Perceptions and Practices of EFL Lecturers in Research: A mixed-method Study

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ABSTRACT: *This mixed-method study aimed to explore the perceptions and practices of 115 English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) lecturers regarding research at different universities in Vietnam. Data were collected through online surveys distributed via Google Forms, and 11 semi-structured interviews were conducted among the participants. Results provided evidence that EFL lecturers were fully informed of the benefits of research and the close relationship between research and teaching. The study revealed important findings: generally poor research experience among lecturers with master and bachelor degrees, unsupportive conditions for research practices at higher institutions, and struggles over the cited conditions in conducting research. The study provided certain valuable suggestions at varying levels. At the micro level, EFL lecturers need to strengthen their motivation in conducting research by attending online research courses, forming the habit of reading scholarly articles, and intrinsically building a passion for conducting research. At the meso level, the faculty should aim to establish research groups with experienced researchers to help young lecturers participate in research activities. At the macro level, universities are advised to ensure the correct identification of research objectives and subjects in accordance with the content of the training program. Finally, universities should increase funding for research., especially by allocating more sources for social science programs.*

1. Introduction

Research practice not only provides scientific and practical significance in the existence and development of society but also plays an extremely important role in education and training (Borg, 2009; Borg & Liu, 2013). Research is currently considered an indispensable link in contributing to the improvement of the quality of training and in creating human resources to meet the increasing needs of society (Shavelson & Towne, 2002; Thomas & Pring, 2004). A good combination of research activities and teaching practice helps evaluate the professional working ability, theoretical thinking and practical awareness of university lecturers (Kirkwood & Christie, 2006; Kincheloe, 2003). Therefore, teaching and conducting research are the two parallel tasks of lecturers, and improving the quality of scientific research is a regular requirement of universities.

Recent studies demonstrated a positive growth rate in research output from Vietnam at approximately 17%–20% per year (Manh, 2015; Nguyen et al., 2017). However, Vietnam was unable to reach the same level as those leading research countries in the ASEAN region such as Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia (Nguyen & Majoribanks, 2021; Tuan & Ly, 2011). Moreover, the abovementioned figures include all scientific research output from Vietnam, including the natural sciences sector, which has been integrated and published internationally earlier.

In the field of humanities and social sciences alone, statistics on productivity and output are limited. Given the criteria for international publication, the number of universities with research on social sciences remains extremely small and based only on the contribution of a few researchers (Ministry of Education and Training [MOET], 2000). When examining the productivity of Vietnamese researchers in the

social sciences based on the database of Social Sciences Humanities Peer Award, the average productivity of a Vietnamese author in these fields is at a very low level compared with that of the overall research in the country (Vuong et al., 2018).

Similar scenarios are observed in foreign language education in which foreign language teachers are encouraged to conduct scientific research (University lecturers' scientific research, 2013); however, they seemingly consider research as the academic "*ivory tower*" that they are disempowered from engaging (Vu, 2021, p. 2). This description provides evidence of the lack of enthusiasm of EFL lecturers for scientific research activities. At the threshold of international integration with the knowledge and sharing economy, a requirement of EFL lecturers in Vietnamese universities is active participation in research activities, improvement in research capacity, and an increase in the number of international publications. Although an increase is noted in the number of studies on the perceptions and practices of L2 lecturers in the context of international higher education (Borg, 2009: Borg & Liu, 2013), studies on the perceptions and practices of EFL lecturers in Vietnamese educational institutions remain few (Pham, 2006; Vu, 2021). Therefore, the current study focuses on this aspect in Vietnamese EFL university lecturers to understand their level of preparedness for research tasks expected of university lecturers, their methods for implementing such tasks, and the conditions they require for these tasks. The general research question of the study is: What are the perceptions and practices of Vietnamese EFL lecturers' in doing research?

2. Literature review

Although the research capacity of teachers has gradually become a major concern in recent years, a limited number of empirical studies shed light on the perceptions and practices of EFL teachers in research. In terms of perceptions, Borg (2010) defines research as a study conducted by teachers with the objective of improving their knowledge and skills and contributing to higher-quality learning and teaching. Kiley and Mullins (2005) demonstrate that 53 research supervisors from different universities viewed research as "a scholarly process characterized by the rigorous application of systematic methods."

Several studies also reveal the characteristics of research. For example, McIntyre (2005) emphasizes that distinguishing reflective practice and language teaching research is critical. Although both are powerful strategies for professional development, they are not synonymous. Moreover, making research public is considered a significant feature of research (Borg & Sanchez, 2015; McIntyre, 2005). Moreover, Borg (2009) examines the conceptions of research held by more than 500 EFL teachers from 13 countries and highlights objectivity as a central characteristic in relation to the quality of research.

EFL teachers are advised to be consumers and doers of educational research, which provides potential benefits, such as innovative methods of viewing, doing, discussing, knowing, and thinking (Atay, 2007; Borg, 2010; Everton et al., 2002; McNamara, 2002; Shank & Brown, 2007) illustrates that the benefits of research in language teaching are considerable with the development of research skills, increased awareness of the teaching and learning process, renewed enthusiasm about teaching, and collaboration with colleagues.

Macaro (2003), Borg (2006, 2009), Allison and Carey (2007), and Borg and Liu (2013), which focused on research practice, expand the body of literature due to the large number of participants from different language training institutions worldwide. The collective findings reflect not only barriers and innovative strategies to the promotion of the research engagement of EFL teachers but also insights into conditions that influence their research practice (Rahimi et al., 2019). According to these studies, the lack of time, motivation, and expertise hinders teachers from conducting research. Several feasible solutions, such as support from advisory committees and the policy of positioning research as an integral part of the performance review of schools, are recommended.

The research of lecturers has been currently the focal concern of education in Vietnam. In higher education, conducting research is one of the critical duties that teachers should fulfill because of its undeniable benefits. Therefore, documents and circulars issued by the government and related ministries exist to form the legal basis for the promotion of research practice in the context of Vietnamese higher education. As mentioned in Decree 99/2014/ND-CP, the government regulates investments in science and technology activities at universities. This decree intends to train and develop research groups and lead researchers and young scientists. Moreover, Circular 47/2014/TT-BGDĐT, which is issued by the MOET, emphasizes the importance of research engagement and the duty of lecturers to conduct research. According to this document, teachers are required to allocate one-third of their annual working time to conducting research, and the institution will evaluate their performance.

Although research is a key topic in lectures, a small number of studies in this field are conducted within the context of Vietnamese universities. Phuong et al. (2018) conducted a study on 56 teachers at a Vietnamese university. The study reveals the positive but technical perceptions and a moderate level of research engagement of English teachers. Several factors, such as a lack of research skills, inaccessible books and journals, and limited financial support, impeded teachers from conducting research. Thus, improving conditions for conducting research, providing additional support from mentors, and more appropriate working time allocations are suggestions to promote the research practice of EFL teachers.

In a qualitative study, Pham (2006) investigated the context in which English language educators at the university level in Vietnam adopted research practice. Data were collected from official documents and conducted interviews with seven teachers from the north and central regions of the country. The findings demonstrated that Vietnamese EFL teachers expressed the need to conduct research. However, various obstacles, such as dissatisfaction with the current evaluation regulations and formats in presenting research findings, heavy workload, lack of library skills to access materials, and inappropriate training, resulted in insufficient research skills and tended to discourage teachers from reading and conducting research.

In another qualitative study, Vu (2021) used semi-structured interviews centered on teacher cognition with 11 lecturers teaching English at a university in Vietnam. The study reported that these teachers valued the benefits of research in teaching language, however, certain barriers, such as time constraints, non-practical publications, and even the lack of research skills and competence, hindered teachers from conducting research.

These studies revealed the perceptions and practices of ELT teachers related to research. They also discussed the workplace contexts for research to determine whether or not they were the stimuli or hindrances to the research practice of teachers. However, the understanding of research, research skills, and research culture of teachers should be explored in depth to reveal more themes related to the research capacity of teachers. This aspect may also be fundamental to the production of practical solutions in further studies.

Despite the increased interest in research engagement among researchers worldwide, less research in this field has been conducted within the context of Vietnamese universities. Therefore, the current study, which aims to explore the relationship between teaching and research, the viewpoints of EFL teachers about research, their research experience, and the conditions of research practice, intends to fill the research gaps in the literature. Such objectives could be explicitly realized through the following research questions:

What are the perceptions of EFL lecturers regarding the benefits of research and the relationship between research and teaching?

What are the personal dispositions of EFL lecturers toward research?

How do EFL lecturers perceive the context of research in the workplace?

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

The study recruited a total of 115 EFL lecturers working at public universities in Vietnam. The participants were selected on the basis of snowball sampling. Among them, 13.91% are female (n = 16), whereas 86.09% are male (n = 99). In terms of the level of education, 5, 96, and 14 lecturers completed Bachelor's (4.3%), Master's (83.5%), and Doctorate (12.2%) degrees, respectively. Moreover, 19, 20, 41, 18, and 17 participants had less than 5 years (16.5%), 5 to 9 years (17.4%), 10 to 15 years (35.7%), 16 to 20 years (15.7%), and more than 20 years (14.8%) of working experience, respectively. Out of the 115 respondents, 11 were interviewed at a later time.

3.2. Instruments

The study employed two research methods, namely, survey questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The first was adapted from the questionnaire developed by Bai and Hudson (2011). The first part of the survey included instructions for the participants to list the number of research outputs they have gained thus far. These outputs could be research articles, conferences, books, book chapters, and academic reviews. Thirty items were rated using a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*) according to their level of agreement. The survey was composed of four sections, namely, perceptions of the relationship between research and teaching (four items), viewpoints on the advantages of research (10 items), research experiences (six items), and workplace context for research (10 items). Three demographic questions (i.e., gender, years of working experience, and qualification) were additionally presented.

Regarding interviews, the main questions were developed on the basis of the research questions: What do you think are the benefits and drawbacks of research in your career and life? How are teaching and research related to each other? (3) How have you experienced the research process thus far? Lastly, (4) Can you describe the context of research at your workplace?

The questionnaires and interview questions were translated into Vietnamese by employing back-translation methods (Behr, 2017; Sousa & Rojjanasrirat, 2011). The procedure was supported by two PhDs in education from universities in Australia and New Zealand and one American-Vietnamese professor in applied linguistics based in the United States. Accordingly, the original English version was first translated into Vietnamese. The initial Vietnamese version was then back-translated into English by the abovementioned team of experts. Any differences between the two English versions were compared and contrasted to reach agreements among the researchers and the experts. The final Vietnamese versions of the questionnaires and interview questions were used to enhance user-friendliness and understandability and to collect data.

3.3. Data collection and analysis

This study was a mixed-method and in convergent parallel design due to its time-saving characteristics (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Accordingly, quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently but analyzed separately prior to combination.

The questionnaires were delivered to the lecturers through an online Google form because the participants belonged to different universities and regions throughout the country. Thus, approaching them individually and face to face is difficult. After two months of snowball sampling and many friendly reminders, a total of 115 EFL lecturers from different universities in Vietnam submitted valid online questionnaires. We then disseminated emails to all of them on the basis of email records in Google Forms. Among the respondents, 11 replied to our requests and participated in the semi-structured interviews. The interviews lasted for 30 min on average and were conducted online through Zoom video conferencing, where time is subject to the preferences of the interviewees.

Data from the questionnaires were coded and entered into SPSS version 24.0 for the descriptive statistics per item. Data from the interviews were manually coded to generate themes and subthemes associated with the research

questions. To ensure confidentiality, the names of the interviewees were coded as T followed by their designated numbers (i.e., from T1 to T11). Two types of data were analyzed separately prior to their combination for comparison and contrast to explore whether or not they were consistent and to examine how they could elucidate the research questions.

4. Results

The initial analyses of reliability demonstrated that all Cronbach's alpha values were acceptable and high (Taber, 2018) (see Table 1). Accordingly, the questionnaire and its four parts were sufficient for use in the investigation of the perception and practice of EFL lecturers of research in their profession.

Table 1. Reliability of the questionnaire

Parts of the survey	Cronbach's alpha
Relationship between teaching and research	.702
Benefits of research	.856
Dispositions for research	.822
Workplace context for research	.732
The whole questionnaire	.851

4.1. Relationship between teaching and research

The findings (see Table 2) indicated that the majority of respondents (nearly 90%) agreed that research and teaching support each other. More than 60% perceived that teaching and research share the same importance. Meanwhile, only 11.3% deemed that teachers could teach well without research, and more than half of the participants disagreed or were unsure about whether or not teaching should be prioritized over research.

All interviewees (N = 11) shared the notion that research can improve language learning and teaching. First, reading and conducting pedagogical research enabled teachers to implement useful techniques and methods in their teaching practice. The participants considered research as a crucial part that always exerted a significant influence on their teaching career. Research articles could provide EFL lecturers with valuable suggestions for making appropriate adjustments in their teaching practice. Moreover, research was identified as a factor that could motivate participants to improve their knowledge and teaching methods. This point is demonstrated in the following quotes:

"Research can help us answer questions related to our teaching practice. Especially doing research can improve my teaching quality. A study is not meaningful if it does not have any positive impacts on teaching practice. Research can provide teachers with valuable information, knowledge, and opportunities for professional development." (T10)

In my opinion, research is quite important. I used to think that my teaching methods were innovative and practical until I read studies relating to English teaching, and I realized that my teaching activities were actually out of date. Then I decided to change and I tried to read more articles and find out effective activities for my class." (T11)

Second, teaching can be a source of inspiration for research. The participants highlighted that the research they conducted was associated with classroom practices. When EFL teachers encounter problems, they would like to make

Table 2. EFL lecturers' views on the relationship between teaching and research

Items	Mean	SD	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)
Teaching and research are equally important.	3.69	0.86	10.5	23.5	66
Teaching should take priority over research.	3.32	0.99	24.3	27	48.7
You can teach well without reading or doing research.	2.16	0.92	73.9	14.8	11.3
Research and teaching enhance each other.	4.2	0.86	4.3	7.8	87.9

changes and learn from their experiences in the classroom. After adopting certain class activities effectively, they would like to share this knowledge with colleagues through articles or presentations at workshops and conferences. The abovementioned scenarios can serve as the inspiration for their research. T04 shares the following view:

"After adopting movie dubbing in teaching pronunciation to students, I realized that this method could motivate students to practice and better their intonation. Then I conducted research on using movie dubbing in teaching pronunciation to the first-year students and it was published in my institutional journal."

4.2. Viewpoints of research

The next section of the questionnaire investigated the viewpoints of the EFL lecturers toward research (see Table 3). Apparently, the participants were positive about the personal and professional advantages of research. The majority of respondents (more than 80%) believed that research facilitates their teaching performances, provides them with the latest professional updates, brings new knowledge to the field of English language teaching, and enhances their professional status. In addition, research enables several EFL lecturers to fulfill

their curiosity and creativity (71.3%), become satisfied in their careers (56.5%), and gain opportunities for promotion (50.5%). According to the respondents (70.5%), research is useful for policymakers. A relatively few participants (64.3%) agreed that conducting research is time-consuming (M = 3.63); moreover, the lecturers expressed different views toward the fact that research is an additional burden in their careers.

The findings from the interviews are consistent with those from the questionnaires because the majority of interviewees (n = 9) share common points of view toward the importance of research. First, research could strengthen the social relationships of the participants. Information on academic topics collected from various research enables teachers to feel more confident in sharing such information with other colleagues during professional meetings. Second, various excerpts from the participants point to opportunities for professional development, improvement of background knowledge and research skills, and improved innovative ideas in facilitating the language learning of students.

"First and foremost, research is absolutely critical for the professional development of a teacher. Research can help us identify difficulties in teaching and suggest practical solutions for these troubles. I was provided with the theoretical

Table 3. Participants' opinions about the benefits of research

Items	Mean	SD	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)
Research allows me to reflect on and improve my teaching.	4.03	0.75	2.6	13.9	83.5
Research keeps me informed of the latest theories and practices in the field.	4.04	0.76	2.6	16.5	80.9
Research increases my professional status.	4.06	0.79	2.6	14.8	82.6
Research satisfies my curiosity and creativity.	3.86	0.79	5.2	23.5	71.3
Research gives me job satisfaction.	3.64	0.79	6.1	37.4	56.5
Research is useful for promotion.	3.43	0.96	16.5	33	50.5
Research can contribute to knowledge in the foreign language field.	4.09	0.73	3.5	9.5	87
Research can inform policy.	3.81	0.83	5.2	24.3	70.5
Research is a waste of time.	3.63	1.06	17.4	18.3	64.3
Research is an extra burden on TEFL academics.	3.08	1.09	34.7	30.4	34.9

background to base on before making the decision on teaching job and daily life." (T07)

"*Research is not only important to teachers but also to students and school leaders. Research engagement can sharpen skills in analyzing, synthesizing, and critical thinking. Moreover, people are able to arrive at correct conclusions thanks to findings of education research.*" (T05)

However, the EFL lecturers in this study (64.4%) admitted that research is a time-consuming issue. The participants demonstrated uncertainty about whether or not research is a burden (M = 3.08).

A few interviewees (n = 2) mentioned time as the reason underlying their hesitation to initiate research. As such, they must spend time conducting research, where revision would require a large amount of effort as well. They then need to wait for a long time for the possibility of a low rate of acceptance. As illustrated by T05, "As I shared above, doing research is really time-consuming. It takes time to read articles, collect and analyze data, then write the article." T11 also complained that she had been waiting for nearly six months prior to the publication of her article.

4.3. Research experience

The first part of the questionnaire explored the number of research articles completed by the participants thus far since they started their careers as EFL lecturers. Accordingly, this part also revealed their research experiences. Table 4 demonstrates the percentages of participants who produced less than two research products under each category. In general, they reported a low number of research outputs under all categories

Table 4. Research outputs among EFL lecturers

Research products	Proportions
Journal articles	53%
Conference Proceedings	60.9%
Books	93%
Chapters in edited books	87.8%
Academic reviews	90.4%

in the list compared with the high average number of their years of teaching experience. Seemingly, they neither wrote research papers nor participated in relevant conferences.

The study found relatively low percentages of favorable responses to statements regarding personal experiences in research. Specifically, Table 5 indicates that all items produced less than 50% of agreement: training (26%, M = 3.10), intrinsic motivation (29.6%, M = 3.15), research network (17.4%, M = 2.85), research planning (20.8%, M = 3.00), expertise (30.5%, M = 3.21), and self-confidence (23.4%, M = 3.07). This finding suggested that the proportions of uncertainty and disagreement in research dispositions were high.

Furthermore, the interview data revealed relatively poor experiences in publishing. Although the majority of interviewees reported the publication of their articles (n = 9), none were published in international journals. The majority of these articles were published in institutional conferences and journals, and only a few were published in national specialized journals. The following excerpts provide clarification.

Table 5. Respondents' research dispositions

Items	Mean	SD	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)
I received a fair amount of research training.	3.10	0.76	19.2	54.8	26
I am internally driven to conduct research.	3.15	0.83	20	50.4	29.6
I have a well-developed network of communication with other researchers.	2.85	0.82	33	49.6	17.4
I always make plans for research.	3.00	0.76	23.5	55.7	20.8
I have in-depth knowledge about my field.	3.21	0.63	7.8	61.7	30.5
I have confidence in conducting research.	3.07	0.72	18.3	58.3	23.4

"In terms of research engagement, I have only one article published in my institutional journal. And I do not participate in workshops, seminars, or conferences. When I was in university, I did an assignment as secondary research, but I did not make it published. To be honest, I am not interested in writing articles." (T07)

"I have taken part in six or seven conferences as a participant, not a presenter. Every year, I submit my paper to the university's annual conference, and I have had four articles published in the proceedings of my institutional conference. I have not had any articles published in other national or international journals." (T02)

According to the interview data, although all participants (N = 11) agreed that research presents various benefits, it was not an interest but a duty to complete. Qualitative data also revealed low frequencies of participation and presentation in workshops, seminars, and conferences, which were considered factors for establishing a research network and for improving research skills. Therefore, the lack of research skills and experience is one of the reasons for uncertainty in research practice.

"I have been working at this university since 2006, but I did not participate in the annual conference of the university until 2015. I started to submit my articles in 2019 to our home journal, and one of my studies was rejected due to low quality. I think the reason is my lack of research skills, and research is not my passion." (T08)

Data were non-normally distributed on the basis of skewness (0.026; standard error [SE] = 0.226] and kurtosis (0.502; SE = 0.447); the study performed the Kruskal–Wallis test, which indicated a significant difference in personal disposition among the three groups of qualifications ($\chi^2(2)$ = 15.93, p < .01). Accordingly, the group of participants with Doctorate degrees scored highest with a mean rank score of 90.7 followed by the with Master's (53.8) and Bachelor's (46) degrees.

Interviewees holding doctoral degrees (n = 2), in fact, proved that they received adequate training and opportunities to facilitate their research practice. In their interviews, they mentioned their participation in several workshops, seminars, and projects, which resulted in more considerable experience in research. T09 shared the following:

"When I took the doctoral course, I had more opportunities to participate in national and international conferences. I was also on the organizing committee of some conferences in my doctoral school. Besides, I could learn how to conduct research step by step, and I took part in a project to help students carry out their action research."

4.4. Conditions of Research Practices

Regarding the context of research (Table 6), although the lecturers shared that they have heavy workloads (69.6%, M = 3.95), they acknowledged the significance of research in their profession (71.3%, M = 3.82) and were ready to access academic resources (64.4%, M = 3.7). However, other activities related to research were unpopular among the participants. For example, only 28.7% agreed that they typically shared their research with others, and 25% expressed that they obtained guidance from leaders of research teams. The percentages of respondents whose management encouraged research and publications, organized training workshops on research methodology, and supported their conference participation were low (42.6%, 41.8%, and 41.8%, respectively). Less than 50% of the EFL lecturers postulated that their institutions invited other researchers to share their research and research experiences. In addition, only over one-third of the participants mentioned that they conducted research individually, which was a relatively limited proportion.

Similar findings were obtained from the interview data. First, all interviewees (N = 11) mentioned their heavy workload as the key factor that hindered them from conducting research. In their narratives, the teachers were multi-taskers. Every day, they taught in class, planned lessons, and marked tests at home. They were also the examiners, supervisors, and head teachers. As a result, they lacked the time to conduct research. The following excerpts from the interviews illustrate these points.

"I think a formidable barrier to teacher research is the heavy workload. I would be ready to do research if I had to teach only less than three

Items	Mean	SD	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)
We do individual research (with no collaboration).	3.05	0.86	25.2	42.6	32.2
The management encourages us to do research and publish.	3.29	0.88	15.7	41.7	42.6
We feel that research is an important part of employment.	3.82	0.66	1.7	27	71.3
We have ready access to reading resources.	3.70	0.65	2.6	33	64.4
The management invites scholars to talk about current research.	3.44	0.81	12.2	39.1	48.7
We talk about research.	3.17	0.70	14.8	56.5	28.7
We are guided by research leaders when engaged in research.	2.99	0.83	25.2	49.6	25.2
The management organizes research methodology training workshops.	3.45	0.78	13	45.2	41.8
The management supports our attending conferences.	3.28	0.86	16.5	41.7	41.8
We have heavy teaching workloads.	3.95	0.93	6.1	24.3	69.6

class hours a day. I would have more time to read articles and think about topics to study. Now, I have to teach nine class hours a day, so I do not know how to manage time to do research. (T05)

"Teachers in my universities have to spend much time teaching in class. They also have different work commitments such as lesson planning, test making and marking, and paperwork. Consequently, it is difficult for us to find time to do research." (T07)

T05 and T08 discussed the lack of research ideas and skills as other reasons for not conducting research. Oftentimes, they encountered difficulties in identifying research methods or analyzing data. However, they do not have a mentor from which to ask for advice. Therefore, they hope to conduct research in groups and receive support and guidance from experienced colleagues or leaders of research teams.

Despite several institutional barriers, the participants expressed positive attitudes toward the research culture in the workplace. They agreed with the institutional requirements for lecturers and hoped that they were provided with favorable conditions in which to conduct research activities. Therefore, the majority of interviewees (n = 8) were encouraged to be more research-engaged if they could obtain financial and administrative support from universities and colleagues. For instance, the participants acknowledged the mechanism, thanks to which they could be funded to publish their articles or to participate in academic conferences. Their reflections are expressed in the following excerpts.

"In my opinion, the university always encourages their teachers to do research, as evidenced by the fact that teachers who present at conferences and have high-ranking publications can get funding from the university. There are also many useful workshops and seminars from division levels to support novice researchers." (T06)

"To be honest, the whole university, from the management board to the head of the Department and the head of the division, supports the research. Most of the teachers in the Department also cooperate and facilitate others' research activities. Whenever I ask them if I can come to their class to interview or work with a group of students, they all agree and provide me with sufficient time." (T10)

5. Discussions and conclusions

This study intended to explore the perceptions of Vietnamese EFL lecturers regarding research and their actual practices of research activities. The current survey and interviews with 115 EFL lecturers in Vietnamese universities demonstrate that these lecturers were well aware of the benefits of conducting research, the organic relationship between research and teaching, the requirement of these two parallel tasks of a university lecturer, and the research conditions in their workplace. These lecturers are also well informed that apart from teaching, scientific research and international publication are other practical contributions of teachers to society. The creation of original knowledge improves the professional capacity of each teacher, which contributes to the development and training of future generations. In addition, scientific research directly contributes to the branding of and trust in Vietnamese education.

However, the participants expressed considerable concerns about their research experience, research conditions, and management mechanisms. First, a few lecturers lack a holistic understanding of research skills or research conventions. They are unfamiliar with formats for journal articles and conference presentations. This finding is similar to those of Pham (2006), Vu (2021), and Yen et al. (2018). Second, the majority of the interviewees disclosed a heavy teaching workload, such that they can barely allocate spare time and energy during the school year to conduct research on a regular basis. Thus, they frequently spend their limited free time in the semester breaks or in the summer on research activities. Thus, their research may not be rooted in the actual needs of the lecturers that emerge during teaching or the needs of the subject or discipline. Instead, it may only be a fulfillment of an annual research obligation. This notion leads to the lack of practicality in research, which demotivates lecturers toward research work. Moreover, the study confirmed that the main source of income for EFL lecturers today is derived from teaching. Scientific research is time- and effort-intensive with a meager income. Therefore, lecturers are less willing to participate in scientific research but invest more in teaching (Pham, 2006; Vu, 2021). Importantly, regulations for registration and payment of scientific research costs are tightened, which leads to many difficulties for EFL lecturers to determine scientific research. The policy to encourage scientific research remains lacking in synchronization and lacks the creation of motivation for conducting research among lecturers and staff. Moreover, funding for the scientific research projects of EFL lecturers is low. This aspect also denotes an inadequacy, which introduces difficulties in the development of scientific research among EFL lecturers. These findings are consistent with those of other studies in Vietnam (e.g., Vu, 2021; Yen et al., 2018).

Based on the abovementioned inhibiting factors, the current study proposes various suggestions for enhancing the perceptions and practices of EFL lecturers in relation to research. At the micro level, EFL lecturers need to strengthen their motivation in conducting research despite their recognition of the parallel tasks of teaching and researching and the benefits of conducting research to their careers. First, EFL lecturers can improve their research knowledge by attending research courses. Various online research courses are available on different platforms, which are conveniently built to enable busy teachers to study at their unique pace. Second, EFL lecturers should form the habit of reading scientific articles regularly instead of waiting until they start a study to read them. Reading a 30-minute article per day may be sufficient for accumulating research knowledge and ideas. EFL lecturers should also attend conferences firstly as participants and gradually build their confidence to present at institutional seminars or national and international conferences. To implement these tasks, EFL lecturers need to be strongly determined and intrinsically build a passion and desire to conduct research. They must consider scientific research as a personal need and patiently conduct research activities alongside teaching tasks.

At the meso level, the faculty should aim to establish research groups such that the lecturers with experience in scientific research can help young lecturers participate in the same topic.

Lecturers across subjects and faculties can also cooperate in related works and issues. Faculties should pay more attention to lecturers with excellent achievements in scientific research, which could provide them with opportunities to share and exchange research knowledge and experience with their colleagues (Allison & Carey, 2007). In addition, faculty leaders should pioneer the conduct of research from which sets an impressive example, provides encouragement, and generates motivation in research activities for other faculty members.

At the macro level, universities are advised to ensure the correct identification of research objectives and subjects in accordance with the content of the training program. This aspect will render research activities practical, especially for the teaching staff. In this manner, teachers are encouraged to conduct research (Gao et al., 2011). In addition, universities should increase funding for scientific research projects. In addition to funding sources for science and technology areas, the university should allocate funding sources for social science subjects, especially for language education, that present topics with high applicability.

For some subjects with few lecture hours due to few students or due to the change in the content of the training program, the lecturers do not have enough lecture hours. The study recommends that universities allow them to convert the number of scientific research hours apart from the norm of the lecturers into standard hours of instruction. This conversion creates conditions for lecturers to be considered to have completed the teaching norm per year when evaluating and ranking lecturers. This decision will be an important and necessary push for lecturers to focus on scientific research activities. Alternatively, for EFL lecturers who frequently experience teaching burdens, universities should reconsider the number of staff and allocate appropriate hours for instruction to leave teachers with sufficient time for conducting research. Importantly, focusing on proposing timely reward regimes for EFL lecturers who participate in scientific research, especially those with high achievements, is necessary for universities. Examples of such schemes included certificates of merit, bonuses, or standards for competition. Currently, a series of private universities, such as Nguyen Tat Thanh University, Duy Tan University, Ton Duc Thang University, and Phenikaa University, are accelerating on the research front. Research awarded with financial equivalents amounting to hundreds of millions of VND after international publication illustrates a significant change in the research fields in Vietnam (Vuong, 2019).

In the context of current globalization, the promotion of scientific research among lecturers is becoming increasingly practical, given the important role of scientific knowledge (Nguyen & Majoribanks, 2021). The scientific research activities of lecturers are crucial in transforming the training process into a self-training process. Lastly, this change is a necessary basis for innovation in teaching contents and methods, which could contribute to the improvement of the quality of training and the fulfillment of the increasing demands of society to train, foster, and develop higher education and high-quality teachers.

This study presents two notable limitations. First, the number of respondents was relatively limited. In fact, the number of EFL lecturers in Vietnam is large, and we expected to obtain more responses due to the large population of this profession. Despite our efforts across two months, only 115 survey questionnaires were submitted, out of which a small percentage agreed to participate in the interviews. Thus, further studies should pay special attention to the sample of lecturers and determine other possible reasons for such a low rate of participation. The second drawback was derived from the survey questionnaire in that it investigated only a few aspects of perceptions about research. It mainly focused on the benefits of research and teaching relations. We believe that other concerns, such as personal experiences in relation to research and contexts for research, should have included additional items. Moreover, future research can explore the perception of lecturers about the characteristics of research, steps in conducting research, research methods, and research scenarios.

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