language proficiency, they ought to have action plans for the process of attaining the requirements of B1 English language proficiency based on the CEFR in Vietnam. Moreover, university students themselves are the most determining factor to be able to reach the expected targets in learning and meeting the standards of English language proficiency B1 level within the CEFR-V.

VI. IMPLICATIONS

Focused on the findings of the study, some pedagogical implications were indicated. Firstly, most Vietnamese EFL students have problems related to candidate and environment in learning and meeting the requirements of B1 English language proficiency. In terms of candidate-related challenges, they often make mistakes in grammatical structures when they speak. Moreover, the biggest challenge in learning English speaking skills is that they lack vocabulary to speak. In regard to environment and facilities-related challenges, university students do not how to use dictionaries effectively to learn new words. Besides that, they do not have appropriate mock tests to practice with. Therefore, instructors might play a crucial role in guiding their students in the process of learning and meeting the requirements of B1 English language proficiency. Finally, the present study also reveals that students' lack of self-confidence and their passiveness contribute to not reaching the expected achievement. Therefore, it is essential to have an immediate language environment for students to practice and improve their process of learning and meeting the standards of English language proficiency of CEFR-V.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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