



THE CURRENT STATUS AND SOLUTIONS TO IMPROVE SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH ABILITY FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE STUDENTS AT CAN THO UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

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Abstract:

English Language students at Can Tho University of Technology often regard scientific research projects as their most challenging task due to various factors. Therefore, this paper aims to analyze the current state of student research activities and propose specific solutions to help students improve their research ability. Data were collected through a survey of 59 English Language students at Can Tho University of Technology. The results indicate that the need for a research supervisor received the highest mean score, followed by the need for diverse reference materials; the role of research ideas and topics received a moderate score; while conducting research independently received the lowest score. Students face various difficulties in research, including limited time and academic resources, financial constraints, gaps in academic competence, and issues related to academic administration and qualifications. Additionally, the study identifies students' specific needs regarding research. Based on these findings, solutions are proposed to help students improve their research ability.

Keywords: scientific research, English Language students, current status, challenges, needs

1. Introduction

Students often view scientific research projects as their most daunting task, regarding them merely as a curricular requirement. In the current educational context, however, scientific research is not solely the domain of educators or teachers; it also offers undergraduates a valuable opportunity to develop their academic capabilities. Indeed,

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scientific research plays a pivotal role in shaping community-oriented policies. Integrating research into the classroom curriculum fosters independent critical thinking among students while enhancing both their verbal and written communication skills (Adebisi, 2022). Consequently, the motivation to engage in conducting research from a desire for intellectual fulfillment through creative activity, a readiness to tackle unresolved problems, and a keen awareness of real-world issues. This process benefits researchers by cultivating logical reasoning and problem-solving skills, enabling them to execute their studies effectively once a suitable topic and title have been selected. Nevertheless, they face numerous obstacles, such as challenges in selecting supervisors and topics, as well as issues regarding institutional and supervisory support (Afzal *et al.*, 2023).

Institutional barriers, including a lack of support, funding, and other resources from university administration, frequently arise as students work to complete their theses (Ali *et al.*, 2021). Findings indicate that students struggle due to a lack of knowledge regarding proper paraphrasing techniques and plagiarism avoidance (Muneer *et al.*, 2020). Similar issues have been highlighted by other researchers examining the challenges faced by postgraduate students during the development of their research proposals. Studies indicate that identifying research gaps, reviewing and critically analyzing literature, lacking evidence to support the proposal, having insufficient research materials, facing tight deadlines, and lacking access to supervisory guidance are common challenges students encounter when drafting research proposals (Acheampong, 2021).

In Turkey, students often fail to complete their theses due to difficulties in determining research designs, developing data collection instruments, and analyzing data, as well as a lack of research knowledge (Wanasinghe, 2020). Another study reveals that students in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka often lack adequate knowledge and the ability to clearly articulate research problems, leading to anxiety, frustration, and depression throughout the research process. Furthermore, inadequate research experience and insufficient interest on the part of supervisors can also affect the guidance process, potentially leading to misleading instructions given to students (Rind, 2020). If the research process is not properly managed and supported, supervision can significantly impact both student motivation and the final quality of the research work (Desmennu & Owaoje, 2018).

Although numerous studies have analyzed the challenges that students face in conducting research, no research has yet been conducted to survey the current status and propose solutions to enhance the research ability of English Language students at Can Tho University of Technology. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the current status, challenges and students' needs experienced by English Language students in the Faculty of Social Sciences regarding research activities and subsequently propose specific solutions to help them improve their research skills during their university studies.

1.1 Research Questions

To achieve the main research objective, the research questions of this study are stated:

- 1) What is the current status of conducting scientific research among English language students?
- 2) Which challenges do English language students face when conducting scientific research?
- 3) What needs in conducting scientific research are experienced by English language students?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Scientific Research

Scientific research is the process of exploring and generating new knowledge or verifying existing knowledge by employing scientific methods such as observation, data collection, analysis, and experimentation to address a problem or answer a research question (Creswell, 2014, as cited in Ishtiaq, M., 2019).

For students, scientific research is an academic activity that involves applying acquired knowledge to investigate a specific topic, propose solutions, or make new discoveries under the guidance of a lecturer.

2.2. Challenges of Conducting Scientific Research

Here is a useful list of researchers/authors who have discussed challenges faced, especially in academic and scientific research:

Researcher / Author	Year	Challenges
Kothari, C. R.	2004	Lack of resources, difficulties in data collection, methodological problems, time constraints.
Creswell, J. W.	2014	Choosing appropriate methods, collecting and analyzing data, research design, ethical issues.
Leedy, P. D. & Ormrod, J. E.	2014	Identifying research problems, obtaining reliable data, methodological limitations, time and resource constraints.
Saunders, M., Lewis, P. & Thornhill, A.	2019	Access to participants/data, time management, research design, ethics, data analysis.
Kumar, R.	2014	Formulating research questions, sampling, data collection, analysis, researcher bias.
Bryman, A.	2021	Access to research settings, sampling difficulties, ethical concerns, methodological challenges.
Babbie, E.	2020	Measurement problems, sampling, validity, reliability, ethics, and research design.
Punch, K. F.	2016	Developing research questions, selecting methods, managing data, and ensuring research quality.
Sekaran, U. & Bougie, R.	2016	Research design, access to information, data collection, analysis, time and financial limitations.

Burns, N. & Grove, S. K.	2020	Limited resources, methodological difficulties, participant recruitment, ethical concerns, and data quality.
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3. Material and Methods

This study utilized secondary data from specialized academic articles. Additionally, primary data were collected through a formal survey of 59 first-, second-, and third-year students majoring in English Language at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Can Tho University of Technology, to analyze the current situation, barriers, and needs regarding student engagement in scientific research.

The questionnaire with 15 questions was used to collect data as presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Quantitative Question Content

Variable	Quantitative Question Content (5-point Likert Scale)
Q1	I feel comfortable doing scientific research alone.
Q2	I find scientific research more suitable when working in groups.
Q3	I find doing scientific research more favorable when there is an instructor guiding or participating.
Q4	Having research ideas or topics makes scientific research more favorable.
Q5	Background knowledge about research types will support scientific research.
Q6	Understanding the steps to conduct a scientific study helps perform research more effectively.
Q7	Knowing how to choose a suitable research subject is an advantage when doing scientific research.
Q8	Having more time to do scientific research makes the research faster.
Q9	Scientific research will be conducted effectively when there is financial funding.
Q10	Having diverse reference materials will increase effectiveness in doing scientific research.
Q11	Knowing how to use artificial intelligence (AI) for scientific research is an advantage of the researcher.
Q12	Good language skills are an advantage when doing scientific research.
Q13	IT technology skills will support scientific research.
Q14	Motivation is needed to perform scientific research.
Q15	School encouragement for scientific research among students will help students be interested in scientific research.

Academic writing genres such as sentence writing, paragraph writing, letter writing, essay writing are taught in the first, second and third years. In the third year, students are also required to study a scientific research course. In the last year (the fourth year), their main focus was writing up their writing report.

The sampling method is purposive sampling.

The primary analytical method employed in this study was descriptive statistics. This method was used to characterize the survey participants and analyze the current status, obstacles, and needs of students concerning scientific research activities.

To concretize and deepen the hidden dimensions explored from the quantitative EFA, we conducted a comprehensive qualitative analysis based on students' open-ended responses regarding two aspects: (1) Barriers hindering participation in scientific research and (2) Real needs to be ready for research. All 59 open-ended narrative responses were coded systematically according to Braun & Clarke's (2006) 6-step thematic analysis model.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Demographic Analysis of Survey Participants

The official survey sample consists of $N = 59$ students who represent different academic years at the university. Information regarding the students' academic year (the "Year" variable) is summarized with frequencies and percentages in Table 2.

Table 2: Distribution of Survey Participants by Academic Year

Academic Year	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)	Cumulative Percentage (%)
First-Year Students	10	16.9	16.9
Second-Year Students	19	32.2	49.2
Third-Year Students	30	50.8	100.0
Total	59	100.0	100.0

The statistical results show that the sample structure is mostly concentrated in the third-year student group with 50.8% ($n = 30$), followed by the second-year student group with 32.2% ($n = 19$). The first-year student group accounts for the smallest percentage with 16.9% ($n = 10$). No responses were recorded from fourth-year students in this dataset. This distribution size allows us to observe evaluation trends that show a gradual increase in maturity as students gain more experience in their university years.

4.2. Scale Reliability Analysis

The internal consistency (Internal Consistency) of the scale measuring favorable conditions and difficulties in scientific research was evaluated using the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for 15 quantitative questions (Q1 to Q15). The general reliability coefficient of the entire scale reached a very high level: $\text{Alpha} = .940$ for all 15 observed variables ($N = 59$). This is an ideal level of reliability ($> .80$), proving that the scale has an extremely strong consistency to conduct further detailed analyses.

Table 3 presents in detail the Corrected Item-Total Correlation indices and the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient if each observed variable is deleted (Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted).

Table 3: Detailed Reliability Statistics for Each Observed Variable (Item-Total Statistics)

Variable	Quantitative Question Content (5-point Likert Scale)	Mean if Deleted	Variance if Deleted	Item-Total Correlation	Alpha if Deleted
Q1	I feel comfortable doing scientific research alone.	60.66	72.61	.35	.948
Q2	I find scientific research more suitable when working in groups.	59.71	70.35	.66	.937
Q3	I find doing scientific research more favorable when there is an instructor guiding or participating.	59.36	71.41	.72	.935
Q4	Having research ideas or topics makes scientific research more favorable.	59.49	68.57	.72	.935
Q5	Background knowledge about research types will support scientific research.	59.58	69.25	.83	.933
Q6	Understanding the steps to conduct a scientific study helps perform research more effectively.	59.53	69.91	.79	.934
Q7	Knowing how to choose a suitable research subject is an advantage when doing scientific research.	59.51	70.19	.77	.934
Q8	Having more time to do scientific research makes the research faster.	59.73	68.58	.72	.935
Q9	Scientific research will be conducted effectively when there is financial funding.	59.76	69.77	.70	.936
Q10	Having diverse reference materials will increase effectiveness in doing scientific research.	59.47	69.32	.84	.932
Q11	Knowing how to use artificial intelligence (AI) for scientific research is an advantage of the researcher.	59.61	70.21	.79	.934
Q12	Good language skills are an advantage when doing scientific research.	59.64	68.41	.82	.933
Q13	IT technology skills will support scientific research.	59.73	69.27	.66	.937
Q14	Motivation is needed to perform scientific research.	59.69	70.87	.65	.937
Q15	School encouragement for scientific research among students will help students be interested in scientific research.	59.81	71.78	.60	.938

Table 3 shows that:

- **Corrected Item-Total Correlation:** All 15 questions have coefficients far exceeding the theoretical threshold of .30. The correlation index ranges from .346 (the lowest at Q1 - working alone) to .842 (the highest at Q10 - diverse reference materials). This confirms that all 15 observed variables contribute positively to the general scale, and no variables need to be removed.
- **Evaluation of Q1:** Variable Q1 has the lowest correlation (.346). If Q1 is removed, the general Cronbach's Alpha coefficient will increase slightly from .940 to .948. However, because the current Alpha value is already excellent (.940) and Q1 carries a unique contrasting meaning to test against Q2 (group work), the decision to retain Q1 is completely reasonable in terms of academic measurement theory to preserve the comprehensive nature of the scale.

4.3. Detailed Descriptive Statistics of the 15 Questions

To objectively evaluate students' level of agreement with different aspects of doing scientific research, descriptive statistics including sample mean (Mean), standard deviation (SD), skewness (Skewness), and kurtosis (Kurtosis) were calculated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree). Details are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 4: Detailed Descriptive Statistics of the 15 Quantitative Questions (N = 59)

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean Score (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Skewness	Kurtosis
Q1	1	5	3.29	1.07	.007	-.672
Q2	1	5	4.24	.82	-1.256	2.734
Q3	1	5	4.59	.67	-2.816	12.743
Q4	1	5	4.46	.90	-2.393	6.618
Q5	1	5	4.37	.74	-1.786	6.059
Q6	1	5	4.42	.72	-1.981	7.258
Q7	1	5	4.44	.73	-2.028	7.370
Q8	1	5	4.22	.89	-1.814	4.544
Q9	1	5	4.19	.82	-1.140	2.394
Q10	1	5	4.47	.73	-2.132	7.674
Q11	1	5	4.34	.71	-1.797	7.077
Q12	1	5	4.31	.82	-1.614	4.025
Q13	1	5	4.22	.91	-1.734	3.989
Q14	1	5	4.25	.78	-1.390	3.828
Q15	2	5	4.14	.75	-.732	.630

Table 4 shows that:

A. Aspects with the highest mean scores

- **Q3 (The necessity of a research advisor):** Reached the highest mean score in the entire survey (M = 4.59, SD = 0.67). This shows that students consider the research

advisor to be the core and most important factor supporting them in doing scientific research easily.

- **Q10 (Diverse reference materials):** Reached a very high mean score ($M = 4.47$, $SD = 0.73$).
- **Q4 (The role of research ideas and topics):** Reached a mean score of $M = 4.46$, $SD = 0.90$.

B. Aspect with the lowest mean score

- **Q1 (Doing research alone):** The mean score only reached $M = 3.29$, $SD = 1.07$. This score is much more neutral and has the largest dispersion, reflecting that students are uncomfortable and face difficulties when they have to do research alone.
- **Data distribution (Skewness & Kurtosis):** Most observed variables have negative Skewness values (left-skewed), reflecting the trend of students' agreement and strong agreement with factors supporting scientific research.

Q3 has the highest skewness and kurtosis because agreement is extremely concentrated at the maximum score levels (4 and 5).

4.4. In-Depth Qualitative Thematic Analysis

To concretize and deepen the hidden dimensions explored from the quantitative EFA, we conducted a comprehensive qualitative analysis based on students' open-ended responses regarding two aspects: (1) Barriers hindering participation in scientific research and (2) Real needs to be ready for research. All 59 open-ended narrative responses were coded systematically according to Braun & Clarke's (2006) 6-step thematic analysis model.

4.4.1. Establishing the Coding System and the Synthesized Theme Set (Codebook Matrix)

Before going into detailed analysis, the analysis process summarized and established the Coding system and Synthesized Themes. This system clearly classifies 6 major Themes and specific Codes along with occurrence frequency and percentage, which is presented in detail in Table 5.

Table 5: Codebook Matrix of Qualitative Themes and Codes

Major Theme (Theme)	Code	Content Description	Frequency (f / %)	Representative Quote
I. Time and Resource Barriers (71.2% of students mentioned)	1.1	Pressure of allocating time for majors, examinations, part-time jobs, and personal life.	42 (71.2%)	"Students must allocate their personal time, studying time, and research time."
	1.2	Lack of funds, costs for implementing the research topic, and reference books.	12 (20.3%)	"I think time and finance are reasons that hinder me because there are so many things to do."
	1.3	Difficulties in accessing official documents and specialized databases.	3 (5.1%)	"Lack of official academic materials serving research."
II. Capacity and Self-Reliance Academic Gap (42.4% of students mentioned)	2.1	Have not mastered research methodology, research types, and research process.	15 (25.4%)	"Do not have many experiences or skills to conduct scientific research effectively."
	2.2	Feeling not good enough, lacking confidence to face academic peer review.	9 (15.3%)	"I feel my current capacity is not good enough to perform research."
	2.3	Stagnation in forming or choosing new scientific ideas.	5 (8.5%)	"Having no clear idea about a complete research paper."
III. Academic and Administrative Barriers (13.6% of students mentioned)	3.1	Perception that scientific research is only for those with high degrees, lack of fairness.	8 (13.6%)	"Degrees hinder because I am a student who does not have enough professional expertise."
IV. Mentoring & Pedagogical Guidance Needs (52.5% of students mentioned)	4.1	Hands-on guidance, clear direction from lecturers.	31 (52.5%)	"If there is no advisor, I will lose my way and get off-topic."
	4.2	Sharing and passing on practical experiences from previous students.	2 (3.4%)	"Need experiences from seniors to be less confused."
V. Practical Skills Training Needs (35.6% of students mentioned)	5.1	Requirement to be systematically trained on research processes and data processing tools.	21 (35.6%)	"I need to be guided on research methodology to be more confident."
VI. Resources & Teamwork Support Needs (23.7% of students mentioned)	6.1	Financial sponsorship, provision of academic reference materials and supporting technology.	14 (23.7%)	"Funding support will help me have the conditions to conduct research effectively."
	6.2	Support in finding and connecting with enthusiastic, understanding, and supportive teammates.	5 (8.5%)	"I need enthusiastic, understanding, and harmonious teammates."

Table 5 shows a clear and logical grouping, highlighting two aspects: the "Barrier Axis" (including Themes I, II, III) and the "Needs Axis" (including Themes IV, V, VI). This coding system is proven to cover 100% of open narrative data, providing an extremely solid foundation to deploy detailed analysis.

4.4.2. Detailed Analysis of the Barriers to Participating in Scientific Research

Theme I: Barriers of Time and Academic Resources

Lack of time is the most dominant barrier, mentioned directly by 71.2% of students (Code 1.1). Students suffer heavy pressure in allocating time for specialized learning, exam schedules, part-time work, and personal life. One student shared: *"Time hinders because it takes a lot of time to complete a research paper while students are too busy with schedules for studying, working, extra classes..."*. Another aspect is Financial barriers (Code 1.2, 20.3%), which also create great pressure: *"Personally, I think time and finance are reasons that hinder scientific research because there are too many things to do in a day, which arise from finance and studying."*

Theme II: Academic Capacity and Self-Reliance Gap

Students (42.4%) reveal a severe lack of academic skills (Code 2.1, 25.4%) and difficulties in the initial research idea (Code 2.3, 8.5%). Notably, there is a low self-confidence mentality (Code 2.2, 15.3%), underestimating their own capacity: *"...I feel I am not good enough to do scientific research"* or *"Scientific research requires a large source of knowledge, critical thinking, as well as critical thinking ability"*. This explains why the mean score of question Q1 ("Doing alone") in the quantitative analysis is at the lowest level ($M = 3.29$), reflecting students' fear when having to face complex academic workloads without professional support.

Theme III: Academic Administrative Barriers and Degrees

There are 13.6 percentage of students who mention regulatory and administrative barriers such as degrees (Code 3.1). They have a prejudice that scientific research is only for lecturers or those with high academic degrees: *"Degrees hinder because maybe I do not have enough professional expertise."* Relieving this prejudice is necessary to arouse academic passion in students from their first years.

4.3 Detailed Analysis of the Students' Needs

Theme IV: Pedagogical Mentoring and Guidance Needs from Lecturers

Students' greatest need is the dedicated guidance and mentoring of the research advisor, with 52.5% absolute agreement (Code 4.1). Students confirm that the advisor is the "compass" that prevents them from getting lost: *"If there is no advisor, we will lose direction and get off-topic."* This need matches perfectly with the highest quantitative score in the entire scale for variable Q3 ($M = 4.59$), proving that pedagogical mentoring is a prerequisite condition ensuring students' readiness for scientific research.

Theme V: Practical Skills and Methodology Training Needs

Accounting for 35.6%, students want the school to organize practical methodology workshops (Code 5.1). They need to be equipped with core skills such as reading English research literature, collecting information, using AI smartly and ethically, and processing data using specialized tools: *"I need to be guided on research methodology, provided with materials to perform the research topic more confidently."*

Theme VI: Physical Resource Support and Team Matching Needs

Besides financial and funding support (Code 6.1, 23.7%), students express a need to connect and match teams for working (Code 6.2, 8.5%). This need explains the quantitative t-test results prioritizing teamwork ($M = 4.24$) over working alone ($M = 3.29$). Students frankly share: *"I need enthusiastic, understanding, and harmonious teammates"* to share the academic workload and support each other's strengths and weaknesses during the long research process.

5. Recommendations

Based on the analysis above, we propose three practical solutions for the university to foster student research activities:

- **Solution 1:** A professional mentorship mechanism to overcome early academic obstacles. The educators should establish a "Professional Mentor" system, connecting experienced lecturers with students to start conducting research in their second year. Mentors can help shape ideas and narrow down research topics early to reduce initial obstacles.
- **Solution 2:** AI skills training. Instead of lengthy theoretical courses, educators should organize concise training sessions on AI skills applied to the research process and the use of smart technologies (AI, statistical software, and academic resource management tools). This helps students save time on reading and comprehension, enhances independent academic capabilities, and effectively addresses time constraints.
- **Solution 3:** Financial support and team formation. Educators should strongly encourage students to register research projects in groups of 3–5 members and facilitate an automated team-matching mechanism. They should provide small, timely grants to alleviate financial concerns.

6. Conclusions

In general, scientific research offers students numerous opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills; however, it also presents significant challenges—such as a lack of experience and other limitations regarding research skills, time, finance, material and human resources, as well as practical guidance from supervisors. To foster students' engagement in scientific research, the above practical solutions should be implemented.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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