

BOOK REVIEW

**English Language Teaching in Vietnam:
Reflections, Innovations, and Insights**
A Collaboration of Vietnam Community
of Practice



Title: English Language Teaching in Vietnam: Reflections, Innovations, and Insights
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Most edited volumes in applied linguistics declare their origins in conference proceedings or commissioned research. This one is different. *English Language Teaching in Vietnam: Reflections, Innovations, and Insights*, edited by Ngoc-Tung Vu, Hanh Dinh, Khanh Bui, and Hang Thi Thu Nguyen, originated in the Vietnam Community of Practice (ViCoP), a virtual professional development platform established in 2020 precisely because the COVID-19 pandemic had made in-person academic exchange impossible. As the volume's Foreword explains, the founding co-editors created ViCoP as an online collaborative space grounded in Lave and Wenger's (1991) framework of communities of practice, with the explicit goal of enabling Vietnamese EFL educators, researchers, and graduate students to exchange research and build professional knowledge collectively. The program ran from September 2021 to May 2022. Membership carried a concrete expectation: each participant was required to produce a book chapter as a tangible output of their engagement. The book under review is that output. This production context is not incidental to the volume's significance; it shapes what the book is, what it can claim, and where its limits lie.

Situating this volume within recent scholarship on ELT in Vietnam clarifies both its position and the questions it leaves open. The most directly relevant predecessor is *Building Teacher Capacity in English Language Teaching in Vietnam: Research, Policy and Practice*, edited by Le et al. (2019, published by Routledge), which examined teacher professional development through the institutional lens of the National Foreign Language Project 2020. That volume asked how state-mandated reform structures constrain and enable teacher agency, and it did so from within a well-resourced editorial and publisher infrastructure. A broader comparative frame is offered by Tran and Marginson's (2018) *Internationalisation in Vietnamese Higher Education* (published by Springer), which positions Vietnam within global debates about internationalisation, policy borrowing, and the tensions between Western educational models and local context. Both of these volumes are anchored in major academic publishers and engage explicitly with theory and policy. The ViCoP volume occupies a different register. It is

practitioner-generated, bottom-up, and built from a logic of community participation rather than institutional mandate. Placed alongside the earlier works, it reads less as a scholarly successor than as a complementary and deliberately alternative mode of knowledge production about Vietnamese ELT.

The collection comprises ten chapters organized loosely around the six thematic tracks of ViCoP: EFL teaching, EFL learning, curriculum and assessment, community involvement, school leadership, and education technology. Chapter 1, by Ngoc-Tung Vu, examines the professional reintegration of Vietnamese EFL teacher returnees, educators who pursued graduate study abroad and navigated re-entry into domestic institutional contexts. Chapter 2, by Hang Thi Thu Nguyen, proposes a collaborative model between teacher education institutions and partner schools to support pre-service teacher development. Chapters 3 and 4 address EFL learning where Tran Hoang Phuong Uyen (Chapter 3) investigates the use of model texts to build lexical resources for IELTS Writing Task 2, while Long Tran (Chapter 4) explores EFL learner identity formation through a narrative case study of Vietnamese university students. Thi To Loan Pham's Chapter 5 analyses the move structure of 'Results and Discussion' sections in undergraduate theses written by Vietnamese English-major students, responding to a widely documented gap in academic writing instruction. Chapter 6, by Thi Anh Hang Trinh, is an autobiographical account of intercultural English teaching practice by a non-native speaker. Chapter 7, by Linh Ngoc Truong Pham, addresses meta-cultural competence development through linguistic landscape content in TEIL curricula. Chapter 8, by Hanh Dinh, examines STEM integration into English learning activities for middle school learners. Chapter 9, by Ha Nguyen and Khanh Bui, investigates the enablers and barriers to EFL educators' participation in ViCoP itself, using the community as its own research site. Chapter 10, compiled by Khanh Bui, closes the volume with first-person reflective pieces from ViCoP members across roles of manager, theme leader, and participant.

The breadth of topics across these chapters reflects ViCoP's six thematic mandates accurately, and in this respect, the volume is a faithful documentary of what the community set out to do. Several chapters respond to genuinely underexplored areas in Vietnamese ELT. Thi To Loan Pham's genre analysis in Chapter 5 addresses a practical writing challenge that most Vietnamese university students encounter but receives little sustained pedagogical attention. Thi Anh Hang Trinh's autobiographical account in Chapter 6 contributes to the growing but still thin literature on NNES teacher identity in Southeast Asia. Ha Nguyen and Khanh Bui's Chapter 9, which reports on the thematic analysis of sixteen interviews and identifies ten enablers and ten barriers specific to the Vietnamese socio-cultural context of virtual CoP participation, offers empirical data that extends beyond Vietnam to any researcher considering community-based professional development in non-Western, resource-constrained settings. Overall, these contributions hold up individually, demonstrating the kind of methodological care and contextual specificity that practitioners and researchers alike will find credible and useful.

What the editorial apparatus provides less clearly is a framework for reading these chapters in relation to each other. The Foreword, authored by Khanh Bui, performs the dual function of introducing ViCoP's history and previewing the book's chapters. It is informative about organizational structure and activities, but it does not offer an interpretive argument about

what the chapters collectively reveal about Vietnamese ELT in the early 2020s. The volume's breadth, which is a product of ViCoP's deliberately inclusive thematic structure, creates a reading experience in which each chapter is substantively self-contained but the connections between them are left to the reader to construct. A more substantial editorial introduction synthesizing the chapters would have strengthened the volume's claim to speak to the field as a whole rather than to the specific concerns of each chapter's intended audience. However, this limitation is, to some extent, structural rather than avoidable: when the organizing principle of a collection is community participation rather than a shared research question, thematic integration is a secondary concern.

The volume's most unusual structural feature is its reflexive turn in Chapters 9 and 10. Rather than treating the community that produced the book as simply the occasion for it, these two chapters make ViCoP itself an object of inquiry. Chapter 9 reports empirical findings on the barriers and enablers to participation in ViCoP, drawing on interviews with community members. Chapter 10 presents first-person accounts from the project manager, theme leaders, and participants, allowing readers to hear directly how involvement in ViCoP shaped individual researchers' identities and practices. Read together, these two chapters transform the volume from a conventional edited collection into something closer to a documented case study of a professional development experiment, one that is willing to acknowledge its own structural challenges. This self-reflexivity is uncommon in edited ELT volumes, including those in the comparable literature on Vietnamese education (i.e., Le et al., 2019; Tran & Marginson, 2018), precisely making it one of the ViCoP volume's distinguishing contributions, even if the format of Chapter 10 in particular—structured largely as compiled quotations—could benefit from more editorial synthesis.

As of 2026, the volume does not appear to have generated substantial citation uptake in peer-reviewed journals or to have been reviewed in major applied linguistics outlets, which reflects in part the limited visibility conferred by its publisher. Eliva Press, based in Moldova, operates on an author-pays model and is not indexed in major academic databases. This observation does not diminish the quality of the research itself, several chapters of which demonstrate genuine scholarly effort and address questions of practical importance. However, it does mean that the volume is unlikely to achieve the circulation of comparable works published through Routledge or Springer, and readers evaluating individual chapters for academic purposes should be aware that the publication process differs from standard peer review as practised at major ELT journals. The more instructive observation is that this gap in visibility is itself a symptom of the structural inequality that the ViCoP project was attempting to address: Vietnamese EFL practitioners who conduct rigorous research continue to face significant barriers to publishing in high-profile international venues, and the ViCoP model represents one response to that constraint, even if not a fully resolved one.

The volume also raises, without fully resolving, questions about the long-term trajectory of ViCoP itself. The program as described in the Foreword ran for a defined nine-month cycle in 2021 to 2022. Chapter 10 closes with forward-looking recommendations about sustaining and expanding the community, but the text provides no account of whether ViCoP continued to operate after the book's publication, developed into a more permanent structure, or remained

primarily the organizational context for this single publication cycle. This matters because it affects how one reads the volume's implicit argument about community-based professional development as a model. Ha Nguyen and Khanh Bui's empirical findings in Chapter 9 identify significant structural barriers to sustained participation in Vietnamese virtual communities of practice, including hierarchical norms, workload constraints, and concerns about professional vulnerability. If those barriers ultimately contributed to ViCoP's own discontinuation, the volume's reflective chapters acquire a different resonance than they would if ViCoP had become a self-sustaining institution.

These qualifications do not diminish the volume's relevance to audiences beyond its immediate Vietnamese context. The specific challenge ViCoP addressed, namely how EFL practitioners in geographically dispersed, institutionally constrained, and under-resourced settings can build research communities without large-scale funding or institutional infrastructure, is shared across much of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The pandemic-era emergence of virtual communities of practice as a professional development mechanism has attracted growing scholarly attention, but much of the theoretical and empirical literature continues to draw disproportionately on Western institutional contexts. ViCoP's documented experience with socio-cultural barriers specific to Vietnam, including those identified in Chapter 9, adds texture to this literature in ways that practitioners and researchers engaged in building similar structures elsewhere will find useful. The conditions that produced ViCoP may have been specific to Vietnam in 2020 and 2021, but the organizational questions it confronted are broadly applicable.

In summary, *English Language Teaching in Vietnam: Reflections, Innovations, and Insights* is a volume whose value lies as much in what it represents as in what it argues. It is a document of what a group of Vietnamese EFL educators produced when they chose, under pandemic constraints and with limited institutional support, to build a research community from scratch and to make their experience of doing so part of the scholarly record. Its limitations are genuine: the collection lacks an integrative interpretive frame, its publication context constrains its reach, and the long-term fate of the community it grew from remains unclear. Its contributions are also equally genuine: empirical data on virtual professional communities in a non-Western context, practitioner research on questions of immediate relevance to Vietnamese ELT, and a structural transparency about how the book came into existence that distinguishes it from more polished but less candid productions. The volume is recommended primarily for readers with a direct stake in Vietnamese ELT practice and for those interested in the organizational conditions under which practitioner scholarship is produced in digitally mediated, resource-constrained educational settings.

THE REVIEWER

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