

LECTURERS' PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHING GENERAL ENGLISH TO NON-ENGLISH MAJORS AT CAN THO MEDICAL COLLEGE, VIETNAM

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Abstract: This study investigates the perceptions of English lecturers who teach General English to non-English major students at Can Tho Medical College in Vietnam. As English becomes increasingly essential in the healthcare sector, especially for accessing global medical knowledge and engaging in international collaboration, the role of English instruction in medical colleges is gaining prominence. Through qualitative interviews with ten English lecturers, this research explores their views on students' motivation, curriculum relevance, teaching challenges, and the integration of technology in language instruction. Findings reveal that while lecturers recognize the importance of English for students' future careers, they face challenges such as limited instructional time, students' low English proficiency, and lack of contextualized materials. However, lecturers also express optimism about the potential of mobile-assisted language learning and AI tools to enhance engagement and learning outcomes. The study concludes with recommendations for curriculum development, teacher training, and institutional support to improve the effectiveness of General English teaching in medical colleges.

Keywords: General English, Non-English majors, Medical college education, Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL), Artificial intelligence in language teaching.

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I. INTRODUCTION

English has become an indispensable tool in the globalized world, particularly in professional fields such as medicine and healthcare. For non-English majors studying at medical colleges, the acquisition of General English is not only a matter of academic requirement but also a gateway to accessing international medical knowledge, participating in global collaboration, and improving professional communication (Crystal, 2012; Nguyen & Hamid, 2015). At Can Tho Medical College, located in the Mekong Delta region of Vietnam, English lecturers face unique challenges in delivering effective language instruction to students whose primary focus lies in specialized medical training rather than linguistic competence.

The importance of English in medical education is underscored by the increasing availability of medical resources, research articles, and professional guidelines published in English (WHO, 2020). Students who lack sufficient English proficiency may struggle to engage with these materials, thereby limiting their academic and professional growth. Lecturers, therefore, play a crucial role in bridging this gap by designing and implementing General English courses that are both relevant and accessible to non-English majors. However, the task is complicated by several contextual factors, including limited instructional time, students' diverse proficiency levels, and the absence of specialized English materials tailored to medical contexts (Vo, 2026).

In addition, the rapid advancement of educational technology, particularly mobile-assisted language learning and artificial intelligence (AI) applications, presents both opportunities and challenges. While

these tools can enhance student engagement and provide personalized learning experiences, their integration requires lecturers to possess adequate digital competence and pedagogical adaptability (Kukulka-Hulme, 2020). Understanding lecturers' perceptions of these issues is essential for improving curriculum design, teacher training, and institutional support. This study, therefore, seeks to explore the perspectives of English lecturers at Can Tho Medical College regarding the teaching of General English to non-English majors, with a focus on challenges, opportunities, and the potential role of technology in language instruction.

II. RESEARCH CONTENT

2.1. The Role of General English in Higher Education

General English (GE) courses are widely recognized as foundational for non-English majors in higher education. They provide learners with essential communicative competence, enabling them to access academic resources and participate in professional discourse (Crystal, 2012). In medical education, English proficiency is particularly important because much of the global medical literature, guidelines, and research are published in English (WHO, 2020). For students in medical colleges, GE serves as a bridge to English for Specific Purposes (ESP), preparing them for discipline-specific language needs (Nguyen & Hamid, 2015).

2.2. Challenges in Teaching General English to Non-English Majors

Several studies highlight the difficulties lecturers face when teaching GE to students whose primary focus is not language learning. One major challenge is low student motivation,

as learners often prioritize their specialized subjects over English (Vo, 2026). Additionally, students' heterogeneous proficiency levels make it difficult to design lessons that meet diverse needs (Nguyen, 2017). Limited instructional time and lack of contextualized materials further exacerbate the problem, leaving lecturers with insufficient resources to tailor GE instruction to medical contexts (Nguyen Ngoc Gia Han, 2025).

2.3. English for Medical Purposes and Curriculum Design

English for Medical Purposes (EMP) has emerged as a critical area within ESP, focusing on medical terminology, communication in healthcare settings, and access to international research (Nguyen Ngoc Gia Han, 2025). However, EMP requires a strong GE foundation. Without adequate GE competence, students struggle to transition into specialized medical English. Research emphasizes the need for needs-based curriculum design that integrates GE with medical contexts, ensuring relevance and engagement (Akbari & Tahririan, 2009).

2.4. Pedagogical Approaches and Teacher Competence

Effective GE instruction depends on lecturers' pedagogical competence and adaptability. Studies show that interactive methods such as role-plays, simulations, and collaborative projects enhance student engagement (Antic, 2007). Teachers must also act as facilitators, guiding students toward independent learning strategies (Nguyen & Hamid, 2015). However, many lecturers report insufficient training in ESP and digital pedagogy, limiting their ability to integrate innovative approaches (Vo, 2026).

2.5. Technology Integration: Mobile Learning and AI

The rise of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) and AI applications offers new opportunities for GE instruction. Mobile devices provide flexible access to resources, support personalized learning, and foster student autonomy (Kukulska-Hulme, 2020). AI-powered tools such as language learning apps and automated feedback systems can enhance pronunciation, vocabulary acquisition, and grammar practice (Nguyen, 2024). Nevertheless, successful integration requires lecturers to possess digital competence and confidence in using technology (Vo, 2026).

2.6. Vietnamese Context and Regional Challenges

Vietnamese studies reveal that while urban universities have begun integrating MALL and ESP into curricula, regional institutions like Can Tho Medical College face infrastructural and professional development challenges (Nguyen, 2017). Lecturers in these contexts often rely on traditional methods due to limited access to technology and training. This disparity underscores the importance of context-sensitive strategies that address both infrastructural gaps and lecturers' intrinsic motivation for professional growth (Vo, 2026).

2.7. Research Gap

Although existing literature provides insights into GE and EMP instruction, few studies holistically examine lecturers' perceptions of teaching GE to non-English majors in medical colleges. Most research focuses either on ESP curriculum design or on technology integration, but rarely combines both perspectives. This study addresses the gap by exploring lecturers' views on GE teaching in a regional medical college, with attention to challenges, opportunities, and the role of technology.

2.8. Research Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to explore lecturers' perceptions of teaching General English to non-English majors at Can Tho Medical College. The rationale for using mixed methods lies in the need to capture both measurable trends and deeper contextual insights, which are essential in understanding complex educational phenomena (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

2.8.1. Research Design

The study followed an explanatory sequential design, beginning with a survey to establish general patterns of lecturers' views, followed by semi-structured interviews to provide richer explanations of the quantitative findings. This design is particularly suitable for educational research where attitudes and practices are influenced by contextual factors (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

2.8.2. Participants

The participants consisted of ten English lecturers currently teaching General English courses to non-English majors at Can Tho Medical College. They were selected using purposive

sampling to ensure that all participants had direct experience in teaching English within a medical college context. The sample included lecturers with varying years of teaching experience and academic qualifications, thereby providing diverse perspectives.

2.8.3. Data Collection

Quantitative data were collected through a structured questionnaire adapted from previous studies on teacher perceptions of English language teaching (Nguyen & Hamid, 2015). The questionnaire included items on teaching challenges, curriculum relevance, and technology integration. Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, allowing lecturers to elaborate on their experiences and provide examples of classroom practices.

2.8.4. Data Analysis

Survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify common trends. Interview transcripts were coded thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach to thematic analysis. Triangulation of quantitative and qualitative findings enhanced the validity of the study and provided a comprehensive understanding of lecturers' perceptions.

2.9. Research Results and Discussions

2.9.1. Overview of Findings

The study revealed that lecturers at Can Tho Medical College perceive General English (GE) as both essential and challenging for non-English majors. While they acknowledge its importance for professional development in healthcare, they also highlight persistent barriers such as limited instructional time, low student motivation, and inadequate contextualized materials. At the same time, lecturers expressed optimism about the potential of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) and artificial intelligence (AI) applications to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes.

2.9.2. Lecturers' Perceptions of Student Motivation

One of the most consistent themes was the issue of student motivation. Lecturers reported that many non-English majors view GE as peripheral compared to their medical studies. This aligns with Nguyen (2017), who found that

non-English majors in Vietnamese universities often prioritize specialized subjects over language learning. Lecturers noted that students frequently attend GE classes with minimal preparation, which affects classroom dynamics and learning outcomes. However, some lecturers observed that when English instruction was linked to medical contexts—such as reading simplified medical articles or practicing doctor-patient dialogues—students demonstrated greater interest. This finding supports Akbari and Tahririan (2009), who emphasized the importance of contextualized vocabulary learning in ESP settings.

2.9.3. Curriculum Relevance and Instructional Challenges

Lecturers expressed concerns about the relevance of the current GE curriculum. They argued that the curriculum often focuses on general communicative skills without sufficient integration of medical contexts. As a result, students struggle to see the connection between English learning and their future careers. This echoes Nguyen Ngoc Gia Han (2025), who highlighted the need for curriculum design that bridges GE and English for Medical Purposes (EMP). Furthermore, lecturers reported challenges such as large class sizes, heterogeneous proficiency levels, and limited teaching hours. These constraints make it difficult to provide individualized support and meaningful practice opportunities.

2.9.4. Technology Integration: Opportunities and Barriers

A significant portion of the discussion centered on technology integration. Lecturers recognized the potential of mobile devices and AI applications to support GE instruction. Mobile learning was seen as particularly valuable in providing flexible access to resources, enabling students to practice outside the classroom (Kukulka-Hulme, 2020). AI-powered tools such as ELSA Speak and Duolingo were mentioned as effective in improving pronunciation and vocabulary acquisition. However, lecturers also noted barriers, including limited institutional support, lack of training in digital pedagogy, and uneven student access to devices. These findings resonate with Vo (2026), who emphasized the importance of teacher digital competence in

successful MALL integration.

2.9.5. Teacher Competence and Professional Development

Lecturers acknowledged that their own digital competence and pedagogical adaptability play a crucial role in integrating technology effectively. Some reported confidence in using mobile apps and online platforms, while others expressed hesitation due to limited training. This disparity highlights the need for professional development programs that equip lecturers with both technical and pedagogical skills. Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis revealed that lecturers with higher digital competence were more likely to experiment with innovative teaching methods, whereas those with lower competence tended to rely on traditional approaches.

2.9.6. Regional Context and Institutional Support

The regional context of Can Tho Medical College presents unique challenges. Lecturers noted infrastructural limitations, such as unstable internet connections and insufficient access to updated teaching materials. These issues are consistent with Nguyen (2017), who identified infrastructural disparities between urban and regional universities in Vietnam. Institutional support was also highlighted as a critical factor. Lecturers argued that without adequate resources, training, and encouragement from administrators, efforts to improve GE instruction would remain limited. They called for policies that prioritize English teaching in medical colleges, recognizing its role in preparing students for global healthcare environments.

2.9.7. Implications for Curriculum Design

The findings suggest several implications for curriculum design. First, GE courses should incorporate medical contexts to increase relevance and motivation. Second, curricula should balance general communicative skills with discipline-specific language needs, preparing students for both everyday communication and professional tasks. Third, technology integration should be systematically planned, with institutional support for infrastructure and teacher training. These recommendations align with international research emphasizing context-sensitive curriculum design in ESP (Antic, 2007).

Overall, the study highlights a tension between the recognized importance of GE and the practical challenges of teaching it to non-English majors in medical colleges. Lecturers perceive GE as essential for students' academic and professional development, yet they struggle with motivation, curriculum relevance, and resource limitations. Technology offers promising solutions, but its effectiveness depends on lecturers' digital competence and institutional support. Addressing these issues requires a holistic approach that combines curriculum reform, professional development, and infrastructural investment.

III. CONCLUSION

This study examined the perceptions of English lecturers teaching General English (GE) to non-English majors at Can Tho Medical College. The findings highlight a complex interplay between the recognized importance of English in medical education and the practical challenges of delivering effective instruction in a regional context. Lecturers consistently emphasized that GE is essential for students' academic and professional development, particularly in accessing international medical knowledge and participating in global collaboration (Crystal, 2012; WHO, 2020). However, they also identified persistent barriers such as low student motivation, limited instructional time, and the lack of contextualized materials relevant to medical studies (Nguyen, 2017; Nguyen Ngoc Gia Han, 2025).

At the same time, lecturers expressed optimism about the potential of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) and artificial intelligence (AI) applications to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes. Successful integration of these technologies, however, requires adequate digital competence among lecturers and strong institutional support (Kukulska-Hulme, 2020; Vo, 2026).

The study concludes that improving GE instruction in medical colleges demands a holistic approach that combines curriculum reform, professional development, and infrastructural investment. By aligning GE courses with medical contexts and leveraging technology effectively, institutions can better prepare non-English majors for the demands of global healthcare communication.

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