

Navigating New Horizons: Vietnamese English-major Graduates in Non-Traditional Careers

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Abstract

This phenomenological study seeks to explore the experiences of Vietnamese English-major graduates as they transition into out-of-expertise job roles in a globalized work environment. Drawing from a qualitative dataset gathered from 67 participants through semi-structured interviews, the research aimed to understand the perceived benefits, challenges, and emotional trajectories associated with such transitions. Key findings indicate that the majority of participants perceived their English proficiency as a significant advantage in diverse job markets. However, they also highlighted cultural challenges when adapting to global work settings, emphasizing the need to understand nuanced cultural norms beyond language proficiency. A recurrent theme was the perceived gap between the rich theoretical knowledge acquired during their academic tenure and its practical applicability in real-world job scenarios. Interestingly, participants also illuminated the unexpected interdisciplinary benefits of their English-major background, suggesting that their studies equipped them with valuable critical thinking and analytical skills. Issues of professional identity emerged strongly, with many participants expressing challenges in aligning their academic label with diverse job roles. Furthermore, the study highlights the profound emotional journey, from initial doubts to building resilience, as a significant aspect of these professional transitions.

Keywords: Experiences, globalized work environments, out-of-expertise job roles, Vietnamese English-major graduates, ESP

Vietnam, a nation witnessing an accelerating pace of globalization and urbanization, has steadily focused its attention on educational reform to cater to the evolving needs of its economy (Thao & Mai, 2022). At the forefront of this educational transformation is the role of the English language,

given its global significance in trade, academia, technology, and diplomacy (Tran & Tanemura, 2020). As English becomes an increasingly pivotal skill set, universities across Vietnam have amplified their emphasis on English majors. It is essential to understand that in Vietnam, unlike in many other cultures, an English major is often pursued not solely for careers in English teaching or translation, but also as a strategic foundation for diverse career paths. This is a critical distinction, as the proficiency in English is viewed as a versatile tool, opening doors in various sectors including business, technology, and international relations (Le, 2017).

As the nation's education system propels forward, a noteworthy trend has emerged. A significant proportion of English-major graduates find themselves venturing into job roles that do not squarely align with their expertise (Tran, 2013). While the reasons for this may be multifaceted, there is a growing need to understand the implications of such career choices and trajectories. This trend raises questions about the curriculum's alignment with students' aspirations, especially considering that many students are now majoring in English not with the intent of becoming teachers or translators, but to leverage the language as a key skill in their non-English-centric careers. Does the learning curriculum prepare these graduates adequately for out-of-expertise jobs? Is their English-major foundation a strength, a neutral factor, or even a hindrance as they navigate these diverse career paths?

This study delves deep into the lived experiences of Vietnamese English-major graduates working in roles outside their field of study. The preliminary report suggests that a notable percentage, nearly 35-40%, are opting for careers in diverse fields such as business, technology, and international relations. Utilizing a phenomenological approach, the research seeks to uncover the nuances, challenges, and opportunities these graduates face, with a particular emphasis on how their educational backgrounds inform their job prospects and performance. By grounding the research in their stories, the study attempts to shed light on the intersection of curriculum design, individual aspirations, and the realities of the job market in Vietnam. In doing so, the research aims to address the critical gap in understanding the extent of the department's realization that many of its English majors do not aspire to become teachers or translators, but rather see their English skills as a versatile asset in a broader job market. Understanding these dynamics is crucial. This study offers practical insights that can assist educational institutions in fine-tuning their curriculum to better align with current job market trends. Additionally, it yields useful information for policymakers and employers in understanding the evolving career dynamics of English-major graduates. For students, this research can serve as a resource in making informed career choices in a rapidly changing professional environment.

Literature Review

English Language Proficiency and Global Job Market

The interconnection between English language proficiency and success in the global job market has been a focal point of scholarly research for decades. This section of the literature review synthesizes key studies and theories that underline the growing importance of English proficiency in a globalized employment landscape. Bourdieu (1997) and Warschauer (2000) were among the early scholars to emphasize the role of English as a form of "cultural capital." They argued that proficiency in English opens up a plethora of opportunities, granting individuals access to a wealth of information and global networks. This concept of "cultural capital" is particularly relevant in a world where English is increasingly seen as a prerequisite for many professional roles.

Extending this perspective, Li (2022) underscored the ubiquity of English as the lingua franca across various fields, including business, science, and diplomacy. Li's (2022) research indicates that strong English skills are more than just a communication tool; they serve as a strategic asset in the global job market, enabling individuals to navigate diverse professional environments and cultural contexts effectively. This viewpoint aligns with the growing body of literature that links language proficiency with professional mobility and success. For instance, Luo and Shenkar (2006) examined how English proficiency facilitates better integration into multinational corporations, where English often serves as the corporate language. Luo and Shenkar's (2006) findings suggest that employees with higher levels of English proficiency are more likely to be involved in significant projects and decision-making processes, thereby enhancing their career growth opportunities. Another critical angle is presented by Erling et al. (2019), who investigated the role of English proficiency in the context of global labor migration. Their study revealed that in many cases, proficiency in English can compensate for the lack of local language skills in the destination country, particularly for skilled professionals. This insight adds a nuanced dimension to the discussion, highlighting English's role as a mediator in global mobility and employment.

In short, there is a consensus on the value of English proficiency in the global job market. It is increasingly clear that English language skills are a critical component of cultural capital, providing individuals with a competitive edge in a diverse range of professional fields. This body of work collectively informs our understanding of the dynamics at play in a globalized employment landscape, where language proficiency intersects with cultural and professional opportunities.

Evolution of the Vietnamese Educational Curriculum

It is pertinent to examine how specific countries, such as Vietnam, have adapted their educational systems to meet these global demands. Vietnam, in particular, presents an interesting case study of curriculum evolution in response to globalization. Vietnam's journey towards globalizing its educational curriculum, with a specific focus on the English language, began in earnest in the early 2000s. Mai (2017) offers a comprehensive overview of this transition from a traditional grammar-focused approach to one that embraces communicative English teaching methods. This shift was driven by the recognition that the global job market increasingly demands not just theoretical knowledge of English but also the ability to use the language effectively in diverse contexts. These reforms were envisioned to align the country's educational output with the requirements of an interconnected world, producing graduates who are not only linguistically proficient but also culturally adaptable. Mai's (2017) study highlights the systemic changes implemented in educational policy and classroom practices, reflecting a nationwide commitment to this new direction.

Despite these efforts, the effectiveness of the curriculum changes has been a subject of ongoing scholarly debate. Nghia and Tran (2020) critically analyzed the post-reform landscape and argued that, while the shift towards a communicative approach was a step in the right direction, the curriculum might still be falling short in terms of practical application. Their research points to a gap between the theoretical knowledge imparted in classrooms and the practical language skills required in real-world situations. This debate is further enriched by the work of Doan and Hamid (2021), who examined the extent to which the new curriculum prepares students for the linguistic demands of the global job market. They found that while students' fluency and confidence in using English have improved, there are still challenges in achieving proficiency levels that meet

international standards. This gap is particularly evident in rural areas where resources and qualified teaching personnel are more limited.

It can be seen that the evolution of Vietnam's educational curriculum, particularly in English language teaching, reflects a dynamic response to globalization. Nguyen and Hamid (2021) explored how the changes in the English curriculum impacted Vietnam's integration into the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and its economic partnerships. Le's (2019) analysis suggests that the enhanced English proficiency among graduates has positively influenced Vietnam's economic and diplomatic relationships, though continued improvements and adaptations are necessary to keep pace with regional and global trends. While significant strides have been made, the literature indicates a need for ongoing assessment and adaptation to ensure that the educational system fully aligns with the evolving demands of the global job market and international standards.

Career Choices of English-major Graduates

The trajectory of career choices among English-major graduates, especially in Asia, has been an area of considerable interest and research. This interest stems from the observed trend of these graduates diversifying their career paths beyond traditional roles in teaching and translation. Xiao (2006) conducted a seminal study in China that highlighted this phenomenon. The research found that a substantial number of English-major graduates in China were transitioning to roles in fields such as marketing, public relations, and finance. Xiao (2006) attributed this trend to two primary factors: the inherent versatility of language skills and the growing perception of English proficiency as a valuable asset across various domains. This observation aligns with the broader narrative of English proficiency being considered a form of "cultural capital" in the global job market.

Expanding on Xiao's (2006) findings, Gagalang (2020) explored the career paths of English-major graduates in Egypt. Gagalang (2020) revealed a similar pattern, with a notable proportion of graduates finding employment in sectors like information technology, customer service, and media. This was largely credited to the growing demand for English proficiency in these industries, coupled with the analytical and communication skills honed through an English-major education. A comparative study by Kobayashi (2018) across several Southeast Asian countries, including Thailand and Indonesia, further underscored the regional trend of English-major graduates branching into diverse career fields. The study suggested that in addition to language proficiency, employers valued the critical thinking, cultural awareness, and adaptability skills that were often inherent in English-major education.

This shift in career choices among English-major graduates is reflective of a broader trend where language skills, particularly in English, are increasingly viewed as transferable and advantageous in a variety of professional domains. This suggests that this trend is not isolated to a specific country but is evident across various Asian contexts. As the global job market continues to evolve, the career trajectories of English-major graduates will likely continue to diversify, challenging traditional perceptions of the utility and applicability of an English-major degree.

Out-of-Expertise Job Roles – Opportunities and Challenges

The phenomenon of professionals, particularly those with specialized degrees like English majors, venturing into roles beyond their core area of expertise is increasingly common in today's dynamic job market. Teferra (2019) provided insightful observations on the challenges faced by individuals

working in roles outside their field of study. Key among these challenges is the need to adapt to industry-specific jargon and understand domain-specific nuances. Teferra (2019) highlighted that while English majors may possess excellent communication skills, the transition to a new field often requires a rapid and intensive learning process to grasp the unique terminologies and operational frameworks of that industry.

Another significant challenge identified is overcoming the “imposter syndrome”, a concept explored in-depth by Dimova and Kling (2018). They found that professionals in out-of-expertise roles often experience feelings of self-doubt and perceived fraudulence, fearing that their lack of traditional qualifications in the field might be seen as a shortfall. This psychological barrier can impede the confidence and assertiveness necessary for success in a new professional environment.

On the flip side, venturing into roles outside one’s primary field of study can also offer unique advantages. Mukhuty et al. (2022) argued that individuals with diverse skill sets, such as those developed through an English-major education, bring fresh perspectives and innovative problem-solving approaches to their new roles. This diversity of thought and approach can be particularly valuable in industries that are rapidly evolving or are highly interdisciplinary in nature. Further, a study by Sanchez and López (2022) explored the career trajectories of English-major graduates in technology startups in Costa Rica. They found that these individuals often excelled in roles requiring high levels of creativity, adaptability, and communication - skills that are not traditionally associated with tech but are increasingly recognized as vital in the sector. Their ability to articulate complex ideas clearly and engage with diverse teams was seen as a significant asset.

In a nutshell, while transitioning to out-of-expertise job roles presents its unique set of challenges, it also opens up opportunities for professional growth and the application of transferable skills. This trend underscores the evolving nature of career paths in the modern job market and the increasing value of interdisciplinary skill sets.

Vietnamese Job Market Dynamics and the Dynamics in Its Tertiary Curriculum

The dynamics of Vietnam’s job market have undergone considerable changes, especially in the context of the country’s rapid economic development and increasing integration into the global economy. Nguyen (2017) provided a detailed analysis of the evolving demands in the Vietnamese job market, particularly in the wake of an influx of foreign companies. His study pointed out the growing need for bilingual professionals who possess not only language proficiency but also the ability to navigate cross-cultural environments. This demand has significantly increased the value of English proficiency in the Vietnamese job market, making it a critical skill for career advancement and international collaboration.

However, alongside the opportunities presented by this evolving market, challenges have also emerged. One of the primary concerns, as highlighted by Tran (2014), is the potential mismatch between the skills of graduates and the specific needs of the job market. Tran (2014) critically examined the relevance of the current educational curriculum in Vietnam, questioning whether it adequately prepares students for the realities of the modern job market. This mismatch can lead to underemployment and a lack of job satisfaction among graduates, as well as a talent gap in the industry. Yen et al. (2023) further explored this issue by analyzing employers’ perceptions on the employability of Vietnamese English-major students in the context of a globalized economy. Their findings indicated that while graduates often possess strong theoretical knowledge, they may lack practical skills and hands-on experience that are increasingly sought after by employers. This gap

between academic preparation and practical job market requirements poses a significant challenge for both graduates and educational institutions.

In response to these challenges, Nghia et al. (2019) investigated the initiatives taken by Vietnamese universities to enhance the employability of their graduates. Their study revealed a trend towards more industry-aligned curriculum development, including the introduction of internships, practical projects, and collaboration with businesses. These efforts aim to bridge the gap between academic learning and professional requirements.

While existing literature provides valuable insights into the role of English proficiency in the global job market and the evolution of Vietnamese educational curriculum, there remains a gap in understanding the specific experiences of Vietnamese English-major graduates working in out-of-expertise roles. This study aims to fill this void, situating itself at the intersection of curriculum design, individual career trajectories, and the broader Vietnamese job market dynamics.

Methods

Research Context: An Analysis on the Curriculum of English-major Education

The curriculum for English majors in Vietnamese universities is multifaceted, designed to equip students with a comprehensive skill set. Core components of the curriculum include language proficiency (encompassing reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills), literature, cultural studies, and applied linguistics. Notably, the curriculum extends beyond traditional English literature and linguistics. It incorporates modules on second language acquisition, pedagogical strategies, and curriculum development, directly aligning with TESL/TEFL competencies. This curriculum integration underscores the commitment to producing graduates who are not only proficient in English but also skilled in teaching methodologies and curriculum design.

Recent curriculum revisions reflect an acute awareness of global trends and job market demands. Many universities in Vietnam have introduced courses focusing on intercultural communication, digital literacy, and critical thinking. These additions signify an expansion of the traditional scope of English studies, aligning it more closely with the demands of a globalized workforce. Such adaptations highlight the evolving nature of the English-major curriculum, aimed at fostering versatile professionals capable of thriving in diverse career paths.

Research Design

In understanding the multifaceted experiences of Vietnamese English-major graduates working in out-of-expertise roles, this study adopts a qualitative research methodology, emphasizing the phenomenological design. Qualitative research, with its emphasis on exploring complex phenomena within their natural settings, offers a nuanced lens through which the intricate realities of these graduates can be unearthed (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The phenomenological design, in particular, is chosen for its unparalleled ability to delve deep into the essence of lived experiences. By focusing on the 'lived experiences' of our subjects, this design enables a more profound exploration of their daily challenges, aspirations, perceptions, and realities, which might not be adequately captured by more structured research methods. This approach is pivotal to understanding the subjective world of these graduates and discerning the underlying structures and essence of their experiences (Nigar, 2020).

Underpinning this study are two theories that guide our inquiry, each offering a distinct yet complementary perspective on the experiences of Vietnamese English-major graduates in the

global job market. The first framework is Bourdieu's (1997) and Warschauer's (2000) concept of "cultural capital." The theory proposes that non-financial social assets, such as knowledge, skills, and education - akin to physical or economic capital - can promote social mobility beyond economic means. In the context of this study, English proficiency is conceptualized as a form of cultural capital. In a globalized job market, this proficiency transcends the boundaries of mere language skill, serving as a lever for career advancement and social mobility. This framework helps us explore how English language proficiency, acquired through higher education, contributes to the employability and career progression of Vietnamese graduates in a diverse range of professional fields. The second theoretical framework is Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory (ST). This theory posits that an individual's learning and cognitive development are fundamentally shaped by their social interactions and cultural context. It emphasizes that knowledge acquisition and learning processes are deeply embedded in, and influenced by, the social and cultural environments in which an individual is situated. Applying ST to our study allows for an examination of how the Vietnamese cultural and educational contexts influence the development and application of English proficiency among graduates. This perspective is instrumental in understanding how these graduates adapt their language skills and cultural understanding to various professional settings, particularly when these settings extend beyond their primary area of academic training.

Together, these frameworks provide a comprehensive lens to examine the nuanced ways in which language proficiency, cultural understanding, and social context interact and influence the career paths of English-major graduates in Vietnam. This approach enables a holistic understanding of their career trajectories and adaptability in the globalized job arena.

Participants

The primary participants of this study comprised 67 English-major graduates hailing from a well-known university in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam. Ranging in age from 23 to 25 years, these graduates represented a diverse cross-section of socio-economic backgrounds, regional affiliations, and career trajectories. Their shared experience, however, was their engagement in jobs outside their area of academic expertise. Some participants had moved into sectors such as digital marketing, where they utilized their language skills in content creation and international client communication. Others found roles in the burgeoning tech industry, working in international customer support or as liaison officers for global partnerships. A few had even ventured into entrepreneurial roles, launching businesses that cater to international markets, leveraging their English skills in negotiation and business development. In the selection process, purposive sampling was employed to ensure a broad spectrum of experiences. Participants were selected based on their willingness to share their narratives and their availability for in-depth interviews. It is important to note that efforts were made to balance representation across gender, different types of out-of-expertise jobs, and urban versus rural backgrounds.

The choice to include 67 participants, which may seem ambitious for a qualitative study, was driven by the study's aim to capture a wide range of perspectives and experiences. This number allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the various ways in which English-major education impacts career trajectories, especially in non-related fields. The diverse sample size was crucial in identifying both common and unique themes across different career paths and personal backgrounds. The diverse sample size included individuals working in fields like event management, international trade, and non-governmental organizations, providing a rich tapestry of experiences and insights.

To manage the extensive data from 67 participants (labelled as Participant 1 - Participant 67), the study was conducted as a collaborative effort involving multiple researchers. This team-based approach ensured that interviews were conducted efficiently, and data were collected and analyzed systematically. Each researcher was responsible for a subset of participants, conducting in-depth interviews and initial data coding. Regular team meetings were held to discuss findings, ensure consistency in data interpretation, and integrate insights from different researchers. This collaborative method not only streamlined the research process but also brought varied perspectives to the data analysis, enhancing the richness and depth of the study's findings.

Addressing ethical concerns was paramount throughout the research process. Prior to any data collection, all participants were informed about the objectives of the study, the nature of their involvement, and the ways in which the collected data would be utilized. Written informed consent was secured from each participant. Confidentiality was strictly maintained by using pseudonyms and ensuring no personally identifiable information was included in any published or shared results. Participants were also assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any repercussions. Furthermore, participants were informed that they could seek clarification on any aspect of the research and were provided with contact details of the research team for any post-interview questions or concerns. Emphasis was also placed on creating a comfortable environment during interviews, recognizing the potential sensitivity of some topics, and offering emotional support if any participant became distressed.

Data Collection

The primary method of data collection for this study was semi-structured interviews, a choice made to allow flexibility in exploring the intricate experiences of the participants while still providing a structured framework to ensure consistency and comprehensiveness in data collection. These interviews were primarily conducted via online platforms, such as Zoom and Skype, and phone calls, given the geographical spread of the participants and the contemporary emphasis on remote communication.

Before the actual data collection commenced, a pilot study was undertaken involving five English-major graduates who met the criteria for the main study. The purpose of this pilot was twofold: firstly, to assess the effectiveness of the interview questions and secondly, to refine the data collection process based on the feedback and experiences from these initial interviews. As a result of this pilot study, several interview questions were revised to be more open-ended, allowing participants to provide more in-depth and nuanced answers.

Some of the revised interview questions included:

- Describe your initial expectations when you chose to major in English. How do they compare to your current professional reality?
- Can you share a specific instance where your English-major background was particularly beneficial in your current job? Conversely, any moments where it posed a challenge?
- How do you perceive the alignment between the Vietnamese English curriculum and the skills required for your current role?

Each interview varied in length, but on average, they spanned between 45 to 75 minutes. Given the cultural and linguistic nuances that might be lost in translation, all interviews were conducted in Vietnamese. This choice ensured participants felt most comfortable and could express

themselves authentically. Additionally, conducting the interviews in their native language allowed for a richer and more contextual understanding of their experiences.

Lastly, to address potential issues of data reliability and validity, all interviews were recorded, with the participants' consent, and then transcribed verbatim. This process allowed for detailed and repeated analyses of the data, ensuring that the essence of the participants' experiences was accurately captured and represented in the findings.

Data Analysis

In this study, we employed thematic analysis as our primary method for interpreting the rich qualitative data gathered from our participants. Thematic analysis, as proposed by Braun et al. (2023), is a flexible and nuanced approach that seeks to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns of meaning (or “themes”) within qualitative data.

The process began with familiarization. After the transcription of the interviews, multiple readings were done by the research team to immerse themselves deeply into the data. This allowed for an initial, intuitive understanding of potential patterns and insights. Following this, initial codes were generated. These codes were short descriptors that captured the essence of different sections of the transcript. Once coding was complete, the next step was to search for themes by examining how different codes may cluster together. Subsequently, themes were reviewed and refined. This involved a two-level checking: firstly, ensuring that the coded extracts for each theme coherently formed a pattern, and secondly, considering the validity of individual themes in relation to the dataset as a whole. After satisfactory refinement, themes were named and defined. Clear definitions and narratives for each theme ensured that they clearly communicated the essence of the patterns in the data. Lastly, the finalized themes were analyzed in the context of the broader research question and the theoretical frameworks that underpinned the study. This integrative process ensured that our findings not only provided insights into the lived experiences of the participants but also contributed to academic discourse in a meaningful way.

Throughout the analysis, we used NVivo to aid in organizing and visualizing the data. This tool was instrumental in keeping track of codes, themes, and the relationships between them. It also provided an audit trail, ensuring the transparency and replicability of our analysis process.

Findings and Discussion

This section explores eight key themes that have emerged from our analysis of the experiences of Vietnamese English-major graduates in out-of-expertise job roles. These themes are critical in understanding the multifaceted nature of their career trajectories and the various factors influencing their professional development.

The Perceived Value of English Proficiency as a Distinct Advantage in the Job Market

A significant majority of the participants (n=54 out of 67) emphasized that their proficiency in English was perceived as a distinctive advantage in the job market, regardless of the field they ventured into. This finding was consistent across different career paths, from marketing to finance to tech roles. Participant 1 shared, *“When I entered the marketing sector, my ability to communicate in English was instantly recognized. It opened doors to international clients, and I was often chosen to lead presentations because of it.”* Similarly, Participant 35 remarked, *“Even in tech roles, where one might assume language is not crucial, my English skills have made a difference. I can easily understand and contribute to global team meetings, and I have become a go-to person*

for interpreting complex instructions.” Interpreting this through the concept of “cultural capital”, the English proficiency acquired by these graduates acts as a form of valuable currency in the job market, giving them a unique edge. ST further elucidates this: the sociocultural context of globalization has elevated the significance of English, making its proficiency a sought-after trait in varied professional contexts.

The value of English proficiency as a distinctive advantage in diverse job markets has been a consistent theme in various studies, aligning with the current finding. Vu and Do (2021) had previously discussed the increasing significance of English as a form of “cultural capital” in a globalized job market, suggesting that English proficiency offers a notable edge in professional settings. Our study further deepens this understanding, indicating that this advantage is not confined to roles that traditionally value language skills, such as teaching or translating, but extends to diverse sectors like marketing, finance, and technology. What is noteworthy in our findings is the practical manifestation of this advantage. Participants consistently underscored not just the theoretical but also the tangible benefits of their English proficiency in day-to-day professional interactions, be it in leading presentations, interpreting instructions, or seamlessly integrating into global team dynamics. This real-world application, highlighted in our study, contrasts with the primarily theoretical discussions prevalent in earlier research. Our study also resonates with Mai (2017), who had documented the transition in Vietnamese English education towards a more communicative methodology with the aim of producing graduates better equipped for globalized contexts. Our findings suggest that this shift in pedagogical approach has had positive outcomes, with graduates feeling confident in their communication abilities in diverse job roles.

The unique contribution of our study lies in the breadth of professional fields covered and the nuanced understanding it provides. While earlier studies, like that of Xiao (2006), have documented the versatility of English-major graduates in specific sectors like marketing or public relations in China, our study paints a more comprehensive picture. It emphasizes the permeation of this advantage across a wider array of sectors, from technological roles to finance, suggesting that the benefits of English proficiency in the Vietnamese context are even more extensive than previously documented. Furthermore, our study not only reinforces but also expands on the theoretical frameworks, the concept of “cultural capital” and ST. While the idea of English as “cultural capital” is not new, our research offers a fresh perspective on how this capital is operationalized in various professional settings in Vietnam, a context not extensively explored in previous research. The rich, lived experiences of our participants, grounded in their real-world narratives, add depth to the discourse, emphasizing the tangible and multifaceted benefits of English proficiency.

Cultural Challenges in Adapting to Globalized Work Environments

Another prevalent theme that emerged from the data was the cultural challenges participants faced in globalized work environments, with 41 out of 67 participants emphasizing this aspect. While their English proficiency was a strength, navigating the nuances of different cultural norms and expectations often posed challenges. Participant 3 expressed,

“While I can communicate effectively in English, I sometimes find it challenging to understand the unspoken cultural norms during meetings with Western colleagues. There is a whole layer of non-verbal communication that is not covered in our curriculum.”

On a similar note, Participant 27 reflected,

“It is not just about the language. I remember feeling out of place in my first international conference. From the way they conducted discussions to their networking style – everything was so different from what I was used to.”

This finding highlights the intersection of cultural and professional adaptation, expanding the definition of expertise to include intercultural competence.

The finding also underscores the importance of cultural adaptability in professional success and demonstrate how it is as pivotal as technical or academic knowledge in a globalized work setting. Furthermore, these experiences align with the ST, illustrating the impact of cultural and educational backgrounds on graduates’ readiness for and adaptation to diverse cultural environments in their professional lives. They also bring into focus the concept of “cultural capital” in a practical context, showing that while English proficiency is a part of this capital, a comprehensive understanding of global cultural dynamics is another crucial component needed for these graduates. Therefore, these insights are not only integral to understanding the full spectrum of the graduates’ experiences but also offer valuable guidance for educational institutions to enhance their curriculum to include training in cultural awareness and intercultural communication.

As stated, the second major finding underscores the twofold importance of the backdrop of globalization in the discussion of cultural challenges faced by Vietnamese English-major graduates in globalized work environments. Firstly, globalization has led to increased interconnectivity and interaction among people from diverse cultural backgrounds. In such an environment, the ability to adapt culturally is not just beneficial but essential for professional success and effective communication. Secondly, globalization has transformed the job market into a global landscape, where professionals frequently engage with international clients, colleagues, and stakeholders. This shift necessitates a deeper understanding and appreciation of different cultural norms and practices. Cultural adaptability becomes a critical skill for navigating the complexities and nuances of a globally interconnected professional world. Studies by Tatzali and Beazidou (2023) emphasize the concept of ‘intercultural communicative competence,’ suggesting that mere language proficiency is not sufficient in global contexts; understanding and adapting to cultural nuances is equally crucial. Our finding resonates with this perspective, highlighting the participants’ struggles in navigating the intricate web of cultural norms and expectations. Previous research, such as that by Holden (2023), discussed the cultural challenges faced by professionals in global settings, but the emphasis was often on broader professional groups without a specific focus on language majors. What differentiates our study is the focus on the nuanced struggles of those who, despite having a strong language foundation, grapple with cultural dynamics.

Moreover, our findings present a more textured understanding of what ‘cultural challenges’ encompass. Participants’ reflections, such as feeling out of place in an international conference or grappling with unspoken cultural norms, provide a granular view of these challenges. This depth contrasts with some existing studies (e.g., Chen et al., 2020) which, while touching upon cultural adaptability, often remain at a conceptual level. The theoretical underpinnings of our study further accentuate its contributions. ST has often been applied to understand learning within specific cultural contexts, but our research stretches its application, using it to explore the tensions experienced by individuals transitioning between two contrasting socio-cultural realms: the Vietnamese educational context and globalized work environments (Hang, 2021). Similarly, while the concept of “cultural capital” has been extensively discussed in relation to language proficiency

(see Gullifer et al., 2021), our study extends its scope, suggesting that cultural adaptability is another vital form of cultural capital in global work settings.

The Disconnect Between Theoretical Knowledge and Practical Application

A notable observation that emerged from the participants' narratives was the perceived gap between the theoretical knowledge imparted during their English-major studies and its practical application in the job market. This sentiment was shared by 48 out of the 67 participants. Participant 5 commented,

“Our curriculum was rich in literature, linguistics, and theoretical understanding, but when it came to real-world application, especially in sectors outside of teaching or translation, I felt unprepared. I had to learn a lot on the job.”

Echoing a similar sentiment, Participant 17 noted,

“I wish our courses had included more practical elements, like business communication or understanding the language nuances in different industries. When I joined the finance sector, it felt like I had to start from scratch, despite being an English major.”

Using ST as a lens, this finding highlights the potential misalignment between the educational experiences crafted within the sociocultural context of Vietnamese universities and the demands of a globalized job market. While the curriculum provides a strong theoretical foundation across various courses, it may not completely prepare students for the practical challenges encountered in a range of career paths. The “cultural capital” framework also comes into play here, suggesting that while theoretical knowledge is a form of capital, its value can be significantly enhanced when paired with practical skills and experiences, making graduates more adaptable and effective in varied professional landscapes.

This theme resonates with the growing body of literature discussing the implications of curriculum design in higher education. Such discussions are not unique to the realm of English studies but span various disciplines. For instance, Gibbons (2002) articulated the increasing demand for ‘mode 2 knowledge,’ a form of knowledge production deeply rooted in practical application, real-world problems, and interdisciplinarity. Our findings mirror this broader educational discourse, pinpointing the perceived limitations of a curriculum heavily skewed towards theoretical understanding, especially when juxtaposed against the multifaceted demands of a globalized job market. The sentiment of our participants echoes the findings of Wang (2021), who documented similar concerns among English-major graduates in China. They felt that while they had acquired substantial theoretical knowledge, they often found themselves at a loss when navigating practical professional terrains.

Our study further nuances this narrative by delving deep into the specific areas where participants felt the gap. Their desire for more courses on business communication, industry-specific language nuances, and other practical elements highlights the multifaceted nature of this perceived disconnect. It is not a blanket gap between theory and practice but specific areas where integration could be enhanced. The application of the “cultural capital” framework to this finding, suggesting a synergy between theoretical and practical knowledge, is a novel contribution of our study. While both forms of knowledge are indeed valuable, our research emphasizes that their combined effect, especially in diverse professional contexts, could be greater than the sum of their individual impacts. This perspective broadens the discourse on “cultural capital” in educational settings, suggesting a more integrated approach.

The Unexpected Interdisciplinary Benefits of an English Major

An intriguing positive aspect that emerged from the data was the interdisciplinary benefits the participants derived from their English-major backgrounds. Out of the 67 participants, 37 highlighted how their English studies inadvertently equipped them with skills and perspectives beneficial to diverse fields. Participant 12 shared,

“In my role in public relations, I have noticed that my background in English literature actually helps. Analyzing texts, understanding narratives, and constructing compelling stories – these are skills I use daily, even if in a different context.”

Similarly, Participant 56 reflected,

“Being an English major trained me to think critically, analyze deeply, and communicate effectively. In my role in project management, these skills have proven invaluable. It is not just about language, but a way of thinking and processing information.”

Interpreting this through the lens of the ST, the participants’ English-major studies within the Vietnamese educational context have inadvertently fostered a set of cognitive and analytical skills, transcending mere language proficiency. This aligns with the idea that education is not just about content but the cognitive processes it cultivates. The concept of “cultural capital” also finds relevance here. The acquired skills – critical analysis, narrative construction, and effective communication – serve as assets that can be transferred and adapted across different fields. This form of capital, while not directly related to specific job roles, offers a competitive edge by enhancing versatility and adaptability.

The interdisciplinary benefits of an English-major present a refreshing and optimistic perspective amidst the broader discourse on the value of humanities education in a rapidly evolving job market. The literature on the applicability of humanities degrees often paints a dichotomous picture: while some studies, like Nussbaum (2010), champion the holistic skills humanities programs cultivate, others, such as McMahan (2009), question their direct relevance in specific professional contexts. Our findings bridge this divide, offering evidence of the unexpected but profound interdisciplinary benefits of an English-major. The sentiments of our participants resonate with Xie et al.’s (2018) study, which found that literature graduates, due to their training in narrative analysis and construction, often excelled in roles that demanded storytelling skills, such as marketing or public relations. However, while the study by Xie et al. (2018) centered primarily on literature graduates, our research encompasses a broader group – English-major graduates – highlighting the versatility of skills acquired beyond just literary analysis.

The profound insight of our study lies in its exploration of the broader cognitive processes honed by an English-major education. As the participants articulated, it is not merely about language proficiency but a distinct way of thinking, analyzing, and processing information. Such perspectives echo Brinkmann’s (2016) work, which celebrated the analytical depth humanities majors bring to diverse roles. Our research anchors this discourse in the specific context of Vietnamese English-major graduates through the innovative application of ST and the “cultural capital” framework and a deeper, layered understanding of the interdisciplinary benefits of such a background. While these frameworks have often been applied in educational contexts, our research employs them to shed light on the professional implications of an English-major education.

Navigating Identity - Balancing the ‘English Major’ Label with Professional Roles

A profound theme that emerged pertained to the participants’ struggle with identity. Of the 67 interviewed, 45 spoke about the challenges and, at times, the cognitive dissonance they felt in reconciling their identity as an ‘English major’ with their roles in out-of-expertise jobs. Participant 23 expressed,

“When I introduce myself in professional settings, I often get puzzled looks after mentioning my English major background, especially since I work in data analytics. There is this underlying assumption that my current role is not where I ‘belong’.”

In a similar vein, Participant 42 said,

“I sometimes feel like I have to constantly prove myself in my IT role, almost as if being an English major is a handicap. It is like wearing a label that does not fit the expectations of my current job.”

The concept of “cultural capital” offers a nuanced understanding of this finding. The “English major” label, while a form of capital in many contexts, can also sometimes become a limiting identifier, inadvertently boxing individuals into certain stereotypes or expectations. In diverse professional landscapes, this label can lead to unintentional biases or misperceptions about an individual’s capabilities. Through the lens of ST, the identity struggle can also be seen as a clash between the sociocultural norms and expectations associated with an English major and those of diverse professional fields. The identity, molded by both academic and societal expectations, is challenged when placed in a contrasting professional context. Such narratives, deeply rooted in the real-life experiences of participants, highlight the complexities of professional identity formation for English majors.

The exploration of identity negotiation delves into a deeply personal realm that is intricately tied to the sociocultural fabric of individuals’ academic and professional experiences. The challenge of reconciling one’s educational identity with their professional role is not an isolated phenomenon. Quezada et al. (2020) discussed a similar experience among arts graduates transitioning into technology roles, highlighting the cognitive dissonance they faced. However, our study is unique in its focus on Vietnamese English-major graduates, shedding light on the specific challenges they face in diverse professional settings. Our finding, which emphasizes the occasional pigeonholing of individuals based on their academic background, resonates with the work of Asmar and Page (2018). They documented the implicit biases associated with certain academic disciplines, suggesting that these biases could impact graduates’ reception in varied job sectors. The participants’ experiences, where the ‘English major’ label seems to create confusion in professional settings, is a manifestation of such biases. Yet, our study deepens this discourse by articulating the emotional toll such experiences can take, impacting graduates’ self-perception and sense of belonging.

The application of “cultural capital” in this context is particularly insightful. While “cultural capital” typically denotes assets that individuals can leverage, our study illustrates its flip side. In certain contexts, what is conventionally viewed as capital can also become a constraint, potentially limiting an individual’s perceived capabilities (Pelling & High, 2005). This dual nature of “cultural capital” underscores its complexity and the need to understand it within specific sociocultural contexts. Furthermore, our research enriches the application of ST. While the theory has often been employed to explore learning within specific cultural contexts, our study expands its scope, using

it to understand the tensions and identity negotiations experienced by individuals as they oscillate between contrasting academic and professional worlds.

The Desire for Enhanced Practical Integration in Curriculum

A recurring sentiment, expressed by 52 out of the 67 participants, was a strong desire for the academic curriculum to integrate more practical elements, equipping them better for real-world scenarios, especially in out-of-expertise roles. Participant 31 stated,

“The university provided a solid foundation in English, but there was a missing bridge between what we learned and how it is used in the real world. Modules on business communication, industry-specific terminology, or even basic soft skills would have been invaluable.”

Echoing this sentiment, Participant 11 shared,

“I felt theoretically prepared but practically under-equipped when I started my job in the hospitality sector. The curriculum could benefit from more real-world simulations, internships, or collaborations with industries.”

Interpreting this finding through ST, it becomes evident that while the educational curriculum provided a strong foundation, it might not have been adequately aligned with the evolving sociocultural demands of the globalized job market. The theory underscores the importance of context in learning, suggesting that learners benefit most when academic knowledge is closely tied to real-world applications. The “cultural capital” framework also plays a role in understanding this sentiment. While the curriculum provided one form of cultural capital (theoretical knowledge), participants felt the absence of another form of capital, which is practical know-how. The feedback suggests that by integrating both forms of capital, graduates can be better prepared to navigate diverse professional terrains.

The perceived gap between academic preparation and real-world demands is not a new concern; it has been articulated in various studies across disciplines (Bennett, 2009; Resch & Schrittmesser, 2023; Schnee, 2008). Our study resonates with the findings of Menon and Suresh (2020), who emphasized the importance of integrating practical elements into higher education to better equip students for professional challenges. They noted that while a strong theoretical foundation is imperative, it needs to be complemented with real-world applications to enhance graduates’ readiness for diverse job roles. Our research adds specificity to this discourse by pinpointing the areas where this integration is most desired through participants’ feedback on the need for modules on business communication or industry-specific terminology.

Bridging this practicality gap is not just about enhancing graduates’ preparedness; it is also about fostering confidence. As the participants’ experience illustrates, feeling “theoretically prepared but practically under-equipped” can impact a graduate’s self-efficacy, making the transition to the workforce more challenging. This sentiment aligns with the findings of Dacre Pool (2020), who emphasized the role of practical experiences in boosting graduates’ self-efficacy and employability. The application of “cultural capital” in this context brings a fresh lens to the discourse. Often, discussions around curriculum reforms center on the idea of skill-building (Barcelona, 2014; Millar, 2016). Yet, our research suggests that it is more layered than that. It is about building diverse forms of “cultural capital” – both theoretical knowledge and practical know-how – and ensuring that these forms synergize, enhancing graduates’ versatility and adaptability.

The Role of Networking and Mentorship in Transitioning to Out-of-Expertise Roles

An interesting and vital aspect brought to light by 38 out of the 67 participants was the influential role of networking and mentorship in facilitating their transition to jobs outside of their study area. Participant 2 noted,

“While my academic background provided the theoretical base, it was through networking events and meeting professionals from varied industries that I gained insights into potential career paths. These connections played a crucial role in landing my current role in human resources.”

Contrastingly, Participant 44 emphasized the role of mentorship, stating,

“When I joined the healthcare management sector, I felt out of depth. But having a mentor from a similar non-medical background showed me the ropes and made the transition smoother. Their guidance was pivotal in helping me adapt and grow.”

The “cultural capital” concept offers an illuminating perspective on this finding. Networking and mentorship can be seen as means to acquire new forms of cultural capital. These personal and professional connections provide English-major graduates with insights, knowledge, and opportunities that might not be accessible through traditional academic avenues. ST further deepens our understanding by highlighting the social nature of learning. As individuals interact within their socio-cultural contexts, like networking events or mentorship programs, they absorb and internalize knowledge, skills, and perspectives that assist them in navigating unfamiliar terrains.

The significant role of networking and mentorship, as elucidated in this finding, brings into focus the multifaceted nature of career transitions, going beyond traditional educational boundaries. Networking and mentorship as pivotal tools in career navigation have been an area of focus in existing literature. For instance, a study by White and Green (2011) explored the instrumental role of social networks in facilitating career opportunities, emphasizing that one’s network can significantly influence job mobility and professional advancement. Our findings underscore this perspective, particularly highlighting the experiences of Vietnamese English-major graduates and the unique challenges they face in unconventional job roles. The emphasis on mentorship in our study resonates with existing research. McQuillin et al. (2022) described mentoring as a complex, interactive relationship contributing to an individual’s personal and professional development. The sentiments of our participants align with this view. The mentor’s role, as articulated in our study, goes beyond providing mere guidance; it is about imparting knowledge, fostering self-confidence, and facilitating smoother integration into unfamiliar professional terrains.

Importantly, the uniqueness of our research lies in its exploration of the interplay between networking, mentorship, and the transition to out-of-expertise roles. While many studies have delved into the benefits of networking and mentorship in career development (e.g., Goerisch et al., 2019; Stuckey et al., 2019), our study places these elements in the specific context of English-major graduates transitioning into diverse fields. This context-specific exploration provides fresh insights into how networking and mentorship can assist individuals in navigating the complexities of such transitions. The concept of “cultural capital” offers an enriched understanding of this finding. Networking and mentorship are not just about making connections or receiving guidance. They are about acquiring new forms of “cultural capital” that can aid in career advancement. This perspective moves the discourse beyond mere networking strategies or mentorship benefits,

suggesting that these elements, when effectively leveraged, can significantly enhance one's "cultural capital," paving the way for more fulfilling professional trajectories. Furthermore, the application of ST adds depth to our understanding. These frameworks emphasize the social nature of learning and the significance of real-life experiences in shaping one's career path. Our research suggests that networking and mentorship are not just supplementary to formal education but are intrinsic to holistic career development.

The Emotional Journey: From Doubt to Resilience

A deep-seated theme that resonated with 49 out of the 67 participants was the emotional journey they underwent while transitioning to out-of-expertise jobs. This journey was characterized by initial doubts and apprehensions, eventually leading to a resilient mindset and adaptability. Participant 21 shared,

"In the beginning, there were countless times I questioned my decision. 'Is this the right path for me?' 'Can I keep up with my colleagues who have a background in this field?' But with time and experience, I have grown confident in my unique perspective and the diverse skills I bring to the table."

Similarly, Participant 61 reflected,

"The initial months in my sales job were tough. Every challenge made me reevaluate my capabilities. But facing those challenges head-on, learning from them, and realizing the value of my English-major background in different scenarios shaped my resilience. Today, I view challenges as growth opportunities."

Looking through the lens of ST, this emotional journey can be perceived as an intrinsic part of the learning curve faced by graduates as they engage with new socio-cultural work environments. Their emotional responses, from doubt to resilience, are part of their adaptation and growth process within these contexts. The concept of "cultural capital" also provides insight into this finding. The initial doubts can stem from the perceived mismatch between the "cultural capital" they acquired in their academic journey and what is expected or valued in their new professional roles. However, as they navigate and integrate into these roles, they start to recognize and leverage their unique capital, leading to resilience and confidence.

The emotional journey of graduates, particularly Vietnamese English-major graduates transitioning into out-of-expertise roles, is a multifaceted process that encompasses a mix of anticipation, apprehension, and eventual adaptation. Initially, graduates experience apprehension due to the perceived disparity between their academic "cultural capital" and the demands of new professional settings. This stage is marked by feelings of doubt and self-questioning, influenced by societal expectations, self-imposed pressures, and the inherent challenges of adapting to new roles. Such emotions are common in the early stages of professional transitions, as noted by Kolb (2014) and Barr et al. (2008). However, as these individuals engage with their new environments, they begin to recognize the value of their unique academic backgrounds. This realization, aligning with Dacre Pool and Qualter's (2012) findings, is crucial in transforming their initial doubts into confidence. Gradually, through social interactions and adapting to the cultural contexts of their new roles, graduates undergo a significant emotional and cognitive transformation. This process, emphasized by ST, leads to increased adaptability and resilience.

Implications

This study embarked on an exploration into the nuanced experiences of Vietnamese English-major graduates as they transitioned into roles outside their primary field of study. Through a qualitative approach and a phenomenological design, the research delved deep into the narratives of 67 participants, aiming to uncover the multi-faceted challenges, benefits, and emotional trajectories that accompanied their professional transitions.

Our study reveals diverse experiences among participants, with English proficiency emerging as a key advantage in the global job market. This proficiency, viewed through the lenses of cultural capital and ST, extends beyond language skills to serve as a valuable asset in diverse work environments. However, participants also faced challenges adapting to these global settings and understanding different cultural norms. A notable issue was the gap between theoretical knowledge and its practical application. While valuing their English major's depth, graduates found it lacking in practical skills for real-world jobs. Many also discovered interdisciplinary benefits from their major, like critical thinking and analytical skills, applicable in various fields. Yet, this led to struggles with professional identity, particularly for those in unrelated fields like IT or data analytics. Participants expressed a need for more practical elements in their curriculum, such as real-world simulations and industry-specific modules. The importance of networking and mentorship in navigating career paths was also highlighted, especially in unfamiliar professional environments. Lastly, the emotional journey from doubt to resilience was a significant theme, underscoring the emotional and psychological aspects of professional transitions and the need for resilience and adaptability.

The significant emphasis participants placed on their English proficiency as an asset in the global job market underscores the paramount importance for institutions to prioritize equipping students with advanced English skills, encompassing both General English and English for Specific Purposes (ESP). This entails not only a strong foundation in grammatical and conversational fluency but also proficiency in professional and technical English relevant to various industries, such as business English, scientific English, or legal English, depending on the career paths of the students. This proficiency is not merely beneficial for roles traditionally associated with language skills but offers broader applicability, ensuring students remain competitive in a globalized work setting. These findings have significant implications for EFL educators and researchers. They highlight the need to re-evaluate and potentially expand the scope of EFL training to encompass not just language teaching proficiency but also the skills required for various global employment opportunities. The interdisciplinary advantages offered by an English major, such as analytical prowess and critical thinking skills, should be emphasized more robustly within academic curricula. EFL programs can benefit from integrating these interdisciplinary elements, thereby preparing educators who are well-rounded, critical thinkers capable of adapting to various teaching and learning environments.

Concurrently, as many participants encountered cultural challenges in globalized environments, there emerges a pressing need for both academic institutions and employers to integrate cultural sensitivity training and cross-cultural communication workshops into their programs. For EFL professionals, this suggests a pivot towards a more holistic language teaching approach that includes cultural competence as a core component. This shift can better equip language learners to navigate the cultural nuances and challenges in international professional settings. Furthermore, the articulated disconnect between theoretical knowledge and its real-world application illuminates the need for academic curriculum reforms. This gap is particularly relevant for EFL training, where

the practical applicability of language teaching methods in diverse cultural and linguistic contexts is crucial. It is imperative for institutions to focus on introducing more practical elements, case studies, and scenarios that mimic real-world challenges. Such a curriculum overhaul can greatly enhance the relevance and effectiveness of EFL programs.

Another significant consideration is the professional identity challenge voiced by participants. This finding is particularly relevant for EFL professionals who often navigate between different cultural and professional identities. Career counseling and professional development avenues in academic settings must be attuned to address potential identity challenges. By equipping graduates with strategies to effectively communicate the value of their academic background in varied professional arenas, they can confidently navigate and counter potential biases or misperceptions. Alongside, the evident desire for greater practical curriculum integration underscores the potential benefits of fostering partnerships between academic institutions and industries. By promoting internships, industry visits, and real-world simulations, students can gain tangible insights into how their skills align with various sectors.

The invaluable role of networking and mentorship in shaping career paths should not be understated. In the context of EFL, this underscores the importance of building a strong professional network and seeking mentorship opportunities for continuous learning and professional growth. Institutions, in recognizing this, should actively foster networking events, alumni engagements, and mentorship opportunities. Such endeavors can offer students the guidance, insights, and connections that are pivotal for seamless professional transitions. Furthermore, the journey from doubt to resilience, as narrated by the participants, accentuates the necessity of emphasizing mental well-being and resilience training within academic realms. For EFL professionals, this could mean incorporating strategies for coping with the challenges of working in diverse and sometimes demanding educational settings. Incorporating workshops focused on emotional intelligence, adaptability, and resilience can holistically prepare students for the multifaceted challenges of transitioning from academia to diverse professional roles.

Last but not least, this study underscores the imperative of diversifying the curriculum in English Studies programs to better align with the evolving demands of the global job market. The evidence presented reveals that while proficiency in English provides a competitive edge, the traditional focus on theoretical knowledge within English majors is insufficient for the practical challenges faced in diverse work environments. The gap between academic learning and real-world application is particularly pronounced, suggesting a need for curriculum that integrates practical skills and real-world simulations tailored to various industries. Additionally, the study highlights the universal applicability of critical thinking and digital literacy skills, traditionally honed in English programs, but now increasingly recognized as vital across disciplines. Hence, there is a pressing need to extend these skills beyond English majors, making them accessible to students in varied fields such as IT and data analytics. Such a shift would not only enhance the employability of graduates but also aid in their professional identity development, especially for those navigating careers unrelated to their major. This reimagined approach would also address the emotional and psychological challenges of career transitions, fostering resilience and adaptability among graduates.

Limitations and Recommendations for Further Studies

This study, while providing valuable insights into the experiences of Vietnamese English-major graduates transitioning to out-of-expertise roles, has its limitations. Primarily, the study was

restricted to 67 participants, which, though diverse in experiences, might not have captured the full spectrum of challenges and benefits faced by all English-major graduates in Vietnam. Furthermore, the reliance on self-reported experiences, while offering depth and personal narratives, might have introduced subjective biases. The use of qualitative methods, primarily semi-structured interviews, limits the ability to generalize these findings across larger populations or different contexts.

Considering the study's limitations and the insights it has provided, there are several avenues for future research. It would be beneficial to conduct a larger-scale quantitative study to gauge the generalizability of the findings, possibly using questionnaires to reach a wider range of English-major graduates in Vietnam and perhaps other countries with similar educational contexts. Moreover, longitudinal studies can be initiated to track the professional journeys of these graduates over time, offering a dynamic view of their adaptations, challenges, and growth. Exploring the perspectives of employers regarding the hiring and integration of English-major graduates in diverse roles can also offer a complementary view, potentially highlighting areas of alignment or disconnect between academic preparation and industry expectations.

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