



HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS' AND STUDENTS' CHALLENGES OF ONLINE INSTRUCTION IN READING CLASSES

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Abstract:

Research into online instruction as an alternative to traditional teaching has indicated its role in facilitating student learning with the use of technology in times of COVID-19 pandemic. However, an intriguing question is how to conduct this mode of teaching English reading within the Vietnamese context. In Vietnam, little information has examined the challenges that high school teachers and students encountered in implementing online English reading classes to meet the needs and interests of the student and facilitate instructional practices. This study is therefore aimed to look into this area of interest. A mixed-methods study was used with fifty teachers and one hundred high school students. Data were collected from questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The findings show that online instruction in reading classes challenged teachers and students to use technology, prepare lesson contents, and assess student comprehension. Implications are provided to teachers and students for the sake of the quality of online instruction.

Keywords: challenges, online instruction, reading classes

1. Introduction

There is increased attention to online instruction as an alternative to traditional teaching as a result of the advanced technology era and the flexibility of online courses (e.g., Allen and Seaman, 2013; Konetes, 2011; Li & Irby, 2008). Researchers have devoted their time and effort to figuring out the process of conducting a lesson on a virtual platform, its opportunities and challenges as well as giving recommendations for further improvement in the context of teaching online (Li & Irby, 2008). A wide variety of technologies, particularly some video conferencing applications such as Zoom, Google Meet or Microsoft Teams have been applied in conducting online classes. However, the efficacy of these technologies and their pedagogical impacts on the educational contexts

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has been the concern of teachers during the context of the pandemic (Al-Marroof et al., 2021). Having not equipped themselves with virtual teaching experience, teachers have been encountering challenges when doing their teaching practices using technology. In Vietnam, the National Foreign Languages Project (VNFLP) launched by the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET, 2008) has stressed the pressing need to promote the quality of language teaching and learning foreign languages, particularly English to respond to the needs of students at all levels of English language proficiency (Ministry of Education and Training, 2008). In a study by Luu (2011), the primary challenge of online instruction is attributed to the technology's impacts on both teachers and learners. Therefore, only with an adequate amount of attention paid to these challenges by school administrators, the quality of online teaching via a range of applications for pedagogical purposes cannot be ensured. In addition, teachers are supposed to encounter challenges when conducting online lessons, which hinders them from the transfer of the knowledge to students, especially in teaching English reading lessons. This study, therefore, aims at identifying challenges encountered by teachers and students of online instruction in reading classes in high schools in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam. The research questions that guided the study reported in this paper were, "What are high school teachers' challenges of online instruction in reading classes?" and "What are high school students' challenges of online instruction in reading classes?"

2. Literature review

The following section reviews the literature on the concept of reading, online instruction and its features relevant to this study.

2.1 Reading comprehension

There are several perspectives on reading comprehension in the literature. Reading comprehension is a process that the reader relates his or her own knowledge to get through the meaning of printed material or text passage (e.g., Anderson & Pearson, 1984; Nuttall, 2005). This suggests the view that comprehension occurs as an interplay of a text, the context, and the reader (Pearson, 2004). In the same vein, Grabe (2009) asserts reading comprehension is a meaning-making process of a particular text. Taken all perspectives together, for the purposes of the study, reading comprehension is defined as an interactive process that the reader first processes information from a particular text and then constructs new meaning generated from that text.

2.2 Online instruction

Online instruction is an alternative to traditional face-to-face teaching due to the risks of COVID-19 pandemic that influenced us in several ways (e.g., Khan et al., 2021; Nooney & Vidal, 2022). This delivery refers to any type of teaching and learning through the Internet rather than in person. Khan and his colleagues (2021) view online instruction as an innovative approach for distributing classroom instruction to a great number of

students, using the web as a medium. Volery (2000) further notes that online instruction is a form of learning delivery through the Internet with a view to transferring knowledge to remote learners. Similarly, Keller and her colleagues (2007) regard online instruction as the utilization of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to convey information in the educational field where instructors and learners are isolated by distance, time, or both for the sake of the good or quality of learners' academic performance or achievements. What is more, online instruction is seen as a set of instructions distributed via electronic media i.e., the Internet, intranets, and extranets (Horton, 2011). Another view is that online instruction as an approach where teaching normally emerges in a different place from learning, requiring communication via technologies and a special organization (e.g., Moore and Kearsley, 2011) and that it is a type of teaching and learning in which the teacher and learners are geographically and temporarily separated from one another (e.g., Sun and Chen, 2016). It is worth considering that online instruction has been interchangeably used to refer to 'e-learning', 'distance learning' or web-based learning.

2.3 Features of online institution

Ascough (2002) advocates that online education possesses some of the following features. First, this type of instruction equips learners and teachers with a different learning experience when compared to traditional brick-and-mortar classrooms. Furthermore, communication is established and enhanced via computers and the World Wide Web as well as participation in the classroom by learners as an adaptation to an online mode of teaching and learning. In Ascough's (2002) perspective, the social dynamic of the learning environment is changed; in addition, discrimination and prejudice are minimized when instruction is conducted on an online platform.

Vai and Sosulski (2011) stress that the four aspects that impact course design and learning space include planning and delivery of course content, communication and delayed feedback. In terms of learning space, a clear difference is found between traditional brick-and-mortar classes and classes conducted in a virtual platform when taking physical location into consideration. While teachers and students in traditional classes meet face-to-face on a particular aspect of learning, they virtually meet one another in an online course. Regarding planning and delivery of course content, instructors are supposed to make a great effort in adapting the lesson content conveyed in every single online lesson so that it can be appropriate for students' level of English language proficiency. The delivery of the content is related to the ways both the teacher and students use technology instead of merely sitting still in conventional brick-and-mortar classrooms. In an online mode of teaching and learning, the interaction between the teacher and students is likely to be restricted because it is electronically achieved through written communication or Internet Protocol Telephony Software such as Skype or Google Meet (Luu, 2021). Delayed feedback is another notable feature of online instruction, and this can be explained in various ways. Time constraints may be a factor affecting the delay of teachers' feeding during online courses. Nevertheless, the teacher

is available to check students' work or their comprehension through emails or social media platforms.

Li and Akins (2005) suggest that, at the tertiary level, online instruction provides faculties with flexibility regarding location and time compared to conventional instructional delivery. Moreover, online instruction is believed to enhance student independence, retention, and facilitation of higher-order thinking (Britt, 2006). Allen and Seaman (2008) state that more than 2800 universities and colleges regarded online instruction as a critical strategic plan for the long term, and most higher education institutions assume that this approach of instruction will be ubiquitous in higher education. Given that online learning and teaching have their place in a wide range of colleges and universities thanks to accessibility of the Internet and flexibility of online courses, increased attention to online instruction is paid (Konetes, 2011). Limperos and colleagues (2015) add that the financial impacts shifted institutions to online instruction with equal or somewhat better student learning outcomes.

2.4 Challenges in online instruction

Online instruction presents challenges to teachers and students. The challenges are identified as time commitment, technology use or learning management systems (De Gagne & Walters, 2009), role change and use of appropriate strategies (Brinthaupt et al., 2011). A shift from conventional face-to-face instruction to an online mode has posed arising issues. Course design and its implementation are considered the two noticeable differences when comparing brick-and-mortar classes and those on a virtual platform (Thormann & Zimmerman, 2012). Sepulveda and Morrison (2020) indicate that lack of direct interaction with learners and the sudden change of setting were the noticeable challenges influencing students' learning process.

Dashtestani (2014) conducted a mixed-methods study including questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to identify teachers' perceptions of using online instruction in Indonesian educational contexts. The findings of this study indicate that teachers encountered a number of obstacles in their teaching practice. These obstacles include lack of online facilities and resources, lack of interaction, cultural resistance to online instruction and teachers' limited knowledge of this teaching type. It was noted that the teachers should be trained skills and strategies required for online instruction. Moreover, the teachers recommended that online and face-to-face instruction need to be combined for the sake of effectiveness in teaching and learning. Educational authorities should consider support provided to the teachers who delivered their lessons online.

In their study, Kebritchi and Santiago (2017) identified three major challenges in online instruction: online learners, instructors, and content development. Learners' challenges include expectations, readiness, identity, and participation in online courses. Instructors' issues include faculty role changes, a shift from face-to-face to online delivery, time management, and teaching styles. In particular, role changes are associated with content development, integration of multimedia into lesson content, and the role of instructional strategies.

While there is a plethora of studies indicating challenges during online instruction, awareness of the challenges encountered by high school teachers and students in reading classes, particularly within the Vietnamese contexts needs to be addressed.

3. Methodology

3.1 Design

A descriptive study using a mixed-methods approach was conducted to investigate challenges encountered by high school teachers and students with regard to online reading instruction. A mixed-methods approach, according to Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2012), incorporates quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. While quantitative data were used to generalize the findings of the study to the entire population, qualitative data were used to obtain a detailed understanding of the initial quantitative data and complement the quantitative data (Creswell, 2003; Fraenkel et al., 2012).

3.2 Participants

Teacher participants were 50 from the three types of schools (high schools and centers) in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam. The participant selection was based on convenience sampling (Fraenkel et al., 2012). This sampling allows for approaching participants available at schools in the community and for administering later data analysis at ease. Of this sample, 36 teachers were female (72%) and 14 were males (28%). They came from the public schools (60.8%), private (29.7%), and continuing education centers (9.5%). At the time of the study, the teachers in cities constituted 51.4%, in towns 20.3%, and in the countryside 28.3%.

Student participants were 100 (54 males) from different high schools including the public (94%), private and continuing education centers (6%). At the time of the study, the number of students was 50 in cities, 8 in towns and 42 in the countryside.

Five teachers (two males) and five students (one female) were invited to participate in the interviews. The purpose of the interviews was to gain their in-depth views of the challenges they encountered during online reading classes.

3.3 Instruments

3.3.1 Questionnaires

The 29-item questionnaire together with two open-ended questions for teachers was divided into three main sections. Section One was participants' background information. Section Two of 10 items focused on challenges faced by teachers while using technology in online reading instruction. The participants were asked to give their opinions on the statements based on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Section Three consisted of 10 items adapted from a study by Luu (2021) with regard to challenges and opportunities when teaching English online at a foreign language center at a university. This section was designed to examine challenges with

regard to teachers' content preparation for reading instruction. Section Four with 9 items and 2 open-ended questions was designed to explore the challenges teachers had to assess student's comprehension and gain insights into their attitudes towards such challenges.

The student questionnaire of similar format and content aimed to investigate challenges they encountered while learning reading and their attitudes towards this online instruction.

3.3.2 Semi-structured interviews

After completing the questionnaires and classroom observation, five teachers and five students were chosen for interviews. Before the interview, interviewees were informed of the purposes of the study and the importance of their participation in the current study. The interviews were carried out in Vietnamese, beginning with open-ended questions, followed up by probes in order to elaborate on what each participant said (Fraenkel et al., 2012). Each interview took approximately 45 minutes. Eight interviews were conducted online via Zoom and recorded. The other two interviews were conducted face-to-face and recorded via smartphones. These recordings were sent to participants via Zalo for retrieval and their own references. All of the interview responses were transcribed and translated into English for later data analysis.

Regarding the interviews with teachers, four questions focused on technology use, content preparation, assessment of students' comprehension, and other issues. The student interview process with a similar format to teachers was conducted to explore the challenges students encountered while learning online reading.

4. Findings

4.1 Teacher challenges

4.1.1 Findings from the questionnaires

a. Challenges faced by teachers in online reading classes

A *Descriptive Statistics Test* was conducted to examine the overall mean score of teacher challenges when conducting online instruction in reading classes. Table 1 presents the results of the test.

Table 1: Teacher challenges

	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Total	50	2.48	4.97	3.63	.51
Valid N (listwise)	50				

Table 1 shows the mean score of challenges faced by teachers when conducting online instruction in reading classes was at a high level ($M=3.63$, $SD=.51$). A *One-Sample t-Test* was run to examine whether the mean score of teacher challenges was different from the test value (3.4), the accepted mean for high level, as noted by Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995), the five-point Likert scale (high-level: means of 3.5 to 5.0).

Table 2: One-Sample t-Test for teacher challenges

	Test Value = 3.4					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Total	3.257	49	.002	.23	.09	.38

The result of *One Sample t-Test* reveals that there was a difference ($t=3.25$; $df=49$; $p=.002$). Thus, it can be concluded that teacher challenges in online reading classes in this study were at a high level.

Table 3: Teachers' challenges by clusters

	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Using technology	50	1.20	5.00	3.24	.77
Preparing the content	50	2.50	5.00	3.79	.63
Assessing students' comprehension	50	2.56	5.00	3.90	.59
MeanE	50				
Valid N (listwise)	50				

Table 3 shows that the mean score for teacher challenges when assessing students' comprehension when delivering their online reading classes was 3.90 ($M=3.90$, $SD=.59$), indicating a high level, compared to that of the content preparation and technology use, respectively.

b. Teacher challenges of online reading instruction by clusters

Table 4: Paired-Samples t-Test for teacher challenges

		Paired Differences				t	df	Sig.	
		Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower				Upper
Pair 3	Clu2 – Clu3	-.10	.59	.08	-2.76	0.63	-1.25	49	.21

A *Paired-Samples t-Test* was run to compare the mean score of the two clusters in the questionnaire. In particular, a *Paired-Samples t-Test* was run to compare the mean scores of the two variables: teacher challenges in preparing the content and in assessing students' comprehension. The result shows that the mean score of Cluster 2 in respect of teacher challenges of preparing the content for online instruction to students in reading classes was 3.79 and the mean score of Cluster 3 with respect to teachers' challenges of assessing students' comprehension was 3.90. The significance value was 0.21, which is higher than 0.05 ($p=.21>.05$). That result indicates that no difference was documented between teachers' challenges of preparing the content when conducting online instruction to students in reading classes and teachers' challenges of assessing students'

comprehension when delivering online reading lessons ($t=-1.25$; $df=49$; $p=.21$). The result shows that the teachers encountered the same level of challenges when preparing the content and assessing students' comprehension.

Table 5: Independent-Samples t-Test for teacher challenges

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.	Mean Difference	SD	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
MeanE	Equal variances assumed	0.17	.67	.50	48	.61	.12	.24	-.36	.60
	Equal variances not assumed			.46	22.79	.64	.12	.25	-.41	.65

An *Independent-Samples t-Test* was run to determine whether there was a difference between male and female teachers regarding technology use. The result reveals no difference between the two target participants ($t=.50$; $df=48$; $p=.61$). It can be concluded that male and female teachers encountered the same level of challenges in using technology to conduct online instruction in reading classes.

4.1.2 Findings from the interviews

a. Teacher challenges of technology use

Analysis of the interview data reveals that most of the teachers had challenges when using technology to conduct online instruction in reading classes. In particular, five teachers indicated that the challenges were related to their unfamiliarity with online platforms. This was due to a lack of training, the collapse of network connection, a lack of functions from students' electronic devices to approach reading lessons, a lack of Internet-based skills, and a lack of security when learning reading using online platforms. The following extracts illustrate their views.

“For the first time using technology in delivering online instruction for reading class, we are not familiar with it due to lack of training. Wi-Fi connection sometimes collapses while teaching or the weak Internet connection from students often interrupts the reading lessons.” (T1, interview extract)

“I think a lack of functions from students' mobile devices prohibits them from fully engaging in the reading lessons. As a result, they cannot use their camera functions or microphone when participating in the virtual class, but communicate with teachers via the chat box, which is time-consuming.” (T1, interview extract)

"I found some noticeable challenges in online reading classes. First, I did not get used to technology in presenting the lesson. I had to spend a great deal of time learning how to use it by consulting my colleagues. I allocate time for learning to deal with the weak Internet connection that hinders me from lesson delivery." (T3, interview extract)

"I think lack of safety and security are identified. During the first month of conducting online instruction, my students and I were usually bothered with strangers' access to the reading link, which distracts us or stops our communication." (T4, interview extract)

"Wi-Fi connection is sometimes lost, preventing us from hearing from each other. This affects the delivery of the lessons, or even the lessons may be stopped." (T5, interview extract)

"Another problem is that students seem to lack Internet-based skills and sometimes cannot get access to the link provided." (T5, interview extract)

b. Teacher challenges of content preparation

Preparing content for online instruction in reading classes was reported by the teachers as one of the most noticeable challenges. The challenges were identified as time spent focusing on the reading content and preparing an engaging lesson, adapting the content and ensuring the quality of the instruction. The following extract illustrates their views.

"In general, teachers are supposed to spend a great deal of time focusing on the lesson content to ensure it was clear and sufficient, which can prevent students from getting bored." (T1, interview extract)

"Preparing the content for reading classes takes lots of time and efforts. Specifically, supplementary or substitute of pre-reading activities are needed to engage students' attention. The questions for the while-reading stage must have been adapted and converted into multiple choice or true/false questions instead of asking students to give a complete answer for each question designed." (T2, interview extract)

"Well, I think content preparation is time-consuming. It takes me time to select the source, design proper tasks to get students' attention and interaction while they are on the screen rather than with the book at hand. (T3, interview extract)

"I find it challenging to prepare an engaging lesson in a virtual platform because of time constraint for lesson or materials selection and delivery mode to students of mixed-ability levels and interests." (T4, interview extract)

"As the school administrators ask teachers to adapt their lesson content, teachers are supposed to abridge the lesson content within a short time. Online instruction takes us

time to prepare to teach a 45-minute period compared to face-to-face instruction.” (T5, interview extract)

b. Teacher challenges in assessing students' comprehension

When asked about the challenges they were encountering while assessing students' comprehension during and after presenting a reading class four out of five teachers reported that lack of teacher-student interaction and student cheating (dishonesty) in doing tests were major themes that emerged from their responses.

“Lack of face-to-face interaction between teachers and students is one of the primary causes resulting in challenges in assessing students' comprehension in reading classes. Students can rely on other resources to find out the answers or cheat in doing some given tests. (T1, interview extract)

“Cheating among students during the process of doing the test is a major concern although I use some platforms to design and deliver the tests through Quizlet for short questions or Azota and Mschool for more demanding questions.” (T2, interview extract)

“I find it difficult to determine whether students actually do their tests or ask someone to support them in doing the tests; therefore, their comprehension cannot be fully assessed.” (T3, interview extract)

“It is difficult to assess if students understand the questions given from completing the tests although they have high scores.” (T4, interview extract)

c. Teachers' health-related issues, lack of security and attitudes

Health-related issues and lack of security were identified from teacher responses. The following extracts illustrate these barriers in their teaching process.

“I learn that the teachers' health is affected because they have to sit in front of the computer for a long time everyday not only to deliver online instruction but also to prepare and then display the reading content through PowerPoint slides. In fact, several teachers had headache and backache because of lack of movement.” (T2, interview extract)

“Another arising problem in reading classes is related to the security of technology. Some strangers get access to the online classes by playing loud music which hinders us to get work done.” (T4, interview extract)

Two teachers expressed their dissatisfaction with the use of online reading instruction. The following extracts reveal their views.

"I find that online instruction in reading classes is not very effective since students are not willing to get involved in the reading lessons." (T4, interview extract)

"To me, face-to-face instruction in brick-and-mortar classes is more effective than online instruction. This is the fact that students may concentrate much on the lessons and interaction between teachers and students in every single reading class." (T5, interview extract)

4.2 Student challenges in online reading classes

4.2.1 Findings from the questionnaires

A *Descriptive Statistics Test* was conducted to examine the mean score of student challenges when they received online reading instruction. Table 6 shows the result of the test.

Table 6: Students' overall challenges

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Total	100	1.83	3.52	2.86	.39
Valid N (listwise)	100				

Table 6 shows that the overall mean score of challenges faced by students when approaching online instruction in reading classes was at an average level ($M1=2.86$, $SD=.39$). A *One-Sample t-Test* was run to examine whether there was a difference between the mean score and the test value (2.6). The result of *One Sample t-Test*, as shown in Table 7, reveals that there was a difference ($t=6.6$; $df=99$; $p=.00$). Thus, it can be concluded that student challenges in conducting online reading classes were at an average level.

Table 7: One-Sample t-Test for student challenges

	Test Value = 2.6					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Total	6.6	99	.00	.26	.18	.33

Table 8: Students' challenges by clusters

	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Using Technology	100	1.70	5.00	3.02	.659
Approaching the Content	100	1.00	3.60	2.50	.563
Comprehending the Lessons	100	1.33	4.44	3.07	.61
Total	100				
Valid N (listwise)	100				

Table 8 shows that the mean score for student challenges in comprehending the lesson was at an average level ($M=3.07$, $SD=.61$), followed by technology use ($M=3.02$, $SD=.659$), and lesson content ($M=2.50$, $SD=.563$).

Table 9: Paired-Samples-t-Test for student challenges

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig.
		Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 2	Clu1 – Clu3	-.05	.81	.08	-.21	.10	-.66	99	.50

A *Paired-Sample t-Test* was run to compare the mean score of two clusters (technology use and comprehension) in the questionnaire. The result indicates that no difference was found ($t=-.66$; $df=99$; $p=.50$).

Table 10: Independent Samples t-Test for student challenges

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.	Mean Difference	SD	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
MeanE	Equal variances assumed	5.85	.01	-.14	98	.88	-.01	.07	-.16	.14
	Equal variances not assumed			-.14	97	.88	-.01	.07	-.16	.14

An *Independent-Samples t-Test* was run to determine whether there was a difference between male and female students regarding challenges in approaching online reading instruction. The result reveals no difference between the two target participants ($t=-1.49$; $df=94$; $p=.88$). It can be concluded that male and female students encountered the same level of challenges during online reading instruction.

4.1.2 Findings from interviews

a. Student challenges in using technology

Four out of five students admitted that they encountered some issues related to Internet connection or network collapse during the process of online reading classes. The interview data indicate a lack of knowledge and experience in using technology and incompatible devices were identified as technological barriers. The following extracts illustrate their views.

“There are two challenges of approaching online instruction I have faced. First, I have difficulty registering for accounts on some platforms as I cannot create an account to get access to the virtual classrooms, which takes me a lot of time to fix. (S1, interview extract). What is more, constant use of the mobile devices poses a challenge for me as these devices

need discharge. These mobile devices can be disrupted or malfunctioned.” (S1, interview extract)

“The most noticeable problem concerning me in reading classes is that the display of the content is not very clear due to the weak or poor Internet connection. Furthermore, teachers’ instruction is not clearly heard by students, which interrupts my learning. (S3, interview extract)

“Internet connection sometimes is collapsed, affecting the process of teaching and learning. Also, some portable devices for approaching online reading cannot function well to meet the demand of the platforms. In other words, devices are not compatible with some online platforms such as Zoom or Google Meet. Students found it unfamiliar with technology use to learn online reading.” (S4, interview extract)

“Well, some technical problems occur such as network collapse and this influences the quality of online reading classes. Occasionally, teachers cannot create a room for delivering instruction. (S5, interview extract)

b. Student challenges in approaching the content

The challenges reported by students included unfamiliarity with online instruction, distraction by other applications on mobile devices, lack of interaction and real-life sharing opportunities. The underlying reasons supporting their challenges are clarified below.

“I think the content of reading online instruction is as diverse as that of face-to-face instruction. However, the way to approach the content is converted, so I find it challenging to get used to it for the first time. What is more, during online reading classes, students may get distracted due to other applications available in their mobile devices, which can be prevented in reading instruction in brick-and-mortar classes where students can just focus on the reading texts on papers.” (S1, interview extract)

“The way of approaching the content of these lessons is far more different in a virtual platform as there is a lack of interaction between teachers and students for dealing with the content of the reading texts, which is considered the soul of a reading lesson. In some reading lessons, teachers have more than just the content of the reading texts to share, and this grabs students’ attention as well as expands their scope of understanding towards what is really discussed through the reading texts. The quality of the lesson content is reduced as teachers lack opportunities to directly share their experiences or integrate other essential information into the reading lesson, which makes the reading lessons conducted online less diverse when compared to those delivered in face-to-face traditional classroom.” (S4, interview extract)

"I assume that instruction for the content of reading texts, if conducted online, poses more challenges for students to get access to. In traditional reading classes, students can interact with teachers to find out the answers for every single reading question, which is hard in online instruction where teacher-student interaction is restricted due to the fact that a lot of noises will be made if any 7 students show their inquiries or opinions towards the target reading question." (S5, interview extract)

c. Student challenge in comprehending instruction

Two student participants reported a loss of concentration due to watching the screen of mobile devices for approaching online reading classes. These participants provided the reasons for the challenges. The following extracts illustrate their views.

"I have been learning English for ten years now and I am used to completing the reading tasks on handouts distributed by teachers or those on textbooks. When staring at the computer screen for a long time to receive instruction, I feel dizzy and have a headache. This hinders my concentration, so I cannot completely understand the reading lessons conducted in a virtual platform." (S1, interview extract)

"Too much use of mobile devices for approaching online instruction in reading classes prevents me from paying attention to the lessons conducted and comprehending them." (S4, interview extract)

d. Students' attitudes towards challenges of online reading

One student expressed their dissatisfaction with online instruction:

"I am not really satisfied with the use of online instruction in reading classes because I prefer authentic interaction between teachers and students in face-to-face classes, which makes me more engaged, and the lessons become livelier and more authentic." (S5, interview extract)

5. Discussion

5.1 Teacher challenges in online reading instruction

The findings indicate that the participating teachers encountered challenges during online reading instruction. They included technology use, content preparation, and assessment of student reading comprehension. With regard to technology, it was found that teachers had to deal with a weak Internet connection, lack of training or prior knowledge about the technology use of online delivery and unfamiliarity with technology in online reading instruction. These findings are in line with a study by De Gagne and Walters (2009) who found that teachers were concerned about the difficulty in getting access to and familiarity with the technology available to them in the virtual learning environment.

The data suggest that content preparation before delivering online reading practices was perceived as time-consuming. This finding is congruent with other studies in the literature. For example, Kebritchi, Lipschuetz and Santiago (2017) stated that content design or development for online classes was one of the most dominant instructors' issues. They further added that online instruction necessitates the role changes of instructors from the traditional face-to-face mode to a new teaching one. The data also support the literature which highlighted the need for engaging students with more active participation and a productive learning environment through different activities.

An additional challenge reported by teachers was assessing students' comprehension in online reading practices. These teachers thought that there was a lack of teacher-student interaction. This influenced how teachers assessed or evaluated student learning outcomes through tests. An example of this is that these teachers mentioned cheating as a burning issue to the accuracy of their students' performance in reading practices. This finding supports the concerns in the literature (Khan, 2021; Sepulveda and Morrison, 2020) who indicated that lack of direct interaction with students and the change of setting were barriers to online assessment.

5.2 Student challenges of online reading

It was found that students had challenges while learning online reading. Analysis of the interview data shows that students were challenged by the use of technology, access to lesson content and comprehension. With regard to technology use, student challenges were found at an average level. These technological issues were identified as weak Internet connection, lack of training or technological competence and unfamiliarity with technology. These findings reinforce the concerns reported in a study by Luu (2021) who found that lack of Internet connection and lack of technological resources were challenges faced by students during online classes.

Lack of teacher-student interaction was reported as a major issue by students. With regard to students' ability to use the camera function, it was challenging for teachers to check whether students were involved in the lessons or comprehended what was presented to them. This finding is in line with that of Sepulveda and Morrison (2020) who indicated that factors such as the lack of direct interaction with learners and the sudden change of setting are the most influential factors in students' learning process.

6. Conclusions

The findings from this study show that online reading instruction was observed to be challenging for both high school teachers and students in the investigated research sites. Instructor challenges were identified as using technology, preparing the lesson content, and assessing students' comprehension. Of the challenges, assessing students' comprehension during and after the reading classes was deemed to be the most arduous task as a result of the lack of teacher-student interaction. Thus, school administrators need

to provide teachers with timely support related to technological competence, resources, and testing and assessment strategies so as to online reading instruction can be better structured.

Despite achieving its aims, this study has some limitations. First, the sample size is still small compared to the number of high school teachers and students in the Mekong Delta; thus, the findings of this current study could not be generalizable. Second, time constraints due to the COVID-19 pandemic have influenced the opportunities to obtain a more holistic picture of other issues on online instruction as well as instructional decisions made in this transition period from the face-to-face approach for experiencing actual happenings in reading classes or preparing for future online practices.

It is recommended that future research needs to involve a larger sample size at different times of the online teaching and learning process. Studies with longer semester time periods should be done to confirm if teachers and students are prepared for future online practices to meet the needs of students.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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