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Challenges of ICT Policy Implementation in ELT: A Case Study in a Vietnamese Province

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Abstract— *Enhancing English teaching is always a top priority for the Vietnamese government. Decision No. 1400/QĐ-TTg on Approving the Project "Foreign Language Learning and Teaching in the National Education System period 2008 and 2020", as a result, is a national policy that mandates the use of ICT in ELT nationwide. This study, therefore, aims to explore how a particular town in Vietnam has complied with the national demand through its ICT policies in ELT. An interpretivist qualitative design was adopted for this study. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations of 16 teachers of English, and analysis was guided by Fullan's Educational Change Theory (2015) and Rogers's Diffusion of Innovations Theory (2003). The results revealed many hindering factors burdening public schools and teachers at the local level, including poor infrastructure, inadequate training for teachers, and a lack of technical support. The findings of this study can be used as a guideline for minimizing obstacles in future improvements in ICT-related policy.*

Keywords— ***English Language Teaching, ICT, ICT in ELT, ICT Integration***

I. INTRODUCTION

English proficiency is a key policy priority in many low- and middle-income countries (Nakamura et al., 2023) because this universal lingua franca (Mendes de Oliveira, 2024) is not only useful for communication but also for culture, diplomacy, education, science, and trade (Xue & Zuo, 2013). Many international organizations have adopted English as an official language for global communication, including the International Civil Aviation Organization (Kara, 2014), the International Maritime Organization (Kelly, 2012), and the International Olympic Committee (Jimson, 2015). As a result, many people around the world have to learn this global language, although English is not an official language in most countries (Graddol, 1997; Victoria et al., 2025).

In Vietnam, English has become a major foreign language since 1986, when the government underwent a political reform to accept free trade (Ngo & Tran, 2023). English is now taught at all public schools at the primary level (Dinh, 2015). The Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) has initiated many policies at the national level to ensure the effectiveness of English teaching since the early 2000s, the "tech-boom" era in Vietnam (Le & Le, 2022), including the adoption of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in English language teaching (ELT) for its ability to "complement, enrich and transform education for the better" (Dhital, 2018, p. 3215) and to address limitations of traditional approaches (Le, 2018). The crucial role of integrating ICT in ELT has been highlighted by UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2018).

In particular, Resolution 49/CP issued by the Executive Branch in Vietnam introduced the use of computers for administrative tasks (Vietnamese Government, 1993). Then, the Vietnamese National Assembly passed a legislative bill, Resolution No. 40/2000/QH10 (Vietnam National Assembly, 2000), which mandated the teaching of ICT at all grades in public schools. However, ICT was a standalone subject; the integration of ICT in ELT was not applicable at this time until Prime Minister of Vietnam

initiated Decision 1400/QD-TTg, which set ICT in ELT as a national policy in 2008 (Prime Minister of Vietnam, 2008) with an expectation that all public schools would have ICT integrated in teaching by 2020, also known as Project 2020. The creation of the national policy, in turn, mandated subordinate educational agencies at the provincial level, known as the Educational and Training Services (ETS), to develop suitable ICT policies in each province to enable ICT in ELT, including providing ICT training to English teachers, constructing ICT facilities, establishing ICT support teams, and developing ICT regulations.

In Ben Tre province, the local ETS issued two official documents, the ICT Training Policy (Ben Tre Educational Service, 2016a) and the ICT Integration Policy (Ben Tre Educational Service, 2016b). The training in Ben Tre province was quite quintessential because not all teachers could receive ICT training at once; instead, a few English teachers from a few schools were drafted for each training course (Ben Tre Educational Service, 2016a). At the same time, ICT-untrained English teachers had to improvise their ICT lectures because the integration could not be postponed.

The above unique characteristics have made Ben Tre province the choice for a research site, alongside a first-hand account as a local native. This case study aims to investigate how policies have been enacted in Ben Tre province and how policies can determine the outcome of the transition from traditional teaching to the use of technology to foster a more engaging learning environment via the use of ICT to improve learning outcomes (Abraham et al., 2022).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Definitions of ICT

ICT is defined variably across sectors (Zuppo, 2012; Hasumi & Chiu, 2024). In education, ICT means digital technologies used in the school environment (Livingstone, 2012). This research study refers to ICT as computer-based and Internet-based tools used for English teaching and learning (Davies & Hewer, 2009).

2.2 ICT Policies

Records show that the first discussion of the integration of ICT in teaching dates back to 2002 through the National Strategy for Information and Technology for Vietnam (Nhu et al., 2019), followed by the Law on Information Technology Application in 2006 (Dinh, 2015). Both emphasized the importance of ICT in education, which resulted in the introduction of Decision No. 1400/QĐ-TTg on Approving of the Project "Foreign Language Learning and Teaching in the National Education System period 2008 and 2020 (Prime Minister of Vietnam, 2008), which demanded the integration of ICT in ELT to take advantage of technology in enhancing teaching and learning experience.

Having a national policy is beneficial for the transition from traditional teaching to a more modern and effective method (Peeraer & Van Petegem, 2011). The old-fashioned approach, on the one hand, cannot help students communicate effectively in authentic situations (Yede, 2020). On the other hand, teachers can easily introduce real-world experiences into classrooms by using ICT (Laius & Presmann, 2024). For instance, the use of videos and graphics can improve students' engagement (Rashid & Asghar, 2016), which, in turn, leverages their interest in exploring more about the topic (Alkamel & Chouthaiwale, 2018). Additionally, students, when learning with ICT, are no longer passive learners but active co-creators. Specifically, ICT improves attitudes and engagement by matching tools to learners' strategies and using rich multimedia; It also helps teachers manage materials and enables authentic communication with speakers across the world (An et al., 2021; Bradley, 2021; Ngo & Eichelberger, 2019)

As a result, Decision No. 1400/QĐ-TTg provides a milestone for public schools to make necessary preparations to integrate ICT in ELT; however, the whole process appears to be challenging.

2.3 Factors Affecting the Integration of ICT in ELT

First and foremost, the deadline set by Decision No. 1400/QĐ-TTg may cause difficulties in some provinces (Hoang, 2013). The innovation of using ICT in ELT, in addition, is risky because there is no guarantee for success regarding this "concept of change", while policymakers in Vietnam have not conducted sufficient research on the effectiveness of using ICT in ELT (Vo & Le, 2014; Dinh, 2015; Ngo, 2016). In case of failure, the traditional teaching method will be resumed (Luong & Quan, 2020). Furthermore, educational administrators at the provincial level may not fully support the adoption of ICT into classrooms because they must comply with mandatory requirements rather than their willingness. Without support from leadership, the importance of ICT may not be recognized properly (Raman & Thannimalai, 2019; Schmitz et al., 2023). A study conducted by the British Council (2015) reports that leadership is responsible for the improper maintenance of ICT tools at many schools.

Secondly, training and support are important factors regarding the adoption of ICT in ELT. According to Bordbar (2010), teachers' competence in using ICT tools can determine the success of the whole integration because competency helps strengthen teachers' confidence in using

technology (Sipilä, 2014; Moradi, 2025). Competency, moreover, is the motivation for teachers to develop new approaches during teaching (Burns & Kurtoglu Hooton, 2016). However, such competency cannot be obtained without training and support. Training, for one thing, can build a strong foundation in ICT competence which boosts teachers' confidence in enhancing teaching experience (Ghavifekr & Rosdy, 2015). In contrast, a lack of training may cause a reluctance to adopt ICT in ELT (Aslan & Zhu, 2018). Similarly, teachers may be discouraged and frustrated from taking ICT into teaching if support is unavailable (Mirzajani et al., 2016). These negative impacts, overall, may contribute to a sense of resistance to technological change among teachers (Lawrence & Tar, 2018; Chou et al., 2019).

Lastly, infrastructure and technological devices can affect the use of ICT in ELT. The lack of adequate ICT tools, including equipment and computer applications, is a key problem that many schools are encountering, especially those that are in remote locations (Ghavifekr & Rosdy, 2015). In addition, Internet connectivity is a major obstacle affecting the use of ICT in teaching and learning (Yu et al., 2024). Besides, how these tools are used is also important. A study conducted by Msambwa et al. (2024) showed that most schools were fully equipped with the latest ICT equipment, yet it was for administrative tasks rather than being applied in teaching and learning.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework helps organize ideas for the research question in a logical way (Abend, 2008). As this study aims to investigate related policies in education change from traditional teaching to the use of ICT in ELT, the Theory of Educational Change (ECT) (Fullan, 2015) stands out to be the most appropriate framework to guide this case study research using the proposed objectives from collecting data through interviews and observation as well as the data analysis.

Even though ECT offers clear scopes for the research process, this theory is unable to explain why a change is adopted in the first place alongside other rejected factors. Therefore, the Diffusion of Innovation Theory (DoIT) (Rogers, 2003) is added to explore technology adoption in educational settings (Medlin, 2001). DoIT, through the exploration of Persuasion, explains whether an individual (or another decision-making unit) favors or disfavors the innovation.

The combination of ECT and DoIT, as a result, will establish the Findings and Discussions of this study in which ECT is responsible for the "what" factor while DoIT helps explain the "how" and "why".

3.2 Research Design

This research study was developed using ontological and epistemological interpretivism in a qualitative approach as the research philosophy to construct an inductive approach to the collected data via interviews and observations for a case study. The choice of interpretivism, instead of positivism, did not require a pre-establishment of a theory (O'Donoghue, 2006). It also helped achieve the purpose of this research by relying as much as possible on the participants' perspectives of what was being researched (Creswell, 2013).

3.2.1 Participants

The choice of participants was under the influence of a sampling technique (Burns, 2000). A total of sixteen English teachers with different ages, genders, teaching experiences, and ICT backgrounds were invited from four secondary schools in four different administrative zones in Ben Tre province with different degrees of ICT integration.

Due to ethical considerations, the four secondary schools were labeled as City School, District School, Village School, and Remote Village School, whereas City School was the most ICT-advanced research site as opposed to Remote Village School with very limited ICT equipment. Similarly, teachers' names were replaced with pseudonyms as described in the table below.

Table 1: Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Age (Year)	Experience (Year)
City School			
An	Female	44	23
Hoa	Female	47	26
Lan	Female	43	22
Tha	Female	46	24
Thu	Female	47	27
District School			

En	Female	40	17
Nho	Female	29	08
Phung	Female	39	17
Sao	Female	40	18
Tan	Female	48	27
Village School			
Diem	Female	40	18
Lin	Female	47	25
Ngoc	Male	48	26
Quynh	Female	42	20
Vu	Male	43	21
Remote Village School			
Tuan	Male	43	17

These sixteen English teachers participated in sixteen first-round face-to-face interviews and another sixteen telephone interviews for cost-saving (Frey & Oishi, 1995) in the second round to gather additional information which could have been missing during the first interviews. In addition, the second interview helps establish the "audit trail" to enhance the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Carcary, 2020) of the collected data.

Besides, sixteen semi-structured observations took place in the classrooms "to discover things that participants might not freely talk about in interview situations" (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 456). With the permission of all participants, two video camcorders were used in which one camcorder captured students' interactions while the other captured the participants.

3.2.2 Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were used to gather information from participants. The session began with pre-established key questions for all participants; then, open-ended questions were asked to obtain more opinion-based feedback (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Observations were the second method used for the data collection in "gathering data through vision as its main source" (Sarantakos, 2013, p. 229). Specifically, observation is the way to study untold stories effectively (Cohen et al., 2011).

Finally, the process of data collection using both methods warranted credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Carcary, 2020) to deliver trustworthiness for the research.

3.2.3 Data Analysis

The main theme of this whole study was the investigation of ICT policy. Therefore, the Thematic Coding Analysis is the most appropriate method to analyze the collected data. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the analysis involves six phases, namely Familiarizing with the Data, Generating Initial Codes, Searching for Themes, Reviewing Themes, Defining and Naming Themes, and Producing the Report.

The collected data, thus, were coded as Policy: National, Policy: Provincial, and Policy: School. During the coding process, local characteristics emerged as a new theme as the ICT Integration Policy and ICT Training Policy in Ben Tre province were quite quintessential. Local characteristics, furthermore, helped explain why ICT was integrated differently between the four research sites.

IV. FINDINGS

The extracted data validate the importance of having a national policy in intensifying the use of ICT in ELT (Peeraer & Van Petegem, 2011). Decision No. 1400/QĐ-TTg issued by the Prime Minister of Vietnam has mandated all provincial institutions in Vietnam, or the Education and Training Service (ETS), to implement the use of technology in teaching (Prime Minister of Vietnam, 2008). The EST in Ben Tre province, as a result, has drafted two ICT-related policies, namely ICT Training Policy and ICT Integration Policy (Ben Tre Educational Service, 2016a, 2016b).

4.1 ICT Training Policy

The ICT Training Policy issued by EST in Ben Tre province offered an opportunity for English teachers to receive ICT

training officially (An, 45a)[1]. The training course "took about three months with eight-hour classes every weekday" (Hoa, 33b) over a wide range of topics. An interviewee from a City School named Tha stated:

> "I have been trained with the use of multi-media. For example, I have been trained to embed audio into a typical document. This means a reading lesson can be converted into a listening exercise" (Tha, 26a, 26b, and 26c).

For another City School teacher, "the training courses cover dedicated software for pronunciation" (Thu, 10a). The training course, in general, "are exciting and effective" (Hoa, 33c), "ICT training courses are helpful" (Hoa, 34d), and "the training courses provide a lot of benefits for teachers in applying ICT into teaching" (An, 13b).

However, not all participants highly praised the effectiveness of the training course. According to a Remote Village teacher,

> "The training courses should concentrate on one specific topic or one application, instead of covering a lot of applications at the very basic level" (Tuan, 26a)

And "current training courses have made it impossible for teachers to use any [computer] application fluently" (Tuan, 26d). Another City School teacher suggested the necessity for frequent training and that it would be better if teachers could participate in the ICT training annually (Hoa, 36d) so "teachers can update their knowledge in new applications as well as website resources" (Phung, 31a). A Remote Village teacher, in addition, believed "teachers should receive additional training in order to keep up to date with the latest software for education" (Tuan, 23d). Eventually, A District School teacher suggested, "ICT classes should be open for any teacher who may participate at any time to learn whatever they desire" (En, 35d).

Furthermore, the ICT training policy contained some negative drawbacks. For instance, many teachers believed it would be more appropriate if the ICT training courses were held in the summer when teachers were free from teaching (Hoa, 30c; Thu, 30a). In contrast, the existing training courses posed several problems not only for the participants who were on leave for training but also for many other teachers. According to a City School teacher,

> "It [the ICT training course] causes a burden not only for the teacher who receives the training, but it also affects the teacher who takes over classes in the absence of the participating trainee" (Tha, 36a).

Moreover, many teachers had to queue up for the training (Vu, 25b) because each school could only appoint one or two teachers at a time (Diem, 13a; En, 24c). Diem, added, "I think all teachers will receive the training in the future, but it is still pending in the meantime" (13e).

At the time these interviews took place, several English teachers had never received any proper ICT training, as summarized in the table below:

Table 2: Trained versus Untrained Interviewees

Participants	Have Trained	Reference
City School		
An	No	An, 43a
Hoa	Yes	Hoa, 32a
Lan	Yes	Lan, 12a
Tha	Yes	Tha, 26a
Thu	Yes	Thu, 23a
District School		

[1] The extracted interview data will be formatted as Participant's Name + Question Number + the Part of the Question, e.g. (Lan, 1a) means Question 1, Part a, by a participant named Lan. Observation references will be Observation + Name, e.g. (Observation Lan) means the observation of a participant named Lan.

En	No	En, 7b
Nho	No	Nho, 6a
Phung	Yes	Phung, 1b
Sao	No	Sao, 17a
Tan	Yes	Tan, 17a
Village School		
Diem	No	Diem, 13f
Lin	No	Lin, 21a
Ngoc	No	Ngoc, 37a
Quynh	Yes	Quynh, 21a
Vu	Yes	Vu, 18a
Remote Village School		
Tuan	Yes	Tuan, 7b

According to the above table, seven out of sixteen, or 44%, interviewees had not received proper ICT training at the time this study took place. Regionally, the City School had one untrained participant. The District School and Village School had three untrained participants for each school. The Remote Village had no untrained teacher; however, this school had only one English teacher (Tuan, 1a).

The inability to provide ICT training courses in the summer or all year round reflected the shortage of budget for education (Ngoc 25a) which explained the overcrowded classrooms, as indicated by many participants (Hoa, 24b, Lan, 32a, Sao, 18b).

The way schools appointed participants was yet another setback. For schools with many teachers, the waiting time to attend the training course was longer because each school could only nominate one or two candidates at a time (Diem, 13a; En, 24c). On the contrary, a Village School teacher had participated in the training three times (Vu, 18a), despite three of the five teachers at this very same school had not received any training, as shown in Table 2. The extracted data also revealed a malpractice in appointing candidates for the ICT training. In particular, a Lan (36e) informed that the ICT training course was only for teachers with the B2 Level of the Cambridge First Certificate in English, but schools often disregard this qualification because "some [school] districts may not have any [qualified] attendees at all" (Tuan, 35b). This practice also led to a case in which experienced teachers might have participated in the ICT training several times, while teachers under the B2 Level were not assigned (Tuan, 34b). The Remote Village teacher, Tuan, also suggested basic computer training because the ICT training course should be dedicated to ICT rather than basic computer training (Tuan, 24a and 24b).

Finally, the ICT training course did not show trainees how to troubleshoot problems. The necessity for technical training was described by a City School teacher:

> "Incompatibility actually occurs and it often happens that I have to conduct my own research to prepare my lessons because the training courses are insufficient. I have been discouraged a lot of times in self-discovering solutions to use ICT in my class because of my limited ability. Actually, I have skipped several problems to continue my lectures, using what I am capable of" (Lan, 14a - 14f).

The ICT Training Policy, in conclusion, contained many drawbacks in the training content and in predefining qualified candidates. With nearly half of the ICT-untrained teachers, the integration of ICT in ELT could not be postponed because of the dictates of another policy, the ICT Integration Policy, which will be described in the next section.

4.2 ICT Integration Policy

The ICT Integration Policy officially dictated the use of ICT in ELT at all public schools throughout Ben Tre province (Ben Tre Educational Service, 2016b). Funds, as a result, were distributed to each school to equip necessary equipment. The extracted data confirmed the use of ICT by English teachers at all research sites, as described in the table below.

Table 3: ICT Integration in ELT

Research Site	ICT Integration	Reference
City School	Yes	An (7a); Hoa (1a); Lan (1c); Tha (1b); Thu (1a)
District School	Yes	En (1a); Nho (2c); Phung (1a); Sao (1d); Tan (1a)
Village School	Yes	Diem (1a); Lin (1c); Ngoc (1a); Quynh (1a); Vu (1c)
Remote Village School	Yes	Tuan (1c)

This policy, however, required the use of ICT in ELT for only two credit hours per school year (Lin, 41a; Quynh, 44a). English teachers at City School did not discuss this quota; instead, they only hinted at the active use of ICT (Hoa, 28a). At District School, ICT was very proactive as teachers were required to use ICT for 50% of all teaching (Nho, 10a). A similar practice was also found at Village School, where ICT was used weekly (Ngoc, 1a). In contrast, ICT was used very limitedly at the Remote Village School, where ICT was only used once every two or three weeks (Tuan, 1c).

The integration of ICT, moreover, faced a conflict between the training course and the schools' regulations. According to an interviewee, the ban on mobile phones affected students dramatically,

> "Besides, most teachers use mobile apps, but students are banned from phones. Although misuse occurs, ICT's benefits are evident. The ban also discourages parents, limiting online tasks and leaving only offline methods available" (Thu, 21e - 21j).

The same interviewee added, "the training courses, for one, involve a lot of online applications, while offline is the only option at this school" (Thu, 22a) for which "many teaching opportunities have to be skipped. As a result, my knowledge may sink into oblivion" (Thu, 22c, and 22d).

Besides, the outdated concept of quietness for a formal classroom should be changed as explained:

> "Management is also an important factor. For example, effective teaching [including ICT] often comes with noise, as students proactively participate. However, management considers a noisy class as an out-of-order class. For this reason, most teachers prefer to keep their class as quiet as possible, which means students cannot participate much" (Thu, 27c and 27d).

Even though EST should not interfere with the school's activities, the lack of indications for public schools concerning the effective use of ICT in ELT, such as recommendations for the removal of the ban on mobile phones and the outdated concept of a quiet classroom, was evidence of an ineffective approach to ensure the practical integration of ICT in ELT throughout the province. This lack of preparation also grew bigger as many obstacles brought by local characteristics were overlooked.

ICT was implemented without considering blackouts as a common threat. In the city, blackouts were considered an "obstacle" (Tha, 29a) even though they did not occur regularly (Tha, 30a). However, in the village, "teachers are afraid of using ICT because of frequent blackouts" (Ngoc, 19c), and they were "the most serious obstacle [to ICT integration] because they are totally out of our control" (Ngoc, 34a). In one observation footage, a blackout occurred in the middle of a class session at the Village School. The teacher had to revert to the traditional teaching methods (Observation Diem). Other participants admitted that they always had traditional teaching on standby in case of blackouts (Lan 46b; Tha 47b; Phung 38b). The interviewee at the Remote Village School, on the other hand, did not treat blackouts as a serious threat because ICT was rarely applied in teaching (Tuan, 1b).

Blackouts yet highlighted a larger issue due to the lack of funding in Ben Tre province. In education, overcrowded classrooms were a direct result of underfunding. Observations at four research sites with sixteen participants confirmed this fact in the table below.

Table 4: Number of Students per Classroom

Observation Name	Students per Class
City School	
An	43
Hoa	42
Lan	41
Tha	40
Thu	46
District School	
En	35
Nho	38
Phung	38
Sao	37
Tan	37
Village School	
Diem	41
Lin	39
Ngoc	42
Quynh	37
Vu	43
Remote Village School	
Tuan	35

A Village School teacher admitted, "It is impractical for a teacher to use ICT tools which are designed for twenty students in a classroom with forty" (Diem, 20b). Thus, "teachers find it very difficult to deliver their lessons" (Diem, 11b). Many teachers believed the capacity should be reduced (Diem, 10c; Hoa, 31b; Sao, 26a) to approximately twenty students per classroom (Hoa, 24e; Lan, 34e; Sao, 18c).

The lack of funding also prevented schools from hiring additional teachers. According to a City School teacher,

> "This school has recommended to the higher authority for additional teachers; however, this has not been applied yet Perhaps funding is the obstacle in this matter" (Tha, 14d - 14e).

The shortage of teaching staff at the Remote Village School was even worse. The sole English teacher at this school stated that he had to teach all grades at his school (Tuan, 1a) because "the Board of Administrators has denied the idea of having additional teachers" (Tuan, 20b).

The integration of ICT in ELT, furthermore, was very challenging due to the lack of funds for upgrading equipment. For example,

> "There is a control panel installed beneath each desk for students to answer multiple-choice questions, but these panels no longer function. Replacement of these panels has been requested but it is still awaiting funding" (Tha, 17a - 17b).

A District School teacher added,

> "I would love to see more projectors, but I do not think the Board of Administrators would approve my request because these projectors are very expensive" (Phung, 15b).

The situation was quite similar at Village School where,

> "Speakers are one of the many devices that seriously need upgrades, but it is impossible to replace all speakers at once, due to limited budgets" (Ngoc, 23b - 23c).

According to another teacher at Village School, other tools should be introduced in teaching, but he doubted,

> "I have seen a lot of these devices, which could be helpful for listening. However, it is hard to request school funding to purchase these devices" (Vu, 14c).

Lastly, the only English teacher at the Remote Village School suggested,

> "The Education and Training Service should make funding available for the Board of Administrators to purchase a larger, 65-inch television to provide better visibility for everyone in the classroom" (Tuan, 23a).

These findings, according to interviews and observations, indicated the effectiveness of all ICT policies in Ben Tre province. The next chapter will investigate how and why such obstacles have existed under the theoretical framework before finalizing a conclusion of whether things could have been done in a different, yet better, way, alongside recommendations in the last chapter.

V. DISCUSSIONS

The British Council suggested in its report that ICT integration should receive support from all government levels (British Council, 2015). ICT policies in Ben Tre province, however, have been a burden for teachers, according to one participant:

> "It causes a burden not only for the teacher who receives the training, but it also affects the teachers who take over classes in the absence of the participating trainee. Teaching schedules, thus, have to change entirely" (Tha, 36a, 36b).

Having the training course in session during the school year, instead of the summer break, is not an ideal choice for teachers (Hoa, 30c; Thu, 30d; Nho, 22a) because other teachers have to cover classes left by those who participate in the training (Thu, 30b). As a result, "all teachers are overworked when one is attending a training course" (Hoa, 30d). This burden is even more difficult for older teachers, as fatigue seems unavoidable. According to one participant,

> "It is about the inappropriate time [of which] training is given, which conflicts with my teaching. I have to provide extra teaching hours to compensate for my absence while participating in the training courses." (Hoa, 30a - 30e)

It is, therefore, challenging, if not impossible, for overloaded teachers to maintain high standards in teaching. Additionally, switching the training course to the summer should have been done. However, the lack of a local university in Ben Tre province, paired with the shortage of funding, has led provincial administrators at the EST to propose this arrangement. First, the EST must recruit ICT experts from universities in nearby provinces to act as instructors for the ICT training course. The hiring during school terms would be much less compared to the cost of recruiting during holidays because funding is always an obstacle (Ngoc, 25a).

The lack of funding also explains the overcrowded classroom that makes ICT integration ineffective because "it is impractical for a teacher to use ICT tools which are designed for twenty students in a classroom with forty" (Diem, 20b) in which "teachers find it very difficult to deliver their lessons" (Diem, 11b). Instead, the number of students per classroom should be reduced (Diem, 10c; Hoa, 31b; Sao, 26a) to approximately twenty students per classroom (Hoa, 24e; Lan, 34e; Sao, 18c). Furthermore, administrators, through the design of the ICT training course, cannot propose effective solutions to overcome obstacles brought by no Internet connectivity and blackouts. According to one interviewee, "the training courses, for one, involve a lot of online applications, while offline is the only option at this school" (Thu, 22a). Other participants confirmed that they always had traditional teaching on standby in case of blackouts (Lan 46b; Tha 47b; Phung 38b). The shift to traditional teaching which is based heavily on grammar competence (Xiaotong, 2014) means it is less suited to helping students learn to communicate effectively in authentic situations (Yede, 2020), or it means the student-centered pedagogy.

The above external obstacles validate the difficulties brought about by administrative structures and infrastructure, as highlighted by Ntorukiri et al. (2022) and policies related to ICT use (Gonfa, 2024). All attempts at integrating ICT in ELT, in addition, are consistent with Peeraer and Van Petegem (2011) regarding the benefit of having proactive policies at a national level – Decision No. 1400/QĐ-TTg in this particular study. The EST in Ben Tre province, hence, adopts this change in education despite the shortage of funding.

According to the theoretical framework, hosting the ICT training course during the school year is associated with the Fund–Policy factor in the Initiation Decisions stage of ECT (Fullan, 2015). As teachers are overloaded with work brought by the training course (Hoa, 30a - 30e; Tha, 36a, 36b), the stage of Initiation Decisions is not supported by the Teacher Advocacy factor. This hardship, for this reason, leverages the degree of Complexity in the Implementation stage, or Stage 2, of ECT (Fullan, 2015). The degree of Complexity is also a concern with blackouts which forces teachers to convert to traditional teaching. Therefore, the

degree of Quality/Practicality, also an element in the Implementation stage, is not fulfilled.

The Complexity element of ECT (Fullan, 2015) is also equivalent to the Complexity element in the Second phase of DoIT (Rogers, 2003). With higher Complexity, two other elements of DoIT, Relative Advantage and Compatibility, are negatively impacted. For instance, the integration of ICT in ELT is inconsistent because many teachers have never participated in the ICT training course, according to Table 2. All of these elements, in turn, are driven by local characteristics of Ben Tre province, or the Socio Economic Characteristics elements in Phase 1, of DoIT which helps explain the shortage of funds as associated with the Fund-Policy factor of ECT (Fullan, 2015).

If external obstacles are unavoidable, the ICT Training Policy shows several disadvantages that are created internally. The way teachers are selected to participate in the training course is a major setback. For example, experienced teachers might have participated in the ICT training several times, while other teachers remain untrained (Tuan, 34b). This ineffective practice, in turn, can affect teachers' confidence in using technology in teaching (Sipilä, 2014; Moradi, 2025). Besides, Arokiasamy et al. (2015) propose the role of leadership regarding how ICT use adopted and used within a school community. Some school's restrictions, such as the concept of a quiet classroom (Thu, 27c and 27d) and the ban on mobile phones (Thu, 21e - 21j), are clear evidence of how leadership may become a problem, regardless of how supportive (Ngoc, 35a).

These internal obstacles, under the scope of the theoretical framework, are similar to the external counterpart as described earlier. The Fund-Policy factor in Stage 1 of ECT (Fullan, 2015) is still a major indicator in examining schools' restrictions which dramatically affects the Quality/Practicality factor in Stage 2. In addition, the number of ICT-untrained teachers, as shown in Table 2, is yet another factor that impacts the Quality/Practicality factor because the Access to Innovation factor in Stage 1 is not equally accessible between teachers.

The Quality/Practicality factor in Stage 2 of ECT is equivalent to the Relative Advantage element in Phase 2 of DoIT (Rogers, 2003). The low degree of Relative Advantage, as a result, leads to a low degree of Compatibility while increasing the level of Complexity. Unlike external obstacles which are unavoidable, administrators could propose better approaches to prevent these problems. This indication reflects the Personality Variables element in Phase 1 of DoIT. This very element is also the scope to explain the Observability elements in Phase 2 as administrators who lack the administrative skills have overlooked the necessity of making necessary changes to ensure a proper ICT training course and an effective integration of ICT in classrooms.

The examination of Fund-Policy and Access to Innovation factors of ECT (Fullan, 2005) helps identify external and internal obstacles while Socio Economic Characteristics and Personality Variables elements of DoIT (Rogers, 2003) explain why funding is the underlying problem and how administrators can influence the process of integration of ICT in ELT.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The use of Education Change Theory (ECT) (Fullan, 2015) and Diffusion of Innovation Theory (DoIT) (Rogers, 2003), paired with Thematic Coding Analysis (Clarke, 2006), allowed the investigation of current ICT policies, the ICT Training Policy (Ben Tre Educational Service, 2016a) and the ICT Integration Policy (Ben Tre Educational Service, 2016b), to determine how policies can determine the outcome of the transition from traditional teaching to the use of technology.

The Findings indicated that existing ICT policies contained two types of obstacles, external and internal. If external factors seemed out of control for administrators at the Education and Training Service (EST) and schools in Ben Tre province, internal obstacles, on the contrary, reflected the lack of administrative skills among these policymakers. In addition, the use of ECT (Fullan, 2005) and DoIT (Rogers, 2003) helped explore and explain the root of these obstacles as well as how and why they existed.

External obstacles, on the one hand, were closely associated with local characteristics in Ben Tre province, in which educational funding and infrastructure were two major factors. For one thing, the lack of funding prevented all teachers from participating in the training course at once. Instead, each school could only appoint one or two candidates per course (Diem, 13a; En, 24c; Vu, 25b). Insufficient funds also prevented all training sessions from taking place during the summer break when teachers were at work. The practice of assigning other teachers to cover classes for those who left for the training course, in fact, created a burden for all teachers within the school, as strongly criticized by one interviewee:

> "It causes a burden not only for the teacher who receives the training, but it also affects the teachers who take over classes in the absence of the participating trainee. Teaching schedules, thus, have to change entirely" (Tha, 36a, 36b).

This problem was even more challenging as the shortage of teachers was not rare. Many interviewees mentioned the

request for hiring additional teachers (Tha, 14d - 14e; Tuan, 20b). Shortage of funding was also the cause of overcrowded classrooms which made the use of ICT very difficult because "it is impractical for a teacher to use ICT tools which are designed for twenty students in a classroom with forty" (Diem, 20b). External obstacles, furthermore, accounted for frequent blackouts for which "teachers are afraid of using ICT because of frequent blackouts" (Ngoc, 19c). Traditional teaching was always on standby, and teachers had to revert to this outdated approach if power outages occurred (Lan 46b; Tha 47b; Phung 38b). Therefore, the purpose of using technology to create a more interesting learning environment through the use of ICT to in order to improve educational achievement (Abraham et al., 2022) was not always guaranteed.

On the other hand, administrators who lack administrative skills were responsible for internal obstacles in implementing the ICT Training Policy and the ICT Integration Policy. For instance, the way in which teachers were selected for the ICT training was a setback because experienced teachers might have participated in the ICT training several times while others had to wait (Tuan, 34b). In contrast, another interviewee suggested "ICT classes should be open for any teacher who may participate at any time to learn whatever they desire" (En, 35d). Moreover, the lack of administrative skills could be found in outdated policies at schools. For example, the concept of a quiet classroom was a barrier for an effective ICT class (Thu, 27c and 27d). Likewise, the ban on mobile phones was considered inappropriate to embrace technology in teaching (Thu, 21e - 21j). These internal obstacles were a direct result of leadership (Ngoc, 35a).

By using a theoretical framework, the scope for investigation was obvious. ECT (Fullan, 2015), through Local Characteristics, could identify that Fund-Policy and Access to Innovation were the two associated factors for all external factors. Similarly, the Socio Economic Characteristics and Personality Variables elements of DoIT (Rogers, 2003), through a relationship between Complexity and Relative Advantage, explained why administrators could influence the outcome of the ICT integration in ELT.

Finally, it has been a few years since this study took place. The integration of ICT in ELT in Ben Tre province could have been improved. For example, most teachers, if not all, could have received ICT training. However, the findings remain valid if new technology is added, such as the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Unless administrators can improve their administrative skills, especially in tackling obstacles brought by local characteristics, these problems will remain quintessential in any future integration of technology in Ben Tre province. And this makes this research study unique.

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