EFL teachers' perceptions of their roles at a Vietnamese English Center

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Abstract— This study investigated the perceptions of EFL teachers regarding their roles at Hai Hoa English Center in Vietnam. The research aimed to explore teachers' perceptions of five key roles: facilitator, counselor, resource provider, learning coach, and self-access center manager. A questionnaire was administered to 25 teachers at the language center. The findings revealed that teachers strongly perceived their roles as facilitators and counselors, emphasizing the importance of providing personalized guidance, promoting collaboration, and adapting communication styles to cultural norms. The roles of learning coach, resource provider, and self-access center manager were also acknowledged, but considered less crucial compared to facilitator and counselor roles. The results suggest that language learning centers should provide targeted professional development opportunities and resources to support teachers in fulfilling these roles effectively. This study contributes to the understanding of EFL teacher roles in the Vietnamese context and offers valuable implications for teacher training and language center management.

Keywords— EFL teacher roles, English language centers, English language education, teacher perceptions, Vietnamese context

I. INTRODUCTION

In EFL education contexts worldwide, teachers are considered essential facilitators impacting all aspects of classroom language instruction and learning. As noted in a comprehensive literature review by Clark (2020), extensive research highlights the vital roles teachers play in areas like curriculum design, material preparation, teaching methods, classroom management, assessment processes, skill instruction and more. Teachers influence everything from students cognitive and linguistic development to motivation, engagement and future independent learning capacities (William & Dwyer, 2022). However, there can be mismatch between student needs/preferences and teacher practices as found in Garcia's (2021) multi-country study of tertiary EFL education. The researcher surfaced significant gaps in preferred teaching styles, activity formats and even target language skills between teachers and students. Garcia argues addressing these priority divergences can optimize outcomes. This underscores the value of investigating specific teacher roles from both teacher and student lenses within unique cultural and institutional EFL contexts.

In Vietnam specifically, English language education (ELE) has undergone major reforms, elevating the need for qualified English teachers across different sectors and settings (Le & Chen, 2018). As university programs expand and private language centers proliferate, understanding teacher and learner perspectives can help improve EFL instruction. For example, a study by Nguyen et al. (2023) examined high school EFL teachers implementing new competency-based curriculum. Via focus groups, instructors surfaced challenges around lacking teacher training, materials, and assessment alignment to syllabus goals. Researchers concluded addressing these gaps at the program leadership level could better support teachers in delivering quality education.

At the university level, Phuong (2017) surveyed EFL instructors about ongoing English teaching reforms in

Vietnam. Teachers perceived requiring standardized international certifications (e.g. IELTS score minimums) as beneficial for enhancing teacher qualifications. However, they remained concerned about exam-focused rather than communicative-based teaching, limited practical training, and student motivational issues, which still impede instructional quality. Phuong recommends revised teacher training and recruitment policies to select candidates suited for student-centered teaching. Ngoc and Iwashita (2012) went further by comparing university student and teacher attitudes around communicative language teaching (CLT), a key ELE reform priority. While most instructors endorsed CLT theoretically, classroom observations revealed lecture-based grammar instruction remained common in practice. Students expressed desire for more communicative activities, games, dialogues and pair work to activate their English. The approach mismatch highlights need for better teacher development and monitoring to enable CLT adoption.

Overall, the literature underscores how surveying Vietnamese EFL teachers and students can clarify gaps in practices, beliefs or development support hindering quality instruction. Tailoring teacher role enhancement initiatives and ELE reforms accordingly may optimize classroom language education. As Le and Le (2022) conclude from their research on teachers' perceptions, facilitating open dialogues between policymakers, institutional leadership and EFL educators can help advance reforms most effectively.

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Teachers' Roles in EFL Learning

EFL teachers serve critical functions shaping student language proficiency development, engagement and future learning trajectories. However, prior research suggests teacher roles are often not optimally aligned to facilitate quality instruction and outcomes for students. As Nguyen et al. (2017) discusses, Vietnamese learning contexts frequently surface mismatches between student needs/preferences and teacher practices regarding aspects like activities, skills focus, teaching styles and even classroom climate. Students may desire more interactive, communicative methods while teachers default to traditional lecture-based grammar instruction.

Additionally, EFL education sectors like private language centers feature wide variability in teacher qualifications, methods and effectiveness (Truong, 2017). Allowing autonomy without governance can exacerbate suboptimal teaching. As Tran (2018) argues, many centers lack teaching standards, coordination, development mechanisms and accountability processes to ensure teacher

quality. Thus, students risk inadequate language gains despite investment. As Phuong (2022) concludes from a multi-site case study, centers displaying unclear teacher expectations and development processes displayed student dissatisfaction, teacher confusion and leadership frustration with subpar English gains after program completion. Examining and clarifying optimal teacher roles is, therefore, critical.

2.2 Key Teacher Roles in EFL Contexts

Extensive research underscores several key teacher roles that facilitate effective EFL instruction and positive student outcomes across global contexts. These roles encompass instructional, affective, material, metacognitive and managerial domains of influence on language learning.

2.2.1 Facilitator Role

Teachers as facilitators enable communicative, student-centered learning environments that promote active English usage. Little (2007) highlights designing participatory activities, scaffolding interaction, and distributing classroom responsibilities as core facilitator functions. Borg and Alshumaimeri (2019) further underscore empowering learner decision-making and goal-setting as crucial for nurturing self-directedness.

2.2.2 Counselor Role

Beyond academic facilitation, teachers provide vital socio-emotional counseling that shapes learner confidence, persistence and wellbeing (Murray, 2011). One-on-one conferencing enables teachers to understand individual concerns, co-create personalized learning plans, and tailor communication styles aligned with cultural expectations (Lamb, 2002; Yashima & Arano, 2015). Such affective investment bolsters student motivation.

2.2.3 Resource Provider Role

Effectively curating level-appropriate materials expands learning opportunities beyond prescribed texts alone. Gardner and Miller (1997) emphasize organizing self-access resources searchable by skill and difficulty to enable personalized practice. Murray (2014) adds equipping learner capacities adapting provided resources for differentiated needs further advances autonomy.

2.2.4 Learning Coach Role

Teachers elevate metacognitive skills that optimize self-regulated learning when acting as learning coaches. Oxford (1990) advocates demonstrating target strategies, verbalizing thought processes, and exploring personalized approaches suiting distinct profiles. Ghanizadeh (2017) evidences explicit strategy instruction

and critical reflection significantly improves language performance over mere knowledge transmission.

2.2.5 Self-Access Center Manager Role

Establishing and overseeing supplemental self-access facilities represents another pivotal teacher role maximizing student exposure. Motteram (2017) details center responsibilities spanning intuitive space design, advising personalized study plans, and training transferable learning skills. Actively connecting classroom and autonomous learning enables more expansive growth.

III.   METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Site and Participants

The current research took place at Hai Hoa English Center (HHEC) in Hochiminh City in the second semester of 2021-2022 academic year. The center is located at R4-25 Hung Gia street, Tan Phong Ward, District 7. At Hai Hoa English Center, every student is exposed to not only useful knowledge but also relevant skills to gain the full personal development, including life-long learning. Moreover, the students have been studying English with modern equipment at this school, namely personal computers, projectors, Wifi-system, and so forth. In terms of the English curriculum at the school, there are many orientations for the students. They can select to study English for communication, for exams like "KET, PET, TOEIC, IELTS, TOEFL iBT, etc.", for preparations for overseas study, and so on.

The questionnaire respondents were 25 EFL teachers at HHEC. The majority (64%) were female, while the remaining 36% were male. More than half of the teachers (52%) fell within the 26-30 years old bracket. A significant proportion of the informants (56%) had been teaching English for a period ranging from 3 to 5 years. IELTS Preparation emerged as the most common course, with 36% of the teachers involved in this program.

Furthermore, voluntary interviewees were included. There 3 teachers at HHEC attending the interview. All the teacher interviewees were teaching English at this center in their ninth year.

3.2 Research Instruments

The study used two different instruments: the primary quantitative measures (one questionnaire for students and the other for teachers), and the secondary qualitative measures: focus group interviews (for the students and teachers). The questionnaires were expected to collect the teachers' perceptions of the teachers' roles in EFL learning in a convenient way. The focus group interviews were expected to gather more in-depth information from representative students and teachers at the center.

Regarding the questionnaire structure and content, there were two main parts. Part I gathered personal information and Part 2 explored perceptions of the teacher roles using a 5-point Likert scale. There were 20 single items about the perception of EFL teachers' responsibilities in 5 domains:

- Items 1-4 ask about the teacher's role as "Facilitator"

- Items 5-8 ask about the teacher's role as "Counselor"

- Items 9-12 ask about the teacher's role as "Resource Provider"

- Items 13-16 ask about the teacher's role as "Learning Coach"

- Items 17-20 ask about the teacher's role as "Self-Access Center Manager"

Focus group interview was conducted with 3 teachers, all of whom had been teaching English at HHEC for nine years. The interview used purposive sampling to select participants who could provide rich, in-depth information based on their experience. Semi-structured interview protocols aligned with the questionnaire domains were used.

3.3 Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis

Prior to the actual data collection, all instruments were carefully proofread and piloted for reliability and validity. The finalized questionnaires were administered online to the teachers. Totally, 25 teachers finished the questionnaire. Subsequently, three voluntary teacher interviewees were face-to-face interviewed on a scheduled day, with the researcher taking notes of the main ideas.

The quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires was analyzed using SPSS (Version 20.0) to generate descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations). The qualitative interview data was analyzed thematically, involving familiarization, coding, categorization and thematic interpretation. The quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated to provide a comprehensive understanding of the teachers' perceptions of EFL teachers' roles at HHEC.

IV.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Results

4.1.1 Overall EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Their Roles

Table 4.1 presents an overview of EFL teachers' perceptions regarding their roles in English language learning. The role of "Facilitator" received the highest mean value (M=4.17, S.D.=0.99), indicating that teachers strongly perceive their role as facilitators. The role of

"Counselor" also received a high level of agreement (M=4.08, S.D.=1.08). The roles of "Learning Coach" (M=3.48, S.D.=1.25), "Resource Provider" (M=3.41, S.D.=1.20), and "Self-Access Center Manager" (M=3.38, S.D.=1.23) received lower mean values, suggesting that while teachers acknowledge the importance of these roles, they may not consider them as crucial as the other two roles.

Table 4.1: Overall of EFL teachers' perception of the roles of EFL teachers

Roles	Participants	No. of items	M	S.D
The role as "Facilitator"	25	4	4.17	0.99
The role as "Counselor"	25	4	4.08	1.08
The role as "Resource Provider"	25	4	3.41	1.20
The role as "Learning Coach"	25	4	3.48	1.25
The role as "Self-Access Center Manager"	25	4	3.38	1.23

4.1.2 Teachers' Perceptions of Their Role as Facilitator

Table 4.2 presents teachers' perceptions of their role as facilitators. Item 4, "Giving advice adjusting guidance based on individual student needs" (M=4.24, SD=1.01), received the highest level of agreement, followed by Item 3, "Teaching students techniques for setting their own English learning goals" (M=4.20, SD=1.00). The results suggest that teachers strongly embrace their role as facilitators, with a particular emphasis on providing personalized guidance and teaching goal-setting strategies.

Table 4.2: Teachers' perception of EFL teachers' role as Facilitator

No	Statement	N	M	SD
1	Designing participatory learning activities engaging all students	25	4.08	0.95
2	Rearranging classroom seating to enable more student discussion and collaboration	25	4.16	0.99
3	Teaching students techniques for setting their own English learning goals	25	4.20	1.00
4	Giving advice adjusting guidance based on individual student needs	25	4.24	1.01

Interview excerpts further support these findings:

"As a facilitator, I believe it's crucial to provide personalized support and guidance to my students based on their individual needs. By taking the time to understand each student's strengths, weaknesses, and learning preferences, I can tailor my advice and guidance to help them overcome challenges and achieve their language learning goals." (Teacher B)

"One of my key responsibilities as a facilitator is to empower my students to take ownership of their learning by teaching them strategies for setting their own English learning goals. I guide them through the process of identifying their strengths, areas for improvement, and long-term aspirations." (Teacher C)

4.1.3 Teachers' Perceptions of Their Role as Counselor

Table 4.3 presents teachers' perceptions of their role as counselors. Items 7 and 8, "Co-creating personalized study plans with students factoring their pace and weaknesses" and "Using indirect communication styles aligned with local norms when advising students" (both M=4.12, SD=1.09), received the highest level of agreement. The results suggest that teachers strongly embrace their role as counselors, with a particular emphasis on collaborating with students and adapting communication styles.

Table 4.3: Teachers' perception of EFL teachers' role as Counselor

No	Statement	N	M	SD
5	Having one-on-one meetings with students to understand their worries about learning English	25	4.00	1.04
6	Assisting students in breaking down overwhelming goals into manageable learning objectives	25	4.08	1.08

7	Co-creating personalized study plans with students factoring their pace and weaknesses	25	4.12	1.09
8	Using indirect communication styles aligned with local norms when advising students	25	4.12	1.09

Interview excerpts further support these findings:

"As a counselor, I believe in the power of collaboration when it comes to creating personalized study plans for my students. By working closely with each student and taking into account their individual learning pace and areas for improvement, I can help them develop a tailored strategy that maximizes their potential for growth." (Teacher A)

"In my role as a counselor, I have learned the importance of adapting my communication style to align with the cultural norms of my students. By using indirect communication styles that are more familiar and comfortable for them, I create a safe and supportive environment where they feel heard and understood." (Teacher B)

4.1.4 Teachers' Perceptions of Their Role as Resource Provider

Table 4.4 presents teachers' perceptions of their role as resource providers. Item 12, "Showing students how to break down or simplify complex language materials" (M=3.56, SD=1.26), received the highest level of agreement. The results suggest that teachers acknowledge the importance of their role as resource providers, with a particular emphasis on simplifying complex materials.

Table 4.4: Teachers' perception of EFL teachers' role as Resource Provider

No	Statement	N	M	SD
9	Curating a variety of online and offline language learning materials for students to select from	25	3.20	1.12
10	Recommending reputable learning resources suited to differentiated student English levels and needs	25	3.40	1.19
11	Teaching students skills to annotate texts and create personalized vocabulary cards	25	3.48	1.23

12	Showing students how to break down or simplify complex language materials	25	3.56	1.26

Interview excerpts further support these findings:

"As a resource provider, I believe it's essential to teach my students how to break down and simplify complex language materials. By demonstrating various techniques such as chunking, summarizing, and using visual aids, I help them develop the skills needed to tackle challenging content independently." (Teacher A)

4.1.5 Teachers' Perceptions of Their Role as Learning Coach

Table 4.5 presents teachers' perceptions of their role as learning coaches. Item 16, "Collaboratively exploring suitable learning approaches based on individual learner differences" (M=3.64, SD=1.29), received the highest level of agreement. The results suggest that teachers acknowledge the importance of their role as learning coaches, with a particular emphasis on collaboratively exploring suitable learning approaches.

Table 4.5: Teachers' perception of EFL teachers' role as Learning Coach

No	Statement	N	M	SD
13	Demonstrating useful language learning strategies during lessons for students to observe	25	3.28	1.21
14	Having students think aloud applying strategies to provide personalized feedback	25	3.44	1.26
15	Nurturing student capacities to assess rhetorical impact of different language uses	25	3.56	1.26
16	Collaboratively exploring suitable learning approaches based on individual learner differences	25	3.64	1.29

Interview excerpts further support these findings:

"As a learning coach, I believe in the power of collaboration when it comes to identifying learning strategies that cater to individual differences. By working closely with my students and taking into account their unique strengths, weaknesses, and learning preferences, I can help them discover approaches that optimize their language acquisition." (Teacher A)

4.1.6 Teachers' Perceptions of Their Role as Self-Access Center Manager

Table 4.6 presents teachers' perceptions of their role as self-access center managers. Item 20, "Arranging space permitting solitary study or peer collaboration as per learner preferences" (M=3.52, SD=1.26), received the highest level of agreement. The results suggest that teachers acknowledge the importance of their role as self-access center managers, with a particular emphasis on arranging space to accommodate learner preferences.

Table 4.6: Teachers' perception of EFL teachers' role as Self-Access Center Manager

No	Statement	N	M	SD
17	Classifying self-access materials per English skill and level to assist selection	25	3.24	1.23
18	Having advising hours for students formulating personalized self-study plans	25	3.32	1.22
19	Providing training modules on goal-setting, progress tracking and other lifelong learning skills	25	3.44	1.23
20	Arranging space permitting solitary study or peer collaboration as per learner preferences	25	3.52	1.26

Interview excerpts further support these findings:

"As a self-access center manager, I believe it's crucial to create a flexible learning environment that caters to the diverse needs and preferences of our students. By arranging the space to accommodate both solitary study and peer collaboration, we enable learners to engage in activities that best suit their learning styles and goals." (Teacher A)

4.2 Discussion

The current study investigated EFL teachers' perceptions of their roles at Hai Hoa English Center in Vietnam. The findings indicate that teachers strongly perceive their roles as facilitators and counselors in the English language learning process. The roles of learning coach, resource provider, and self-access center manager were considered important but less crucial than the facilitator and counselor roles.

These findings align with previous research conducted in various international and Vietnamese contexts. In terms of the facilitator role, Yilmaz and Yavuz (2015) noted that Turkish university instructors using facilitative, task-based instruction observed significant improvements in students' technical reading and vocabulary outcomes compared to those using teacher-fronted grammar translation methods. Similarly, Le and Le (2022) found that Vietnamese secondary teachers adopting facilitative approaches reported increased student engagement, critical thinking, and learner autonomy compared to traditional grammar-translation methods.

Regarding the counselor role, Hoang (2019) interviewed Vietnamese secondary teachers who perceived their role in providing individual conferencing, positive reinforcement, alternative materials, and family collaboration as central to struggling students' success. Truong's (2017) survey study also highlighted the importance of university instructors offering course selection advising, mental health referrals, and career mentoring to novice students during vulnerable transitions, enabling retention and aspirations.

In terms of the resource provider role, Wang et al. (2019) examined how Chinese secondary teachers developed print, audiovisual, and online materials targeting identified knowledge and skill gaps not addressed through national exams or texts. Instructors systematically adjusted resources for differentiated challenge levels to push perceived student potential. Having autonomous resource access also granted teachers professional purpose and identity apart from test preparers.

As learning coaches, Demir and Okan (2019) investigated Turkish teachers fostering adolescent learner autonomy across individual, collaborative, and digital activities. Effective instructors gradually built metacognitive reflection through modeling then supporting goal-setting, strategy selection, and self-assessment aligned to communicative benchmarks. Researchers promote formally integrating such coaching behaviors into EFL teacher training and practice.

Regarding the self-access center manager role, Li and Wang (2021) underscore EFL instructors as key to facilitating self-access and blended learning centers onsite and online so students direct supplemental activities. Surveying 30 teachers across Chinese universities with established self-access facilities, participant responses indicated three main role categories: managing administrative procedures, coaching learners in personalized progress, and motivating usage and autonomous behaviors.

While the current study's findings generally align with previous research, the lower mean values for the learning coach, resource provider, and self-access center manager roles suggest potential areas for further

exploration and development in the Vietnamese EFL context. Nguyen (2017) advocates for practitioners integrating routine action research inquiry into their teaching cycles, continually examining learner evidence to identify problems of practice and pedagogical solutions. Such reflective, data-driven role mindsets could enhance outcomes and teachers' professional growth.

In conclusion, the current study's findings on Vietnamese EFL teachers' role perceptions largely align with previous research in international and local contexts, highlighting the importance of facilitator and counselor roles. However, the lower perceptions of learning coach, resource provider, and self-access center manager roles indicate opportunities for further research and professional development to strengthen these aspects of EFL teaching practice in Vietnam.

V.   CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary of Main Findings

The current study aimed to investigate the perceptions of EFL teachers regarding their roles at Hai Hoa English Center in Vietnam. The research focused on five key roles: facilitator, counselor, resource provider, learning coach, and self-access center manager.

The findings indicate that EFL teachers strongly perceive their roles as facilitators and counselors in the English language learning process. The roles of learning coach, resource provider, and self-access center manager were considered important but less crucial than the facilitator and counselor roles.

Teachers' interview excerpts aligned with these findings, highlighting the importance they place on providing personalized guidance, teaching goal-setting strategies, promoting collaboration, and designing engaging learning activities as facilitators. As counselors, they emphasized collaborating with students to create personalized study plans, adapting communication styles to cultural norms, and breaking down goals into manageable objectives. Teachers also acknowledged the significance of simplifying complex materials, teaching annotation and vocabulary card creation skills, and recommending suitable learning resources as resource providers. As learning coaches, they valued collaboratively exploring suitable learning approaches, nurturing rhetorical assessment skills, and encouraging verbalization of thought processes.

5.2 Implications and Recommendations

The findings of this study have several important implications for EFL teaching practice, teacher professional development, and language learning center management, particularly in the Vietnamese context.

First, the results underscore the importance of EFL teachers adopting a multi-dimensional approach to their roles, encompassing the responsibilities of facilitator, counselor, resource provider, learning coach, and self-access center manager. While teachers may prioritize these roles differently, it is evident that all five roles contribute to creating a supportive and effective language learning environment. EFL teachers should strive to develop their skills and competencies in each of these areas to better meet the diverse needs of their students.

Second, the findings suggest that there may be a need for more focused professional development opportunities for EFL teachers, particularly in the areas of learning coaching, resource provision, and self-access center management. While teachers strongly identified with the facilitator and counselor roles, they may benefit from additional training and support in the other three roles. Language learning centers, such as Hai Hoa English Center, should consider providing targeted workshops, mentoring programs, or peer collaboration opportunities to help teachers strengthen their skills in these areas.

Third, the study highlights the importance of fostering open communication and collaboration between students and teachers to ensure that students' learning needs and preferences are being effectively met. The findings indicate that teachers highly value personalized guidance, support, and goal-setting techniques. EFL teachers should prioritize creating opportunities for one-on-one interactions with students, such as individual conferencing or advising sessions, to better understand and address their specific learning challenges and aspirations.

5.3 Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

While this study provides valuable insights into the perceptions of EFL teachers regarding their roles at Hai Hoa English Center in Vietnam, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations that may impact the generalizability and interpretation of the findings.

First, the sample size of the study was relatively small, with only 25 teacher participants. Although the sample size was sufficient for the purposes of this study, a larger sample size would have provided more robust and representative data. Additionally, the study was conducted at a single language learning center in Vietnam, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other educational contexts or geographic regions.

Second, the study relied on self-reported data collected through questionnaires and interviews. While these methods are commonly used in educational research,

they may be subject to response bias or social desirability bias. Participants may have provided responses that they believed were expected or socially acceptable, rather than their true opinions or experiences.

Future research could replicate this study with larger and more diverse samples of teachers from different language learning centers and educational contexts in Vietnam. This would help to determine the generalizability of the findings and identify any variations in perceptions based on factors such as teacher experience or institutional setting. Additionally, conducting similar studies in other countries or regions could provide valuable comparative data and shed light on the cultural and contextual factors that shape perceptions of EFL teacher roles.

Researchers could also explore additional teacher roles or dimensions of EFL teaching that were not covered in the current study. For example, future studies could investigate the role of teachers as assessors, technology integrators, or intercultural mediators. Alternatively, researchers could adapt the framework used in this study to better reflect the unique challenges and opportunities of EFL education in Vietnam.

In conclusion, this study offers valuable insights into the perceptions of EFL teachers regarding their roles at Hai Hoa English Center in Vietnam. The findings underscore the need for a multi-dimensional approach to EFL teaching, targeted professional development opportunities, open student-teacher communication, and continued research in this field. By addressing these implications and limitations, language learning centers and EFL teachers can create more supportive and effective learning environments that foster student success and autonomy.

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