



DOI:10.22144/ctujoisd.2025.070

Understanding learner satisfaction in EFL Continuing Education Programs: A Qualitative case study in Viet Nam

Le Xuan Mai, Phuong Hoang Yen, Huynh Minh Hien, and Le Thanh Thao*

School of Foreign Languages, Can Tho University, Viet Nam

*Corresponding author (thaole@ctu.edu.vn)

Article info.

Received 27 Nov 2024

Revised 28 Nov 2024

Accepted 1 Jun 2025

Keywords

A qualitative case study, EFL continuing education programs, learner satisfaction, Viet Nam

ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study explores the factors contributing to learner satisfaction in English as a foreign language (EFL) continuing education programs in Viet Nam. Grounded in the andragogical principles and the socio-cultural perspective on language learning, the study investigates the experiences of five Vietnamese adult learners, including three graduates and two current participants, through semi-structured interviews. The findings reveal that learner satisfaction is shaped by four key factors: teacher-student relationships, program relevance to learners' goals, challenges and support mechanisms, and cultural dimensions of satisfaction. Participants emphasized the importance of empathetic, supportive teachers, practical and goal-oriented curricula, and flexible program structures that accommodate their professional and personal responsibilities. Cultural values, such as respect for teachers and the inclusion of culturally relevant content, further enhanced their engagement and motivation. The study's contributions lie in contextualizing learner satisfaction within the Vietnamese socio-cultural framework, highlighting the interplay between universal adult learning principles and local cultural practices. Practical implications include the need for culturally responsive pedagogy, flexible program design, and robust institutional support to enhance EFL learning experiences. While limited by its small sample size, this study offers valuable insights and lays the groundwork for further research on adult learner satisfaction in EFL programs across diverse contexts.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the demand for English as a foreign language (EFL) instruction has surged in Viet Nam, driven by globalization and the growing importance of English in professional and academic settings. Continuing education programs have emerged as pivotal platforms for adult learners to acquire and enhance their English proficiency. However, understanding what truly satisfies EFL learners in these programs remains a critical area of inquiry,

particularly given the diversity of learner needs and expectations in the Vietnamese context.

Learner satisfaction is widely recognized as a key factor influencing the success of educational programs, yet it is a multifaceted construct influenced by a range of pedagogical, psychological, and contextual factors. Previous studies have highlighted the importance of teaching methodologies, curriculum design, teacher-learner interaction, and learning resources in shaping learner satisfaction (Djudin, 2018; Siddig & Al

Khoudary, 2018; Smith & Worsfold, 2014). However, there is a limited understanding of how these elements interact within the unique cultural and institutional frameworks of Viet Nam's continuing education system. Moreover, while quantitative studies have shed light on general trends, there is a growing need for qualitative insights that capture the nuanced experiences and perceptions of learners.

This study aims to address this gap by exploring the factors that contribute to learner satisfaction in EFL continuing education programs in Viet Nam. Employing a qualitative case study approach, this research investigates learners' perspectives to uncover the underlying elements that enhance their learning experiences. By focusing on a specific program and delving into the lived experiences of participants, this study seeks to provide a holistic understanding of what satisfies EFL learners in this context.

The findings of this study have the potential to inform educators, program designers, and policymakers, offering practical insights for improving the quality of EFL education in Viet Nam. Furthermore, this research contributes to the broader discourse on adult language learning by situating learner satisfaction within the socio-cultural dynamics of a rapidly developing country.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Learner satisfaction in language education

Learner satisfaction has been widely studied in the context of education, where it is regarded as a critical indicator of the quality and effectiveness of a program. Satisfaction is a multidimensional construct influenced by pedagogical, institutional, and personal factors (Weerasinghe & Fernando, 2017). In language education, satisfaction is closely tied to learners' perceptions of teaching quality, curriculum relevance, classroom interaction, and achievement of learning goals (Al-Mahrooqi et al., 2016).

Research suggests that teaching methodology plays a pivotal role in determining learner satisfaction. Communicative language teaching (CLT), for instance, emphasizes meaningful interaction and learner-centered instruction, aligning with adult learners' need for practical application (Richards, 2006). Similarly, task-based language teaching (TBLT) has been found to enhance learner engagement and satisfaction by integrating real-life tasks into the classroom (Ellis, 2009). These

approaches resonate with learners who seek tangible benefits from their language education, such as improved communication skills for professional and personal development.

2.2. Adult learning principles in continuing education

Continuing education programs are designed to cater to adult learners, whose needs and motivations often differ from those of younger learners. Knowles' (1984) theory of andragogy emphasizes the importance of self-directed learning, experiential learning, and immediate applicability for adults. These principles emphasize the importance of aligning instructional strategies with learners' life experiences and goals.

Adult learners in EFL programs are typically motivated by specific objectives, such as career advancement, academic achievement, or personal fulfillment (Hussain et al., 2020). Their satisfaction is influenced by the extent to which programs address these goals and provide a supportive learning environment. Flexible scheduling, access to resources, and opportunities for peer collaboration have been identified as key contributors to satisfaction in adult education contexts (Smith, 2019).

In the Vietnamese context, adult learners in continuing education programs often face additional challenges, including balancing learning with work and family responsibilities. Addressing these challenges through context-sensitive program design is essential for enhancing learner satisfaction.

2.3. EFL teaching in Viet Nam: Challenges and opportunities

The teaching and learning of English in Viet Nam are shaped by unique socio-cultural, economic, and institutional factors. As a developing country with a growing integration into the global economy, Viet Nam places significant emphasis on English proficiency as a means of enhancing employability and competitiveness. However, EFL instruction in Viet Nam often encounters challenges such as large class sizes, limited resources, and a traditional emphasis on grammar-focused instruction (Vu Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021).

Despite these challenges, there has been a shift toward learner-centered pedagogies and communicative approaches in recent years. Studies have shown that Vietnamese learners value practical

and interactive learning experiences that enable them to use English in real-world contexts (Nguyen et al., 2024). Moreover, teacher-learner relationships are particularly important in Vietnamese culture, where respect for educators is deeply ingrained. The quality of teacher feedback, encouragement, and interpersonal connection significantly influences learner satisfaction (Pham et al., 2019).

While the existing literature provides valuable insights into the general determinants of learner satisfaction in language education and adult learning, there is limited research focusing specifically on EFL continuing education programs in Viet Nam. Most studies in this area adopt a quantitative approach, offering statistical analyses of satisfaction levels but often failing to capture the lived experiences and nuanced perspectives of learners. Additionally, the interplay of cultural values, institutional practices, and learner expectations in the Vietnamese context remains under-explored. Therefore, this study aims to answer the following research question: “What factors contribute to the satisfaction of EFL learners in continuing education programs in Viet Nam?”

3. METHODS

3.1. Research design

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the factors contributing to learner satisfaction in EFL continuing education programs in Viet Nam. Qualitative research is particularly well-suited for capturing the rich, complex, and contextually embedded experiences of learners, offering insights that extend beyond numerical trends and standardized measurements (Wallen & Fraenkel, 2013). By focusing on learners’ subjective perspectives, this approach aims to uncover the nuanced interplay of personal, pedagogical, and contextual factors influencing their satisfaction.

Semi-structured interviews serve as the primary data collection method for this study. This approach provides flexibility to probe into specific areas of interest while allowing participants to share their experiences and perceptions in their own words. The semi-structured format ensures that key themes related to learner satisfaction are addressed, including teaching quality, curriculum relevance, classroom environment, and support services, while also leaving space for participants to raise additional factors they deem significant. The interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of adult learners

enrolled in EFL continuing education programs in Viet Nam, selected to ensure diversity in terms of age, gender, professional background, and prior English learning experiences.

The theoretical framework underpinning this study is informed by two complementary perspectives: Knowles’ (1984) andragogical principles and a socio-cultural approach to language learning. The theory of andragogy emphasizes the unique characteristics of adult learners, including their self-directedness, need for practical application, and reliance on life experiences as a foundation for learning. This framework provides a lens to examine how the design and delivery of continuing education programs align with the specific needs and motivations of adult EFL learners. For instance, the extent to which programs allow for autonomy, experiential learning, and relevance to real-world contexts is critical in shaping learner satisfaction.

The sociocultural perspective on language learning, rooted in Vygotskian theory, highlights the importance of interaction, collaboration, and cultural context in language acquisition (Vygotsky, 1987). From this perspective, learner satisfaction is influenced by the quality of social and cultural interactions within the learning environment. Teacher-learner relationships, peer support, and the integration of culturally relevant materials are key aspects that contribute to a supportive and engaging learning experience. This framework is particularly relevant in the Vietnamese context, where collectivist cultural values and respect for authority figures play significant roles in shaping classroom dynamics and learner expectations.

By integrating these theoretical frameworks, the study seeks to provide a holistic understanding of learner satisfaction in EFL continuing education programs. The qualitative design, combined with the use of semi-structured interviews, allows for an in-depth exploration of how these theoretical constructs manifest in learners’ lived experiences. The insights generated from this research are intended to inform program design and instructional practices, ultimately contributing to the improvement of EFL education for adult learners in Viet Nam.

3.2. Participants

The participants in this study consist of five Vietnamese adult learners enrolled in or recently graduated from EFL continuing education programs. The group was purposefully selected to

ensure diversity in their experiences, reflecting a range of perspectives on what contributes to learner satisfaction. Three of the participants have completed the program, while the remaining two are currently enrolled. This mix allows the study to capture reflections from those who have had time to evaluate the program's long-term impact and the ongoing experiences of current learners.

To protect the identities of the participants, pseudonyms were assigned to each individual. The three graduates are referred to as Hoa, Minh, and Lan. Hoa is a 32-year-old marketing professional who pursued the program to improve her business communication skills. Minh, 28, works in the tourism industry and sought the program to enhance his conversational fluency with international clients. Lan, 40, is a teacher at a local high school who enrolled to meet professional development requirements and expand her teaching expertise. The two current learners, Thao and Quan, are 25 and 35 years old, respectively. Thao is a recent university graduate preparing for a Master's program abroad, while Quan, a project manager, is balancing work with evening classes to improve his English for career advancement.

Ethical considerations were central to the research design. Participants were informed of the study's objectives, their voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequences. Consent forms were obtained, ensuring that participants understood the purpose and scope of the research, as well as how their data would be used. To further ensure confidentiality, personal identifiers were removed from the data, and pseudonyms were used throughout the analysis and reporting process. The researchers also took care to avoid any potential harm to the participants by creating a safe and respectful environment during interviews, emphasizing that there were no right or wrong answers to the questions posed.

The selection of participants with diverse backgrounds and experiences allows for a richer understanding of the factors contributing to learner satisfaction in EFL continuing education programs. The ethical measures implemented in the study underscore the commitment to maintaining the integrity of the research process and respecting the participants' rights and well-being.

3.3. Data collection

The primary method of data collection for this study was semi-structured interviews, chosen for their

flexibility in exploring the nuanced perspectives of participants while maintaining a focus on key themes related to learner satisfaction (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). Before conducting the main interviews, a pilot study was carried out with two participants who were not part of the final sample. The pilot study served to refine the interview questions, ensuring they were clear, culturally appropriate, and effective in eliciting rich, detailed responses. Based on feedback from the pilot, revisions were made to include more open-ended questions and prompts that encouraged participants to reflect deeply on their experiences.

The final interview guide included questions such as "What aspects of the program do you find most satisfying and why?", "How do your teachers' methods impact your learning experience?", "What challenges have you faced in the program, and how have they been addressed?", and "Can you describe any specific moments or activities that made you feel motivated or supported?" These questions were designed to explore various dimensions of learner satisfaction, including pedagogical practices, program structure, and the socio-cultural aspects of the learning environment.

Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes and was conducted in a location chosen by the participants to ensure their comfort and privacy. Most interviews took place in quiet coffee shops or private study rooms, providing a relaxed and distraction-free environment. Given that all participants were Vietnamese, the interviews were conducted in Vietnamese to allow for more natural and expressive communication. This approach also ensured that participants could articulate their thoughts and feelings without the constraints of using a second language. The interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent and later transcribed verbatim. For analysis, key excerpts were translated into English while maintaining their original meanings and nuances.

To ensure the reliability of the data, the researcher established rapport with participants, creating a trusting atmosphere that encouraged open and honest sharing. Follow-up questions and probes were used to clarify or elaborate on responses when necessary, allowing for a deeper exploration of their experiences. The use of semi-structured interviews provided a balance between consistency in addressing core themes and adaptability to the unique insights offered by each participant. This process yielded rich qualitative data, offering

valuable perspectives on what satisfies EFL learners in continuing education programs in Viet Nam.

3.4. Data analysis

The data collected from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, a qualitative method that identifies, organizes, and interprets patterns of meaning within the data. This approach was chosen for its flexibility and its capacity to capture both explicit and latent themes related to learner satisfaction in EFL continuing education programs. Thematic analysis was conducted following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework, ensuring a systematic and rigorous process.

The first step involved familiarization with the data. The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim in Vietnamese, and the researcher repeatedly reviewed the transcripts to immerse in the participants' narratives. Key segments were translated into English for reporting purposes, ensuring the preservation of cultural and contextual nuances. During this stage, initial notes were taken to highlight significant phrases, ideas, or recurring concepts.

The second step entailed generating initial codes. Using a manual coding process, meaningful segments of the text were systematically labeled based on their relevance to learner satisfaction. Examples of codes included "teacher encouragement," "practical application," "peer collaboration," and "challenges balancing work and study." These codes captured both surface-level meanings and deeper implications that aligned with the study's research question.

Next, the coded data were organized into potential themes. Related codes were grouped together to form broader themes that reflected underlying patterns. For instance, codes such as "teacher feedback," "interactive teaching methods," and "motivational support" were grouped under the theme "Teacher Influence on Learning Satisfaction." Themes were refined through iterative review, ensuring they were distinct yet interconnected, and directly linked to the research objectives.

In the fourth step, the themes were reviewed and refined further. The researcher ensured that each theme was supported by sufficient data and checked the coherence of the thematic structure. Some preliminary themes were combined or redefined, while others were discarded for lacking sufficient

evidence. At this stage, the themes were also cross-checked against the entire dataset to confirm their validity and ensure that they captured the essence of participants' experiences.

The final steps involved defining and naming the themes and producing the report. The themes were clearly defined and contextualized within the theoretical framework, highlighting their relevance to andragogical principles and the socio-cultural perspective on language learning. Key themes included "Teacher-Student Relationships," "Program Relevance to Learner Goals," "Challenges and Support Mechanisms," and "Cultural Dimensions of Satisfaction." These themes were illustrated with direct quotes from participants, providing authentic insights into their experiences.

This study, by employing thematic analysis, was able to systematically unpack the complex factors contributing to learner satisfaction in EFL continuing education programs in Viet Nam. This approach facilitated a deep understanding of the interplay between individual perceptions, pedagogical practices, and socio-cultural influences, offering valuable contributions to the field of EFL education.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Teacher-student relationships

A key theme that emerged from the data was the significant influence of teacher-student relationships on learner satisfaction. All five participants, including three graduates and two current students, emphasized that positive and supportive interactions with their teachers played a pivotal role in fostering their motivation and engagement. They described that teachers' encouragement, approachability, and individualized attention made them feel valued and supported throughout their learning journey.

Hoa, a graduate, shared: *"My teacher always took time to explain things I didn't understand, even after class. She encouraged me to keep trying when I felt like giving up. I felt like she genuinely cared about my progress."* Hoa's experience aligns with the andragogical principle of fostering a supportive environment tailored to adult learners' needs. Her teacher's individualized feedback and encouragement reflect the importance of acknowledging the learner's autonomy and personal challenges. From a socio-cultural perspective, the teacher's active engagement can be understood as a

form of scaffolding, where support is provided to help the learner move beyond their current capabilities, ultimately fostering both confidence and satisfaction.

Similarly, Thao, a current learner, noted: *“Our teacher is always cheerful and patient. When I make mistakes, she doesn’t criticize; instead, she helps me understand why it’s wrong and how to improve. It makes the classroom feel like a safe place to learn.”*

Thao’s remarks highlight the socio-cultural importance of a positive emotional climate in the classroom, particularly in the Vietnamese context, where respect and harmony are highly valued. The teacher’s approach resonates with the andragogical theory’s emphasis on creating a learning environment where adult learners feel respected and understood. Additionally, the teacher’s patient guidance exemplifies culturally sensitive pedagogy, enhancing the learner’s satisfaction by reducing anxiety and fostering trust.

These excerpts illustrate how teacher-student relationships are central to the learner experience, with teachers acting not only as instructors but also as mentors and motivators. Such relationships contribute to a supportive and engaging learning environment, which is particularly critical for adult learners balancing multiple responsibilities. The findings underscore the importance of teacher sensitivity to both individual and cultural needs in fostering learner satisfaction in EFL continuing education programs.

4.2. Program relevance to learner goals

Another key theme identified in the data was the importance of program relevance to learners’ personal and professional goals. All five participants expressed that their satisfaction with the program was closely linked to its ability to address their immediate needs and support their long-term goals. Participants highlighted that practical content, skill-focused instruction, and real-world applicability significantly enhanced their learning experience.

Minh, a graduate, reflected: *“The program was designed with clear objectives. For someone like me, working in the tourism industry, the focus on communication skills and situational practice was exactly what I needed. I could apply what I learned immediately at work, and it boosted my confidence when talking to foreign clients.”* Minh’s account demonstrates the alignment between the program’s curriculum and his professional goals, an aspect

emphasized by the andragogical framework. The andragogical theory posits that adult learners are goal-oriented and value learning that directly applies to their real-world contexts. From a socio-cultural perspective, Minh’s satisfaction can also be linked to the program’s responsiveness to the economic and professional demands of the Vietnamese context, enabling him to navigate intercultural interactions more effectively.

Similarly, Quan, a current learner, explained: *“I appreciate how the program focuses on workplace communication. It’s not just about grammar or theory, but it’s about how I can use English in emails, meetings, and presentations. That’s what I need for my job, and it keeps me motivated to learn.”* Quan’s remarks underscore the significance of immediate applicability in adult education. His motivation aligns with the andragogical theory’s principle that adult learners are problem-centered and seek learning experiences that solve practical challenges. Additionally, from a socio-cultural lens, the program’s emphasis on workplace communication reflects the growing importance of English in Viet Nam’s professional sectors, catering to learners’ aspirations in a globalized economy.

These findings highlight that learner satisfaction is closely tied to the relevance of the program’s content and objectives to their personal and professional goals. By addressing learners’ needs for practical application and real-world utility, the program not only enhances their learning experience but also contributes to their sense of achievement and motivation. This underscores the critical role of context-sensitive curriculum design in meeting the expectations of adult EFL learners in continuing education programs.

4.3. Challenges and support mechanisms

Participants discussed the challenges they faced during the program and the strategies that enabled them to overcome these difficulties. All five participants highlighted various challenges, including balancing study with work or family responsibilities, mastering complex language skills, and managing feelings of self-doubt. Despite these hurdles, their satisfaction was influenced by the availability and effectiveness of support mechanisms, such as flexible scheduling, opportunities for peer collaboration, and teacher guidance.

Lan, a graduate, described her struggle with time management: *“As a mother and a teacher, I found it*

hard to balance my work, family, and studies. But the program offered evening classes, and my teacher was always understanding when I couldn't meet a deadline. These small things made a big difference and helped me stay on track." Lan's experience highlights the importance of institutional flexibility and teacher empathy in addressing the unique challenges of adult learners. According to the andragogical principles, adult learners bring a wealth of responsibilities and prior experiences to the classroom, which necessitates a learning environment that accommodates their individual circumstances. From a socio-cultural perspective, the collective support offered by the program and her teacher reflects the Vietnamese value of relational harmony and shared understanding, contributing to her overall satisfaction.

Similarly, Thao, a current learner, mentioned the role of peer support in overcoming difficulties: *"Sometimes, I feel frustrated because English grammar is so complicated. But in group activities, my classmates always help me out. It feels like we're all in this together, and it motivates me to keep going."* Thao's comments emphasize the role of collaborative learning in adult education. Peer support aligns with the sociocultural theory, which underscores the importance of interaction and shared learning in building competence. Her experience also aligns with the andragogical theory's principle of leveraging learners' collective knowledge and experiences, which can foster a sense of community and mutual encouragement.

These findings demonstrate that while challenges are an inevitable part of adult learning, effective support mechanisms significantly contribute to learner satisfaction. Flexible program structures, empathetic teachers, and peer collaboration create a supportive learning environment that helps learners navigate their difficulties. This underscores the importance of a holistic approach to program design and delivery, one that considers both individual and collective needs within the socio-cultural context of Viet Nam's adult EFL learners.

4.4. Cultural dimensions of satisfaction

The influence of cultural factors on learner satisfaction emerged as a significant theme in this study. All five participants highlighted ways in which cultural norms, values, and expectations shaped their perceptions of the learning experience. Respect for teachers, a sense of community among learners, and culturally relevant teaching materials

were key aspects that contributed to their satisfaction.

Hoa, a graduate, remarked: *"In our culture, teachers are highly respected, and I felt this respect reciprocated in the program. My teacher always treated us as equals and listened to our opinions, which made me feel confident to participate. It was a unique balance of respect and openness."* Hoa's reflection underscores the dual cultural expectations of authority and relational harmony that are prevalent in Vietnamese society. According to the andragogical framework, adult learners value mutual respect and recognition of their experiences. This respect, coupled with culturally sensitive pedagogy, created a learning environment where Hoa felt empowered. From a socio-cultural perspective, the teacher's approach fostered an inclusive atmosphere, allowing for collaborative learning within the bounds of traditional respect.

Quan, a current learner, shared a different perspective on cultural relevance: *"The examples and materials in class often reflect Vietnamese culture, like how to describe Tet (Lunar New Year) or talk about local food. It's easier to connect with these topics, and it makes learning feel more natural and enjoyable."* Quan's account illustrates how culturally relevant content enhances engagement and satisfaction. From the andragogical theory's standpoint, adult learners draw on their life experiences as a foundation for learning, and integrating familiar cultural references makes the material more relatable and applicable. The sociocultural theory further supports this by emphasizing the role of cultural context in shaping meaningful and effective learning experiences.

These findings reveal that learner satisfaction is deeply intertwined with cultural dimensions, reflecting the importance of culturally responsive teaching practices. The balance between respecting traditional values and fostering open, participatory learning environments, as well as the integration of culturally familiar content, contributes significantly to learners' positive perceptions of the program. This highlights the necessity of aligning EFL instruction with the cultural expectations and lived realities of learners in Viet Nam to enhance their overall satisfaction and learning outcomes.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study align with and extend existing research on learner satisfaction in EFL and adult education. Similar to previous studies, this

research highlights the importance of teacher-student relationships, program relevance, and support mechanisms in fostering learner satisfaction (Al-Mahrooqi et al., 2016). However, the current study sheds light on how these factors are influenced by cultural dimensions specific to the Vietnamese context, contributing new insights to the field of EFL education.

The emphasis on teacher-student relationships as a cornerstone of learner satisfaction corroborates findings from other studies emphasizing the role of teachers' empathy, feedback, and support (Aldrup et al., 2022). However, the unique contribution of this study lies in its exploration of how cultural expectations around respect for teachers intersect with modern, participatory pedagogical approaches. Unlike studies in more individualistic cultural contexts, where learner autonomy and egalitarian relationships are prioritized, this research reveals how Vietnamese learners value a balance between traditional respect for authority and opportunities for open dialogue. This nuanced understanding contributes to the literature by emphasizing the need for culturally responsive teaching practices in collectivist societies.

Similarly, the significance of program relevance to learner goals aligns with previous research on adult learners' preference for practical, goal-oriented education (Knowles, 1984; Richards, 2006). Nevertheless, the current study emphasizes the specific ways in which EFL programs in Viet Nam address these needs by incorporating workplace communication and culturally relevant content. While earlier studies have often focused on general applications of English, such as conversational fluency or academic language (Ellis, 2009), this research underscores the importance of tailoring programs to local professional and cultural contexts. This specificity enriches our understanding of how relevance is perceived differently across settings, offering practical implications for curriculum design.

The findings on challenges and support mechanisms also align with global studies on adult learning, which highlight the importance of flexible program structures and peer collaboration (Smith, 2019). However, the current study's focus on the interplay of individual and communal support mechanisms reflects the socio-cultural characteristics of Vietnamese learners. For example, the emphasis on peer support as a collective effort aligns with the cultural value of interdependence, a dimension often

under-explored in Western-centric research. This contribution underscores the importance of considering cultural dynamics when implementing support mechanisms in adult education programs.

Finally, the cultural dimensions of satisfaction identified in this study provide a significant departure from the dominant narratives in the literature. While studies in other contexts have focused on general pedagogical strategies (e.g., Bell, 2022; Le & Le, 2022), this research reveals how culturally relevant content and teaching methods directly impact learner satisfaction in Viet Nam. The use of familiar cultural references in instructional materials not only enhances engagement but also helps bridge the gap between learners' existing knowledge and new language skills. This finding underscores the critical role of cultural alignment in EFL programs, contributing to a growing recognition of the importance of localizing educational practices.

6. CONCLUSION

This study was conducted against the backdrop of increasing demand for English language proficiency in Viet Nam, particularly among adult learners in continuing education programs. Recognizing the critical role of learner satisfaction in determining the success of such programs, this research aimed to explore the factors that contribute to satisfaction among Vietnamese EFL learners. Guided by Knowles' andragogical principles and the socio-cultural perspective on language learning, the study employed a qualitative design using semi-structured interviews with five learners, including three graduates and two current participants, to gain in-depth insights into their experiences.

The findings revealed that learner satisfaction was influenced by several interconnected factors. Teacher-student relationships emerged as a cornerstone, with participants highlighting the importance of teachers' encouragement, empathy, and culturally responsive pedagogy. Program relevance to learners' personal and professional goals was another critical factor, with participants valuing practical, skill-oriented instruction tailored to real-world applications. Challenges such as time management and complex language skills were common, but the availability of support mechanisms, including flexible scheduling, peer collaboration, and teacher guidance, helped learners navigate these difficulties. Finally, cultural dimensions, such as respect for teachers and the inclusion of culturally relevant content, played a

significant role in shaping participants' perceptions of the learning experience.

The implications of this study are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it contributes to the growing body of research on learner satisfaction by situating it within the socio-cultural context of Viet Nam. By highlighting the interplay between universal principles of adult learning and culturally specific practices, the study adds a nuanced understanding of how satisfaction is constructed in collectivist societies. This challenges the predominantly Western-centric narratives in the field and underscores the need for context-sensitive approaches in EFL education.

Practically, the findings offer valuable insights for educators, program designers, and policymakers seeking to enhance the quality of EFL continuing education programs. Teachers should be trained not only in effective pedagogical strategies but also in culturally responsive practices that respect and integrate learners' socio-cultural backgrounds. Program designers should ensure that curricula are aligned with learners' professional and personal goals, incorporating real-world applications and culturally relevant content to maximize engagement. Institutions should also prioritize flexible scheduling and provide structured support mechanisms to accommodate the diverse needs of adult learners.

In conclusion, this study underscores the importance of integrating cultural, pedagogical, and institutional factors to create a holistic and satisfying learning experience for EFL learners in Viet Nam. By addressing these interconnected dimensions, educators and institutions can foster a learning environment that empowers adult learners, meets their goals, and ultimately contributes to the broader development of EFL education in similar contexts.

REFERENCES

- Adeoye-Olatunde, O. A., & Olenik, N. L. (2021). Research and scholarly methods: Semi-structured interviews. *Journal of the American College of Clinical Pharmacy*, 4(10), 1358-1367. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jac5.1441>
- Alstrup, K., Carstensen, B., & Klusmann, U. (2022). Is empathy the key to effective teaching? A systematic review of its association with teacher-student interactions and student outcomes. *Educational Psychology Review*, 34(3), 1177-1216. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-021-09649-y>
- Al-Mahrooqi, R., Tuzlukova, V., & Denman, C. J. (2016). Tertiary education and communication skills development of Omani learners: Student perspectives. *The International Journal of Communication and Linguistic Studies*, 14(2), 15-34. <http://bit.ly/3OqDUW3>
- Bell, K. (2022). Increasing undergraduate student satisfaction in Higher Education: the importance of relational pedagogy. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 46(4), 490-503. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2021.1985980>

7. LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

While this study offers valuable insights, it has certain limitations. The sample size of five participants, though sufficient for qualitative analysis, may not capture the full diversity of learner experiences across different regions or institutions in Viet Nam. Additionally, all participants were drawn from a single cultural context, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other cultural or linguistic settings. The use of semi-structured interviews, while effective in eliciting rich, detailed data, relies on participants' self-reported experiences, which may be influenced by recall bias or a desire to present themselves favorably. These limitations suggest the need for caution in applying the findings beyond the specific context studied.

Future research could build on this study by including more learners from a wider range of educational institutions and regions to capture a more representative picture of EFL learner satisfaction in Viet Nam. Comparative studies that explore satisfaction across different cultural or national contexts could also provide valuable insights into the role of socio-cultural factors in shaping learning experiences. Moreover, employing mixed-methods approaches that combine qualitative interviews with quantitative surveys or classroom observations could offer a more comprehensive understanding of satisfaction and its relationship with program design, teaching practices, and institutional support. Such studies could further explore the long-term impact of satisfaction on learners' academic and professional outcomes, contributing to the development of more effective and inclusive EFL programs globally.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Djudin, T. (2018). The effect of teaching method and lecture program on students' satisfaction rates and academic achievement. *Journal of Education, Teaching and Learning*, 3(1), 121-128. <https://www.learntechlib.org/p/209107/>
- Ellis, R. (2009). Task-based language teaching: Sorting out the misunderstandings. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 19(3), 221-246. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1473-4192.2009.00231.x>
- Hussain, M. S., Salam, A., & Farid, A. (2020). Students' motivation in English language learning (ELL): An exploratory study of motivation-al factors for EFL and ESL adult learners. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, 9(4), 15-28. <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiaac.ijalel.v.9n.4p.15>
- Knowles, M. S. (1984). *Andragogy in action*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Le, M. X., & Le, T. T. (2022). Factors affecting students' attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language in a tertiary institution of Vietnam. *International Journal of TESOL & Education*, 2(2), 168-185. <https://doi.org/10.54855/ijte.22229>
- Vu Nguyen, D. N., & Nguyen, Q. N. (2021). Task-based language teaching to enhance learner communicative competence in Vietnam: A matter of opinion. *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation*, 4(8), 151-159. <https://doi.org/10.32996/ijllt.2021.4.8.22>
- Nguyen, P. T., Nguyen, Q. L. H. T. T., Nguyen, L. T., & Huynh, V. D. B. (2024). Investigating the e-learning choice under the learners' perspective using demand driven learning model: insights from Vietnam. *Scientific Reports*, 14(1), 27437. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-024-78488-y>
- Pham, L., Limbu, Y. B., Bui, T. K., Nguyen, H. T., & Pham, H. T. (2019). Does e-learning service quality influence e-learning student satisfaction and loyalty? Evidence from Vietnam. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, 16(1), 1-26. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-019-0136-3>
- Richards, J. C. (2005). *Communicative language teaching today*. Singapore: SEAMEO Regional Language Centre.
- Siddig, B. E., & Al Khoudary, Y. A. (2018). Investigating Classroom Interaction: Teacher and Learner Participation. *English Language Teaching*, 11(12), 86-92. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v11n12p86>
- Smith, B. M. (2019). *Adult learning principles used with nontraditional students in higher education to enhance learner satisfaction and retention*. Lindenwood University.
- Smith, C., & Worsfold, K. (2014). WIL curriculum design and student learning: a structural model of their effects on student satisfaction. *Studies in Higher Education*, 39(6), 1070-1084. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2013.777407>
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1987). *The collected works of LS Vygotsky: The fundamentals of defectology* (Vol. 2). Springer Science & Business Media.
- Wallen, N. E., & Fraenkel, J. R. (2013). *Educational research: A guide to the process*. Routledge.
- Weerasinghe, I. S., & Fernando, R. L. (2017). Students' satisfaction in higher education. *American Journal of Educational Research*, 5(5), 533-539. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2976013>