

AN INVESTIGATION INTO CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS FOR TEACHING “COMMUNICATION” SECTION IN ENGLISH TEXTBOOK “ENGLISH 8 - GLOBAL SUCCESS” AT SOME LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN QUANG NGAI CITY

NGHIÊN CỨU VỀ NHỮNG THÁCH THỨC VÀ GIẢI PHÁP TRONG VIỆC GIẢNG DẠY
PHẦN “COMMUNICATION” TRONG SÁCH GIÁO KHOA “TIẾNG ANH 8 – GLOBAL
SUCCESS” Ở MỘT SỐ TRƯỜNG TRUNG HỌC CƠ SỞ TẠI THÀNH PHỐ QUẢNG NGÃI

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Abstract - At present, the textbook “English 8 - Global Success” is used to promote the 8th graders’ English communicative competence. The year 2023-2024 is the first school year this English textbook was used in lower secondary schools in Quang Ngai. Therefore, teachers and students face some challenges, especially the ones related to “Communication” section. This study utilized a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches. Descriptive statistics were used to assess the answers to the questionnaire closed-ended questions. The analysis was employed to find and examine themes in the qualitative data gathered from interviews and classroom observations. The subjects include eight teachers and ninety students at three lower secondary schools. The findings revealed the teachers’ appreciation of the “Communication” section and challenges such as teachers’ lack of proper training, insufficient guidance, supplementary resources and time constraints. Suggestions were provided for improving the quality of teaching “Communication” section.

Key words - Communicative competence; teachers’ perception; professional development; communication; challenges

1. Introduction

At present many secondary schools in Vietnam have chosen the English textbook “English 8 - Global Success” [1] to teach English to the 8th graders. This textbook focuses on a developing the communicative competence for the learners. The school year 2023-2024 is the one in which this English textbook was used in lower secondary schools in Quang Ngai City. That teachers and students here face some obstacles in teaching and learning it, especially the ones related to the teaching of its “Communication” section is inevitable. Therefore, this study was conducted to investigate the teachers’ perception of teaching this section, the difficulties they have faced and proposed solutions to teach it better and enhance students’ communicative abilities. The findings of this study are hoped to be beneficial for the benefits for teachers who want to teach “Communication section” effectively.

To achieve the aim mentioned above, the study tried to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the teachers’ perception of teaching the

Tóm tắt - Hiện nay, sách “Tiếng Anh 8 – Global Success” được dùng để nâng cao năng lực giao tiếp tiếng Anh cho học sinh lớp 8. Năm học 2023-2024 là năm đầu tiên cuốn sách này được dạy tại trường trung học cơ sở (THCS) ở Quảng Ngãi. Vì vậy, giáo viên và học sinh gặp vài thách thức, nhất là những vấn đề liên quan đến phần “Giao tiếp”. Nghiên cứu kết hợp đường hướng định lượng và định tính. Số liệu thống kê miêu tả được dùng để đánh giá các câu trả lời cho các câu hỏi đóng trong phiếu khảo sát. Việc phân tích được thực hiện nhằm tìm và kiểm tra các chủ đề trong dữ liệu định tính thu thập từ phỏng vấn và dự giờ. Đối tượng khảo sát gồm 8 giáo viên và 90 học sinh tại 3 trường THCS. Kết quả cho thấy, giáo viên đánh giá cao phần “Giao tiếp”, và chỉ ra một số thách thức như giáo viên chưa được đào tạo và hướng dẫn đầy đủ, thiếu tài liệu hỗ trợ và thời gian. Những đề xuất đã được nêu ra giúp nâng cao chất lượng dạy phần “Giao tiếp”.

Từ khóa - Năng lực giao tiếp; nhận thức của giáo viên; phát triển chuyên môn; giao tiếp; những thách thức

“Communication” section for 8th graders at selected lower secondary schools in Quang Ngai City?

2. What challenges do teachers face in teaching “Communication” section for 8th graders at selected lower secondary schools in Quang Ngai city?

3. What solutions can address the challenges teachers face in teaching “Communication” section for 8th graders at selected lower secondary schools in Quang Ngai city?

2. Some Theoretical Concepts

2.1. Communication

The English word ‘communication’ is derived from the Latin *communis* [2], which means common sense. The word communication means “exchange of ideas, information, etc. between two or more persons” [3, p. 64].

2.2. Communicative Competence

Canale and Swain [4, p.15] defined communicative competence as “the ability to use language effectively and appropriately in social contexts”. They proposed a model of communicative competence that consists of four

components: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence [5].

Halliday's notion of a socially constrained meaning potential [6] also emphasizes the importance of a communicative approach in that it has been concerned with the interaction of social context, grammar, and meaning.

2.3. Communicative Language Teaching

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is one of the most common methods in modern language education. It concentrates on the processes of using language in real-life situations, prioritizing communicative competence over grammatical accuracy [3, p. 65]. The textbook "English 8 - Global Success" falls within this framework, focusing on developing communication skills through various interactive tasks.

CLT [7] is an approach to language teaching that prioritizes communication as the main goal of language study. It emphasizes interaction between learners and the use of authentic texts in the target language, both inside and outside the classroom. CLT focuses on developing learners' ability to communicate effectively in real-life situations rather than solely focusing on grammatical competence. The materials are designed to promote the use of communicative language and they are based on tasks and authenticity.

2.4. Communicative Activities in Communication Section

Communicative activities, as used in teaching the Communication section in "English 8 - Global Success" textbook, are designed to engage students in meaningful language use through interaction and collaboration. These activities include role-plays, group discussions, problem-solving tasks, and information gap exercises, all of which encourage students to use English in practical, real-world contexts. These tasks aim to improve fluency, foster collaborative learning, and build students' confidence in using English. Additionally, Nunan [7] emphasized that students' engagement and interaction are echoed in "English 8 - Global Success" textbook's approach, which incorporates communicative activities to make language learning both effective and enjoyable for 8th graders.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design and Methods

To address the research questions, which focus on teachers' perceptions, challenges, and solutions regarding the "Communication" section, the study employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches. According to Creswell [8], combining these methods allows for capturing the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative data, while mitigating the limitations of each approach when used independently.

To answer the first research question regarding teachers' perception, qualitative data were gathered through interviews and classroom observations. The second question, which investigates the challenges teachers face, was addressed by analyzing the responses from the questionnaires, which provided specific,

quantitative data. The third question, exploring possible solutions to these challenges, was addressed through both the interviews and classroom observations, allowing for a deeper understanding of the teachers' proposed solutions.

In summary, the study used three data collection techniques: questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations. The quantitative data from the questionnaires were analyzed in terms of percentages, while qualitative data were obtained through interviews and classroom observations to provide a fuller picture of teachers' experiences and perspectives.

3.2. Research Setting, Participants and Sampling

3.2.1. Research Setting

This study was conducted at Nghia Ha, Nghia An and Tran Van Tra Lower Secondary Schools in Quang Ngai City, Quang Ngai Province. All three schools are about ten kilometres away from the city centre. Teachers are using the English textbook "English 8 - Global Success" mentioned above.

3.2.2. Participants and Sampling

Focusing on 8th graders using "English 8 - Global Success" English textbook, the researcher first identified clusters, such as different schools or classes. After randomly selecting a few of these clusters, eight teachers and ninety students within the chosen clusters were invited to participate in the questionnaire. This method not only simplified the sampling process by limiting the number of groups to manage but also allowed for efficient data collection, capturing a representative slice of the population without the need for individual sampling across all students.

The samples of the study include the responses of teachers and students to the questionnaires, the transcript of their interviews and notes from observation sheets of the 8th graders' English classes at Nghia Ha, Nghia An and Tran Van Tra Lower Secondary schools.

All the participants were coded for personal confidentiality in research. The teacher participants were referred to as TH1, TA1 or TT1 (Teacher 1 of Nghia Ha lower secondary school, Teacher 1 of Nghia An lower secondary school, Teacher 1 of Tran Van Tra lower secondary school, respectively). Similarly, the student informants were coded as SH1, SA1 or ST1 (student 1 of Nghia Ha Lower Secondary School, student 1 of Nghia An Lower Secondary School, student 1 of Tran Van Tra lower secondary school, respectively).

Table 1. Numbers of Teachers and Students Who Joined the Survey

		Pilot Test Questionnaire	Pilot Test Interview	Questionnaire	Interview
Nghia Ha	TH	2	2	2	2
	SH	5	5	30	10
Nghia An	TA	2	2	2	
	SA	5	5	30	10
Tran Van Tra	TT	2	2	2	3
	ST	5	5	30	20

The sample of the study include the responses of teachers and students to the questionnaires, the transcript of their interviews and notes from observation forms of teachers at Nghia Ha, Nghia An and Tran Van Tra Lower Secondary schools which were collected.

3.2.3. A Brief Introduction to “English 8 – Global Success”

The English textbook “English 8 - Global Success” consisting of twelve units was published by Vietnam Educational Publisher on the basis of the 2018 General Education English Curriculum issued by Ministry of Education and Training [9] with the Editor-in-chief Hoang Van Van. Each unit has seven sections as follows: getting started, a closer look 1, a closer look 2, communication, skills 1 (reading and speaking), skills 2 (listening and writing) and looking back and project.

3.3. Data Collection Instruments

To get the best results for the study, the questionnaires, interview questions as well as observation sheets were piloted before officially collecting the data.

Firstly, the researcher came to each school to meet the teachers and students, then explained the purpose of the research as well as the importance of their cooperation. Next, the researcher delivered the questionnaires to the students and waited for their answering all of the questions in about 20 minutes. The completed questionnaires were then collected.

For eight teachers from three schools mentioned, the researcher arranged to meet them individually and waited for them to complete the questionnaires.

After that the researcher carried out face-to-face interview with students and teachers from each school. All of important information were carefully noted for later analysis.

Finally, it took some days to conduct classroom observations. With the agreement of teachers in charge of the classes, the researcher observed their teaching of “Communication” section in the class and took note all important information related to the activity.

3.3.1. Questionnaires

The study utilized a questionnaire with two sections to gather data from participants. The first section collected their demographic information. The second section consists of six questions in Vietnamese for students and in English for teachers. Respondents can choose the appropriate answers through Yes/ No and Wh- questions with multiple choice answer. Besides, there are some open – ended questions in order to get teachers’ ideas conveniently. Before distributing the questionnaire widely, the researcher piloted it with six students, participants randomly chosen from the student population investigated, two for each school, to validate the language and structure, make necessary changes and remove unnecessary items. Because the contents of the questionnaire are relatively simple for the teachers to understand, it was not piloted with them. The draft questionnaire was then carefully amended before actual use.

3.3.2. Interview

The interviews were carried out to supplement the quantitative results and gain a more comprehensive understanding of the participants’ perception of teaching “Communication” section. There were five items for the interview that were based on the questionnaire responses. The researcher directly met and talked with teachers and students in each school taking part in the interviews. This method enabled participants to freely express their own thinking related to teaching and learning “Communication” section in the English textbook “English 8 - Global Success”. Each interview lasted about ten minutes.

3.3.3. Classroom Observation

To obtain more reliable and comprehensive data, the researcher conducted classroom observations in six classes where the “Communication” section of the English textbook was being taught. These classes were located at Nghia Ha, Nghia An, and Tran Van Tra lower secondary schools. The researcher observed various aspects of teaching, such as teacher-student interactions, teaching methods, student engagement, and how the “Communication” section was implemented in practice.

The data gathered from these classroom observations, alongside the information from the questionnaires and interviews, were analyzed qualitatively. This analysis provided deeper insights into the real-world challenges and strategies teachers used when teaching the “Communication” section, helping to triangulate the findings from other data sources.

3.3.4. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed and presented in three main categories. The first category focused on teachers’ perceptions of teaching the “Communication” section in “English 8 - Global Success”. The second category examined the reality of teaching and learning the “Communication” section, including the challenges teachers and students face. The final category presented potential solutions to the difficulties identified in the teaching process.

For the quantitative data, the responses from the closed-ended questions in the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics, with results presented in figures, including frequencies and percentages. This allowed for a clear overview of trends and patterns in teachers’ responses.

For the qualitative data, collected from interviews and classroom observations, thematic analysis was used to identify and analyze recurring themes and patterns. The researcher carefully examined the data to identify key insights related to teachers’ perceptions, challenges, and solutions. These themes were then grouped and interpreted to provide a deeper understanding of the teachers’ experiences and the teaching practices used for the “Communication” section.

By integrating both quantitative and qualitative analysis, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive view of the teaching and learning process in the “Communication” section.

3.3.5. Reliability and Validity

To ensure the reliability and validity of the research, the researcher tried to interview and delivered questionnaires to many participants in all three schools in Quang Ngai City. Furthermore, the researcher followed the procedures strictly and carefully in order to get reliable results. The questionnaires and interview questions were made in advance and rewritten or redesigned after being piloted so that the respondents could understand them correctly before giving their feedback. Especially, the questionnaires for students were designed in Vietnamese to help them understand and give appropriate answers.

4. Findings and Discussions

4.1. Teachers' Perception of Teaching "Communication" Section in "English 8 - Global Success"

4.1.1. The Role of "Communication" section in the English textbook

This section explores teachers' perception regarding the teaching of "Communication" as presented in the English textbook.

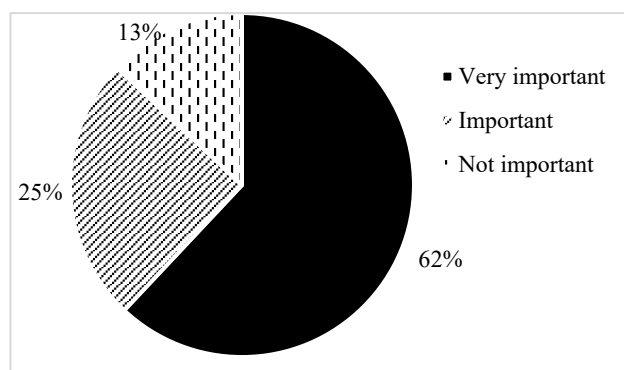


Figure 1. The Role of "Communication" section

About 62% of teachers believed that this section played a very important role in the English textbook. They highly appreciate the role of this section because it not only provided students with the practical situations, further practice, and an opportunity for skill consolidation, but it also helped them to broaden their cultural knowledge and language. Whereas 25% of them stated that teaching "Communication" section was important and only 13% of teachers said that it is not important.

4.1.2. Advantages of "Communication" section

Table 2. Advantages of "Communication" section

Advantages of "Communication" Section	Teachers (Number = 8)	
	Occurrence	%
Enhanced Speaking Skills	6	75
Real-life Application	5	62.5
Cultural Awareness	3	37.5
Activities Involving Teamwork and Collaboration	4	50
Critical Thinking	2	25

Being questioned about the advantages of the section, 6 out of 8 teachers taking part in the interview (accounting for 75%) agreed that it provided students with a variety of

activities to improve their language competence and speaking skills. Another thing which stands out is that more than 62% highly appreciated the situations given in the section as they were close to real life. Moreover, three of eight informants stated that "The activities in the section are designed to raise cultural awareness" was also one of the advantages of "Communication" section. With a half of informants agreed, the idea "There are many activities involving teamwork and collaboration" was a strong point of this section. Many parts included group activities and role-plays that not only made learning dynamic and enjoyable but these activities also encouraged students to engage in discussions.

4.1.3. Students' Enjoyment of "Communication" section

Most of teachers participating in the survey shared that their students liked learning "Communication" section because there were not any difficult exercises and teachers did not assess them in this section.

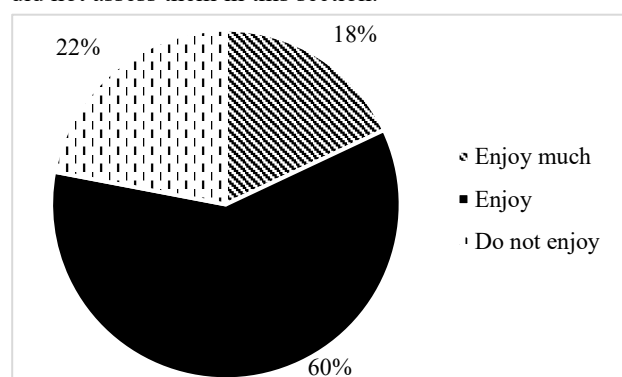


Figure 2. Students' Enjoyment of "Communication" section

The data presented in Figure 2 show that up to 60% of the total students were interested in learning this section. Besides, 18% of responses expressed their extreme enjoyment to "Communication" section, meanwhile 22% of students do not enjoy learning this section.

Based on the questionnaire survey and the interviews, the researcher could figure out several reasons for students' pleasure.

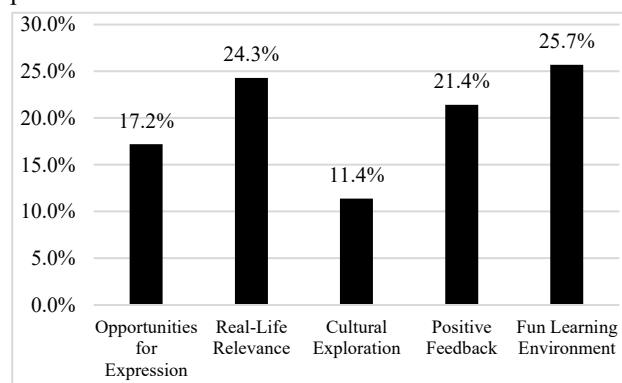


Figure 3. Percentages of Reasons for Students' Enjoyment of "Communication" section

The first thing to notice is about 17.2% of student informants said that they had opportunities for their expression. Students appreciated the chance to express their thoughts and opinions, fostering a sense of ownership

over their learning and encouraging creativity. Secondly, nearly a quarter of student informants (24.3%) thought that the content related to real-life situations, helping them see the practical application of communicative skills in their daily lives. Moreover, with the lowest rate (11.4%), students could explore different culture and communication styles, it made the content more engaging and enriching. Two other reasons receiving “Positive feedback” and having “Fun learning environment” are accounting 21.4% and 25.7% because the recognition from teachers can boost students’ confidence and motivation, enhancing their enjoyment, even a supportive classroom atmosphere can make students feel comfortable and contribute to a more enjoyable learning.

4.1.4. Teachers and Students’ Favourite Activities in “Communication” Section

Table 3. Teachers and Students’ Favourite Activities in “Communication” Section

Activities	Teachers’ Opinions (Number = 8)		Students’ Opinions (Number = 90)	
	Occurrence	%	Occurrence	%
Real-life Simulations and Role-playing	2	25	30	33.3
Hands-on Activities and Interactive Games	4	50	47	52.2
Presentations and Debates	2	25	13	14.5

Table 3 illustrates teachers’ and students’ favourite activities in “Communication” section. It is clear that the teachers and students shared the same ideas about the most favourite form of activities “Hands-on Activities and Interactive Games”, more than 50% of them enjoy activities that involve creating posters or playing games which made learning fun and competitive. While “Real-life Simulations and Role-playing” were quite familiar with both teachers and students, they made up 25% and 33%. For “Presentations and Debates”, teachers appreciated students’ presentations (25%) as they helped to develop speaking skills and foster critical thinking; however, only 14.5% of students could join in presentations or debates.

4.2. Challenges in Teaching and Learning “Communication” Section

4.2.1. Challenges in Teaching “Communication” Section

Table 4. Challenges in Teaching “Communication” Section

Challenges in Teaching “Communication” Section	Teachers (Number = 8)	
	Occurrence	%
Time Constraints	8	100
Engagement and Participation	6	75
Relevance to Real-life Situations	7	87.5
Varied Language Proficiency	5	62.5

It can be recognized that “Time constraints” (100%) was the biggest issue in their process of teaching. What is more, the other problem most teachers had to cope with was “Engagement and participation” (75%), teachers

thought that encouraging shy or reluctant students to participate in discussions or activities can be difficult. Creating a supportive environment where all students feel comfortable expressing themselves is crucial but can take time. Moreover, students may find it hard to relate the communication concepts to real-life situations (87.5%). Teachers need to provide relevant examples and practical applications to show the value of effective communication skills, therefore, many teachers found that relevance to real-life situation was difficult. Lastly, some teachers chose “varied language proficiency” (62.5%), they claimed that their students had different levels of English proficiency, making it difficult to engage all learners effectively.

4.2.2. Challenges in Learning “Communication” Section

Table 5. Challenges in Learning “Communication” Section

Challenges in Learning “Communication” Section	Students (Number = 90)	
	Occurrence	%
Vocabulary and Language Complexity	76	84.4
Confidence in Speaking	67	74.4
Lack of Practice Opportunities	54	60

The first things are vocabulary and language complexity which is 84.4%. Most of students may struggle with unfamiliar vocabulary or complex sentence structures, which can hinder their ability to fully understand and use expressions in real-life communication contexts. The second one is confidence in speaking (74.4%). Many students report feeling nervous or self-conscious about speaking in a foreign language, especially in front of others. This can make the “Communication” section challenging if it involves dialogue practice or spoken activities. The third one is lack of practice opportunities (60%). In some classrooms, a number of students have limited time for interactive speaking activities, making it hard for them to practice what they learn. This lack of hands-on practice can impede their progress in mastering communication skills.

4.3. Solutions to Overcome the Challenges in Teaching “Communication” Section

4.3.1. Students’ Expectations from Teachers in Teaching “Communication” Section

From interviews of students, we got several opinions. SH2 (class 8B, Nghia Ha Lower Secondary School, personal interview, May 10, 2024) quoted that “Learners expect opportunities to collaborate and communicate with their peers. Working in groups or pairs can enhance their learning experience and build social skills. In short, students want lessons that connect to their personal interests, current events. This relevance can increase their motivation and investment in learning communication skills”.

SA1 (class 8G, Nghia An Lower Secondary School, personal interview, May 15, 2024) said that “Nowadays, English has become a very important subject for all of students. About COMMUNICATION, we need to mention

the clear communication from teachers, because if teachers speak clearly, their students will easily understand them. English is a subject which really needs the interaction between teachers and students, so we need "Engaging Lessons" to satisfy students who look for lessons that are interactive, engaging, and relevant to their lives".

From a number of students' opinions, this figure was made and analyzed.

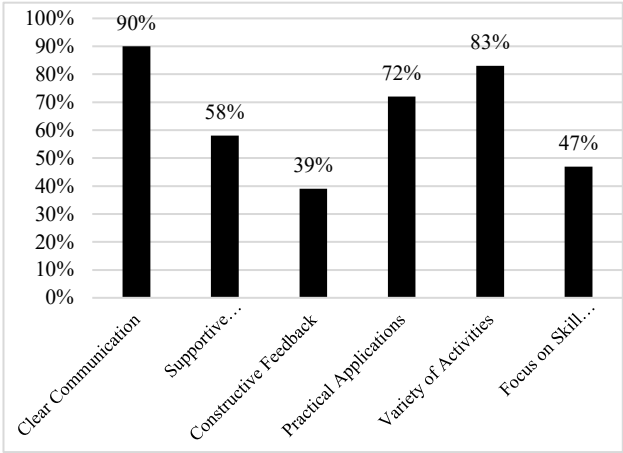


Figure 4. Students' Expectations from Teachers

Clear communication which can minimize misunderstandings accounts for the highest priority, with 90% of students emphasizing its importance, indicating a strong desire for understandable and engaging instruction. In contrast, only 39% of students feel that they receive constructive feedback, suggesting a significant gap in this area that could hinder their skill development. A supportive environment, while important, received a moderate 58%, indicating that many students may still feel hesitant to fully express themselves. Practical applications and a variety of activities were rated at 72% and 83% respectively, showing that students appreciate hands-on learning experiences and diverse instructional methods. Lastly, with only 47% valuing a focus on skill development, there is a clear need for teachers to enhance their emphasis on cultivating practical communication skills to better prepare students for real-world interactions.

4.3.2. Teachers' Solutions to Challenges in Teaching "Communication" section

In addressing the challenges encountered while teaching the "Communication" section to 8th graders, teachers can adopt a variety of effective solutions to enhance the learning experience.

TT (English teacher at Tran Van Tra Lower Secondary School, personal interview, June 7, 2024) claimed that "I believe that interaction is key to learning communication skills. One of the primary ways I foster an interactive environment is by incorporating role-playing activities. For instance, I set up situations where students must make conversations, such as ordering food or resolving a conflict. This not only makes learning fun but also allows them to practice real-life communication in a safe setting".

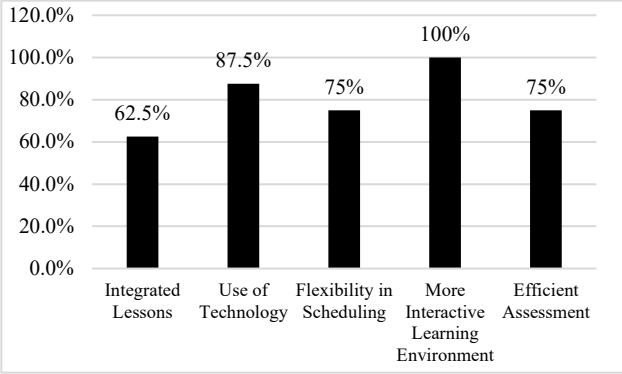


Figure 5. Teachers' Solutions to Challenges in Teaching "Communication" section

The overwhelming 100% support for a more interactive learning environment emphasizes the necessity of engagement in the classroom. In addition, the high percentage of 87.50% for the use of technology highlights students' desire for innovative methods that enhance their learning experiences, indicating that digital tools and resources are essential for modern teaching. Flexibility in scheduling, rated at 75%, indicates a demand for adaptability in lesson planning, allowing for a more personalized learning pace and accommodating diverse student needs. Likewise, integrated lessons, with 62.5%, suggest that students benefit from a cohesive approach that connects different subject areas, reinforcing their understanding of communication concepts. Finally, the 75% rating for efficient assessment emphasizes the importance of timely and constructive feedback to monitor progress effectively.

4.3.3. Teachers' Development to Cope with the Challenges in Teaching "Communication" section

Based on the challenges identified, several solutions have been proposed to help teachers overcome the difficulties in teaching the "Communication" section effectively. Moreover, teachers themselves have to focus on professional development, pedagogical adjustments, and contextual improvements.

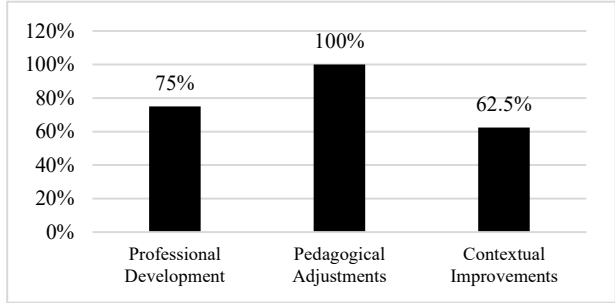


Figure 6. Teachers' Development to Cope with the Challenges in Teaching "Communication" section

75% of teacher have opinions about professional development (PD). Teachers need opportunities to learn how to design and implement student-centered communication activities that are engaging and appropriate for different proficiency levels. To make communication lessons more effective, teachers should consider adapting pedagogical adjustments (100%). In additional, many

teachers claimed that it must be necessary to address the contextual challenges (62.5%), schools should invest in more modern teaching aids such as learning management systems (LMS), educational apps and smartboards and interactive whiteboards that facilitate communicative activities.

5. Conclusion and Implications

5.1. Conclusion

This issue has highlighted the complexity of teaching the "Communication" section in the textbook *"English 8 - Global Success"* for 8th graders in lower secondary schools in Quang Ngai City. While teachers recognize the importance of communicative skills, they face numerous challenges, ranging from inadequate training and limited resources to students' low proficiency and motivation. By addressing these issues, teachers will be better equipped to help students develop the practical language skills they need to succeed in both academic and real-world settings.

5.2. Implications

Firstly, the study highlights the need for localized curriculum adaptation to meet the specific needs of students in Quang Ngai province. While national curricula provide a broad framework, local conditions such as regional differences in access to resources, educational infrastructure, and students' English proficiency levels require customization for effective teaching. In the "Communication" section of the 8th-grade curriculum, students are expected to develop practical speaking and listening skills. Secondly, teachers in lower secondary

schools in Quang Ngai often face challenges in delivering the "Communication" section effectively due to inflexible training in the communicative approach. Finally, the findings suggest that current teaching practices for the "Communication" section rely heavily on teachers doing most of the speaking and students remaining passive recipients. To sum up, teachers should implement more collaborative and interactive classroom activities where students have the opportunity to engage in real-life communication scenarios.

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