

# English Learning and Teaching in Primary Schools in Rural Vietnam: A Case Study

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**Abstract**—English learning and teaching is considered an essential part of Vietnam's educational system, garnering significant attention from families, schools, and society. This study examines the current state of English learning and teaching at the primary level in rural Vietnam through a case study of Viet Thuan Primary School, Vu Thu, Thai Binh, Vietnam. The study employs a mixed-method approach, utilizing questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and classroom observation as research tools. The participants include students, teachers and parents at Viet Thuan Primary School. The results reveal that although the curriculum aligns with educational goals and students display a keen interest and positive attitudes towards learning English, their proficiency level in the language remains low. The study also identifies unique challenges and difficulties faced by both teachers and students in rural areas, including limited parental support, limited exposure to English outside the classroom, challenging textbooks, and inadequate teaching resources and time allotment. This research offers practical insights for policymakers. By understanding the challenges faced by rural schools, targeted strategies can be developed to create a more supportive learning environment for rural students. Additionally, the research findings offer valuable insights for educators, assisting them in adopting suitable teaching methods to enhance the quality of English learning and teaching in rural areas.

**Index Terms**—English learning and teaching, primary schools, rural areas, challenges

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, English has emerged as the global lingua franca, playing a dominant role in different fields, such as diplomacy, business, finance, commerce, science and technology, and education. The widespread use of English makes it essential for learners or students to acquire proficiency in the language in order to access global opportunities and enhance their personal and professional advancement (Shan & Aziz, 2022). As a result, English language teaching and learning has become an integral part of educational systems worldwide, including in non-English-speaking countries like Vietnam (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2019).

Due to the dominance of English in a globalized world, the implementation of compulsory English language education at the primary level has become an inevitable trend in nations where English is not the primary language (Do et al., 2022). However, teaching English at this level is not an easy task, especially concerning the students' early age and limited exposure to English outside the classroom (Daud, 2024). Up to now, a substantial body of research has been conducted across diverse settings to better understand the realities of English teaching and learning at this crucial stage (e.g., Angraeni & Yusuf, 2022; Do et al., 2022; Emmanuel, 2023; Falah et al., 2023; Farmasari, 2021; Laila et al., 2023; Nguyen, 2011; Purtanto et al., 2023; Rouabhia, 2023; Salim & Hanif, 2020; Sukmawati & Pujiani, 2024; Sulistiyo et al., 2020). These studies highlight unique challenges, ranging from a shortage of qualified English teachers, lack of resources, language policy changes, insufficient time allotment, inadequate teacher education, big class size, ineffective teaching approaches, limited exposure to English, low motivation, absence of curriculum guidelines, and low level of English proficiency (Farmasari, 2021; Laila et al., 2023; Purtanto et al., 2023; Salim & Hanif, 2020; Sulistiyo et al., 2020). Various remedial measures have been proposed to address these challenges and enhance the quality of English education in the future (Angraeni & Yusuf, 2022; Sulistiyo et al., 2020).

English language education in rural areas has always been a major concern in many countries worldwide due to its improper implementation and obstacles (Shan & Aziz, 2022). Studies have identified various challenges faced by both English language teachers and learners in rural settings. Some of the most common difficulties include lack of teaching resources, insufficient class time, low interest and motivation, negative attitudes towards English learning, low English proficiency, limited exposure to English outside the classroom, and lack of parental support, often compounded by low family socioeconomic status (Anggela et al., 2024; Endriyati et al., 2019; Halik & Nusrath, 2020; Khulel, 2021; Laila et al., 2023; Masturi et al., 2022; Omodan, 2020). These challenges impede students' English language acquisition and fluency, hamper the implementation of effective teaching methods, thereby hindering the progress of English language

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education in rural areas (Aziz et al., 2019; Endriyati et al., 2019; Halik & Nusrath, 2020; Hibatullah, 2019; Laila et al., 2023; Masturi et al., 2022).

In the context of Vietnam, English language education has become essential for the country's development. English is a compulsory subject in Vietnam's schools from grade 3 through grade 12 (Do et al., 2022). The Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) of Vietnam has implemented several policies to promote the learning and teaching of English from the primary level. Additionally, the teaching of English in rural areas is given priority. However, research related to primary-level English language education in rural settings remains modest. This study aims to address this research gap by investigating the current situation of English learning and teaching in rural Vietnamese primary schools to gain insights into the broader scope of foreign language education in Vietnam. The research questions include:

- 1) What is the current situation of English language teaching and learning in rural areas in Vietnam?
- 2) What are the attitudes of primary students, parents and teachers towards the textbook, curriculum, and the teaching and learning of English at the primary level in Vietnam?

## II. OVERVIEW OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING IN VIETNAM

Nguyen (2011) states that learners' acquisition of foreign languages in general and English in particular is significantly influenced by government policies towards foreign language education. This section explores Vietnam's foreign language education policies to understand the role of English in the country's education system. The history of foreign language education in Vietnam can be divided into five periods: 1945 to 1954, 1955 to 1975, 1976 to 1986, 1987 to 2000, and 2001 to the present, each of which corresponds to different phases in the nation's history. Understanding these periods helps us grasp the changes in government policies towards foreign language education over time.

During the 1945-1954 period, foreign language education was not a priority in schools, and French was only taught as an additional language in some regions of the country (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2019; Wright, 2002).

From 1955-1975, in North Vietnam, the first foreign language school offering Russian and Chinese education was established in 1958 (Tran, 2008; cited in Lam, 2011). In the South, English became a compulsory foreign language at both school and university levels, with education focusing on the cultural and political aspects of the language (Nguyen, 2011; Wright, 2002). Foreign languages received more attention during this period.

During the 1976-1986 period, following the Chinese war in 1979, Chinese, English, and French were replaced by Russian (Wright, 2002). English language teaching started to develop in Vietnam in 1986 when the government shifted its political direction to attract foreign investment (Nguyen, 2011).

From 1987-2000, the government continued to emphasize the significance of foreign language education during this time. In the 1990s, foreign languages, with English being the most popular one, were introduced as elective subjects in primary education. This period witnessed the rise of English as the most widely used language across the nation (Nguyen, 2011).

From 2001 to the present, Resolution No. 40 of the 10th National Assembly in 2001 on the renovation of general education highlighted the importance of developing a project on foreign language teaching in schools by 2010. Article 7 of the 2005 Education Law specified that compulsory foreign languages included in the national curriculum are those commonly used in international transactions (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2019). Based on these requirements, MOET proposed the "Teaching and Learning Foreign Languages in the National Education System for the Period 2008-2020" project (referred to as Project 2020) in 2001, stating that "English is a compulsory subject in all levels of general education schools by 2025" (MOET, 2016). This project was approved in 2008. In 2001, English language education was introduced in Vietnam's primary schools to enhance students' English proficiency from an early age. Currently, learning and teaching English has become more essential and widespread in Vietnam (Nguyen, 2011).

In conclusion, each historical period emphasized different aspects of foreign language education, reflecting the nation's education priorities and goals. From 1945 to 1954, foreign languages were not a priority; from 1955 to 1975, they were considered important for national development; from 1976 to 1986, they were integrated into the curriculum to support socio-economic development; from 1987 to 2000, they were included in the curriculum to facilitate the international integration and openness process of the nation; and from 2001 onwards, foreign languages are seen as essential for building a skilled and competent workforce. These policies serve as the guiding principles for foreign language teaching, learning, research, and development activities in Vietnam in recent times.

## III. METHODOLOGY

### A. Research Site

This study presents a case study of learning and teaching English at Viet Thuan Primary School, Viet Thuan Commune, Vu Thu District, Thai Binh Province, Vietnam which is about 5 kilometers from Thai Binh center. Established in 1992, the school is situated in the center of Viet Thuan Commune. It accommodates 680 students and employs 32 teachers, including 2 English language teachers.

### B. Participants

All students from grades 3 to 5 at Viet Thuan Primary School took part in the research. The numbers of participants in each class are presented in Table 1:

TABLE 1  
NUMBERS OF PARTICIPANTS BY CLASS

Grade	3				4					5			
Class	3A	3B	3C	3D	4A	4B	4C	4D	4E	5A	5B	5C	5D
Number of students	30	33	32	32	25	30	27	27	27	34	30	34	35
Total	127				136					133			
Grand total	396												

Besides, two English language teachers at the school participated in the study. One teacher, coded as T, has a bachelor's degree and 10 years of teaching experience and the other, coded as H has a bachelor's degree and 20 years of teaching experience. The participants also include 90 parents whose children are in Class 3A, 4B, and 5B at Viet Thuan Primary School.

### C. Research Method

The study utilizes both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative research method involves collecting quantifiable data and conducting statistical analyses of data gathered through questionnaires administered to students and parents. The qualitative method includes class observation and in-depth interviews with parents and teachers with two instruments: questionnaires and interviews.

The first research instrument employed is questionnaires. The eight-item, closed-ended questionnaire for students explores their attitudes towards English, English textbooks, and lesson content; self-assessment of four English skills; home self-study habits and extra tutoring experiences; and parents' perceived English proficiency level. The questionnaire for parents consists of 7 items aimed at investigating parents' awareness of the primary-level education goals and their children's English learning program; support for English learning through home tutoring and additional classes; perception of the importance of English learning; and their own perceived English proficiency level.

The second research tool is in-depth interviews. Parent interviews with a combination of closed-ended and open-ended questions delve into parental perspectives on supporting their children's English learning, their perceived importance of English education, and their self-assessed English proficiency level. Teacher interviews explore their perceived difficulties and challenges in teaching English at the primary level in a rural setting, their views on student and parent attitudes towards English learning, and their suggestions for improving the quality of English learning and teaching.

### D. Research Procedure

This experimental research was conducted in four steps:

- Step 1: Classroom observations were conducted during the 2023-2024 academic year across 13 grade 3, 4, and 5 classes at Viet Thuan Primary School to assess the students' interest and participation in English language lessons. A total of 26 lesson periods were observed with two periods for each class. These lessons included both theoretical and practice content. All lessons were recorded for further analysis. The focus of these observations was on teacher-student interactions, particularly the frequency of questioning, the accuracy of student responses, and teacher feedback.
- Step 2: Questionnaires were administered to 396 students in grades 3, 4, and 5, and 90 parents from classes 3A, 4B, and 5B at the end of the 2023-2024 academic year.
- Step 3: In-depth interviews were conducted with 30 conveniently chosen parents from classes 3A, 4B, and 5B. Additionally, interviews were held with two English language teachers at the school.
- Step 4: The collected data from the classroom observations, questionnaires, and interviews were analyzed to find out about the current situation of English language learning and teaching at Viet Thuan Primary School. The findings from this analysis will be used to draw conclusions about the broader realities of primary-level English education in rural Vietnam.

### E. English Textbooks for Primary Schools in Vietnam

The series of primary-level English textbooks, written by Hoang Van, was selected based on Decision No. 50/2003/QĐ-BGDĐT issued by MOET on October 30, 2003 (Nguyen, 2011). This decision outlines three main goals for English as an elective subject in primary education including:

- Developing basic communication skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing for everyday use;
- Providing students with basic knowledge of some English-speaking countries, including cultures, people, customs, and traditions;
- Building positive attitudes towards learning English and cultivating a love for the Vietnamese language through English learning. The students' learning methods, personality, and intellectual abilities will be gradually developed.

The primary English language program aims to equip students with basic communication skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The program, designed with a communicative and theme-based approach, comprises 210 periods

for grades 3 to 5, with two 40-minute lesson periods per week. The topics in the curriculum are repeated and expanded in accordance with the students' language proficiency. The specific curriculum content is illustrated in Table 2:

TABLE 2  
THE CONTENT OF THE ENGLISH TEXTBOOKS FOR GRADERS 3, 4, AND 5

Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
<p><b>You and Me</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- First meetings.</li> <li>- Names of my friends</li> </ul> <p><b>My school</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Friends and teachers</li> <li>- School objects</li> <li>- Classroom activities</li> </ul> <p><b>My family</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- My family members</li> <li>- Age of my family house</li> <li>- My house</li> </ul> <p><b>The world around us</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Weather</li> <li>- Pets</li> <li>- Toys</li> </ul>	<p><b>You and Me</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- My new friends</li> <li>- My birthday party</li> <li>- Things I can do</li> </ul> <p><b>My school</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Classroom furniture and objects</li> <li>- Primary school subjects</li> <li>- Primary school routines</li> </ul> <p><b>My family</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- My family daily routines</li> <li>- Favorite food and drinks</li> <li>- Jobs of my family members</li> </ul> <p><b>The world around us</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Flowers and zoo animals</li> <li>- Buildings around my house</li> <li>- Children's clothing</li> </ul>	<p><b>You and Me</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- My friends from abroad</li> <li>- My dreams</li> </ul> <p><b>My school</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Primary school life</li> <li>- Children's sports and games after school</li> </ul> <p><b>My family</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Personal hygiene and common diseases</li> <li>- Holidays of my family</li> <li>- Hobbies of my family members</li> </ul> <p><b>The world around us</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Seasons</li> <li>- Places of interest</li> <li>- Road safety</li> </ul>

As shown in the table, the textbooks are structured around four main themes - You and me, My school, My family, The world around us - across three grades. Each theme expands as students progress through the grades. For example, under the theme "The world around us", grade 3 students learn about the weather, pets, and toys; grade 4 students study flowers and zoo animals, buildings around their house, and children's clothing; and grade 5 students explore seasons, places of interest, and road safety. This series represents a new thematic approach to compiling English textbooks for primary education. Hoang (2012) defines thematic approach as follows:

In the thematic approach, the teaching content for a grade level is organized around themes familiar to students, which are then further divided into sub-themes called topics. Each topic corresponds to a unit and has specific targeted language competencies and content, such as sounds, new words, and grammar structures. Additionally, the thematic approach encourages students to use the new language creatively, developing their communication skills to deal with topics closely related to the one being studied (p. 8).

#### IV. RESULTS

##### A. Student-Related Research Results

###### (a). Classroom Observation Results

This section reports the results from classroom observations which aim at assessing students' interest and participation in English language lessons. Observations focus on the interactions between teachers and students, specifically looking at the frequency of questioning, answer accuracy, and teacher evaluations.

During the practice lessons, a high frequency of teacher-student interaction was observed. Many students actively volunteered to answer questions and some even expressed disappointment when not chosen. This reveals a generally positive and enthusiastic classroom environment. However, the accuracy of student responses varied. While a small number consistently provided correct answers, the majority provided incorrect responses. Notably, teachers employed a scaffolding approach, confirming answer correctness or soliciting responses from other students before providing the correct answer.

Observations revealed a noteworthy difference in participation between grade levels. Fourth and fifth graders appeared more confident and comfortable engaging with the teacher, even in the presence of an observer. This suggests a potential correlation between grade level and language learning confidence. Interestingly, students who frequently volunteered to answer questions were more likely to provide correct responses and receive positive teacher feedback. This group also demonstrated a higher level of interest in the lessons compared to less active students. However, the teachers paid more attention to the less active group, presumably due to their perceived lower academic achievement. This highlights the teacher's commitment to differentiated instruction and addressing individual student needs.

###### (b). Survey and In-Depth Interview Results

The attitude of students greatly impacts their motivation to learn, especially in the context of acquiring a second language. As a result, the first three questions in the student questionnaire are designed to gauge their attitudes towards English, the English textbook, and the lesson content. The majority of students (95.5%) express a strong preference for

English, while only 3.5% dislike it, and 1% hold neutral or different opinions. When it comes to the English textbook, 86% of students favor it whereas 12.4% dislike it, and 1.6% have neutral attitudes. Similarly, a significant proportion of students (91.4%) like the content of English lessons, while only 8.6% express their dislike. These responses indicate an overall positive attitude towards English. Despite the high interest in the subject, the preference for the textbook is somewhat lower, which aligns with findings from in-depth interviews. For example, N.V. Đ., a fifth grader, describes the textbook as basic. Some fifth, fourth, and third graders find the textbook unattractive, though only third graders want it to be more visually appealing. Regarding the lesson content, students' evaluations are quite positive. When asked, "Do you like the lesson content?" 91.4% respond positively, whereas 8.6% express dissatisfaction. These findings suggest students' interest in the subject, the course material and the lesson content as well. This intrinsic motivation is crucial for success in second language acquisition.

To further assess the students' English proficiency, the researchers asked them to self-evaluate their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills as well as to identify their strongest and most challenging skills. The results are presented in detail in Chart 1:

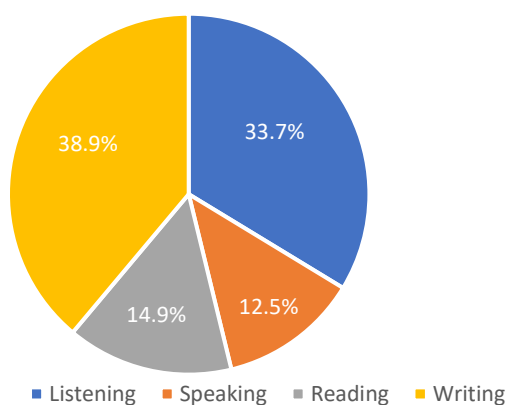


Chart 1. Students' Strongest Skill

Among the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing), students rate writing (38.9%) and listening (33.7%) as their strongest skills, suggesting a relative weakness in speaking and reading. The proficiency levels in these skills vary across different grades, as shown in Table 3:

TABLE 3  
STUDENTS' STRONGEST SKILLS ACROSS GRADES

Grade \ Skill	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing
3	25.4%	10.4%	16.4%	47.8%
4	31.5%	7.3%	16.9%	44.3%
5	44.2%	19.6%	11.6%	24.6%
<b>Average</b>	<b>33.7%</b>	<b>12.5%</b>	<b>14.9%</b>	<b>38.9%</b>

According to Table 3, third and fourth graders consider writing to be their best skill (47.8% and 44.3%, respectively), whereas fifth graders (44.2%) regard listening as their strongest. This can be attributed to the increased exposure to spoken English that fifth graders receive during grades 3 and 4. In contrast, the focus on rote memorization and reproduction of new vocabulary and grammar structures from the textbook, as observed in classroom practices, may explain why students in the third and fourth grades perceive writing as their strongest skill. This finding highlights a potential need to diversify instructional methods to create a more balanced development across all four language skills.

The statistical data related to the most difficult skill from students' perspectives are provided in Chart 2 below:

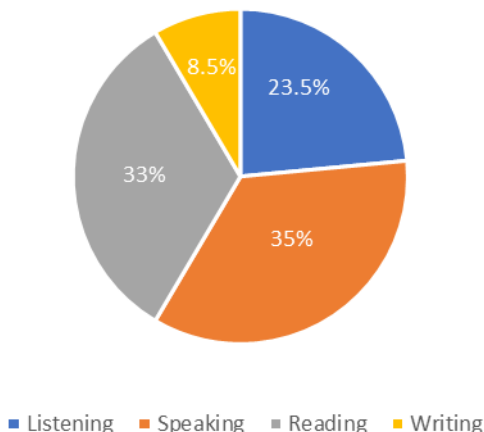


Chart 2. Students' Most Challenging Skill

As can be seen from Chart 2, speaking (35%) and reading (33%) are the most challenging skills for students, which aligns with their perceived strong skills. Table 4 displays the most challenging skill across three different grades.

TABLE 4  
STUDENTS' MOST CHALLENGING SKILLS ACROSS GRADES

Grade \ Skill	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing
3	18.7%	35.1%	38.8%	7.4%
4	18.5%	38.7%	34.7%	8.1%
5	33.3%	31.2%	25.4%	10.1%
<b>Average</b>	<b>23.5%</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>8.5%</b>

A closer examination of Table 4 reveals interesting facts across grades. Grade 3 students find reading the most difficult (38.8%), while fourth graders consider speaking to be the most challenging (38.7%). Fifth graders, on the other hand, rate listening as their biggest challenge (33.3%), followed by speaking at 31.2%. These findings indicate that students generally struggle with different skills, as the proportions for the most challenging skills differ significantly. Although these are subjective assessments made by primary students, they can provide insights into student academic performance. The fact that listening and writing are perceived as better skills can be attributed to the emphasis on intensive writing and listening practice in daily lessons, with limited opportunities for speaking practice. This is why many students express a desire for more speaking practice in class.

Living conditions have a significant impact on student language acquisition. Therefore, the researchers investigated students' self-study habits at home, as this factor demonstrably influences academic achievement. Chart 3 shows the results.

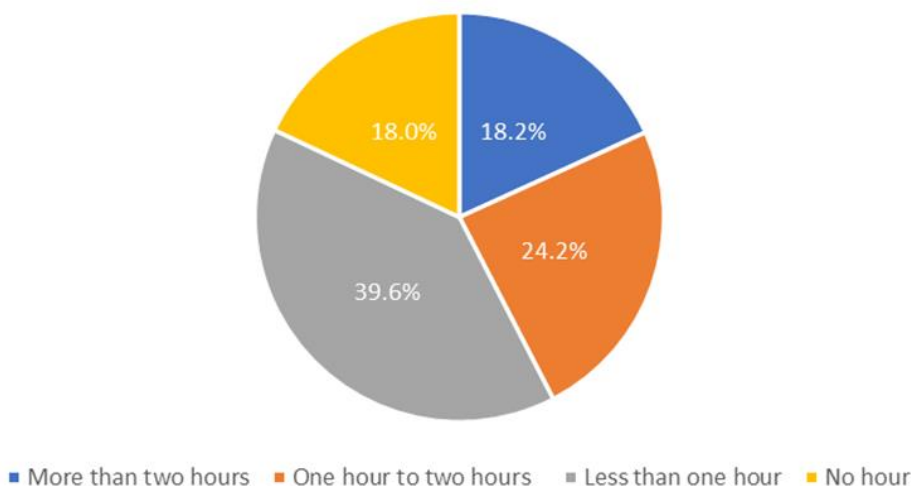


Chart 3. Students' Weekly Time Spent on Self-Study at Home

As depicted in the chart, pupils invest a limited amount of time on self-study at home. A great number of students (39.6%) dedicate less than one hour per week to home study. This, combined with the fact that 18% reportedly do not study at home at all, highlights the need to explore the factors influencing these study habits.

One such factor is parents' English proficiency, which plays an important role in supporting students' home study, particularly in the context of language learning. Chart 4 depicts the parents' perceived English proficiency.

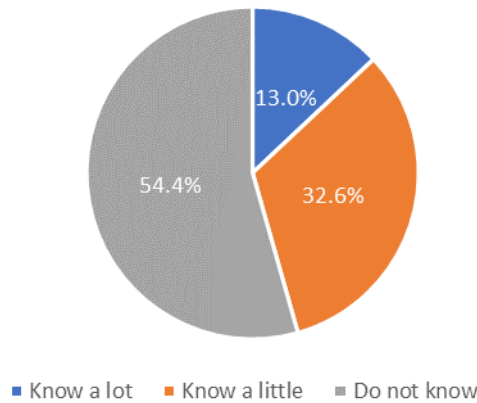


Chart 4. Parents' Perceived Level of English Proficiency

Chart 4 shows students' perceptions of their parents' English proficiency. According to the surveyed students, only 13% believe that their parents are fluent in English, enabling them to help with schoolwork. Meanwhile, 32.6% think that their parents have some knowledge of English, which may have been accumulated from prior schooling. The majority (54.4%) state that their parents do not know English and are unable to support their English studies at home. The assessment of parents' English level by students across grades is summarized in Table 5:

TABLE 5  
PARENTS' PERCEIVED LEVEL OF ENGLISH PROFICIENCY BY GRADE

Grade	English level	Know a lot	Know a little	Do not know
3		19.4%	29.9%	50.7%
4		8.1%	24.2%	67.7%
5		11.6%	43.5%	44.9%
	<b>Average</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>32.6%</b>	<b>54.4%</b>

The proportions vary across levels; however, all categories have one thing in common, that is the percentages of parents who are perceived as not knowing English are the highest (50.7%, 67.7%, and 44.9% for grades 3, 4, and 5 respectively). This may be partly due to the fact that most parents work as laborers and farmers, which do not involve exposure to foreign languages, especially English.

In terms of additional schooling, only a small number of students attend extra classes (78 out of 396, accounting for 19.7%), while the majority do not take any classes outside the classroom (318 out of 396, making up 80.3%) (see Chart 5). Viet Thuan Commune is located about 5 km from Thai Binh City, which has many English centers. However, most students in this school do not take extra classes.

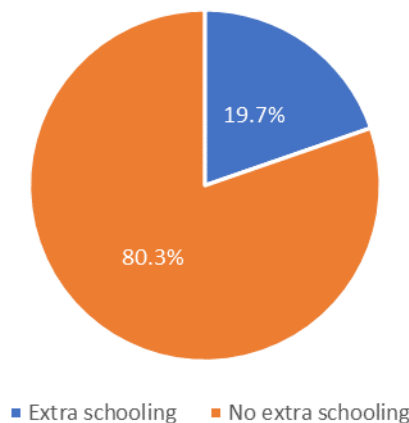


Chart 5. Students' Extra Schooling

To assess students' academic performance and progress, the researchers compared their scores from the two end-of-term English tests for the 2022-2023 school year and the English progress test administered at the beginning of the 2023-2024 school year. The results, as reported in Table 6, reveal minimal improvement across grades.

TABLE 6  
STUDENTS' SCORES IN ENGLISH TESTS  
(Source: Viet Thuan Primary School's statistics)

Grade Score	Grade 4			Grade 5		
	First semester test	Second semester test	Progress test	First Semester test	Second semester test	Progress test
9, 10	20%	23%	18%	25%	25%	17%
7, 8	30%	32%	35%	25%	33%	30%
5, 6	45%	43%	39%	47%	40%	47%
Below 5	5%	2%	8%	3%	2%	6%

Table 6 provides a breakdown of the students' performance in the three English tests for grades 4 and 5. Scores for grade 3 students are not included since they do not take this assessment at the beginning of the school year. While scores from the beginning-of-year test may be lower due to the summer break, there are only slight differences between first and second-semester scores for any grade. The persistently high proportions of scores below 6 across the two grades indicate a low overall level of English proficiency. This can be attributed to the lack of parental support and limited opportunities for additional English learning outside the classroom, despite English being a mandatory subject.

In conclusion, students' survey data offers valuable insights into the realities of English language teaching and learning in rural Vietnam. While students demonstrate a positive attitude and strong motivation towards English learning, as evidenced by an observed positive and enthusiastic classroom environment and students' interest in English, the textbook and course content, their level of English proficiency is not high. This can likely be attributed to limited parental support and opportunities for extra schooling. Due to the parents' low level of English, students receive minimal parental assistance with their studies. Additionally, most students do not have the opportunity to attend extracurricular English classes or to interact with native speakers, further restricting their exposure to the language. Another contributing factor is the limited time devoted to self-study at home. In terms of teaching resources, the primary-level English textbooks and course materials are considered suitable for educational objectives and are generally well-received by students. Of the four language skills, speaking and reading are the two most difficult skills; therefore, teachers should provide more opportunities for students to improve these two skills.

*B. Parent-Related Research Results*

This section delves into parental perspectives on their children's English language learning, drawing on data from surveys and interviews. Understanding parental views is crucial as they play an important role in shaping their children's academic success, especially in foreign language acquisition. Since English often differs greatly from the students' mother tongue, mastering it presents unique challenges. To explore these challenges and provide effective support, the research examines various aspects of parental perspectives, including:

- Awareness of the primary-level foreign language education goals
- Understanding of their children's English curriculum
- Time dedicated to tutoring their children at home
- Investment in their children's extra schooling
- Evaluation of the importance of English
- Perception of their children's English proficiency
- Expectations for their children's English learning

Chart 6 below details the extent to which parents understand the goals of primary-level foreign language education.

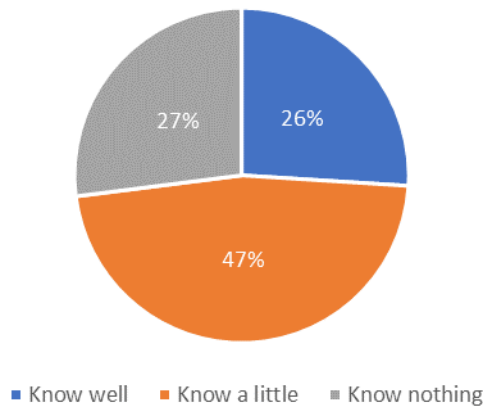


Chart 6. Parental Awareness of Primary-Level Foreign Language Education Goals

The figure reveals that while nearly half (47%) of parents have some knowledge, a concerning percentage (27%) has no understanding. This highlights the need for improved communication to ensure all parents understand the objectives of foreign language education at the primary level, enabling them to support their children more effectively.

Regarding the children’s English program, most parents either have no knowledge or only understand a little, which is insufficient to support their children’s studies. This is illustrated in Chart 7 below.

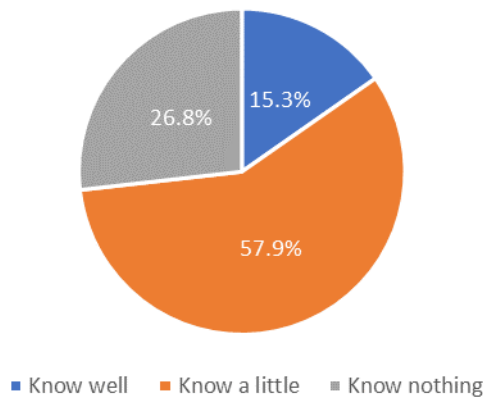


Chart 7. Parents’ Understanding of Their Children’s English Learning Program

The survey results suggest a big knowledge gap regarding the English learning program among parents. Specifically, 84.7% (57.9% know a little and 26.8% know nothing) lack a strong grasp of their child’s program, whereas only 15.3% claim to know it well. This limited understanding could potentially hinder their ability to effectively support their children's learning at home. Additionally, parental home tutoring is elaborated in Chart 8.

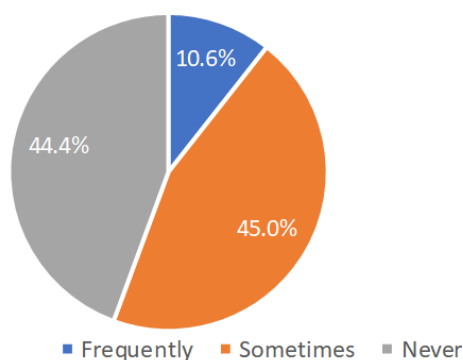


Chart 8. Frequency of Parental Home Tutoring

The chart shows limited parental involvement in home-based English learning. Only 10.6% frequently tutor their children at home, while 45% provide occasional tutoring, and a significant proportion (44.4%) do not tutor at all. This

limited involvement is further reflected in the time commitment, with nearly 40% dedicating no time and over 30% spending less than an hour per week on tutoring (Chart 9). Only a small percentage (9.4%) invest more than two hours engaging in this activity. The result indicates that the time parents spend on their children’s home studies is limited.

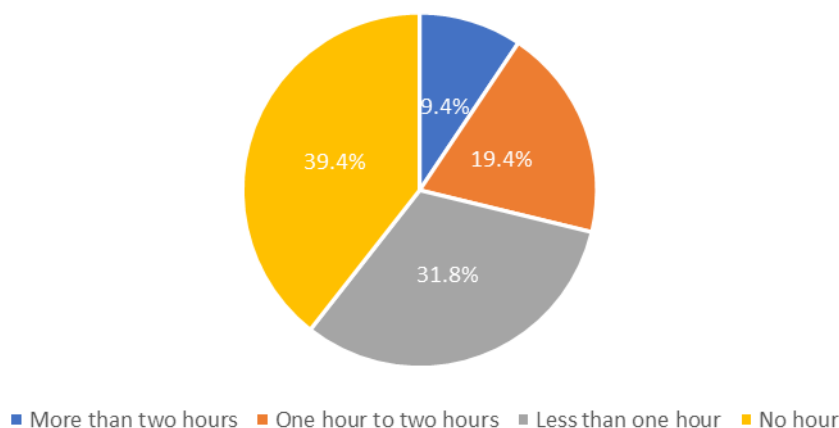


Chart 9. Parents' Weekly Tutoring Time

In-depth interviews shed light on the reasons behind this. A key factor is parents’ self-perceived lack of English proficiency, making them hesitant to offer guidance for fear of providing incorrect answers (e.g., "Although I know little English, I can't tutor my daughter in her study", "I don't know English well enough to tutor my child", "Because I don't know English, I can't guide my children in learning", "I don't know English, so I only ask my son to self-study at home"). In addition, busy work schedules prevent some parents from dedicating time to home tutoring (e.g., "I am so busy at work so I let my son self-study at home"). Thus, students receive minimal parental support. They have to study independently, or depend on their teachers in class. Moreover, most rural parents do not enroll their children in extra classes, as indicated in Chart 10.

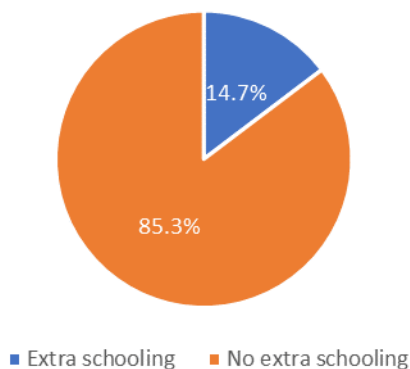


Chart 10. Parents' Investment in Extra English Classes for Their Children

The chart highlights a low enrollment in extracurricular classes. Only 14.7% of parents enroll their children in extra classes, which aligns with the student survey results. Some reasons were identified during the interviews with the parents. Due to financial constraints, some parents are unable to afford additional schooling for their children. Viet Thuan is an agrarian community so many parents have below-average incomes, making extra classes financially out of reach. Additionally, busy work schedules leave parents with almost no time to support their children at home. The parents, however, are aware of the importance of English for their children as shown in Chart 11 below:

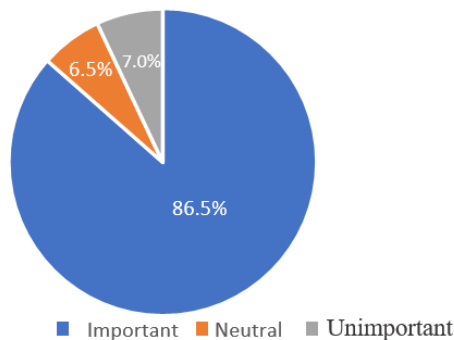


Chart 11. Parents' View on the Importance of English

The vast majority of parents (86.5%) recognize the importance of English learning for their children, even at the elementary level. This demonstrates a strong awareness of the importance of English. Only a small proportion (7%) views English as unimportant, while a few (6.5%) hold neutral views. Their comments suggest a degree of uncertainty, for example, "Actually I am not sure about the importance of English", or a results-oriented perspective like "The answer depends largely on my child's learning outcome". Parental evaluation of their children's English proficiency is shown in Chart 12.

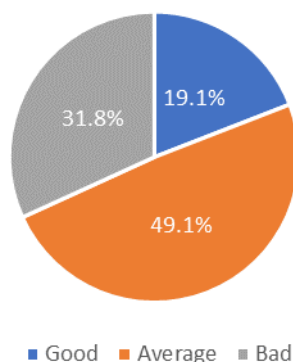


Chart 12. Parents' Assessment of Their Children's English Proficiency

In Chart 12, it is revealed that only 19.1% of parents consider their children's English good. A much larger proportion (49.1%) perceives it as average and a substantial number (31.8%) view it as bad. Interview results further support these findings, with comments indicating parental uncertainty like "I am not sure. My child just knows simple greeting structures" and limitations in parental assessment abilities such as "I cannot evaluate my son's English performance".

In a word, the data collected from the interviews and questionnaire with the parents reveals their limited time dedicated to supporting their children's home-based English learning, partly because of their restricted English language proficiency and busy work schedules. Many parents also lack awareness of the goals of primary-level foreign language education and the specific English language program used at their children's school. Additionally, despite recognizing the importance of English learning and perceiving their children's English proficiency to be low, parents hardly invest in their children's extra schooling out of financial difficulties and time constraints. These limitations, which are prevalent in many rural Vietnamese areas, can negatively impact students' achievement and progress in English language learning.

### C. Teacher-Related Research Results

In-depth interviews were conducted with two teachers of English at Viet Thuan Primary School to investigate the realities of English learning and teaching at this school. In terms of students' attitudes, teacher T highlighted that most students are enthusiastic about English learning. However, he remarked that the primary-level English textbooks focus excessively on vocabulary and phonics, presenting significant challenges to primary students. For instance, the sections on word stresses designed for grade 5 students might be difficult for even secondary school pupils. Teacher H further emphasized the lack of parental support as a key difficulty. Despite students' interest in English, many parents struggle to assist their children's learning at home due to their limited English proficiency. Both teachers stressed the challenges faced by educators in rural areas including inadequate teaching resources and limited class time, which hinders effective implementation of new teaching methods. They also pointed out the importance of addressing these challenges to create a more supportive learning environment and expressed their desire for more class time and easier and more access to modern teaching materials and aids.

Below are some excerpts from the interviews with the two teachers.

*“The teaching equipment and materials in my school are in poor condition or can no longer be used. In addition, the lack of internet access makes it difficult for me to get access to interesting teaching and learning materials. I suggest the government invest more in equipping rural schools with modern teaching resources”* (teacher T).

*“The shortage of English teaching materials has made it difficult for me to adopt effective and modern teaching methods. Moreover, limited time allotted for English lessons leaves almost no chance for practice during class. I think allocating more time to English lessons would greatly benefit students”* (teacher H).

In conclusion, the interviewed teachers report their students’ positive attitude towards English learning. They identify students’ difficulties, including lack of parental support and demanding textbooks which focus heavily on vocabulary and phonics and teachers’ challenges which encompass inadequate teaching resources and insufficient time. In order to overcome these challenges, the teachers suggest increased class time and investment in modern teaching materials and aids.

## V. DISCUSSION

The recent research provides insight into the realities of English learning and teaching at the primary level in rural Vietnam. The study provides some significant findings. First, the English textbooks and course content at the primary level are considered appropriate for established educational goals and are generally well-received by students. Second, students demonstrate a keen interest in and positive attitudes towards English language learning, as evidenced by the positive classroom environment. This result contradicts the findings obtained by Anggela et al. (2024) and Halik and Nusrath (2020), who reported low motivation, lack of interest and negative attitudes towards English learning among surveyed students. Obviously, a keen interest in English language learning often results in better acquisition and outcomes. Students who are genuinely interested in the language are more likely to engage with the material, practice regularly, and seek out additional resources, all of which enhance their proficiency. Positive attitudes towards learning English, such as confidence and motivation, also play a crucial role, as they reduce anxiety and encourage persistence in the face of challenges. Together, these factors create a conducive environment for effective language learning and improved outcomes.

Third, the research reveals a low level of English proficiency among primary school students. This result is consistent with the finding of Masturi et al. (2022) who claimed that the higher failure rate in English among rural students compared to their urban counterparts highlighted their limited competence and greater struggle in learning the language. This problem is prevalent in rural areas leading to numerous difficulties and challenges in English teaching and learning. The rural students’ low proficiency can be attributed to several factors, such as limited parental support and knowledge, low English proficiency, restricted opportunities for additional schooling, lack of practice outside the classroom, and demanding textbooks. This result aligns with the previous studies by Anggela et al. (2024), Endriyati et al. (2019), Halik and Nusrath (2020), Hibatullah (2019), Khulel (2021), Masturi et al. (2022). Parents’ educational backgrounds are believed to influence their children’s English language education in rural schools. However, most parents cannot speak English, making it difficult for them to assist with their children’s schoolwork (Masturi et al., 2022). Many parents are also unaware of the importance of English. Furthermore, the low socioeconomic status in rural families leads to poverty and financial struggles, negatively affecting children’s English language education. Financial burdens prevent parents from providing necessary learning resources or sending their children to private tuitions, leading to an over-reliance on school English language teachers, which in turn causes stress among the teachers (Endriyati et al., 2019; Masturi et al., 2022). Limited practice outside the classroom is another factor as it reduces exposure, slows progress and hinders fluency and comprehension.

Last, the study identifies unique challenges faced by rural English teachers in their efforts to improve teaching quality and enhance student proficiency. These difficulties include inadequate teaching resources and insufficient time allotment. This result is consistent with numerous previous studies by Anggela et al. (2024), Aziz et al. (2019), Endriyati et al. (2019), Farnasari (2021), Laila et al. (2023), Omodan (2020), Purtroppo et al. (2023), Salim and Hanif (2020), and Sulistiyo et al. (2020). English language education in rural areas is characterized by inadequate, poorly maintained or damaged facilities (Anggela et al., 2024; Endriyati et al., 2019; Omodan, 2020) and insufficient teaching materials (Farnasari, 2021; Salim & Hanif, 2020). These combined factors have undermined teachers’ motivation to teach and students’ motivation to learn, hindered the implementation of effective teaching methods and materials, and negatively affected the efficiency and efficacy of English language education in rural settings (Farnasari, 2021; Endriyati et al., 2019; Salim & Hanif, 2020; Omodan, 2020). Additional challenge identified is inadequate time, which hampers the progress of English language education (Salim & Hanif, 2020; Sulistiyo et al., 2020).

Based on the findings, the following implications for parents, educators, and educational policymakers are proposed. First, parents should take on more responsibility for their children’s education by actively monitoring and tracking their progress in English learning (Shan & Abdul, 2022) and providing necessary support at home. Second, students should be provided with more opportunities to engage in extracurricular activities to improve their exposure to English. Next, it is crucial to equip rural schools with sufficient facilities, teaching aids, and learning resources to support English language teaching and offer opportunities for students to experience various types of English learning (Shan & Abdul, 2022). To address the challenge of limited English instruction time, a comprehensive school curriculum review is recommended. Integrating English language learning into different subjects and creating opportunities for English

practice in non-language classes can maximize exposure to English and solidify language skills in a meaningful context (Daud, 2024). Also, teachers should allocate more time to speaking and reading practices in class since these are two most perceived difficult skills for primary students.

This study focuses on rural settings only, so future researchers may investigate the differences between teaching English at the primary level in rural and urban settings and research effective strategies to enhance English language learning and teaching in rural contexts.

## VI. CONCLUSION

This case study of Viet Thuan Primary School provides an overview of English learning and teaching in rural primary schools. The research focuses on three key areas: the impact of learning and teaching conditions on students' achievement, the motivational factors and attitudes of students and parents towards English learning, and the effectiveness of English learning as reflected in students' scores. The findings underscore the challenges faced by rural Vietnamese schools in delivering effective English language education. While the curriculum aligns with educational goals and students demonstrate enthusiasm and positive attitudes, their English proficiency remains relatively low. This can be attributed, at least in part, to the difficulties encountered by both teachers and students, such as limited parental support and knowledge of primary-level education goals and curriculum, restricted opportunities for extra schooling, lack of practice outside the classroom, demanding textbooks, and insufficient teaching equipment and resources. The research offers implications for policymakers and educators who seek to develop appropriate educational strategies and teaching techniques to improve the quality of English learning and teaching in rural areas. Limitations, however, are unavoidable. The sample is quite small which includes one school's students only. Future research should aim to expand the study by including a larger and more diverse sample of primary school students across multiple schools or regions. This will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the findings and ensure that the results are more generalizable to a broader population.

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