



PERCEPTIONS OF VIETNAMESE PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS OF ENGLISH ABOUT ACTIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING

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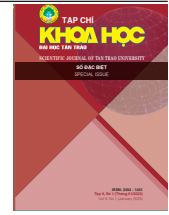
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Abstract:

Vietnamese educational system, including primary level, has experienced a renovation towards Active Teaching and Learning (ATL) approach, which aims at creating a friendly environment for students to fully develop their creativeness and pro-activeness to become independent learners. The application of ATL also fulfills the desire of education in Vietnam to move from traditional pedagogy to a student-centered approach to suit the needs of globalisation era. In this transformation journey, teachers play a prime role since they are policy implementers. This qualitative case study with seven teachers of a private primary school in Hanoi explores the perceptions of these teachers of ATL and point out the challenges that they face in employing ATL in their teaching practice. In-depth interviews with seven open-ended questions based on Weimer's (2002) [45] five theme framework of ATL characteristics were conducted and analysed under Casual Layered Analysis (Inayatullah) [3]. The results disclose that while the participants show a sense of support ATL, they still insist on their exclusive centre in the classroom. Moreover, the study discovers that teachers have a basic understanding about ATL, however, they are confused about how to adopt this approach in practice. Barriers prevent teachers from taking ATL into account come from many directions such as pressure from educational system, pressure from students' parents or the lack of training. Implications of the study are categorized into three main types, which consist of theoretical, practical and policy implications. It is highly recommended that future studies can be conducted to investigate students' perceptions of ATL to compare with teachers' perceptions. This will help to reveal if there is any mismatch between teachers' and students' beliefs to contribute to the implementation of ATL in primary schools in Vietnam



NHẬN THỨC CỦA GIÁO VIÊN TIẾNG ANH TIỂU HỌC VIỆT NAM VỀ DẠY VÀ HỌC TÍCH CỰC

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Thông tin bài viết	Tóm tắt
<p>Ngày nhận bài: 18/10/2022</p> <p>Ngày sửa bài: 15/11/2022</p> <p>Ngày duyệt đăng: 10/12/2022</p>	<p>Hệ thống giáo dục Việt Nam, trong đó có cấp tiểu học, đã trải qua quá trình đổi mới theo hướng dạy và học tích cực nhằm tạo môi trường thân thiện để học sinh phát huy hết khả năng sáng tạo, chủ động trong học độc lập. Việc áp dụng dạy và học tích cực cũng đáp ứng mong muốn giáo dục Việt Nam chuyển từ phương pháp sư phạm truyền thống sang phương pháp lấy học sinh làm trung tâm để phù hợp với nhu cầu của thời đại toàn cầu hóa. Trong hành trình chuyển đổi này, giáo viên đóng vai trò quan trọng hàng đầu vì họ là những người thực thi chính sách. Nghiên cứu tình huống định tính với bảy giáo viên của một trường tiểu học tư thục ở Hà Nội nhằm khám phá nhận thức của những giáo viên này về dạy và học tích cực đồng thời chỉ ra những thách thức mà họ gặp phải khi áp dụng phương pháp này vào thực tế giảng dạy. Các cuộc phỏng vấn sâu với 7 câu hỏi mở dựa trên 5 khung chủ đề về các đặc điểm dạy và học tích cực của Weimer (2002) [45] đã được thực hiện và phân tích trong phần Phân tích theo lớp thông thường (Inayatullah, 2004) [22]. Kết quả cho thấy trong khi những người tham gia thể hiện sự ủng hộ dạy và học tích cực thì họ vẫn nhấn mạnh vào vai trò của họ trong lớp học. Hơn nữa, nghiên cứu phát hiện ra rằng giáo viên có hiểu biết cơ bản về dạy và học tích cực, tuy nhiên, họ bối rối về cách áp dụng phương pháp này trong thực tế. Rào cản khiến giáo viên không tính đến dạy và học tích cực đến từ nhiều phía như áp lực từ hệ thống giáo dục, áp lực từ cha mẹ học sinh hay... Ý nghĩa của nghiên cứu được phân loại thành ba loại chính, bao gồm ý nghĩa lý thuyết, thực tiễn và chính sách. Rất khuyến khích các nghiên cứu trong tương lai có thể được tiến hành để điều tra nhận thức của học sinh về dạy và học tích cực để so sánh với nhận thức của giáo viên. Điều này sẽ giúp phát hiện liệu có bất kỳ sự không phù hợp nào giữa niềm tin của giáo viên và học sinh trong việc đóng góp vào việc thực hiện dạy và học tích cực ở các trường tiểu học ở Việt Nam hay không.</p>
<p>Từ khóa:</p> <p><i>Dạy học tích cực, giáo viên tiểu học, phương pháp dạy học, Việt Nam.</i></p>	

INTRODUCTION

Active Teaching and Learning (henceforth ATL) has increasingly been supported worldwide by national governments as well as international organizations. In 1990, in the World Conference on Education for all which was jointly held by UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank, there was a statement that “active and participatory approaches are particularly valuable in assuring learning acquisition and allowing learners to reach their fullest potential”. In 1991, a research-based policy report of the World Bank highlights the importance of moving from a conventional teaching method in which teachers and textbooks are the main resources of knowledge to an active teaching and learning approach in which students are in charge of their learning. In 2000, the World Education Forum in Senegal with the attendance of educational policy-makers, donors, NGOs and representatives from more than 100 countries put an emphasis on universal commitment related to ATL “Governments and all other EFA partners must work together to ensure basic education of quality for all, regardless of gender, wealth, location, language or ethnic origin. Successful education programs require among other things: well-trained teachers and active learning techniques”.

In response to this universal trend, the Vietnamese Government decided to renovate the educational system in the form of transforming from traditional teaching techniques to active teaching and learning approach (or can be referred as learner-centred approach in the context of Vietnam). ATL is the kind of teaching and learning methods aimed at “developing activeness, pro-activeness and creative of the learners while teachers take on the role of facilitators”.

This paper will explore teacher perceptions of ATL through concentrating on a case of English teachers in a private primary school in Hanoi, Vietnam. Teachers of English are chosen for this study because English teaching is believed to involve more in ATL than other subjects (Dang, 2006) [13]. Findings from previous studies indicate that teaching methods at private schools such as the one in this research seem to be more active than those at public schools (Nguyen, 2011) [30]. Furthermore, ATL is said to be one of the main focus of the surveyed school. Hence, these are informant rich cases that can enable the researcher to gain in-depth understanding about the phenomenon explored.

The purpose of this case study is to examine the meaning of ATL to teachers of English in this primary school and how it has been integrated in the curriculum. Accordingly, the research seek to answer the following questions: (1) *What are the perceptions of private primary teachers of English about ATL?* (2) *What are the challenges that these teachers of English face in applying ATL?* The findings of this paper are expected to help provide useful recommendations of enhancing the application of ALT with respect to theoretical framework, practice procedures and administrative policies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Active Teaching and Learning: Definition and Characteristics

Active Teaching and Learning is a term used in context of Vietnam and can be referred as “active learning”, “learner-centred” or “student-centred” (Nguyen, Do, Nguyen, & Cao, 2010) [29]. Allen (1995) [1] asserted that ATL is an old concept originating from the Greeks and the Socratic method of questioning and the word “active” in ATL does not refer primarily to physical activity, but it refers to the “active mental processes” that involve learners in building knowledge (Allen, 1995) [1]. Meanwhile, according to Dang (2006) [13], ATL involves learners’ activeness and flexibility in developing profound comprehension and in accounting for their own learning. Some researchers agreed that ATL consists of a variety of strategies to engage students in the process of learning and facilitate students becoming independent learners by enhancing students’ motivation and excitement of learning (Benek-Rivera & Mathews, 2004 [8]; Bonwell & Eison, 1991 [9]; Yoder & Hochevar, 2005 [47]). Moreover, Olgun (2009) [32] stated that ATL requires students to be “active participants” rather than “passive observers”. Based on the theory coined by Salman (2009) [41], ATL emphasizes students’ interaction with the learning content through initiatively generating knowledge and teachers’ role as facilitators. In short, it is obvious that all scholars agreed on the facilitating role of teachers and learners’ autonomy in ALT. It aims at changing “from teacher-centred approach to student-centred approach”.

Weimer (2002) [45] proposed a five theme framework to identify the main characteristics of ATL, which includes the balance of power, the function

of content, the role of teacher, the responsibility for learning, and the purpose and process of evaluation.

The balance of power

According to (Weimer, 2002) [45], in ATL classes, power is shared between teachers and students in collaborative decision-making process related to the course such as the assignments, course objectives or textbooks, as long as students' experience and knowledge has been appropriately deliberated (Weimer, 2002) [45]. Teacher-student balanced power can bring about win-win situations where students develop both "affectively and cognitively" (Çam, 2014) [11], increase "understanding about the organization and nature of the information" (Allen, 1995) [1], and teachers are motivated in terms of "preparing more, risking more, and be rewarded more by the sheer pleasure of teaching" (Weimer, 2002) [45]. Another important beneficiary of balancing power is that the environment of the classroom is improved because there is a much stronger sense that the class belongs to everyone. Hence, when something is ineffective, students are much more willing than in the past to help teachers fix it.

The function of content

Unlike the exclusively central role of content in traditional teacher-centred classes, in ATL classes, content is used "not as a collection of isolated facts, but as a way for students to critically think about the big questions in the field" (Wohlfarth, 2008) [46]. The function of content rotates around two main themes. The first one is that content serves as the foundation of knowledge improving learning skills such as time management or self-study so that students can thrive in other contexts or disciplines. The focus is on "the process of learning and applying the know-how and other elements in permanent confrontation to meaningful situations, i.e., search for information, analyse information, explain information" (Peyser, Gerard, & Roegiers, 2006) [34]. This idea is what Roegiers (2005) [39] calls "learn to dive before to swim". Teachers in this situation should guide students how to learn and become independent learners. The second point is that content enhances learning in the form of letting students actively involve in it rather than passively listen to what teachers say. This means that students can access and experience the content first-hand to reflect and construct their own knowledge.

The role of teacher

Although different researchers have compared the role of teachers in ATL to different images, such as gardeners (Fox, 1983) [15], midwives (Ayers, 1986) [5], guides (Hill, 1980) [20], football coaches (Barr & Tagg, 1995) [7], and maestros before an orchestra (Eisner & Reinharz, 1984) [14], they all share the same voice when it comes to the facilitative role of teachers. This role includes of three components "a knower, an activity organizer and a learning counsellor" (Dang, 2006) [13]. A "knower" defines a person who has a great deal of knowledge in the forms of "the target language" and "the choice of methodology" (Tudor, 1993) [44]. "An activity organizer" not only designs and orients learning activities towards the direction that can motivate student but also gives student feedback on their performance (Tudor, 1993) [44]. "A learning counsellor" refers to the one who is in charge of "preparing learners, analysing their needs, selecting methodology, transferring responsibility and involving learners" (Tudor, 1993). Accordingly, teachers are no longer authoritarian classroom managers, instead, attention is paid to students and the learning processes just like what King (1993) [25] portrayed "From Sage on the Stage to Guide on the Side".

The responsibility for learning

The responsibility for learning in ATL, according to Weimer (2002) [45], belongs to students. If teachers facilitate students in the journey of fully recognizing the responsibility, students can play different roles in ATL.

In the first place, students play the role as the centre of teaching and learning process, which is based on the notion about "multiple intelligences" coined by Gardner (1985) [17], whereby students are treated in different ways suitable for their own interests. This gives students the right to be empowered, which can lead students to "realise their full potential; engaging with their teachers and embarking on the learning process in the manner that will be most beneficial to them" (Attard, Ioio, Geven, & Santa, 2010) [4]. In addition, in ATL approach, students have the chance to participate in the process of designing content, activities, materials and pace of learning through interaction with their peers and their teachers (Jones, 2007) [23]. Hence, students have a feeling of attention from teachers that encourages them to participate more

in class and responsible for their own learning. From these, students may engage in setting their own goals, implementing the tasks to fulfil the goals, monitoring their progress to decide the effective strategies that they can use to accomplish the targets (Hannafin, Hall, Land, & Hill, 1994) [18].

Secondly, students in ATL play the role as “deep learners” who are able to acquire, recall information from their experience and apply it to solve problems in new and varied contexts (Rhem, 1995, as cited in Brackenbury, 2012) [10]. Deep learners are created as a result of the way students are taught to construct knowledge (Allen, 1995). In ATL approach, students no longer treat teachers and content as the dominant sources to answering their questions in class. Instead, teachers and content are parts of larger context and are used as tools to encourage students to build knowledge and skills based on their own discovery and exploration (Brackenbury, 2012) [10]. Through ATL, learners can relate knowledge to their past experience to the new experience and apply it to their life.

The purpose and process of evaluation

Evaluation is an integral part of the teaching and learning process because it aims at reviewing this process to enhance the quality of education. In ATL, the purpose of evaluation is both summative-inform cumulative evaluations to measure student growth after the end of a course and formative - provide the immediate feedback during the learning process (Fink, 2003; Yorke, 2003, as cited in Brackenbury, 2012) [10]. Summative purpose is based on the fact that evaluation generates grades through tests or examinations (Weimer, 2002) [45]. Formative assessment, such as feedback, supports teachers in monitoring current knowledge of students to boost learning or providing additional opportunities for student learning. Formative assessment targets at “help[ing] students learn to think about their own thinking so they can use the standards of the discipline or profession to recognize shortcomings and correct their reasoning as they go” (Bain, 2011) [6]. In a research conducted by Steckol (2007), formative assessment is proved to enhance student learning (as cited in Wohlfarth, 2008) [46]. The process of evaluation includes self-assessment and peer-assessment. Self-assessment means that students develop skills that enable them to evaluate their work accurately and “to identify relative strengths

and weaknesses, determine what next needs to be improved, develop an implementation plan, implement it, and finally use an assessment of its effectiveness to position themselves for the next round of improvement” (Weimer, 2002) [45]. Peer-assessment signifies that students are able to gauge other students’ work. There is a close link between self-assessment and peer-assessment because skills that are used to self-evaluate can become tools for students in peer-assessment.

Application of ATL in teaching English as a foreign language in Vietnamese primary schools

Teaching English in primary schools in Vietnam has not received a lot of attention until the 1990s when the increasing demand for the use of English with the aim of attracting more investment from the outside world. At some primary schools in big cities like Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh, the 1990s underwent a period of teaching English as a pilot program. In dealing with the needs of society, the Ministry of Education and Training issued official documents in 2003 for teaching foreign languages at elementary level heading ATL in which English was an elective subject with two forty-minute periods a week. This policy was supported nationwide which contributed to the expansion of teaching English in primary schools in all areas of Vietnam (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2007) [31]. In 2008, the MOET issued Decision No.1400/2008 QD-BGD in which English has become the compulsory subjects in primary schools for students starting from Grade 3. In terms of policy for teaching English in Primary School, the Decision No. 50/2003 QD-BGD&DT targeted at:

“Inculcating basic English communicative skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing to enable students to communicate in English at school, at home, and in familiar social environments; Providing students with a fundamental knowledge of English to enable them to gain primary understanding of the country, the people, and the culture of some English speaking countries; Building positive attitudes towards English and a better understanding and love for Vietnamese through learning English.” (Nguyen, 2011) [30].

According to this Decision, students from Grade 3 to 5 were expected to develop active learning skills to become independent which Moon (2009) [27] stated that these educational goals were too long and too ambitious. Moreover, the application of ATL in English teaching in Vietnamese primary schools has in

fact faced many other difficulties. The first challenge is the lack of English teachers at the primary level both quantitatively and qualitatively. According to Nguyen and Nguyen (2007) [31], there was no standard regulating the quality of teachers of English at primary level, therefore, “their proficiency in English and ability to teach it are far from satisfactory” (p.169). Furthermore, the number of teachers going through adequate training for teaching English for primary schoolers was limited (Thuy Anh, 2007) [43].

Concerning teaching and learning materials, the new series of national curriculum textbooks of English for primary schools are competence-based. This requires the teachers to thoroughly understand the philosophy of learner-centred pedagogy and ATL approach so as to help young students acquire and internalize the competencies embedded in the textbooks. On the contrary, based on the researcher’s personal observation in duty trips to different cities in Vietnam, the introduction of this new series has actually evoked primary school teachers’ negative reactions regarding time management (i.e., ineffective time allocation in large classes), culture of learning and teaching (i.e., Confucian teacher-centred pedagogy), and schools’ policies that favours ATL and other innovative teaching techniques and methods (i.e., lack of adequate in-service training of ATL).

As a consequence, since 2012 up to present, Vietnam’s Ministry of Education and Training has cooperated with the top universities of the country to implement training courses for in-service primary and secondary school teachers of English to enhance their professional skills, provide them with updated pedagogies and assist them to effectively use the national curriculum English textbooks. Until the long-term effectiveness of such programs can be confirmed by another rich body of research, the shortage of proficient primary school teachers of English still hinders the nation-wide application of ATL in the language classroom.

It is well worth noting that there are differences in applying ATL by English teachers in public and private schools. Findings from various research papers show that English teachers at the private schools are reported to use a wider range of teaching methods that are more active than those at the public school (Moon, 2009 [27]; Hayes, 2008 [19]; Nguyen & Nguyen,

2007) [31]. This is why the current paper seeks to explore the perceptions about ATL of a popular private primary school’s teachers of English. Moreover, it seems obvious that there is still a gap between belief and practice of innovative teaching and learning, and teachers in Vietnam still apply traditional teaching methods such as lecturing. Bringing about a research of perceptions will shed the light on the situation because teacher’s perception is believed to have an enormous impact on how they teach students. Besides, “changing teachers’ beliefs that underpin their practice and improving teachers’ knowledge are important in implementing a new policy or an education innovation” (Fullan, 2007) [16]. By discovering their beliefs and perceptions, it is hoped to contribute to change the teaching approach from conventional teaching to active teaching and learning.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative case study seeks to answer the research questions through in-depth interviews with seven teachers of English in a well-known private primary school in Hanoi. The data was analyzed based on Weimer’s (2002) [45] five theme framework of ATL characteristics and Inayatullah’s (1998) [21] content analysis.

At first, there were fifteen teachers of English in the school volunteering to participate in the study. Their ages ranged from 24 to 40 years old, and they all possessed bachelor degrees in English teacher education. In the first stage of choosing informants, the criteria “teaching experiences” was used to divide teachers into two sub-groups because teaching experience is believed to have a strong impact on how teachers perceive and apply ATL (Saito et al, 2008) [40]. The first group, which consisted of eight teachers, had more than ten years of experience, while the other group with seven teachers had less than ten years of teaching. After that, deviant case sampling was applied to select the teachers for the research. In the first group, four teachers who are the most experienced ones in teaching were selected. In the second group, three teachers who had the least experience teaching were chosen. In order to protect the participants’ identities, they are named Teachers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7.

The interview sessions were undertaken online due to the geographical distance between the participants and the researcher, and in Vietnamese because using

mother tongue could assure better explanation and better expression for the researcher and participants to enhance mutual understanding that can lead to in-depth understanding about the issue. The interview sessions, after the process of recording and transcribing, were translated into English, and sent back to the informants for confirmation.

To analyze the data, Weimer’s (2002) [45] five theme framework of ATL characteristics helps discover the participants’ perceptions of ATL in terms of teacher-student power relationship, the significance of teaching and learning contents, the teacher’s role, students’ autonomy and evaluation procedures. Just as important, casual layered analysis provides a deeper understanding about two questions that are mentioned in the introduction of this research, which are the perceptions of teachers of ATL and challenges that they have to face when employing ATL. There are four levels of CLA. The “litany” level helps researchers to skim the surface of the scenario or problem. (Inayatullah, 2004) [22]. The second level beneath the surface including the causes, related to “social, technological, economic and environmental political and historical factors” explains for what happens in the litany level (Inayatullah, 2004) [22]. The third level brings about the discourse/worldview that reveals “underlying belief system and deeper assumptions” (Pham, 2010) [35].

The balance of power

Table 1: Views on balance of power

Main theme	Sub- themes	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3	Teacher 4	Teacher 5	Teacher 6	Teacher 7
The balance of power	Power is shared in class, but teachers play the authoritarian role.	x		x				
	Power sharing is only possible for older students		x		x	x		
	Power cannot be shared						x	x

Table 1 shows teachers’ opinions about how the power should be allocated in the classroom. Based on the results, there are two teachers who think that shared power could be accepted as long as their role as the authority in the classroom is still guaranteed.

“Teachers can share the power in the classroom with students to the extent that teachers’ positions should stay the same. I mean that teachers still have the right and students should listen and respect to what teachers say in class” (Teacher 1).

The fourth level, which is the deepest or the “root” level of the analysis, concentrates on metaphor or myth such as “deep stories, the collective archetypes, the unconscious, often emotive, dimensions of the problem or the paradox” (Inayatullah, 2004) [22]. At this level, exploration tries to “uncover hidden and explicit mythologies, narratives, symbols and metaphors within the text” (Anthony, 2004) [2].

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Participants’ perceptions of ATL

In general, all interviewed teachers hold positive attitudes towards ATL and support this approach. They agree on the merits of the pedagogy which Teacher 1 believes to “create a friendly environment in which the interaction between teachers and students is enhanced”. ATL is also welcomed by these participants because it “is a trend of modern era” which “is supported in the policies” (Teacher 5) and “popular in many developed countries in the world” (Teacher 4). However, they also state that it is hard for them to apply ATL in their teaching practice. More information related to the participants’ perceptions is revealed in the following parts which are based on five characteristics of ATL: the balance of power, the function of content, the role of teacher, the responsibility for learning and the purpose and process of evaluation (Weimer, 2002) [45].

Furthermore, Teacher 2 states that although it is necessary to create the balance of power between students and teachers, it should be implemented in the higher levels of education such as secondary or high schools because elementary students are not believed to have enough knowledge and experience to take part in the decision-making process in class. Besides, some teachers are afraid that sharing power could give way to a lack of discipline in the classroom as Teacher 5 maintains:

“If I am too friendly with students, and I let my students know that my role is equal to that of students, how can I bring students back to where I want them in the classroom?”

From the analysed data, it can be said that teachers are not ready in sharing the power in the classroom with students. They still hold a belief of the role as an authority figure in the classroom.

The function of contents

Table 2: Views on the function of content

Main theme	Sub themes	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3	Teacher 4	Teacher 5	Teacher 6	Teacher 7
The function of content	Content should be practical	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Content is overloaded	x	x			x		
	There must be room for teaching learning skills		x			x		

Table 2 indicates that all participants agree that the content of teaching should be practical rather than theoretical. Teachers 6 and 7 claims that the content should be “applicable in real life and students can connect what they learn to what they see in their daily lives” as well as “meet students’ interests and be related to their backgrounds and experience.” They also refer to the fact that students have to learn too much in the ‘standard’ time-frame. The course workload is usually overloaded, resulting in the teachers often finding themselves hardly have enough time to ‘cover’ all the contents, much less having time to matching the teaching pace with students. From teacher 1 and 2’

experiences, they consider the normal textbook course as “excess and lack of the right level of content at the same time”, as well as “should allocate more time for more flexible teaching”.

In addition, teacher 5 raises the idea that the content of teaching served as an instrument for teachers to teach children basic skills that could benefit for their lifelong learning. She claims that “content of textbooks should include learning skills that teach the student how to self-teach himself, as learning is continuous and is not a closed process”. This view is shared by teacher 2, who thinks that “learning skill is important, and should be integrated into the textbook as well”.

The role of teachers

Table 3: Views on the role of teachers

Main theme	Sub themes	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3	Teacher 4	Teacher 5	Teacher 6	Teacher 7
The role of teacher	Facilitator	x	x	x	x	x		
	Facilitator Lecturer						x	x

Regardless of teaching experiences, all participants highlight the important role of teacher as facilitators because “teachers cannot know everything” (Teacher 1) and “modern pedagogy focuses on training students become autonomous learners based on the guiding of teachers” (Teacher 2). Teacher 6, an experienced teacher, claims that teachers acted as both “lecturers” whose mission is “to deliver knowledge for students” and “facilitators” who “instruct, suggest and design attractive teaching activities to involve students’

participation in the process of discovery new information to absorb knowledge for themselves”. She adds that these two roles are equally important and teachers should play the role as “lecturers” and “facilitators” in a “flexible” and “creative” way. For example, normally she uses lecturing style to teach her students but if she observes and realises that her students get bored, she would change to the facilitative role in which she divides the class into groups and let them work with each other under her instructions.

*The responsibility for learning***Table 4: Views on the responsibility for learning**

Main theme	Sub themes	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3	Teacher 4	Teacher 5	Teacher 6	Teacher 7
The responsibility for learning	Students are responsible	x	x	x			x	x
	Both students and teachers are responsible for learning				x	x		

According to the table above, there are two trends of perceiving the responsibility for learning among the participants. First of all, most of the teachers believe that students are the only ones who take account of their learning because “learning is students’ duty and the primary reason why students go to school” (Teacher 3). Teacher 2 also reveals that she lets her students realise their responsibility for learning by creating motivation for learning. To achieve this goal, she offers rewards for her students such as presenting them stickers of their favourite anime characters. Teacher 6 mentions a different way to raise students’ intrinsic interest of

studying, which is through helping them set targets for their learning.

On the other hands, two teachers think that both teachers and students are responsible for learning. Teacher 4 states that students take responsibility for their learning and teachers should have a sense of responsibility for teacher’s learning because “teachers should learn to improve the quality of teaching, teachers should learn to obtain more knowledge”. Teacher 5 believes that “when students don’t study well, parents may blame teachers for that, so learning responsibility should also belong to teachers”.

*Participants’ evaluation of their teaching***Table 5: Views on teaching evaluation**

Main theme	Sub themes	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3	Teacher 4	Teacher 5	Teacher 6	Teacher 7
How teachers evaluate their teaching	Through students	x	x	x	x	x		x
	Through students, students’ parents and other teachers						x	

Most of the interviewed teachers think that through observing their students they can reflect if their teaching is effective or not. Precisely, Teachers 4 and 5 believe that “if students have good grades and are eager at class, [the] teaching is efficient” or they “teach in the right way”. For these participants, students’ attitudes, students’ growth through grades are used as

benchmarks to evaluate their teaching. Teacher 6 also adds that the effectiveness of teaching relies not only on students but also on feedbacks of their co-workers and students’ parents. However, when asked about the most important element to assess her teaching lesson, she still emphasizes the factors related to students.

*Participants’ evaluation of their students***Table 6: Views on students’ evaluation**

Main theme	Sub themes	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3	Teacher 4	Teacher 5	Teacher 6	Teacher 7
How teachers evaluate their students	Students attitudes	x	x	x		x		x
	Students learning outcomes	x			x	x	x	
	Collaboration within leaning groups		x				x	x
	Feedbacks from students’ parents	x						
	Peer evaluation		x					

Students' attitudes and students' learning outcomes are two main themes in the responses. According to the teachers, these two components have a close connection because students' positive attitudes could lead to their positive learning results. Interestingly, the idea related to grades is mentioned a lot in the interview sessions. Teacher 1 shares:

"I assess a student based on his or her attitudes of learning. I observe if he or she shows interest in the topic or ask any critical questions or not. I also look at the result of the task that I give the student if he or she can complete it. Tests are important too because the grades after tests can help me to measure my students progress. In my class, students with good grades are usually students who eagerly answer my questions".

Likewise, Teacher 6 uses "written tests and observation to assess students". If a student has good grades, he or she is hard working and owns positive attitudes of learning. Others instruments that teachers apply to evaluate students are through "cooperation with members in a learning group" or "feedbacks from students' parents about how students study at home". Peer evaluation is the idea of only Teacher 2 to assess students because other teachers asserted that students did not obtain enough knowledge to evaluate each other. This idea is supported by the study of Jones (1995) [24]. It is noticeable that teachers focus a lot on grades because high-stakes examinations determine reputation of schools and teachers. This leads to the impact on teachers' notions about teaching methods so students can get good marks in examinations.

The gap between perceptions and practices

In general, teachers of English in Doan Thi Diem Primary School have a basic understanding about ATL because they all perceive themselves as facilitators, the key characteristics in ATL. Furthermore, they support ATL and think that ATL is significant for both teachers and students. However, casual layered analysis reveals that there is a gap between teachers' perceptions and practice as they reveal. Additionally, teachers still hold the authoritarian attitudes to students by stating that the power in the classroom still in the palms of teachers and somehow refuse to share it with students. This is supported by the research of Saito and Tsukui (2008) [40].

The paradox between ATL support and authoritarian attitude toward students

Although the teachers support ATL and perceive their role mainly as "facilitators", they still hold authoritarian attitudes towards students. This can be explained by the notion that the Vietnamese teachers struggle with assumptions that attach to them. Being a teacher of English means that the teacher have to perform like a facilitator while to become a good Vietnamese teacher require he/she to fulfill his/her traditional duty as imparter of knowledge (Phan, 2004) [37]. This can be explained by challenges that inhibit teachers from implementing ATL effectively. This is also a matter of the research question of this study. The challenges appearing in this part mainly rotate around the word "pressure". The participants claim to have to stand a variety of pressure which can be categorized into two main types: pressure from parents of students and pressure from educational system. In addition to that, from teachers' perspectives, other constraints also exist which hinder the application of ATL.

Pressure from students' parents

One of the challenges that teachers mention in the interview sessions is associated with students' parents. First of all, students' parents underwent their school life with teacher-centred classroom in which teachers played the role as knowledge transmitters; accordingly, these parents naturally presumed that teachers were the source that "fed" knowledge into their children's mouth. Teacher 5 says that "some parents assume that teachers should teach their kids everything like what they used to study in the past".

Secondly, the participants also emphasise that some parents have high expectations of their children's learning outcomes, so teachers have to teach in the way that meet such needs.

"Some parents of students in my class always told me to force their children study hard so their children can pass the entrance examination to enter some of the famous secondary schools like Hanoi- Amsterdam Secondary School or Le Quy Don Secondary School. I think that I have to meet the demands because they attach their wish to my responsibility." (Teacher 4)

Pressure from educational system

Class size, lack of time and curriculum are highlighted by most of the teachers as the main constraints that hinder them from implementing ATL effectively. According to the participants, there are

about 30 students in each class at their school. This number, if compared to other schools, can be accepted but it is still considered as too crowded with the ideal class in ATL as mentioned in the literature review. In such a class with 30 students, teachers report that it is very difficult for them to pay attention to each student's needs and concerns because of the lack of time. According to the regulations from the Ministry of Education and training, each lesson lasts only 40 minutes. Students in this primary school had seven periods of English each week. In addition to teaching English as a subject which focused on four skills: reading, speaking, writing and listening, teachers in the school had to cover Mathematics and Science in English too. As teachers are in rush to cover the material, they decide to adopt the easy way of illustrating knowledge rather than letting students to explore the facts. This traditional method can facilitate teachers transferring the content in a brief amount of time. This is consistent with a study conducted by Pham (2010) [35] and Miner, Das & Gale (1984) [26]. Teacher 3 complains that "the content is too much" and she has to "try to pay attention to each student in the class but it's very difficult to do within the time allocation like that."

The teachers also complain about the issue associated with training. They state that there is a lack of training of ATL so they do not know how to manage a class with ATL. Besides, teachers also comment that a great deal of knowledge about ATL that they obtain is through the channel of documents or policies of the Government, no pilot schools or model lessons about ATL are provided for them; accordingly, it creates hardship for them to have a practical understanding about ATL.

In addition to that, teachers state that the pressure comes from high expectations of policy, which "set long list of educational goals to achieve". Teachers are required not only to develop skills for the apparent need of ATL but also to maintain high academic standards for students. This statement accords with the research of Pham (2011) [36] in which the goals are commented as "too ambitious and unrealistic" (p.13). The pressure also stem from the strong control influence of the authority. Inspectors always visited school and checked lesson plans to make sure that teachers cover all items of the curriculum. Hence, teachers are pushed to focus on fulfilling the content-covering goal rather than

designing activities to carry out ATL. This is consistent with findings by Schweisfurth (2011) [42].

Other challenges

Students' resistance is one of the obstacles that teachers in this school mention. Some of the students are "lazy and don't want to study", other students might be "less motivated than others". Although not all of the students present like the above-listed behaviours, their attitude might spread to others who are in contact with them. Since students are indispensable parts ATL, these negative attitudes trouble the way that teachers adopt ATL.

The issue related to seating arrangements is also stated in the interviews. According to teachers, students have to sit in rows in the classroom, with seats facing the front, which brings about difficulties for teachers to design active activities that students have to move around the classroom. This seating arrangement also forces students to focus on teacher in the front, which shows a sense of teacher-led pedagogy that contradicts the principles of ATL.

Another challenge is the loose cooperation between teachers and students' parents. In accordance with teachers' responses, teachers and students' parents only have one official meeting to update information about their children progress at the end of each semester, which means only twice per year. This results in the case that teachers can not share the notion of ATL with students' parents, thus, hardly receive support from these parents to adopt ATL.

CONCLUSION

The participant teachers of English reveal a sense of support to ATL a basic understanding of ATL. To illustrate, they believe that content should be practical and link to students' life experiences or teachers play the facilitative roles. Conversely, they still hold firmly to the authoritarian attitude towards their students

The participants perceived that although they want to change their teaching method towards ATL direction, it is very hard for them to apply it in reality. There are two main challenges that these teachers have to cope with. The first is the pressure from parents of students, pressure from educational system such as class size, lack of time and curriculum, pressure from government policies and other barriers, namely, loose cooperation between schools and parents' students or seating

arrangement. These constraints belong to the conscious mind of teachers, which means that they realize these facts and are capable of articulating their points of views and giving relevant stimulus and support for the conversations. On the other hand, the biggest obstacle that the teachers have not recognized yet in the process of mastering ATL is in their subconscious part. It is their perceptions that inhibit them from adopting ATL. For example, the idea of ATL, which stresses the egalitarian classroom where teachers and students share the power, is opposite to their authoritarian attitude towards students.

This study is believed to be significant for the management board of the surveyed primary school to reflect on its teachers' experiences in applying ATL, thereby designing methods and procedures to help teachers effectively integrate ATL in their classrooms. Extensive teacher peer support, regular professional meetings, and enhanced rapport with students' parents should be taken into consideration.

The research brings about practical implications for the teachers of English in this particular school in terms of recognizing the hidden beliefs that underpin in their views. Hence, changing the negative parts of their mind that hinders the application of ATL is a matter of urgency. To materialize this goal, it is necessary for these teachers to improve their professional capacity and obtain a great deal of knowledge related to ATL by researching information on the Internet or reading books or thinking critical about the feedbacks given by their colleagues. It is also essential for them to create a stimulating environment that encourages learning and enhance the relationship with their students. By doing that, they can boost intrinsic impetus of students, "hold their interest and imagination", thus, reduce the number of students who are "lazy and less motivated" as they stated in the interviews (Carr, 2005) [12].

This study also provides a chance for policy makers of the Vietnamese Government to encourage deep reflection on the practice of ATL in reality. The biggest challenge is teachers' perceptions, which can be hard to change but it does not mean impossible (Nespor, 1987 [28]; Peacock, 2001 [33]; Raths, 2001) [38]. It is advisable that policy should play the role as key change agents in transforming teachers' perceptions, which can be said as the biggest constraints to the implementation of ATL.

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