

From Criteria to Challenges: Unpacking Hiring Practices in Vietnamese English Language Centers

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ABSTRACT: *This study critically analyzes the employment practices of English language schools in Vietnam, including their selection criteria, recruitment processes, and the challenges they present, as well as their impact on educational quality. According to statistics from 18 centers nationwide, the findings are that all the centers require candidates to possess IELTS or TESOL certification, 75% prefer candidates with at least a Bachelor's degree, and 85% prefer native English speakers. Formal interviews (used by 90% of the centers), teaching demonstrations (70%), and written examinations (50%) are standard tools used for selection. Large-scale concerns identified during the recruitment process include difficulties in recruiting highly qualified native speakers (90%), evaluating teaching capability effectively (65%), and navigating complex visa requirements (85%). Statistical methods, such as ANOVA, Chi-square tests, and Pearson correlation, were employed to determine the relationships between institution size, location, and program type, as well as recruitment preferences and issues. Findings show that centers with higher staff are more likely to prefer in-house speakers, city centers experience more visa-related problems, and programs that offer special studies are more selective in their hiring practices. The study emphasizes the need for tighter regulatory directions and more equitable recruitment processes to ensure improved English language teaching (ELT) quality in Vietnam. The study also recommends future research on the connection between recruitment policies and pedagogical quality.*

KEYWORDS: English language teaching, Recruitment practices, Hiring challenges, Vietnamese English centers, Teacher qualifications.

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1. Introduction

“Vietnam, with an estimated population of approximately 100 million, comprising around 40% of individuals under the age of 18 (General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2023), is undergoing a critical period of transformation in its educational reform efforts to integrate into the global landscape. Since 2017, the government has allocated 20% of the national budget to education (Ngo & Tran, 2024), highlighting its commitment to developing a well-educated workforce. A significant policy shift by the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training in 2017, which awarded top scores in the national high school English exam to students with an IELTS score of 4.0 or above (Tran & Hoang, 2024), has underscored the importance of English proficiency, leading to a surge in IELTS preparation. This prioritization has led to the rapid growth of English language centers

across Vietnam, serving a heterogeneous student population seeking improved career prospects through better English skills. The effectiveness of these centers depends critically on the qualifications and teaching methods of their staff (Le, 2018; Tran, 2023), making the recruitment and training of English language teachers a key concern. This study examines the perspectives of decision-makers within the evolving educational sphere to understand how recruitment and development strategies for English language teachers are adapting to the increasing demand for English proficiency. Despite their significance, more scholarly research is needed on the hiring practices of English language centers in Vietnam. While global studies have examined native-speakerism and its impact on teacher recruitment, the intersection of these trends with local hiring practices in Vietnam still needs to be explored. This gap calls for in-

depth research into the criteria, processes, and challenges Vietnamese English centers face in recruiting English teachers, which is essential for addressing potential biases and improving the recruitment process. The research aims to: (i) Explore the hiring criteria set by Vietnamese English centers for English teachers, including qualifications, experience, and perceived competencies; (ii) Examine the recruitment processes from job advertisement to selection and hiring; and (iii) Understand the challenges faced by these centers in hiring qualified English teachers, including issues related to native-speakerism, teacher availability, and regulatory constraints. This study is significant for English language centers, policymakers, educators, and stakeholders in the Vietnamese educational sector. By analysing current hiring practices, it aims to enhance recruitment strategies, ensuring they are equitable, transparent, and aligned to deliver high-quality English education. Policymakers can use the findings to develop guidelines supporting the recruitment of effective teaching professionals. Educators and prospective teachers will gain insights into the qualifications and competencies valued by employers, aiding their professional development. Ultimately, this research fosters dialogue on the importance of teacher quality in English language education and how improved hiring practices can support Vietnamese learners' educational achievements and global integration.

2. Literature review

2.1. Global hiring practices

The global discourse on hiring practices in English language teaching provides a rich backdrop for examining Vietnam's English language centers. Key debates around native-speakerism, teacher identity, and educational effectiveness establish a contextual foundation for a focused investigation in the Vietnamese context. Van der Geest (1981) first addressed the preference for native speakers in language teaching, a perspective that influences global hiring practices, including those in Vietnam. Researchers like Árya and Medgyes (2000) and Canagarajah (2005) challenge the presumed superiority of native English-speaking

teachers (NESTs) over non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs), advocating for hiring based on pedagogical skills rather than native speaker status. This shift, which values linguistic diversity and teaches competencies, is particularly relevant to Vietnam's evolving educational needs. Scholars such as Reves and Medgyes (1994), Lasagabaster and Sierra (2005), and Llurda (2005b) highlight biases against NNESTs, issues that are also reflected in Vietnam's hiring practices. Mahboob (2004), Clark & Paran (2007), and Kiczowskiak (2020) document employer preferences for NESTs, underscoring the widespread impact of native-speakerism. This necessitates reassessing hiring criteria in Vietnam to prioritize teaching skills. This study aligns with and expands on global discussions by providing a localized analysis of hiring practices in Vietnam. It aims to understand how global trends of native-speakerism and valuing pedagogical skills are manifested, adapted, or challenged in Vietnam's English Language Teaching (ELT) sector. This research contributes to enhancing English language education through equitable and effective hiring practices by examining teacher selection criteria, recruitment processes, and challenges faced.

2.2. Local context and challenges

In the specific setting of Vietnam within the broader Asian landscape, the inclination towards hiring native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) is deeply rooted in ideologies and policies that privilege educators from countries traditionally recognized as English-speaking. This regional preference is critically examined in the works of scholars such as Kubota (2002), Nunan (2003), and Jeon (2009), who emphasize the strategic role of English within Asian educational frameworks, highlighting a clear preference for native speaker norms. Furthermore, research conducted by Boonsuk and Ambele (2021) explores the hiring dynamics in Asian contexts, including Thailand. It highlights the discrimination and misconceptions that both non-English-speaking teachers (NESTs) and non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) encounter. Their findings, along with insights from Baker (2012),

Boonsuk (2016), and Boonsuk and Ambele (2011), highlight the challenges stemming from biased selection processes and the often-unrealistic expectations placed on NNESTs. This backdrop underscores a significant research gap in capturing the viewpoints of recruiters within the discourse on teacher identity, particularly in the Vietnamese context. It draws attention to NNESTs' obstacles in finding employment, exacerbated by systemic biases and a marked preference for native speakers. This study aims to bridge the gap by examining how global trends and regional preferences impact hiring practices in Vietnam. By examining the local application of these broader ideologies and the resultant challenges, the research aims to offer nuanced insights into the recruitment landscape in Vietnam, shedding light on the perspectives of decision-makers involved in the hiring process and the impact of these practices on the quality of English language education.

2.3. Research gaps and questions

Despite extensive research on global hiring practices and challenges in the Asian educational sphere, a significant gap remains in the literature regarding hiring practices in Vietnamese English language centers. This gap highlights the need for empirical studies on hiring criteria, methodologies, and the obstacles these centers face in recruiting English language educators. Critical aspects, such as recruiters' perspectives, the influence of native-speakerism on local hiring decisions, and the overall impact on Vietnamese ELT, require further examination. Additionally, an in-depth analysis is needed to examine how Vietnamese English centers align global hiring trends with local educational demands. Addressing these issues can reveal specific challenges and opportunities for improving hiring practices in Vietnam, aiming for a fair and effective teaching environment.

The study aims to address the following research questions (RQ):

RQ1. What specific qualifications, certifications, and personal attributes do Vietnamese English language centers prioritize when defining ideal teacher profiles?

RQ2. What are the standard procedures and tools used by Vietnamese English centers during the recruitment and selection process for English teachers?

RQ3. What challenges do Vietnamese English language centers face in recruiting and retaining qualified English teachers, and how do these challenges affect teacher quality and educational outcomes?

This study bridges the literature gaps by exploring how Vietnamese English centers navigate the interplay between international norms and local educational needs in the recruitment of teachers. It aims to enrich the understanding of hiring practices in the Vietnamese context, providing insights to guide policy reforms and encouraging the adoption of best practices that prioritize pedagogical quality over the native vs. non-native teacher dichotomy. By filling these gaps, the research aims to contribute significantly to the discourse on ELT in Vietnam, advocating for improvements to enhance the quality and ELT accessibility.

3. Research methodology

3.1. Research design

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to explore hiring practices in Vietnamese English centers. Comprehensively, by integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods, the research aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of the criteria, processes, and challenges involved in hiring English teachers and explore the nuanced perspectives of recruiters. This design enabled a more robust data analysis, providing deeper insight into the complexities of the recruitment landscape within the context of Vietnamese English centers.

3.2. Sampling

The study targeted 18 Vietnamese English language schools in the north, center, and south regions of the nation to ensure regional representation and obtain a range of recruitment practices prevailing in Vietnam. To ensure representation of variation in institutional size, institutions were selected using a stratified

purposive sampling strategy, where two small, two medium, and two large institutions were chosen from each region. This sampling strategy was intended to provide balanced information across operation sizes in a way that would enable comparisons of poorly and well-funded institutions. Small centers were typically those with fewer than 100 students and limited program options, while large centers addressed institutions with over 300 students and a comprehensive range of specialist programs in English. Aside from size and geographical variation, consideration was also given to presenting variations in teacher staff profiles, specifically within the context of coexistence between native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) and non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs). The participants were purposively selected and included human resource managers, academic directors, and other decision-making staff responsible for the line operation of making appointments. These were deemed the most informed for the research interest on institutional recruitment policies. A letter of informed consent, detailing the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of participation, and assurances of anonymity and confidentiality, was provided to participants to ensure adherence to ethical standards.

3.3. Data collection methods

Quantitative data were gathered through surveys and questionnaires distributed to the selected English centers. These instruments, which featured both closed-ended and open-ended questions, collected information on hiring criteria, recruitment processes, and perceived challenges in hiring English teachers. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with HR managers, directors, and other stakeholders involved in the hiring process. These interviews aimed to collect in-depth qualitative data on the experiences, perceptions, and challenges of hiring English teachers, focusing on hiring criteria, decision-making processes, challenges faced, and the impact on teacher quality and educational outcomes.

3.4. Document analysis

An analysis of job postings, hiring guidelines, and teacher contracts provided by the English centers was conducted. This offered additional insights into the formal criteria and expectations set by the centers, the contractual obligations of the teachers, and any standardized processes used in recruitment and selection.

3.5. Data analysis

Survey and questionnaire responses were analyzed using statistical methods, with descriptive statistics summarizing the data and inferential statistics examining relationships between variables related to hiring practices and English center characteristics. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze data from semi-structured interviews and document analysis, involving coding to identify recurring themes and patterns related to hiring practices, challenges, and recruiters' perspectives. The qualitative findings were integrated with the quantitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the recruitment landscape in Vietnamese English centers. This mixed-methods research design aimed to provide a holistic view of hiring practices, enabling the identification of best practices and areas for improvement.

4. Results

The study collected data on various aspects of hiring practices, including qualifications required, selection processes, and perceived challenges in hiring English teachers. It also considered the characteristics of the English centers, such as their size, location, and the types of English programs offered.

4.1. Survey/questionnaire results

Overall perspectives

The findings reveal the essential criteria Vietnamese English language centers prioritized when hiring English teachers, highlighting a complex interplay of requirements. All surveyed centers (100%) mandate IELTS or TEFL/TESOL certification, emphasizing the importance of concrete evidence of language proficiency and instructional skills. About 75% require a

minimum of a Bachelor's degree, underscoring the value of formal education as a marker of teacher preparedness. Notably, 85% prefer native English speakers, indicating a strong bias toward native fluency and cultural insights. This trend raises questions about the fairness and inclusivity of such practices, especially considering the unique strengths of non-native English-speaking teachers, such as bilingualism and cultural empathy. These findings suggest areas for further discussion and potential re-evaluation to achieve more inclusive and equitable hiring standards in Vietnam's English teaching industry.

Selection processes

This study examines how Vietnamese English language centers select candidates for teaching positions, striking a balance between subjective judgment and objective evaluation. The key selection methods include formal interviews, teaching demonstrations, and written tests, providing a comprehensive view of the recruitment landscape. Approximately 90% of Vietnamese English centers rely heavily on formal interviews, making them a central part of the recruitment process. These face-to-face interactions assess language proficiency, teaching approach, classroom management, and alignment with the center's values. Interviews highlight that teaching is about more than just academic credentials. Approximately 70% of centers require candidates to conduct teaching demonstrations, showcasing their practical teaching skills and ability to engage students. This hands-on evaluation allows recruiters to observe the candidate's instructional strategies and classroom presence. Half of the centers incorporate written tests to assess language proficiency, with a focus on grammar, vocabulary, and writing skills. However, the fact that only 50% use this method suggests that some centers prioritize communicative skills and practical teaching abilities, as demonstrated in interviews and demonstrations. This study reveals a nuanced selection process that combines subjective insights from interviews and demos with objective data from written tests, aiming to identify candidates who excel in linguistic understanding, pedagogical knowledge, and alignment with the center's educational goals.

Perceived challenges

Navigating the recruitment landscape for English teachers within Vietnamese English centers reveals significant hurdles that impact the hiring process and the quality of English language education. The survey findings highlight these challenges. A staggering 90% of centers struggle to attract qualified native English-speaking teachers due to a scarcity of candidates willing to work in the region, fierce competition, and high qualification expectations. This imbalance between supply and demand prompts centers to reassess hiring standards and consider enhancing professional development for non-native English-speaking teachers. Approximately two-thirds of centers report difficulty in accurately assessing teaching competencies during the recruitment process. Conventional methods like interviews and written tests often fail to gauge instructional prowess. While 70% of centers use teaching demonstrations, they may only partially capture a teacher's long-term potential. This highlights the need for more comprehensive evaluation techniques, such as prolonged observation periods or trial teaching stints. Additionally, 85% of centers need help with complex visa and work permit processes for foreign instructors. Bureaucratic obstacles deter applicants and delay recruitment, complicating international hiring efforts. These challenges underscore critical areas for intervention. They affect the ability to staff programs with competent educators and reflect broader issues in the global ELT market, such as supply and demand mismatches, the effectiveness of hiring practices, and regulatory hurdles. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive strategy, including reevaluating hiring preferences, adopting sophisticated assessment techniques, and streamlining regulatory processes to enhance the quality of English language teaching.

Characteristics of selected English centers

Vietnam's English language center scene is as varied as the learners it serves, featuring a broad spectrum of center sizes, locations, and program offerings. This variety caters to the diverse objectives and preferences of English learners across the nation. It's vital to thoroughly examine

Table 1. Characteristics of English language centers

Center Size	Number of Students	Teaching Staff	Programs Offered	Facility Size
Small	Fewer than 100	5 to 10 instructors	Narrower range, e.g., General English, Conversational English	Single or limited classrooms, modest facility
Medium	100 to 300	10 to 25 instructors	Broader range, including General English, Business English, Exam Preparation, specialized courses	Medium-sized facility with multiple classrooms and administrative offices
Large	More than 300	25 or more instructors, including both local and foreign teachers	Wide array of programs from basic to specialized test preparation, advanced language skills, and international certification programs	Large facility, possibly multi-story or multiple locations, with amenities extensive

these distinguishing features to understand how hiring practices evolve.

The survey highlights three main categories based on center size, as shown in Table 1.

This study categorizes Vietnamese English centers into small, medium, and large, ranging from boutique setups to well-resourced institutions, highlighting diverse hiring needs. Larger centers can attract more qualified instructors. Centers are evenly distributed across Vietnam, reflecting a uniform demand for English education and varying recruitment strategies based on location, especially in competitive urban areas. Program-wise, 35% of centers focus on General English, 15% on Business English, and 50% on Exam Preparation, meeting the high demand for proficiency certification. The diversity in center sizes, locations, and programs underscores the need for flexible hiring practices tailored to each center's specific requirements and learner goals.

Relationship between center size and hiring preferences

This study employed an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test to explore how the size of English language centers in Vietnam - categorized as small, medium, or large - affects their hiring preferences, particularly regarding native speakers and required qualifications. The aim was to understand the impact of a center's scale on its recruitment approaches in the competitive teaching market.

Figure 1 illustrates distinct preferences for native speakers based on center size, with small centers at 70%, medium centers at 80%, and large centers at 95%. This gradient indicates that larger centers are more inclined to hire native English-speaking teachers, influenced by market dynamics and strategic recruitment. Centers were grouped by size to assess preferences for native speaker status, educational qualifications, and teaching experience. Larger centers prefer native speakers, likely due to competitive pressures and marketing benefits. They view this as a strategy to attract more students and meet higher expectations for language proficiency and cultural insight. All centers strongly demand IELTS/TESOL/TEFL certification and a Bachelor's degree. Still, larger centers are more likely to mandate these qualifications, reflecting their resources and ability to attract highly qualified candidates.

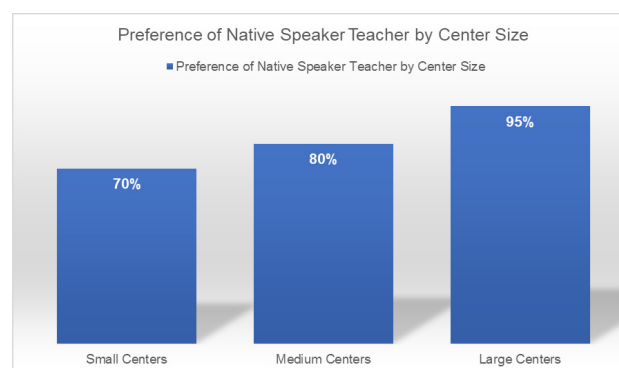


Figure 1. Preference of native speaker teacher by center size

The connection between center size and hiring preferences, especially the strong preference for native speakers in larger centers, highlights the nuanced recruitment scenario in Vietnam's ELT sector. These findings suggest a disparity in hiring strategies driven by the operational scale and market demands of different-sized centers, highlighting the need for ongoing investigation into how these preferences impact inclusivity and educational quality.

Impact of location on perceived challenges

This study employed a Chi-square test to investigate the impact of geographical location on the hiring challenges faced by English language centers across Vietnam. It focused on finding qualified teachers, assessing teaching skills, and navigating visa regulations for foreign hires. Centers were grouped by location in the Northern, Central, and Southern regions to identify significant correlations between their geographical position and reported hiring obstacles.

Figure 2 presents the Chi-square test findings on hiring challenges by location within Vietnamese English language centers. Surprisingly, the highest percentage of challenges was reported in the Central and rural areas at 85%, while urban centers in the Northern and Southern regions experienced slightly lower rates at 75% and 68%, respectively. This trend highlights the complexities of urban centers, particularly in terms of visa and work permit regulations, necessitating tailored strategies to navigate these challenges. The analysis highlights a critical connection between a center's location and its challenges, with urban centers facing pronounced visa and work permit issues. These centers, driven

by high demand for native English-speaking teachers and stringent regulatory landscapes, struggle with hiring and legally onboarding foreign staff. Additionally, intense competition for qualified educators in urban areas indicates various recruitment and retention challenges. These insights highlight the significant impact of location on recruitment challenges within Vietnam's English language education sector. There is a clear need for strategic interventions and policy support to address these challenges, particularly in urban regions. Understanding these location-based differences is crucial for improving the hiring landscape, securing highly qualified teaching professionals across Vietnam, and ensuring equitable access to quality English education nationwide.

Correlation between program types and selection processes

This study employed a Pearson's correlation analysis to explore the relationship between the types of English programs offered by Vietnamese centers, such as General English, Business English, and Exam Preparation, and the intricacies of their teacher hiring processes. This approach helped to understand the connection between program offerings and the rigor of selection methods, including interviews, teaching demos, and written tests.

Centers were grouped based on their program focus, and the complexity of their selection processes was evaluated through a composite score reflecting the diversity of hiring activities. The analysis aimed to reveal if centers with specialized programs tend toward more detailed hiring practices. The findings indicated a clear positive correlation: centers focusing on Business English or Exam Preparation typically adopt more thorough selection processes, suggesting these programs demand teachers with specific skills and higher language proficiency. This pattern suggests that the specialized nature of these courses necessitates a more comprehensive evaluation of candidates' abilities. This relationship between program types and selection process complexity highlights centers' tailored approach to ensure their staff can meet the demands of specific English programs. For teachers, applying to centers with specialized

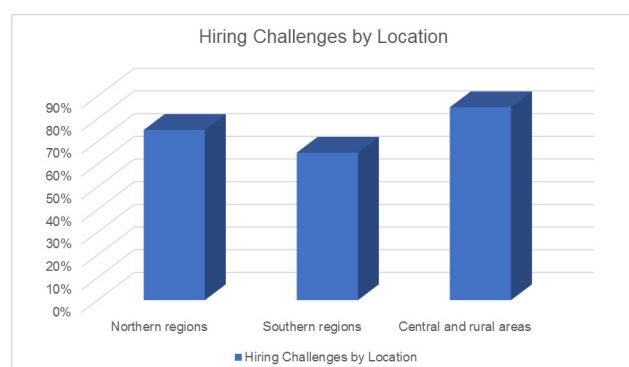


Figure 2. Hiring challenges by location

offerings might involve undergoing more rigorous evaluation processes. Meanwhile, for the centers, this correlation highlights the importance of aligning hiring strategies with their educational objectives to maintain quality and meet student expectations. These findings underscore the broader dynamics of hiring within Vietnam's English teaching landscape, suggesting areas for further investigation to refine recruitment practices.

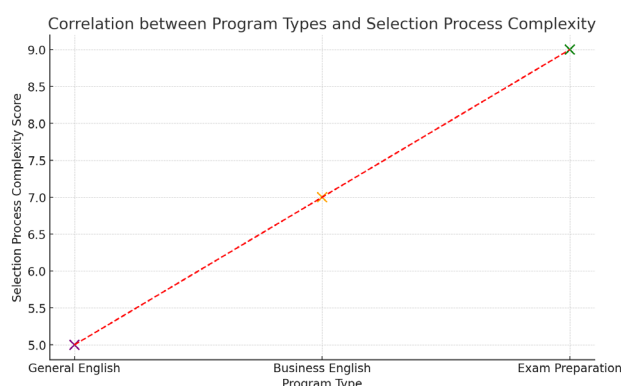


Figure 3. Correlation between program types and selection process complexity

4.2. Semi-Structured Interview Findings

This section presents qualitative narratives from HR managers, directors, and other key stakeholders, providing a robust foundation for comparative analysis. It offers a unique vantage point on the dynamics at play in teacher hiring across Vietnam's diverse educational spectrum.

Overall interviewees' perspectives

Table 2 succinctly captures the insights from interviews conducted with key stakeholders in the hiring process at Vietnamese English language centers. Discussions on hiring criteria reveal a focus on specific certifications and experience, underscoring the alignment of recruitment to provide high-quality communicative English teaching. Challenges in recruitment, including the competitive market for native speakers and the difficulty in finding specialized instructors, illustrate the obstacles centers face. However, the positive impact of meticulous hiring on educational outcomes is evident, with significant improvements in student test scores reported. Future directions suggest a proactive stance

Table 2. Overall Interviewees' Perspectives

Interview Section	Key Insights and Responses
Introduction	"We're conducting this study to uncover impactful strategies in teacher recruitment, ensuring the highest standards of English education," explained the lead interviewer, emphasizing the goal of enhancing educational quality through effective hiring practices.
Background Information	"Our center has seen a 30% increase in student enrollment due to our reputation for hiring top-tier teachers," shared a director, illustrating the direct correlation between hiring practices and center success.
Criteria and Qualifications	"We prioritize candidates with a IELTS and CELTA certification and at least two years of teaching experience. This aligns perfectly with our mission to offer communicative English teaching," one HR manager noted, highlighting the strategic alignment of hiring criteria with educational goals.
Recruitment and Selection Process	"From job vacancy posting to conducting demo lessons, our process is designed to attract and identify teachers who are not just qualified but truly passionate about teaching," detailed a recruiter, providing a glimpse into the comprehensive and engaging recruitment strategy.
	"Competing for native speakers in a market where they are in high demand is tough. We've had to increase our salary offer by 20% over the past two years," a private center owner admitted, underscoring the competitive challenges and strategic responses. "Recruiting enough qualified foreign English teachers directly for our center has proven challenging, leading us to engage intermediary companies for assistance. Unfortunately, this comes with a hefty price tag," shared an Academic Manager.

Interview Section	Key Insights and Responses
	“There's a significant demand for IELTS test preparation among students in my area. However, finding native or foreign teachers with the expertise to teach IELTS test preparation is challenging; most are only equipped to teach General English.” a center manager revealed.
Challenges Faced	“Most foreign English teachers arriving in our region prefer teaching English to younger children. On the other hand, our students seeking IELTS preparation are mostly aged 13 to 22 and highly value the opportunity to study with foreign instructors. Unfortunately, these teachers often lack the experience or certifications necessary for exam preparation,” another Academic Manager noted.
Impact on Education Quality	“Our rigorous selection process has directly contributed to a 40% improvement in student test scores over the last three years,” claimed a director, offering concrete evidence of the positive impact of hiring practices on educational outcomes.
Future Directions	“We're exploring partnerships with international teaching colleges to create a pipeline of qualified teachers, aiming to address our biggest hiring challenges,” envisioned a center manager, suggesting proactive strategies for future improvement.
Closing	“Ensuring that our teachers are the best fit for our students is an ongoing journey. We believe in learning, adapting, and striving for excellence,” reflected a seasoned educator, encapsulating the commitment to continuous improvement and the critical role of effective hiring practices in achieving educational excellence.

towards addressing recruitment challenges, with plans to partner with international teaching colleges. Overall, Table 2 provides a concise overview of the complex landscape of teacher recruitment in Vietnamese English language centers, from strategic hiring criteria to the challenges and successes of recruitment processes, all aimed at upholding high standards of English education.

Hiring practices and challenges across English centers

Table 3 offers a snapshot of hiring practices and challenges across Vietnamese English language centers, highlighting distinct strategies employed by public, private, urban, and rural centers. Public

centers focus on formal qualifications to uphold quality, while private centers value practical skills and a strong preference for native speakers driven by market and parental expectations. Urban centers, facing bureaucratic and cost-of-living challenges, prioritize stringent selection criteria despite a large applicant pool. In contrast, rural centers invest in local talent, navigating the scarcity of native speakers with a focus on training and community engagement. Challenges vary from bureaucratic delays in public centers to high turnover rates in private ones. Urban centers additionally need help with competitive markets, while rural areas deal with isolation. Responses to these challenges include innovative retention

Table 3. Hiring Practices and Challenges across English Centers

Aspect	Public Centers	Private Centers	Urban Centers	Rural Centers
Hiring Criteria & Procedures	Formal qualifications emphasized. An HR manager mentioned, “80% of our hires have advanced degrees, reflecting our commitment to quality.”	Focus on practical skills. A director stated, “75% of our teaching staff are native speakers, enhancing language immersion for our students.”	Quality over quantity. “Despite receiving 200+ applications monthly, we select only those who exceed our stringent criteria,” noted an urban center director.	Invest in local talent due to recruitment challenges. “We provided training to 90% of our staff locally,” shared a rural center manager.

Aspect	Public Centers	Private Centers	Urban Centers	Rural Centers
	Formal qualifications emphasized, with some preference for NESTs based on policy. “Government policies subtly encourage NESTs, aligning with parental expectations,” an HR manager mentioned.	Strong preference for NESTs. “Parents and students often equate quality with native English speakers, driving our hiring decisions,” a director stated.	Quality and NEST preference. “While we value qualifications, the market demand for NESTs is undeniable,” noted an urban center director.	Focus on qualifications, with challenges in attracting NESTs. “NESTs are rare here, so we focus on qualifications and training,” shared a rural center manager.
Challenges	Bureaucratic delays impact agility. “It takes us 3-6 months to fill a position, affecting our operational efficiency,” an HR manager disclosed.	High turnover rates, with an average teacher tenure of less than a year. “Competitive offers from abroad make retention our biggest hurdle,” a center owner revealed.	Competition and high living costs pose challenges. “The turnover rate is 20% higher in urban areas,” an administrator observed.	Isolation and limited opportunities deter applicants. “Only 10% of candidates consider long-term positions,” a rural educator noted.
	Navigating governmental policies and public expectations for NESTs. “Balancing policy requirements with actual teaching needs is challenging,” an HR manager disclosed.	Meeting high demand for NESTs amidst turnover. “Finding and keeping NESTs is a constant challenge due to their high demand elsewhere,” a center owner revealed.	Attracting NESTs in competitive urban markets. “The challenge isn’t just finding NESTs but keeping them in the competitive urban landscape,” an administrator observed.	Limited access to NESTs, focusing on local talent development. “Our main challenge is the scarcity of NESTs willing to work in rural settings,” a rural educator noted.
Approaches & Outcomes	Stability leads to higher retention. “Our turnover rate is below 10%, thanks to secure contracts,” a public center principal highlighted.	Innovative retention strategies needed. “Implementing a career development program reduced our turnover by 15%,” a private center director reported.	Diverse methods enhance satisfaction. “Student satisfaction scores have improved by 30% with new teaching methodologies,” an urban teacher claimed.	Community engagement impacts learning. “Our student engagement scores are high, despite resource limitations,” a rural teacher commented.
	Adherence to policies with efforts to balance with quality teaching. “We strive to meet policy expectations while ensuring teaching quality,” a public center principal highlighted.	NESTs as a key selling point. “Having NESTs has significantly improved enrollment rates,” a private center director reported.	NESTs contribute to urban center appeal. “NESTs enhance our center’s appeal, driving student enrollment and satisfaction,” an urban teacher claimed.	Emphasizing teacher development due to NEST scarcity. “We invest in local teachers’ development to compensate for the lack of NESTs,” a rural teacher commented.

Aspect	Public Centers	Private Centers	Urban Centers	Rural Centers
Implications for Policy & Practice	Simplify hiring to improve efficiency. “Reducing bureaucratic steps could decrease hiring time by 50%,” suggested an educational policy expert.	Professional development as a retention tool. “A structured professional development plan can increase retention by up to 25%,” a HR specialist advised.	Supportive measures for teachers. “Housing allowances could lower urban turnover rates,” a financial analyst recommended.	Enhance access to resources. “Remote teaching tools increased student satisfaction by 20% in remote areas,” a tech consultant observed.
	Review and potentially adjust policies to support diverse hiring. “Policies could be more flexible to allow for a broader definition of quality teaching beyond being a NEST,” suggested an educational policy expert.	Encouraging professional development for all teachers. “Beyond hiring NESTs, investing in all teachers’ development can enhance educational quality,” a HR specialist advised.	Strategies to retain NESTs in urban centers. “Implementing retention strategies specific for NESTs can mitigate the high turnover,” a financial analyst recommended.	Initiatives to attract NESTs to rural areas or enhance local teacher training. “Offering incentives for NESTs in rural areas or focusing on elevating local teachers’ skills could bridge the gap,” a tech consultant observed.

strategies, professional development programs, and remote teaching tools to enhance student engagement.

Table 3 underscores the complexity of hiring in different contexts, suggesting a need for policy flexibility and targeted support to improve recruitment efficiency and teacher retention, aiming to boost the overall quality of English education in Vietnam.

The findings underscore the multifaceted nature of recruitment strategies and the distinct challenges different types of centers face. As evidenced by the detailed perspectives and statistical data gathered from decision-makers, it is clear that the landscape of teacher hiring is influenced by a complex interplay of factors, including institutional type, geographic location, and market dynamics. Public and private centers, as well as urban and rural institutions, navigate unique obstacles in their quest to recruit and retain qualified teaching staff, impacting the educational experiences of their learners.

4.3. Document analysis

This part focuses on how the formal criteria, contractual obligations, and recruitment processes reflect on broader educational and organizational goals, and how they address or fail to address the challenges identified by decision-makers in the study. Additionally, incorporating critical perspectives offers a deeper understanding of the implications for teacher quality, center reputation, and student outcomes.

Table 4 provides a critical analysis of the components involved in hiring practices at Vietnamese English centers, offering insights into how these practices align with or diverge from the ideal objectives of ensuring high-quality teaching staff and maintaining center reputation. It also explores the implications of these practices for teacher quality, suggesting a need for a more balanced and flexible approach to recruitment and selection.

5. Discussion

This section analyzes the findings and explores how these practices influence

Table 4. Components involved in hiring practices at Vietnamese English centers

Aspect	Insights from Job Postings, Hiring Guidelines, and Contracts	Critical Observations	Implications for Teacher Quality & Center Reputation
Formal Criteria & Expectations	Job postings emphasize IELTS/TEFL/TESOL certifications, experience, and sometimes native language proficiency. Hiring guidelines detail ideal candidate profiles, including educational background and language proficiency.	While such criteria aim standards, they may inadvertently narrow the pool of potential candidates, excluding talented individuals based on credentials rather than teaching ability.	Centers that prioritize certifications and native language proficiency might enhance reputation but their risk overlooking the diverse skills and innovative teaching methods brought by non-native or less traditionally qualified teachers.
Contractual Obligations	Contracts specify teaching hours, responsibilities beyond teaching, and professional development requirements. They also outline salary, benefits, termination conditions, and renewal terms.	The emphasis on extensive duties and professional development is positive but may place heavy demands on teachers without corresponding support compensation, or potentially affecting job satisfaction and turnover rates.	High contractual expectations can boost teacher engagement and development, contributing to center quality. However, if not balanced with adequate support, they may lead to burnout and turnover, tarnishing the center's reputation.
Standardized Recruitment Selection Processes	Processes include application screening, structured interviews, demo lessons, and reference checks. Some centers also have standard application forms and structured assessment criteria.	While standardized processes fairness ensure and thoroughness, they may lack the flexibility to adapt to individual candidate strengths or the specific needs of the center, missing potentially out on exceptional talent.	Adherence to structured processes can enhance the center's reputation for professionalism and in thoroughness recruitment. However, rigidity in these processes might limit the ability to attract and recognize diverse teaching talents, affecting overall teacher quality and student satisfaction.

educational quality, considering the challenges of recruiting qualified teachers and the strategies centers use to navigate these challenges under the categories of responses to the research questions. This discussion aims to contextualize the outcomes within both the local Vietnamese and broader global educational landscapes, offering insights for policymakers, educators, and future research directions.

5.1. Criteria and qualifications sought by Vietnamese English centers

This section addresses research question 1: What specific criteria and qualifications do

Vietnamese English centers seek in hiring English teachers? Drawing from a recent study and relevant literature, the analysis identifies valued attributes, including educational background, teaching experience, language proficiency, and professional competencies. It examines how these criteria align with global trends and local needs. Key findings reveal a strong emphasis on specific qualifications. All surveyed centers require IELTS or TESOL certification, underscoring the universal standard of language proficiency and teaching ability. Additionally, 75% of centers mandate a Bachelor's degree, highlighting the importance of formal education. Furthermore,

85% of centers prefer hiring native English speakers, indicating a significant bias towards native speaker status in the hiring practices of Vietnamese English centers. These preferences resonate with global ELT hiring practices, where the idealization of native speakers and the importance of certifications deeply influence decisions. Scholars such as Van der Geest (1981), Árvai and Medgyes (2000), and Canagarajah (2005) have long debated the implications of these practices, advocating for a broader evaluation of teachers that considers pedagogical skills over native speaker status. Despite this, the preference for native speakers persists, reflecting systemic biases and potentially overlooking the diverse abilities that non-native English-speaking teachers bring to the classroom, such as bilingual advantages and more profound empathy for language learners. Moreover, this alignment with global trends also mirrors pro-NEST ideologies and policies specific to the Asian and Vietnamese educational landscapes. Studies by Kubota (2002) and Nunan (2003) highlight the regional emphasis on native speaker models, driven by societal beliefs and academic goals, to enhance learners' English proficiency. Consequently, while Vietnamese English centers' hiring criteria align with global practices, emphasizing language proficiency certifications, formal education, and native speaker preference, this approach diverges from critical perspectives that challenge the superiority of native speakers. This discrepancy underscores the need for Vietnamese English centers to reconsider their hiring criteria. By valuing pedagogical effectiveness and linguistic diversity, centers can foster more inclusive and equitable hiring practices. Such a shift not only aligns with global educational standards but also addresses the specific needs of the local educational context, potentially enhancing the overall quality of English Language Teaching (ELT) and learning in Vietnam.

5.2. Recruitment and selection processes

This section examines how Vietnamese English centers recruit and select English teachers, addressing the second research question: How do Vietnamese English centers conduct their

recruitment and selection processes for English teachers? By integrating insights from a focused study and relevant literature, this analysis aims to uncover recruitment methodologies, including job advertisements, application screening, interviewing, and final selection. It also assesses the transparency, fairness, and effectiveness of these processes, identifying potential challenges or biases. The reliance on formal interviews by 90% of Vietnamese English centers underscores the importance of interpersonal communication in assessing teaching candidates. Interviews assess nuanced teaching competencies, including pedagogical philosophy and cultural fit (Yen et al., 2023). Additionally, 70% of centers use teaching demonstrations to observe candidates' instructional strategies and classroom management skills in real-time (Johnson & Keane, 2023). However, the study highlights challenges, particularly in sourcing qualified native English-speaking teachers, a concern for 90% of centers. This difficulty mirrors the complexities of the global ELT market, where attracting native English speakers is competitive and expectations are often unrealistic (Do & Hoang, 2023). Moreover, about two-thirds of centers express concerns about effectively evaluating teaching skills, echoing critiques of the limitations of traditional recruitment methods (Pessach et al., 2020). The preference for native speakers, while common, aligns with critiques of native-speakerism, which advocate for recognizing the qualifications and teaching abilities of non-native English-speaking teachers (Canagarajah, 2016). Narayan (2023) suggests adopting innovative assessment techniques, such as portfolio evaluations and peer teaching observations, to address these biases, offering a more comprehensive view of candidates' capabilities. More nuanced evaluation methods, as supported by Narayan (2023) and Pessach et al. (2020), can help mitigate the highlighted challenges and enhance the fairness and effectiveness of the recruitment process. Moreover, widening the candidate pool by addressing biases and enhancing the attractiveness of teaching positions through professional development opportunities could alleviate the scarcity of qualified candidates

(Boonsuk et al., 2023; Reynolds & Yu, 2023). By integrating empirical evidence and scholarly opinions, this section situates the study's findings within the broader academic discourse on English Language Teaching (ELT) recruitment and selection practices. Acknowledging the complexities, challenges, and biases in current methodologies and proposing evidence-based improvements can help Vietnamese English centers evolve their hiring practices to align with global standards and local needs, fostering a more equitable and effective ELT environment.

5.3. Challenges in hiring qualified English teachers

Addressing Research Question 3, What challenges do Vietnamese English centers face in hiring qualified English teachers, and how do these challenges impact the quality of English language education offered?, this section integrates study insights with broader academic discourse to illuminate the complexities of the hiring process. Issues related to supply and demand, native speakerism, regulatory constraints, and market pressures are explored for their implications on teacher quality and educational outcomes. A significant challenge is the mismatch between the supply of qualified native English-speaking teachers and the demand within Vietnamese English centers. This difficulty, compounded by global competition and stringent certification requirements, narrows the pool of eligible applicants. These findings align with those of Boonsuk et al. (2023) and Reynolds and Yu (2023), who highlight the complexities and competitive nature of the global English Language Teaching (ELT) market. The preference for native English speakers, evident in 85% of the centers, limits staff diversity and overlooks the pedagogical advantages of non-native English-speaking teachers. This bias undermines the recognition of non-native speakers' qualifications and teaching skills, crucial for high-quality English language education. Canagarajah (2016) critiques this native-speakerism, emphasizing the need for a more inclusive evaluation of teacher competencies. Vietnamese English centers also face bureaucratic hurdles related to visa and work permit regulations for foreign teachers. These regulatory challenges deter potential candidates,

complicating hiring and leading to delays and additional costs. This aligns with Tran et al. (2021), who discuss the legal complexities of educational institutions in hiring foreign staff. The competitive landscape of English language education in Vietnam pressures centers to meet market expectations, particularly concerning native speaker status and teaching credentials. This market-driven approach may compromise the selection process, prioritizing specific qualifications over a comprehensive evaluation of teaching competencies. Boonsuk et al. (2023) and Reynolds and Yu (2023) highlight the impact of market pressures on recruitment strategies, echoing challenges in the Vietnamese context. These recruitment challenges, both directly and indirectly, affect the quality of English language education that Vietnamese centers provide. Difficulty in sourcing qualified native English-speaking teachers and biases excluding highly qualified non-native speakers could undermine the educational experience for learners. Furthermore, administrative hurdles and market pressures may detract from high teaching standards. In conclusion, the challenges in hiring qualified English teachers, ranging from supply and demand issues to native-speakerism, regulatory constraints, and market pressures, significantly affect the quality of English language education in Vietnamese centers. Reevaluating hiring practices to prioritize pedagogical effectiveness and cultural diversity, supported by strategic policy interventions and internal reforms, can enhance educational outcomes and foster a more equitable and effective English Language Teaching (ELT) environment that meets learners' needs.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

This study provides a critical examination of recruitment procedures and issues in English language centers across Vietnam, with a focus on selection criteria, procedural approaches, and their impact on the quality of English language teaching. Based on a mixed-methods approach, data collected from 18 English centers across various regions of the country gave a general picture of the trends in hiring. The findings indicate a global requirement for TESOL or IELTS certification (100%), a strong need

for candidates holding at least a Bachelor's degree (75%), and a strong preference for employing native English speakers (85%). The three most commonly employed recruitment methods are formal interviews (90%), teaching demonstrations (70%), and written language proficiency tests (50%).

Nevertheless, the study has also identified several systemic problems that make effective teacher recruitment challenging. These are the absence of locally born English-speaking teachers with the correct qualifications (90%), difficulty in assessing the teaching capabilities of candidates based on conventional recruitment strategies (65%), and the complexities involved in acquiring visas and work permits for overseas workers (85%). Furthermore, research evidence suggests that the most prominent institutions, urban campuses, and those offering specialized programs (e.g., IELTS preparation or business English) will tend to have more formal recruitment standards and will prefer native speakers over non-native speakers. These variations suggest that hiring policies are not applied uniformly and tend to be influenced by institutional size, program structure, and campus setting.

The study highlights a pressing need for policy reform and the establishment of more level, merit-based recruitment systems that more accurately reflect both local educational priorities and global best practices. Despite the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training's (MOET) support for teacher quality development through initiatives such as the National Foreign Language Project 2018–2025, there is a lack of comprehensive regulatory guidance on the recruitment of teachers within private English language centers. This policy vacuum contributes to the sustenance of native-speakerism alongside other discriminatory hiring practices that damage equity and instructional effectiveness. The findings here call upon MOET to issue standardized recruitment regulations with priorities for pedagogical expertise and merit-based assessment irrespective of a teacher's native-speaker status.

Aside from policy considerations, the research highlights regulatory barriers under Vietnamese labor legislation, particularly Decree No. 152/2020/NĐ-CP, which imposes stringent

requirements for foreign workers. These include cumbersome procedures for verifying credentials, visa sponsorship, and employment in accordance with work permit terms. While designed to regulate overseas employment, such legal conditions are burdensome for English language institutes and potentially deter the hiring of quality foreign teachers. To prevent this issue, better inter-ministerial coordination between MOET and the Ministry of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs (MOLISA) is required to streamline legal processes and enable policies that recruit teachers to enhance, rather than detract from, educational quality.

In this context of obstacles, the following are the most significant policy recommendations emerging from the research. To begin with, MOET should issue formal recruitment standards applicable to all English centers, public or private. These standards must prioritize pedagogical effectiveness over criteria such as nativeness, transparency, and fairness. Second, relevant labor policies should be reviewed and revised to reduce administrative obstacles to schools that want to employ foreign teachers without sacrificing essential standards of quality. Third, the establishment of a MOET and MOLISA-coordinated nationally accredited teacher accreditation system may enable both domestic and international recognition of teaching qualifications, hence expanding the pool of potential candidates.

This study enables future scholarly research into the interconnections between teacher recruitment policy and broader educational outcomes. Longitudinal studies that measure the long-term impact of hiring practices on teacher retention, teacher quality, and student achievement would be most valuable. Comparative studies by region and globally would be beneficial for identifying best practices and guiding Vietnamese policy reforms. Lastly, addressing the mentioned issues through harmonization of policies, institutional change, and decision-making guided by evidence offers a path toward an inclusive, effective, and quality English teaching system in Vietnam. These efforts not only align with national development visions but also contribute to the international debate on effective and equitable English language education.

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