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Editors

English Language Education for Graduate Employability in Vietnam

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Chapter 15

Vietnamese EFL Learners' Perspectives on Learning English Online and Employability



Ngoc Tai Huynh , Vi Truong, and Tran Le Huu Nghia 

Abstract Much has been written about the benefits of online learning; but few studies investigate the perceptions of learners learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) towards online learning and their employability. The current study aims to explore factors influencing foreign language learners' decisions to take English online courses and examine challenges faced by learners and the impact of experiences gained from online courses on their employability competences. Twenty semi-structured interviews were conducted with Vietnamese learners of English who have online English language learning experiences. The obtained data were then analysed and interpreted based on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM; Davis et al. in *Management Science* 35:982–1003, 1989) and Tomlinson (*Education + Training* 59(4):338–352, 2017) conceptual framework of employability. The results reveal various factors encouraging participants to select online English courses, such as time flexibility, teacher–student interaction, cost-saving, recommendation from friends, teaching materials, and teaching methods. They also face some challenges when studying English online in terms of practicality issues and professional competence of online instructors. Overall, the findings indicate positive influences of taking online English courses on various aspects of learners' employability competences.

Keywords English as a foreign language · Online learning · Employability competences · Vietnamese learners of English · Technology Acceptance Model

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15.1 Introduction

The advancement of information communications and technology (ICT) has impressively transformed our society (Niebel, 2018). In education, ICT is, and continues to be, a tool that helps to enhance the effectiveness of learning by saving time and money for both learners and educators, promoting lifelong learning and distance learning, enabling self-paced learning as well as improving the accessibility to global knowledge (Haythornthwaite et al., 2016; Munro et al., 2018). Especially, within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, online education instantly becomes mainstream worldwide to maintain formal and informal educational activities (Stracke et al., 2022; Truong et al., 2021). Teaching and learning English is no exception.

In recent years, global economic integration has accelerated due to reduced trade barriers, advanced technology, and increased flow of trade, capital, investment, information, and skilled human resources. As the key language of globalisation, proficiency in English is undoubtedly crucial for the employment and career development of individuals nowadays. Indeed, the last few years have experienced tremendous growth and innovation in English language teaching and learning with the support of online technology (Pham et al., 2014). Vietnam, located at the heart of Southeast Asia, attracts foreign investment with its favourable geographic location, open foreign investment policy, political stability, extensive international integration, steady economic growth, a young and abundant workforce, and competitive labour costs (Nguyen, 2021). Intending to become a high-income country by 2045, Vietnam is now amongst the most dynamic emerging countries, with a vibrant labour market (The World Bank, 2021). In Vietnam, besides job-specific technical skills and crucial soft skills in the workplace, English language skills are highly sought after by employers (Le, 2020). However, it is repeatedly reported that Vietnamese employees possess a low English language proficiency compared with other countries in the region (Doan & Hamid, 2019; Huynh, 2020). According to a report published by the EF English Proficiency Index (EF EPI), in 2019, for the first time since 2015, Vietnam's adult English proficiency dropped from "moderate proficiency" to "low proficiency" category. This situation is maintained until 2021 (EF English Proficiency Index, 2021). This low English proficiency level, amongst others, obviously impacts the employability of many Vietnamese employees (Doan & Hamid, 2019; Luong, 2016), especially vulnerable fresh graduates who have not accumulated much work experience and social network that can ensure their employment opportunities.

Given that more and more quality educational resources are available on the Internet nowadays, Vietnamese learners can certainly benefit from these resources, particularly English courses. This research is designed to investigate the perspectives of Vietnamese learners towards learning English online and its impacts on their employability. More specifically, we will report a qualitative study that looks into learners' experience with online English learning and the factors affecting their decision to learn English online, focusing on how this experience contributes to the development of their employability.

15.2 Literature Review

15.2.1 *English Language Proficiency and Employability*

Within 30 years, there was a rise in the global labour force from 1.2 billion in 1980 to around 2.9 billion in 2010 where most of this growth was in developing countries (Dobbs et al., 2012). In order to stand out in a highly competitive market, job seekers need to develop their employability skills as possessing only a degree is not sufficient to ensure them a competitive advantage in the job market. Generally, employability means.

a set of achievements - skills, understandings and personal attributes - that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy. (Yorke, 2006, p. 8)

Recent interest in employability research includes research into the nexus between English proficiency and employability as well as the value of English in employment opportunities as one of the most prevalent topics (such as Pandey & Pandey, 2014; Rao, 2019; Zainuddin et al., 2019). In non-native English speaking countries, English proficiency plays a crucial role in facilitating the employability of job applicants (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2018; Doan & Hamid, 2019; Pandey & Pandey, 2014; Wijewardene et al., 2014). Results from a study indicated that the self-perceived employability of Information Technology graduates in Vietnam was determined by their English language skills, soft skills, adaptability skills, the quality of the training program, and job-seeking efforts (Thang & Wongsurawat, 2016). It is reported that the high unemployment rate of technical and vocational education students in Thailand, another country in the area, is due to their lack of English proficiency and communication skills (Sa-Nguanmanasak & Khampirat, 2019). Although usually known as a country with high English proficiency (EF English Proficiency Index, 2021), research in Malaysia has pointed out that lacking English proficiency is amongst the main reasons that led to the high unemployment rate amongst graduates in this country (Ting et al., 2017). The situation is similar in other non-native English speaking nations in other areas. For instance, in Oman, English has been seen as a necessary tool for advancement and the acquisition of knowledge and technology in this Arab nation (Al-Mahrooqi & Tuzlukova, 2014). Al-Tamimi and Shuib (2009) noted that due to petroleum engineering graduates' poor performance in English, most of them had been rejected when applying to work at the oil companies in Yemen. Erling (2015) claimed that English skills are recognised to improve a person's employability remarkably in the Middle East and North African countries because employers prefer a job applicant who can speak English well. The evidence suggests that English proficiency is a must for those who want to develop their career in an international arena nowadays.

In short, there is a link between employability and English proficiency in our increasingly globalised and internationalised world. Therefore, it is essential to equip

with an adequate level of English, especially those who are about to enter the labour market, to maximise their opportunity to be employed and thrive on the job.

15.2.2 Teaching and Learning English Online

The term online learning, first introduced in 1995 (Bates, 2014), has been used more and more frequently. Within several decades, it has been defined by many scholars and researchers. Singh and Thurman (2019, p. 302) reviewed the literature on the definitions of online learning within 30 years from 1988 to 2018 and constructed the definition of online learning as

education being delivered in an online environment through the use of the Internet for teaching and learning. This includes online learning on the part of the students that is not dependent on their physical or virtual co-location. The teaching content is delivered online and the instructors develop teaching modules that enhance learning and interactivity in the synchronous or asynchronous environment.

Synchronous learning happens when the learning sessions or tutorials occur on set schedules and time frames. In contrast, in asynchronous classes, students are flexible in completing their learning in their own time (eLearners, n.d.). When it comes to learning a language online, telecommunication applications, mainly Skype and Zoom, support very much for the learning and teaching activities. English has been dominating the internet languages for decades; by 2018, it is estimated that more than fifty per cent of all web content is in English (Bada, 2018). As most resources on the Internet are in English, these resources have thus become valuable educational materials for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners to self-direct their learning (McGreal, 2017). In terms of learning resources, researchers (for example, Truong et al., 2021; Yang & Chen, 2007;) have suggested that the accessibility and availability of online resources make the advantages of learning languages online outweigh those of traditional learning. Furthermore, the diversity and high quality of resources available on the Internet can improve learners' satisfaction and performance over time (Yang & Chen, 2007). Sanders and Morrison-Shetlar (2001) claimed that ICTs encourage learners in learning foreign languages and motivate them to learn proactively and creatively. Concerning the learning environment, learners can access online resources to learn English from anywhere at any time, which will lead to their cost, time, and effort-saving (Accredited Online Training, n.d.). In addition, the flexibility of online learning is extremely beneficial for at-risk learners as it contributes to helping them from failing or dropping out of their courses (Darling-Hammond et al., 2014). By engaging with online resources for their English self-studies, learners can also develop their employability capital. As explained earlier, a considerable amount of literature has been published in recent years on online learning adoption and employability; however, there is a scarcity of scholarship relating to EFL learners' perspectives on learning English online to improve employability. This study seeks to contribute to the emerging body of research about how online learning can help to improve learners' English proficiency and employability.

15.2.3 The Theoretical Frameworks

The Technology Acceptance Model (Davis et al., 1989) and the graduate capital model (Tomlinson, 2017) are employed as the theoretical foundations for our study. More specifically, the researchers first use the Technology Acceptance Model, an information system theory developed by three of the world's most influential researchers, Fred Davis, Richard Bagozzi, and Paul Warshaw as one of the theoretical lenses to understand how participants come to accept technology in learning and how they use technology in learning English (Rawls College News, 2015). Then, Tomlinson's (2017) conceptual framework of employability is applied as a theoretical framework to explore participants' perceptions of how online learning English experiences can enhance employability.

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is an extension of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) proposed by two professors of social psychology, Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen in 1980. By replacing many of TRA's attitude measures with the two technology acceptance measures, namely ease of use, and usefulness, TAM has been extensively employed to investigate users' acceptability of information technology systems. The model proposes that when users are introduced to new technology, their decision of adopting or non-adopting the technology is influenced by two main factors: perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. Davis defined the perceived usefulness as "the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance his or her job performance" and the perceived ease of use refers to "the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would be free from effort" (Davis, 1989, p. 320). Figure 15.1 illustrates the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis et al., 1989, p. 985).

As depicted in Fig. 15.1, the actual use of a new Information Technology (IT) system is determined by the user's behavioural intention (BI), which is, on the other hand, influenced by their attitude towards the use of that system (A). According to Davis et al. (1989), the attitude towards using the system is based on the impact it may have on user's performance. Despite the hesitation in using the new system, the probability that the user will use it is high if they think that the system can improve their work performance. Moreover, the theorists proposed that the belief in the system's usefulness (U) is somewhat affected by that system's ease of use

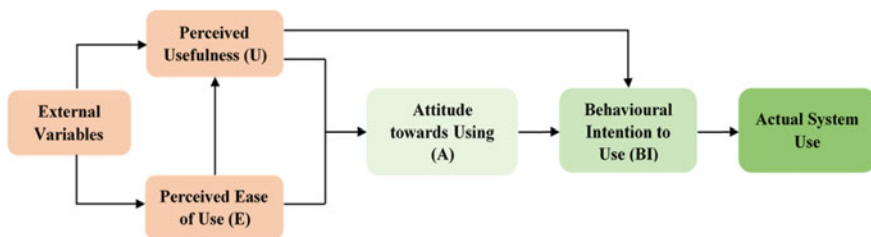


Fig. 15.1 Technology acceptance model (Adapted from Davis et al. [1989])

(E). For instance, given two different new systems with similar functions, the one that is more comfortable to use will likely be more useful to the users. Also, it is suggested by the theorists that perceived usefulness is a factor that exerts a direct influence on the behavioural intention to use the system. Other external variables such as social-cultural factors, political factors, or users' characteristics also impact users' perceived usefulness and ease of using the new technology system.

As one of the most popular theories in the Information System discipline, TAM has been studied and verified by various scholarships to understand the technology acceptance behaviour of individuals in different research contexts. The outcomes of these studies proposed changes by adding more variables to the original model or combining TAM with other models, which led to the development of many new versions of TAM such as Technology Acceptance Model 2 (TAM2) (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000), Technology Acceptance Model 3 (TAM3) (Venkatesh & Bala, 2008), and Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) (Venkatesh et al., 2003).

TAM has many limitations and received much criticism despite its widespread adoption in different research constructs across time, disciplines, and population. The limitations of TAM in the online learning adoption study summarised by Islam et al. (2014) include the lack of design and implementation constructs, limited understanding of behaviour, and missing adoption outcomes. The phenomenon investigated in this study is the adoption, the decision to take up, follow, or use, and it is thus a psychological process that leads to the decision of acceptance or non-acceptance of learning English online. The researchers were acutely aware of the inherent limitations of TAM; however, we still decided to adopt the original TAM (Davis et al., 1989) as a theoretical framework for this research as the nature of the factors influencing the adoption of learning English online in this research setting fits well with the concept that the theory and model propose and cover.

A considerable amount of literature has been published on the adoption of TAM (Davis et al., 1989) as a theoretical framework to understand what makes stakeholders in both developing and developed countries accept educational technologies in learning and teaching (e.g., Ding & Er, 2018; Esteban-Millat et al., 2018; Ji et al., 2019; Martinho et al., 2018; Teo et al., 2019). Šumak et al. (2011) concluded in their review paper in 2011 that TAM is the most applied theory in online learning acceptance literature. Indeed, as online learning is technology-driven and requires at least some computer skills from the user, previous research findings agree with the framework that Perceived Ease of Use of the online learning systems directly influences Perceived Usefulness and Attitude towards using those systems. Although new determinants to online learning acceptance were added by previous research, such as competitive pressure (Namisiko et al., 2014), personal innovativeness (Liu et al., 2010), or system quality (Motaghian et al., 2013), the two central antecedents from TAM: Perceived Ease of Use and Perceived Usefulness remain the core of the framework (Chang et al., 2012; Elkaseh et al., 2016; Hasan, 2007; Teo et al., 2008). As the focus and context of this study are different from those reported in the literature, the original version of TAM (Davis et al., 1989) is adopted as a theoretical framework

to investigate the factors influencing Vietnamese learners' decision to learn English online.

Tomlinson's (2017) conceptual framework of employability, also called the graduate capital model, is another theoretical framework used to investigate participants' perceptions of how online learning English experiences can enhance employability. Tomlinson (2017) proposed a conceptual framework of employability with five components: human capital, social capital, cultural capital, identity capital, and psychological capital. Figure 15.2 presents the graduate capital model adapted from Tomlinson (2017).

Introduced and developed in 1993 by Gary Becker, an economist, human capital consists of a graduate's hard knowledge, skills, and future performance. Social capital is "the sum of social relationships and networks that help mobilise graduates' existing human capital and bring them closer to the labour market and its opportunity structures" (p. 342). In other words, social capital can facilitate and assist an individual's access and awareness of labour market opportunities. Cultural capital is the "formation of culturally-valued knowledge, dispositions and behaviours that are aligned to the workplaces graduates seek to enter" (Tomlinson, 2017, p. 343). This form of capital is composed of cultural knowledge, embodied behaviours, distinction and symbolic value (Bourdieu, 1977). Graduates with well-developed cultural capital will have a good understanding of the culture in their prospective workplaces.

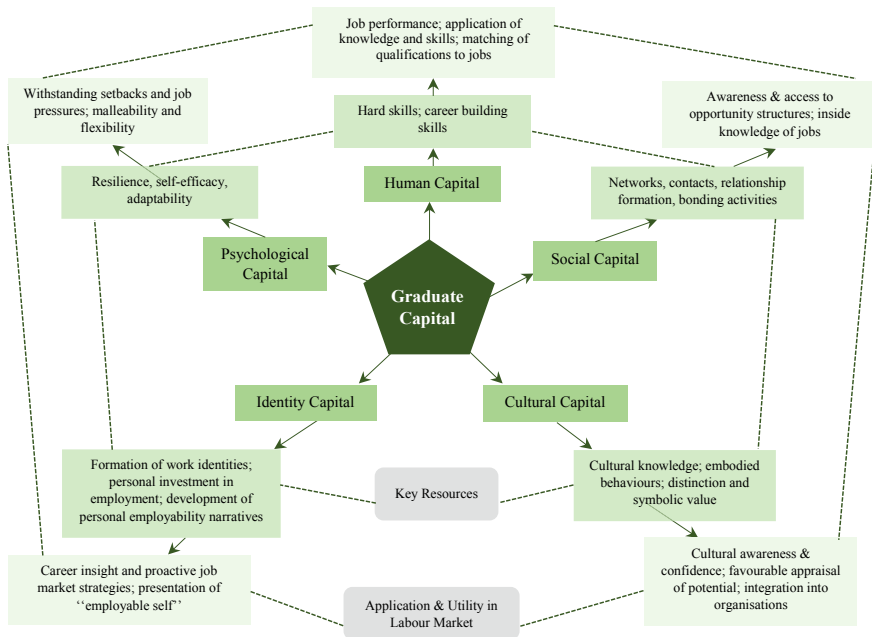


Fig. 15.2 Graduate capital model (Adapted from Tomlinson [2017])

Identity capital is “the level of personal investment graduates make towards the development of their future careers and employability” (Tomlinson, 2017, p. 345). In other words, identity capital comprises the formation of work identities, personal investment in employment, and the development of personal employability narratives. The “psychosocial resources, which enable graduates to adapt and respond positively to inevitable career challenges” such as resilience and self-efficacy are considered psychological capital (Tomlinson, 2017, p. 347). Amongst the proposed employability capitals, human capital is considered by Tomlinson (2017) the core component, which consists of knowledge, skills, and future performance possessed by a graduate as it significantly affects other capitals. Within the forms of human capital such as technical expertise, career-building skills, and knowledge, communication ability is likely to be complementary to others (Mavisakalyan, 2017). Communication skills are ranked as the most or second most sought-after baseline skill by employers in all industries (Burning Glass Technologies, 2015).

Overall, the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis et al., 1989) and the graduate capital model (Tomlinson, 2017) are employed as the theoretical frameworks to design and implement this investigation. Details of this study are provided in the next section.

15.3 The Current Study

Whilst previous research explores the opportunities for and challenges of learning English online (such as Hidayati & Husna, 2020; Krishnan et al., 2020; Widayanti and Suarnajaya, 2021), they do not investigate the contribution of learning English online experience to students’ development of employability. To partially address this research gap, this study seeks to answer two research questions:

1. *What factors affect Vietnamese EFL learners’ decision to learn English online?*
2. *How does this online learning experience influence their employability development?*

The Technology Acceptance Model (Davis et al., 1989) and Tomlinson’s conceptual framework of employability are used to design a set of open-ended interview questions and analyse collected data. Twenty EFL learners from the Mekong Delta area of Vietnam who have different backgrounds, professions as well as English competency levels were interviewed. Impressively, many of them have been learning English on the Internet for more than 10 years. Snowball sampling techniques were used, starting from participants known to the researchers. Information about the interviewed participants is provided in Table 15.1. The participants self-assessed their current English levels based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

This research was conducted in Vietnam in the third quarter of 2019. Before the interviews started, participants were provided with the project’s explanatory statement and required to sign the consent form. During the semi-structured interviews,

Table 15.1 A summary of participant information

Participant	Gender	Age	Occupation	Current English level	English learning time (years)
P01	Male	28	Driver	A1	3 years
P02	Female	16	High school student	A2	8 years
P03	Female	21	Fresh graduate in English	B2	>10 years
P04	Male	23	English–Vietnamese interpreter	B2	>10 years
P05	Male	22	Fresh graduate in English	B2	>10 years
P06	Male	29	Banker	B2	20 years
P07	Female		Television editor	B1	>10
P08	Female	23	Undergraduate student in accounting	B1	10 years
P09	Female	21	Beauty salon staff	A2	<10 years
P10	Female	22	Unemployed	A2	<10 years
P11	Female	22	Teacher (Primary level international school)	B2	>10 years
P12	Female	20	Second-year student of University of Foreign Languages	B2	>10
P13	Female	22	Fresh graduate in public finance management	B1	10 years
P14	Female	24	Graduate student in economics	A2	10 years
P15	Female	26	Postgraduate student of Hospitality	B2	>10 years
P16	Female	38	Engineer of organic vegetables	B2	>15 years
P17	Male	30	High school teacher of chemistry	B1	>10 years
P18	Male	34	Civil engineer	B1	5 years
P19	Female	33	Manager (not specified)	A1	<10 years
P20	Female	32	Sales & customer service	B2	>10 years

participants were asked to talk about their experience of learning English online and reflect on how these experiences contribute to improving their employability. Directed content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), a type of qualitative content analysis approach was adopted to classify and analyse the collected data. The data analysis was mainly based on the two theoretical frameworks, namely the TAM (Davis et al., 1989) and Graduate capital model (Tomlinson, 2017), but where applicable, new concepts and categories were added. The findings of the investigation are presented in the following section.

15.4 Factors Affecting Learners' Adoption of Online English Learning

15.4.1 *Perceived Ease of Use*

When discussing the advantages of learning English online, time flexibility is the most popular benefit which is highly appreciated by 15 over 20 people. The participants revealed that they were able to study at any time they prefer. In addition, they were able to review the lessons of the previous class meetings. One participant who is currently working as a manager of a private company and wanted to upgrade her English competence (from A1 to A2 CEFR) highlighted that:

The first advantageous aspect of learning English online is the timetable. This means there are always slots available within 24 hours every day. Even at 1 am, I could also study English online if I want to. It is really good in terms of time flexibility. (Participant 19)

Similarly, participant 10 perceived her current English competence as at A2 and wanted to take online English courses because she did not have much time to study English at centres. Some other participants said that since they had to take courses at University in the daytime and learning online at their convenience in the evening is the best option. In terms of learning environment, eight learners also highly valued the fact that they could study at any place with an internet connection. This not only encouraged their learning attitude but also saved them time, money, and effort for commuting. These participants mentioned that they could study in their own room in a comfortable environment and they had much privacy when learning via the online mode. A sense of privacy is one of the reasons for making online learning a more comfortable environment for students. For instance, Participant 15 thought that she has more privacy when taking online courses and this makes her feel more confident, easier to communicate with online instructors, and fellow learners. This learner stated that:

One of the good things about online learning is that I have more privacy when learning. With online learning, I can study English in my own room. I feel relaxed and comfortable in comparison to the face-to-face learning environment where there are so many learners. (Participant 15)

A few pointed out that there were certain courses which allowed them to interact one on one with the tutor, which specifically enabled them to correct their common mistakes and progress further. One of them claimed that:

Foreign teachers are more comfortable in terms of psychology. If we make mistakes, they help us correct. And I don't feel ashamed when practicing speaking in English. (Participant 18)

Also, some other participants said that they feel more comfortable when asking questions with online tutors and discussing with classmates (Participants 3, 2, 11, 14, 15, 16). Several participants reported that they can even create various groups between learners when joining an online course from their own accommodation without coming to the real classrooms. This helps them to create a virtual learning environment for practicing English every day (Participants 13, 15, 16).

In addition to the better interactions between learners and teachers, when comparing online learning experiences with face-to-face learning, many participants mentioned that online learning allows them to have more chances to review vocabulary, grammatical structures whenever they have time as Participant 14 contended that:

In comparison to face-to-face learning mode, I feel that learning online helps me understand lessons better. I can review the lessons again and again if I don't understand something when learning online. However, for face-to-face learning at language centres, the chance for reviewing difficult lessons is just once. (Participant 14)

Findings from our interviews revealed that cost-saving is the second most popular advantage of online learning, with 11 people mentioning it as their favourite point. For example, Participant 3, who is a fresh graduate student in English major and wanted to upgrade his English competence, mentioned that:

One of the obvious benefits of learning English online is the low cost. I can take inexpensive and even free courses at various levels while I only need to pay for the Internet fees. (Participant 3)

Cost-saving is also the reason for participants to select online English courses. Participant 1, for instance, is working as a driver and wanted to study English for communicative purposes. He asserted that his income is not high, and he made use of internet connection to learn English with a lot of free courses and flexible schedules.

In our findings, recommendation from friends is an external factor that makes learners select online learning mode rather than registering a face-to-face course at language learning centres. For example, participant 19, who is currently working as manager recalled:

I took an online course because I was recommended by a friend. She said that it takes only about one or two courses for me to be confident in communicating in English. Therefore, I registered for an online course. (Participant 19)

In sum, flexibility (in terms of learning schedules, learning environment, interaction with instructors), cost-saving, and recommendation from friends are amongst the factors provoking learners' perceptions of the ease of use when taking online

English courses, which make them select online English courses instead of face-to-face courses. Some of these factors also contribute to learners' engagement with the knowledge taught in the lessons.

15.4.2 *Perceived Usefulness*

When being asked about the usefulness of online English courses, the majority of the participants admitted that teaching materials and teaching methods are the essential factors that make them consider online English courses useful for improving their English competence. Both positive and negative statements were found in participants' responses to the quality of online learning courses, which consist of teaching materials and teaching methods of online English courses.

There are various positive comments about the *teaching materials*. Most of them are mentioned by the participants in terms of qualities and quantities. Amongst these, being rich and diversified in content is the most popular praise. Below is one of the complements with respect to the suitable level of teaching materials of online courses:

I think the materials they use are quite good as I just mentioned. And they are not too many, too high in comparison with the English level of the learners. This makes us understand the content easier. (Participant 19)

Similarly, some other learners such as Participants 5 and 6 thought that the materials are more diverse, accessible, and good quality in comparison to those used in the classrooms. One participant highlighted the convenience of being able to search for the materials at any time (Participant 10). Other participant (Participant 7) offered positive comments on the quality of learning materials:

I really like the way teaching materials are developed in terms of designs. For example, there are many beautiful images and slides in each lesson. (Participant 7)

The second well-recognised feature of teaching materials is that the quality was high and practical (Participants 2, 5, 6, 11, 19, 20). Participant 2, for instance, stated that the provided materials are quite appropriate for the lessons. Other learners thought the materials provided good lessons for practicing pronunciation from beginner to advanced levels. For any word that they don't know, they can look it up in the dictionary. For some sentences they even learn by heart (Participant 1 & Participant 16). This good feature of online teaching materials makes them enjoy learning pronunciation from online resources. The content designs were highly praised by some learners (Participants 3, 7), in which Participant 3 mentioned that it was easier for her to remember the lesson thanks to lots of illustrations and beautiful images the instructors used for their lessons.

For teaching methods, more than half of the interviewed participants responded positively to the teaching methods applied by online English instructors. Firstly, the ease to interact in class was appreciated by four participants (Participants 5, 11, 15, & 16). They felt open to interacting with their classmates, and the software used by the

provider is helpful to their English pronunciation. For instance, one of these learners highlighted:

I felt comfortable when learning English online in my private room. Moreover, the provider created groups for us to talk to each other every day in English. This creates a good learning environment. The software provided by the course helped to standardize my English. (Participant 16)

In short, various factors were found to be influential in learners' perceptions of usefulness of online English courses. Amongst these factors, teaching materials and online instructors' teaching methods were reported as the decisive factors making learners feel that online English courses are useful for improving their learning of English via the Internet.

15.5 Challenges of Online English Learning

Besides advantages, the participants also mentioned several drawbacks of online English courses which come from three main sources: teachers, learners, and practicality issues.

The first source of challenge of online learning is related to teachers/tutors. More specifically, teaching methods used by teachers and tutors were mentioned the most by participants of this study when complaining about the disadvantages of online English courses. For example, Participant 1 thought that the lessons had no systematic flow, and this makes it hard for him to follow. This learner complained that:

The lessons have limited timelines. They are divided into too many smaller parts, without a curriculum. They are not as systematic as those taught in classrooms. (Participant 1)

Poor professional quality and class size were other weak points of online English courses. Some learners complained about teachers' English competence that:

There are both good and bad online teachers in terms of their professional skills. Some teachers taught us the wrong content (something not certified). For instance, one teacher who is not an American or English native teacher uploaded a video about pronunciation on YouTube. There were some words pronounced wrongly in this video. (Participant 4)

Some other learners were not happy because the courses had too many students, making the tutor unable to correct the mistakes of each individually as Participant 19 complained:

The tutor didn't have much time to correct our tasks. He just wrapped up the lesson of the day. There were about 5 to 6 learners in each lesson whereas there was only one tutor. (Participant 19).

The lack of face-to-face interactions was identified as another major challenge for online English courses. More than half of participants said that they were not able to clarify their concerns during the course because they did not have a chance to talk directly to the tutors. Participant 20 complained that the effectiveness of online

learning is not perfect since this mode of learning can only satisfy part of learners' demands. This learner said:

Because there was no direct interaction with teachers and tutors, I wasn't corrected for mistakes in pronunciation effectively when in need. Moreover, I couldn't immediately ask more questions about what I don't understand relating to the lessons. (Participant 20)

The second challenge of online English courses comes from the learners themselves. In particular, the lack of learners' self-discipline was the runner-up in terms of factors causing challenges to online English courses. This issue was perceived and admitted by 12 over 20 people. Since there were not any strict disciplines, learners either had no motivation to attend the class or were distracted by unwanted types of online entertainment. Most of the participants claimed that this is one of the key factors making them give up learning online courses. One of them, Participant 7 addressed this issue:

At first, I had a very strong motivation, then this motivation became gradually low because there was no one encouraging me. It seemed that I needed someone to inspire and encourage me to go on with the learning process to achieve my goals. (Participant 7)

Another participant reported that it is easy for her to quit the online lessons since there is no requirement for attendance of learners (Participant 10). Therefore, it can be suggested that the easy-going nature of online English courses can bring about both the strength and weakness of this learning mode. Whereas the lack of discipline can make learners feel relaxed, comfortable without being forced to attend online courses as strictly as those in the classrooms, this can also demotivate learners.

The third major source of challenges for online English courses comes from practicality issues. One of them is the technical process when taking an online English course. Participants said that some online learning platforms are quite difficult for them to stay focused. Participant 3 provided further explanation:

It is easy for me to be distracted when searching for online learning materials, especially when I use YouTube to search for online learning videos. There are too many videos available, and I have to try my best to overcome my habits of using entraining videos while learning. (Participant 3)

Three learners (Participants 4, 9, & 12) complained about the user-friendliness of online materials. Some of the learners said it was harder to read online than to scan through a book, and they felt it troublesome when they had to install software to do homework (Participants 4, 12).

In sum, issues associated with teachers, learners, and practicality were identified by participants of our study. These problems come from either the online English course providers in terms of professional competence of their instructors or the ways online courses are organised.

15.6 The Contribution of Online English Learning to Students' Employability

Overall, regarding the effectiveness of learning English online, most students stated that online learning was an effective method (15 out of 20 participants). Based on Tomlinson's (2017) conceptual framework of employability, the participants' perceived positive contribution of online English learning to their employability was categorised in terms of human capital, cultural capital, psychological capital, and identity capital.

15.6.1 Contribution to Students' Human Capital

With regard to the positive influences of online English learning to human capital, many participants believed that learning English online has helped them work effectively. In particular, seven students could apply what they learned into daily life and professional activities. For example, Participant 7 is working as an editor of a TV channel and she confirmed that she could make use of English language channels to expand knowledge in various fields. This participant said that she could use her English knowledge to search for relevant information when writing news and searching for cultural knowledge when making programmes about international cultures. This participant highlighted that:

There are many programs which require me to read the original contents in English then make the news in Vietnamese. The world news, for instance, if I didn't improve my English via online courses, I would have to use Google translation and other translation tools. This consumes much of my time. However, since I learnt English online, my English skills support me very much in these tasks. (Participant 7)

Similarly, Participant 12 who is working as a teacher of an international kindergarten centre confirmed that the skills that she learnt from online English courses help her teach more effectively. This participant asserted that:

Thanks to the online English courses, I have the skills of evaluating the information and teaching methods of native speakers. Then, I apply them in my work as a teacher. Moreover, I learned from the teaching methods of American teachers which have a clear focus, logic to help my students understand the lessons more easily. These sources of knowledge have orientated my teaching methods as well. (Participant 12)

The above findings indicate that online learning English offers learners with opportunities to enhance their professional skills and knowledge. They could directly apply the knowledge gained through online English courses to enhance the effectiveness and productivity of their jobs. This is supported by the fact that the majority of the participants said that better English communication skills helped them gain more respect from their customers or colleagues. They could enhance their knowledge about foreign cultures and could sometimes talk to their foreign customers more

easily. In particular, amongst 20 online learners taking part in the interviews, six people (Participants 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, & 11) admitted that online learning significantly supported their employability. More specifically, Participant 1 is working as a driver and he said that:

Now I can communicate with foreign customers in English when I deliver goods to them. This helps me earn respect from my colleagues and customers. (Participant 1)

Although being a high school student, Participant 2 is more satisfied with cultural knowledge when learning online English courses. This participant strongly believes that such knowledge will be helpful when applying for a job in a foreign company or communicating with foreigners. Besides, good English proficiency also creates a good impression with potential employers, hence improving their career prospects. Eleven people believed that online learning somehow supported their career development and that they can have more opportunities to be promoted to a higher position.

15.6.2 Contribution to Students' Cultural Capital

In terms of cultural capital, most of the participants admitted that online English courses enrich their knowledge of other countries. This enables them to communicate with foreign customers more effectively. For instance, Participant 5 believed that being able to use English would be essential for her job especially when working with people from other countries. This participant explained that:

Learning English online helps me keep using English after finishing high school. Especially when I have to communicate with international customers, and English is very necessary in these situations. (Participant 5)

Also, Participant 1 shared that by taking online English courses, he was able to communicate with various international customers. This participant said:

Now I can communicate with foreign customers in English when I deliver goods to them. This helps me earn respect from my colleagues and customers. (Participant 1)

15.6.3 Contribution to Students' Psychological Capital

With respect to psychological capital, most of the participants asserted that good English proficiency also created a good impression with potential employers, hence improving their career prospects. Eleven people believed that the knowledge of English language and cultures of other countries somehow supported their career development and that they could have more opportunity to be promoted to a higher position. Participant 2, for instance, although being a high school student, she is more satisfied with cultural knowledge of other countries when learning online English courses. This participant claimed that:

I strongly believe that the intercultural knowledge I gain from such courses will be helpful when applying for a job in a foreign company or communicating with foreigners. (Participant 2)

15.6.4 Contribution to Students' Identity Capital

In terms of identity capital, our findings indicate a positive contribution of online English courses to learners' professional identity as well. More specifically, learners become more open-minded and they value the differences in the profession. For example, Participant 3 believed that online English courses help her become a more flexible teacher in terms of using appropriate teaching methods. This participant highlighted:

As a teacher, taking online English courses for professional development like those helped me to become more open-minded and flexible in my teaching methods. I had chances to learn about and adapt up-to-date teaching methods. For instance, I am interested in using Learner-centered education to encourage students to develop their abilities instead of using traditional methods of Teacher-centered education which lack interactions between teachers and students. (Participant 3)

Additionally, possessing better English communication skills after taking online courses helped participants gain more respect from their customers or colleagues. In particular, Participant 1 is working as a driver and he stated that:

Now I can communicate with foreign customers in English when I deliver goods to them. This helps me earn respect from my colleagues and customers. (Participant 1)

However, three participants confessed that they found online learning had not much impact on their employability because what they learned was far different from their profession, thus they could not apply to their daily job (Participants 13, 17, 19). Participant 19, for instance, admitted that the language knowledge she learnt from online course is not directly applicable to her profession as a manager:

There is no connection between what I learnt and my current job. I only learn English online to be more confident in case I meet a foreigner so that I can communicate with them. Or I can use my knowledge of English to help my children at home with their lessons. (Participant 19)

Similarly, Participants 12 (a fresh graduate) and 17 (a teacher of Chemistry) thought that they still haven't applied much the English skills they learnt from online courses in their jobs although they learnt a bit about foreign cultures through these courses.

To sum up, by analysing interview data obtained from our conversations with 20 Vietnamese EFL learners, various factors influencing their perceptions of online English learning were identified. Also, the relationship between taking online English courses and learners' employability was also revealed. In the following section, we will discuss the significance of our findings as well as implications for stakeholders.

15.7 Discussions and Conclusion

The significant driver of this chapter is to explore Vietnamese EFL learners' perceptions about online English learning by means of the Internet and its impacts on learners' employability. This section will discuss findings of these research aims and provide implications for future research on online English learning and teaching, for learners of English who wish to take online courses, and for employers who wish to improve their employees' professional competence via developing English competence.

With respect to findings, several significant findings were identified through our analysis of participants' responses. For the first research question, our findings revealed major factors propelling learners towards studying English online. These factors were categorised in two major groups, namely *perceived ease of use* and *perceived usefulness*. Amongst them, flexibility (in terms of schedules, learning environments and forms of interactions), rich learning resources and well-designed lessons, effective teaching methods and cost-saving were reported as the most significant factors influencing learners' choices of online studying courses. However, the interview data revealed that there are also factors causing learners' dissatisfaction when taking online courses such as teachers' poor professional skills and knowledge, low-quality teaching materials, learners' self-discipline, and technical issues. These findings are aligned with other studies related to the implementation of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic (Ali, 2020; Demuyakor, 2020; Efriana, 2021; Farrah & al-Bakry, 2020). Demuyakor (2020), for instance, asserted that course contents, teaching materials and teachers' professional skills are decisive factors for successful and effective online learning.

One of our findings which is different from that of previous studies on the usefulness of online learning is in terms of learners' self-discipline. More precisely, unlike recent researchers who found that ICTs can motivate students to learn proactively and creatively (Azmi, 2017; Yang & Chen, 2007), in this chapter, however, most of the participants revealed that the longer they take an online learning course, the less motivated they become. The reasons for such a decrease in learners' motivation are distractions caused by other resources available on the Internet such as music, movies, news, and so on. Moreover, there are no strict rules established by the instructors of online English courses. This also makes learners feel less motivated after a few weeks of learning English online. Additionally, we found that poor performance of online tutors is another source making learners feel demotivated. Learners who participated in our study stated that they felt as if their tutors just wanted to get the lessons completed as quickly as possible whereas they need their tutors to be someone who can inspire them on the journey of learning a foreign language.

For the second research aim, findings of this chapter are aligned with previous studies on the usefulness of ICTs for employability (Aini et al., 2021; Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2018; Thang & Wongsurawat, 2016; Vu et al., 2022). More specifically, the majority of participants find learning English online more effective than other modes of learning since it brings about positive impacts on learners' employability.

In particular, favourable results from taking online English enable the participants to perform better in their profession in terms of human capital, psychological capital, cultural capital, and identity capital. Many of the participants in our study admitted that learning online is an appropriate mode for them to maintain lifelong learning and promote professional development. Most of the participants found that the knowledge acquired from their online courses are especially helpful to expand their knowledge since they can use English to search for information on the Internet, to successfully communicate with clients in their jobs and to earn respect from colleagues when showing that they can speak English with foreigners.

Findings from our studies indicate that online learning has a lot of potential benefits for learners of English in particular, and for foreign language educators, employers, and online education providers in general. Therefore, it is very likely that online learning will become one of the most efficient and popular tools for foreign language education in the near future. More importantly, during the uncertain time of COVID-19 pandemic when the world has to practice social distancing, it seems that online English learning is an ideal tool for the teaching and learning of English (Demuyakor, 2020). Thus, there is an urgent need to make online English learning become a convenient and helpful tool for learners to use. For this goal to be achieved, online English teachers should have an awareness of the promising future of online English learning and a profound understanding of learners' perceptions on this teaching tool. Based on such an understanding, teachers of English should continuously develop their professional skills and knowledge associated with teaching English online so as to deliver the most efficient and interesting lessons possible when teaching English online. As for learners, they also need to be informed about the benefits alongside the challenges of learning English online. As pointed out in our findings, when learners possess practical skills of the English language through online English courses, they have more opportunities to stand out in the labour market. Therefore, learners of English should also be aware of the potential benefits of online English language learning which may either support their current careers or provide them with chances to secure a better job in the future. Once learners have a better understanding about the crucial role of the English language in their employability, they will become more engaged and more self-disciplined when learning English online. For course designers or online English providers, they should develop online English courses that have a focus on helping learners to achieve practical linguistic skills which can be applied in various professional and social situations. It should be noticed that most learners selected online courses in hope to turn the English language knowledge into their soft skills which enable learners to seize the opportunity of work promotion or to further their professional skills and knowledge. This means that learners do not expect to take online English courses as a mode of entertainment or merely to gain knowledge about an extra language.

In sum, this chapter was set out with aims of investigating Vietnamese EFL's perceptions of learning English online and the influences of learning English online on their employability. Although there exist issues in taking online courses, the overall finding was that learning English online appears to be an ideal choice for

adult learners of English in Vietnamese especially those who are already having a job and want to improve their professional knowledge by means of developing their English competence. One limitation of this study was the relatively small samples of participants (20 participants) who have various backgrounds in terms of ages, genders, educations, and jobs. Therefore, future studies should have a larger sample of participants to have more representative data.

The findings reported in this study are significant in the context of Vietnam where the high English competence of prospects and current staff is highly demanded by employers. However, it is repeatedly reported that Vietnamese employees possess a low level of English language proficiency. As reported, findings from our study indicate positive impacts of learning English online on learners' English competence and employability. This means this mode of learning and teaching English should be considered by Vietnamese learners and employers, especially in the time of global pandemic when the practice of social distances is required to prevent the spread of COVID-19. However, for this mode of learning to have ultimate results, all reported challenges should be addressed by course providers, teachers, and learners.

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