Using Accreditation Standards for Internal Quality Assurance for Tertiary General English Program in Vietnam

Quach Thi To Nu[1,2*], Nguyen Loc[1]

[1]HCM City University of Social Sciences and Humanities - Vietnam National University, Vietnam
[2]Industrial University of Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
*Corresponding author's email: tonuquachthi@gmail.com
* https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9297-2733
https://doi.org/10.54855/ijte.24431

ABSTRACT

Keywords: accreditation, quality assurance approach, General English training, higher education institutions	The mixed-method study used a quantitative questionnaire to collect feedback from teachers and program directors regarding the current practices of quality assurance approaches in General English (GE) training programs at their higher education institutions (HEIs). Additionally, the study sought their evaluation of applying accreditation schemes to ensure the quality of GE training programs using a semi-structured interview. The results indicated that the quality assurance measures implemented in the GE training program were generally perceived as effective and aligned with industry standards and best practices. However, there needs to be a comprehensive QA approach that covers areas of improvement related to the learners' needs and expectations and the implementation of QA approaches for curriculum effectiveness. Informants were found to have positive evaluations of the application of the existing accreditation schemes for GE training programs at HEIs in Vietnam. Research on the effectiveness of a specific accreditation scheme implemented at particular HEIs in Vietnam will be conducted in the future.

Introduction

In the landscape of English Language Teaching, General English (GE) training at higher education institutions (HEIs) holds significant importance in Vietnam, as it is a fundamental prerequisite for students to engage in international exchanges and thrive in the global job market. However, concerns have been raised regarding the quality of GE training provided by higher education institutions (HEIs) in Vietnam. Despite efforts made by the Vietnamese government to enhance education quality, there remains a lack of standardization and accountability in assessing GE programs (Hoang, 2018; Nguyen T.T., 2017). This deficiency in

quality assurance has resulted in inconsistent outcomes in terms of student performance and employability (Katsomitros, 2015; Nguyen T.H., 2017). Tran (2019) highlights that while GE training is a mandatory component of many higher education programs in Vietnam, its quality and effectiveness can vary significantly. Many institutions still rely on traditional teaching methods that prioritize grammar and vocabulary over communicative competence and real-world language use, leading to students with theoretical knowledge but poor practical skills. A mismatch between learning outcomes and assessment can be another cause for undesired training quality. For instance, Dang and Pham (2024) explored the alignment of student learning outcomes with assessment methods in higher education. Their study found that ambiguous verb usage in learning outcomes could lead to misunderstandings, affecting both teaching and assessment quality. They highlighted the importance of using precise verbs and maintaining balanced requirements in learning outcomes to improve the coherence and effectiveness of the curriculum in linguistic programs. Teachers' competence in assessment also plays a vital role in the quality of English training programs. As part of enhancing English training quality, Dao (2021) recommends incorporating self-reflection tools, like the Tree of Life, into teacher education. This approach aims to help educators better understand and develop their assessment identity, addressing the shortcomings of traditional teacher education programs in fostering teacher identity.

A primary challenge facing GE training in Vietnam is the shortage of qualified and experienced lecturers. Many institutions depend on part-time or inexperienced lecturers who may lack the necessary skills or training to teach English (Nguyen, T.T., 2017) effectively. Additionally, there needs to be more resources, including textbooks, teaching materials, and language labs, poses another obstacle (Tran, 2018; Tran, 2019; Tran, 2020).

To address these challenges, some institutions have begun adopting more contemporary teaching methods, such as task- and project-based learning. Others have invested in teacher training programs and resources to improve the quality of instruction. There is also a growing trend towards international partnerships and collaborations to bring in foreign lecturers and resources (Nguyen, 2017; Nguyen, 2021). Some institutions are even seeking accreditation as a quality assurance (QA) approach for GE training at their higher educational institutions (NEAS, 2022).

Educational institutions have emphasized quality assurance issues in all contexts. Accreditation is a widely recognized QA approach employed by HEIs worldwide. It involves external evaluations of educational institutions or programs against established standards, ensuring that the quality of education meets minimum requirements (Deem & Lucas, 2008). Accreditation is extensively utilized in various countries, including the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia, and it has proven to be an effective approach to ensuring quality education (Staub, 2019).

However, the reality showed that the QA for GE training is a novice to the Vietnamese context, resulting in the need for research on the effectiveness of accreditation as a QA approach in GE training at HEIs in Vietnam. This study aims to fulfill this urgent need by investigating the current practices of accreditation in GE training at HEIs in Vietnam and evaluating its effectiveness in assuring the quality of GE training.

Literature review

Overview of quality assurance in education

Quality Assurance in education encompasses a range of processes and practices designed to ensure that education and training programs meet established standards and expectations. Its ultimate aim is to provide students with a high-quality education that equips them for their future careers and enables them to achieve their personal goals. QA can take various forms, such as accreditation, certification, licensing, and regulation (Warren, 1993; SEAMEO, 2003; INQAAHE, 2015).

Accreditation stands out as one of the most widely adopted QA approaches in HEIs worldwide. It involves an external evaluation of an educational institution or program against predefined standards, serving to ensure that the quality of education meets minimum requirements. Accreditation entails a rigorous process that incorporates self-assessment, peer review, and external evaluation to foster continuous improvement in educational quality (Council for Higher Education Accreditation, 2022; U.S. Department of Education, 2022).

Regarding quality assurance in language education, both government and academia have raised their concerns and solutions via their research and projects. Heyworth (2013) investigated into the application of quality management (QM) in language education. He outlined key aspects of QM, such as defining its purpose, describing principles and practices, presenting various descriptive frameworks, and discussing the roles of reflective practice and action research. He summarized quality descriptions for different areas of language teaching, including examinations and assessment, education for migrants and young learners, and mainstream education. Additionally, Heyworth provided an account of the accreditation and recognition of language teaching institutions and critically reviewed some contradictions and conflicts within the QM approach, such as the tensions between accountability and trust and between creativity and standardization. He also examined the strengths and weaknesses of auditing and quality inspection methods. In Vietnam, the government had an action plan for language education. In particular, the Vietnamese Prime Minister issued Decision No 1400/QD-TTg to enhance English education in Vietnam, aligning it with global trends. The 10-year National Plan (2008-2020) aims to improve English teaching and learning in the national educational system. The Plan adopts the Common European Framework of Reference for Language's 6-level testing system to assess English proficiency and encourages the development of bilingual programs in Vietnamese educational institutions. Hoang (2008) investigated the poor quality of English education at VNU, Hanoi, addressing whether the quality is indeed poor and identifying the causes. The research presented findings from the 2006-2007 Pivotal Project Team and conducted a detailed analysis of the current state of English education, highlighting contributing factors to its poor quality, namely lack of systematic learning goals, non-systematic course books, big class size, inappropriate equipment, lack of English practice environment, incompetent teachers. The paper concluded with corresponding recommendations for improvement to meet regional and global educational needs. Ranson (2005) raised the ESL students' perceptions and expectations in terms of their needs and support. The paper presents preliminary findings from a survey of international ESL students at the University of Melbourne. It explores their perceptions and expectations regarding English language learning

needs and support. The study highlights a significant gap between these students' expectations and the current university support services despite well-documented cultural, social, and academic challenges faced by international ESL students in Australia. Issues in this research are called student support in the literature of recent quality assurance. Stroupe (2013) had a more systematic approach to administering an English program.

In Vietnam, QA in education has been a focal point of recent educational reforms. The Vietnamese government has implemented various policies and programs to enhance the quality of education, including the establishment of a national accreditation system (Vo & Phan, 2019; Dinh & Bui, 2020). Nonetheless, significant challenges remain in ensuring education quality in Vietnam, particularly concerning the assessment of GE training programs.

Types of accreditations and their impacts

Accreditation is a process of QA that involves evaluating an educational institution or program against established standards. There are different types of accreditations, and each has a specific purpose. Institutional accreditation evaluates the institution as a whole, while specialized accreditation evaluates specific programs within the institution (Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs, 2021). National accreditation is recognized by the government of the country in which the institution is located, while regional accreditation is recognized by a specific region within a country.

The overarching goal of accreditation is to ensure that educational institutions and programs uphold rigorous standards of quality, thereby furnishing students with an exemplary educational experience primed for their future careers. Accreditation also facilitates employers in gauging the caliber of job applicants and is frequently a prerequisite for graduates seeking entry into certain professions or pursuing professional licensure (Council for Higher Education Accreditation, 2022).

Research delving into the impact of accreditation on educational training programs abounds. Several studies have scrutinized the influence of program accreditation across various educational dimensions. Darolia and Koedel (2018) conducted a study in Missouri, uncovering that program accreditation positively correlates with graduates' employment prospects and earnings. Morrison and Schneider (2019) concentrated on undergraduate business programs and discerned that accreditation positively impacts student learning outcomes. Hill and Bartholomew (2019) explored the effect of accreditation on nursing program quality, utilizing data from the National Council of State Boards of Nursing, concluding that accreditation effectively enhances nursing program quality. Renn and Reason (2019) delved into the impact of accreditation on program quality in higher education, revealing an overall beneficial influence, albeit with variations contingent on the program and accrediting agency. In the realm of online master's degree programs, O'Connor and Lau (2020) found that program accreditation correlates with increased enrollment and improved student outcomes.

Accreditation in higher education institutions in Vietnam

In Vietnam, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) undergo accreditation conducted by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET, 2022; Ta *et al*., 2019) or other authorized agencies. While accreditation remains voluntary, its significance is progressively rising for institutions

aiming to attract students, secure funding, and sustain or enhance the quality of their programs. Two primary types of accreditation prevail in Vietnam: institutional accreditation and program accreditation. Institutional accreditation appraises the overall quality of an institution, encompassing governance, management, facilities, and resources, while program accreditation scrutinizes specific programs within an institution, such as those in business, engineering, or education (Do *et al.*, 2020).

Accreditation in Vietnam is a relatively nascent concept, continuously evolving. While the MOET has established accreditation standards, a pressing need exists for enhanced transparency and consistency in the accreditation procedure (Vietnam Briefing, 2020; Asia-Pacific Quality Network, 2019).

Vietnamese Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) offer English language education in two main forms (Hoang, 2010). At the tertiary level, English is introduced nationally both as a discipline and as a subject. In the first category, students study English to earn a BA, MA, or doctoral degree in English. Trained in this category, they can become teachers, translators, interpreters, or researchers in either English linguistics or English language teaching methodology. This kind of program undergoes program accreditation following standards set by the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET). Additionally, some programs may seek accreditation from international bodies like FIBAA and AUN-QA Assessment. In the second category, English is a compulsory subject applied across the whole higher educational system in Vietnam for students enrolled in disciplines other than English Language. In this category, students study about 10% of the total credit hours of an undergraduate program, 12% of the total credit hours of a graduate program, and three self-studied credit hours at a doctoral program. While not part of a full degree program, this subject can be endorsed by the NEAS scheme.

Accreditation of English Language Education

The pursuit of higher education quality has spurred an escalating demand for accreditation bodies, particularly specialized ones, originating from Western contexts (Eaton, 2015; Knight, 2015; Morse, 2015). Nations prioritizing the internationalization and globalization of education have begun recognizing the imperative of evaluating the quality of foreign language teaching programs.

To attract international students, universities in the United States and Europe are intensifying their focus on quality assurance. English has evolved into a mandatory subject for foreign students, facilitating their engagement in lectures and interactions. External quality evaluation processes are being instituted to ensure this standard. In the United States, legislation enacted in 2010 mandates that all Intensive English Programs (IEPs) obtain accreditation from a recognized agency. Accredited IEPs exclusively issue documents for international students applying for an F-1 visa. Leading accrediting bodies for IEP programs include the Commission on English Language Program Accreditation (CEA) and the Accrediting Council for Continuing Education and Training (ACCET) (Ludska, 2019).

In Turkey, the collaboration between the British Council and the Turkish Council on Higher Education has birthed an external accreditation program geared toward enhancing the quality of English language teaching in university-level Intensive English Programs (IEPs).

Consequently, an external accreditation process has been formulated and implemented (Donald, 2019). Presently, numerous student preparation programs have undergone quality assessment through external/international accreditation via organizations like the Commission on English Language Program Accreditation (CEA), EAQUALS, and Pearson-Edexcel.

In Middle Eastern nations, where English language proficiency is imperative due to the prominence of oil extraction, the Commission on English Language Program Accreditation (CEA) has been conducting accreditation evaluations since 2004, primarily in the Middle East. Reeves (2019) characterizes CEA as a specialized accreditation entity adept at meeting the burgeoning demand for assessing foreign language teaching.

Crandall and Chisholm (2004) proved the importance of accreditation in maintaining quality in ELT programs, providing insights into the challenges, benefits, and the necessity of collaborative stakeholder engagement in developing effective accreditation frameworks.

The briefing of accreditation schemes in English Language Teaching

This section summarizes five reputable accreditation schemes: NEAS in Australia, Accreditation UK in the UK, CEA in the US, Languages Canada, and Eaquals. These schemes have been chosen for their recognized reputation and successful implementation on both national and international levels. They have been carefully designed to accommodate a wide range of educational organizations, including public and private institutions, autonomous language centers and schools, global chains of centers, contractual arrangements with colleges and universities, and university-affiliated programs.

NEAS Accreditation Scheme

The NEAS (National ELT Accreditation Scheme) is a rigorous accreditation scheme specific to English language teaching institutions in Australia. Established in 1990, NEAS accreditation ensures that institutions meet or exceed the NEAS standards in areas such as curriculum, teaching and learning, assessment, student support, and management and administration. This accreditation scheme is internationally recognized as a benchmark for quality assurance in English language education, enhancing the reputation of NEAS-accredited institutions among students and industry stakeholders (Crichton & Craven, 2016). Some HEIs located in Vietnam, such as RMIT, and Hoa Sen University, have their GE training programs accredited by NEAS.

The Accreditation UK

Accreditation UK, a collaboration between the British Council and English UK, accredits English language services in the UK. Established in 1996, it covers various providers such as language schools, home tuition providers, and further and higher education institutions (Accreditation UK Handbook). The scheme ensures quality standards for English language education offered to international students. Accreditation is granted to organizations meeting these standards, allowing them to enroll students on short-term student visas. The scheme is based on four main standards: Management, Resources and Environment, Teaching and Learning, and Welfare and Student Services.

CEA

The Commission on English Language Program Accreditation (CEA) is a specialized accrediting agency in charge of evaluating intensive English language programs and institutions operating at the post-secondary level. CEA conducts accreditation assessments within the United States as well as globally. The CEA Scheme encompasses 44 distinct standards grouped into 11 areas (CEA Standards for English Language Programs and Institutions, 2017). These standards align with the requirements outlined by the US Department of Education regulations for recognized accrediting agencies. The 11 areas encompass a wide range of criteria, including Mission, Curriculum, Faculty, Facilities, Administrative and Fiscal Capacity, Student Services, Recruiting, Length and Structure of Program Study, Student Achievement, Student Complaints, and Program Development, Planning, and Review.

Languages Canada

Languages Canada is the primary language organization in Canada, representing English and French. It has been recognized by the Canadian government and the international community. The main goal of Languages Canada is to ensure the well-being of students studying or planning to study English and/or French in Canada (Languages Canada Quality Assurance Scheme Accreditation Handbook, Orion Assessment Services, 2017). Membership in Languages Canada requires adherence to the Standards and Quality Assurance Scheme. This scheme includes an evaluation of six key areas: Student Admissions, Student Services, Teaching Staff, Curriculum, Marketing and Recruiting, and Administration. Each area consists of primary standards and supplementary specifications.

EAQUALS

Eaquals is an international organization committed to promoting high standards in language teaching and learning worldwide. It focuses on quality language instruction across languages, countries, and education sectors. EAQUALS embodies its core values, including plurilingualism, intercultural understanding, international cooperation, and lifelong learning, through various charters: the General Charter, the Charter for Course Participants, the Staff Charter, and the Information Charter. These charters form the basis of the Eaquals Accreditation Scheme, with the Quality Standards derived from them representing their practical implementation. The Standards are structured into twelve categories that encompass different aspects of a Language Education Centre's activities. Each category includes specific standards and compliance indicators to ensure adherence to quality guidelines. The twelve categories outlined in The Eaquals Inspection Scheme Manual Version 7.1 (2016) are Management and Administration, Teaching and Learning, Course Design and Supporting Systems, Assessment and Certification, Academic Resources, Learning Environment, Client Services, Quality Assurance, Staff Profile and Development, Staff Employment Terms, Internal Communications, and External Communications.

Evaluation of these schemes

Kotarska (2019) pointed out core standards in quality assurance of language education after comparing these accreditation schemes, namely (1) the UK-based schemes" Accreditation UK, BAC/IELP and BALEAP; (2) the US-based scheme: CEA; (3) languages Canada; (4) the

Australian scheme: NEAS; (5) An international scheme: Eaquals. He concluded that although the main standards or assessment areas range from five to twelve, all the schemes cover five generic standards, namely Management, Administration, Governance and Staff; Programme Design and Delivery; Assessment and Certification; Resources and Learning Environment; Student Welfare and Services.
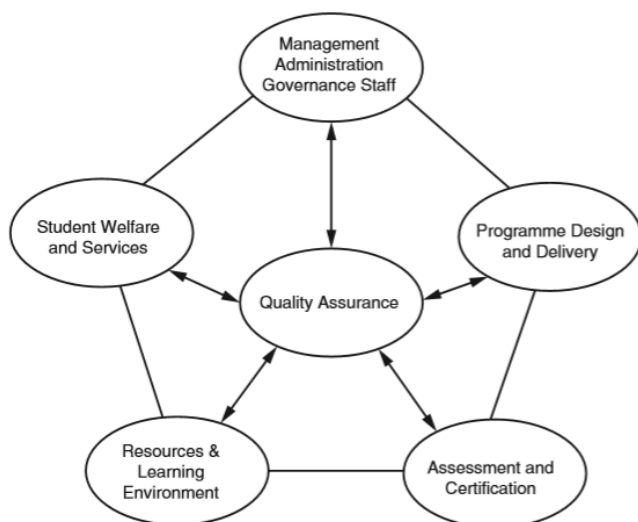

Figure 1. Generic quality standard by Kotarska (2019)

Research Questions

To fulfill the purpose of the study, the survey sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the teachers' and program managers' experiences and feedback on QA approaches in GE training at HEIs in Vietnam?

2. What is the program managers' evaluation of the application feasibility of accreditation schemes in QA in General English training at HEIs in Vietnam?

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

The sample for this study consisted of all GE lecturers and 3 program directors at 3 HEIs (one public sector and two private sectors) in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. They were selected on the basis of convenience sampling due to the approach's feasibility. The program manager at HEI 1, coded as PD1, is a male, born in 1989, with 2-year experience in this position, having experience with AUN and FIBAA accreditation as AUN and FIBAA accredited their English Language Program. The program manager at HEI 2, coded as PD2, is a male, born in 1986, with five years of experience in this position, having accreditation knowledge as MOET accredited their ELP. The program manager at HEI 3, coded as PD3, is a female, born in 1976, with three years of experience in this position, having experience of AUN accreditation as AUN accredited their English Language Program. These HEIs have their own department/division of

General English, which belongs to the faculty of foreign languages, where students accumulate credits to advance to the English level. The department/division of General English provides General English courses to their students. The sample size was quite small, from 3 HEIs, which was determined based on participants' availability and willingness to participate in the study.

Table 1.

Description of HEIs and its General English courses

HEI Type	Code	Program	Number of periods	Number of levels	Credit	Number of students	Number of teachers
1. Private sector	HEI 1	English for International Communication	630 periods	6	20	12.139	30
2. Private sector	HEI 2	General English Program	480 periods	8	32	5.000	25
3. Public sector	HEI 3	English	90 periods	2	6	36.000	45

Design of the Study

This mixed-method study explores the feasibility of using an accreditation scheme as a QA approach in GE training at HEIs in Vietnam. The quantitative approach was used first to collect teachers' and program managers' experiences and feedback on QA approaches used in GE training as well as their evaluation of the application feasibility of accreditation schemes in QA in GE training. A qualitative approach was used to explore the program managers' evaluation of the application feasibility of accreditation schemes in QA in GE training more deeply. This study adhered to ethical principles and guidelines for research involving human participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and their privacy and confidentiality would be protected.

Data collection & analysis

Data was collected through surveys and interviews with GE lecturers and program administrators at HEIs in Vietnam. The surveys were administered in a hybrid manner to collect data on the experiences and feedback of participants regarding the use of accreditation as a QA approach in GE training. The survey is a 5-point Likert questionnaire that consists of two parts, namely (1) the experiences and feedback on QA approaches in GE training and (2) the evaluation of the feasibility of the accreditation scheme as QA approach in GE training. The statements in the questionnaire in part 1 and part 2 were written based on the literature on internal quality assurance components, features, and purposes by Martin (2018) and suggestions on the feasibility of using standards for program administration by Stroupe (2013), respectively. The value of each level was calculated as follows: (highest point - lowest point) / number of points = (5-1) / 5 = 0.8. The significance of each point is divided as follows (Likert, 1932):

- From 1.00 to 1.80: Totally disagree / Never / Completely not influential.

- From 1.81 to 2.60: Disagree / Infrequent / Normal

- From 2.61 to 3.40: Normal

- From 3.41 to 4.20: Agree / Frequent / Influential

- From 4.21 to 5.00: Totally agree / Very often / Very influential

The interview questions were created following the study aims and the interpretation of the survey results, which allowed for a more in-depth exploration of participants' views and experiences regarding the feasibility of applying for accreditation in GE training. Informants were interviewed, either in person or virtually via Zoom, at their convenience. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis, focusing on how informants evaluated the feasibility of the proposed standards.

Findings

The experiences and feedback on QA approaches in GE training at HEIs in Vietnam

Table 2.

Experience in QA approaches in GE training

	Factors	Mean	Std. Deviation	Ranking
1.	Quality assurance approaches (course report, bench marking, teacher training, and student feedback) are integrated into my GE training program.	3.29	0.64	3
2.	The GE training program implements quality assurance approaches to ensure the effectiveness of the curriculum	3.19	0.74	5
3.	The GE training program continuously improves its instructional materials and teaching methodologies.	3.45	0.67	1
4.	I am satisfied with the level of monitoring and evaluation conducted by the GE training program to ensure the quality of teaching and learning outcomes	3.25	0.72	4
5.	The overall effectiveness of the quality assurance approaches implemented in the GE training program	3.30	0.52	2

The data provided in Table 2 focuses on various factors related to QA approaches in a GE training program. Each factor is described in terms of its mean score, standard deviation, and ranking. "The GE training program continuously improves its instructional materials and teaching methodologies" received the highest mean score of 3.45 and was ranked first. This suggests that participants recognized the program's efforts to continuously improve its instructional materials and teaching methodologies continuously, indicating an acceptable commitment to enhancing the quality of education. "The overall effectiveness of the QA approaches implemented in the GE training program" received a mean score of 3.30 and was ranked second. This indicates that participants generally believed that the QA approaches implemented in the program have an overall positive impact on its effectiveness. "QA approaches (course report, benchmarking, teacher training, students' feedback) are integrated into my GE training program" received a mean score of 3.29 and was ranked third. It can be inferred that participants generally perceived the integration of QA approaches into the program, indicating a systematic approach to ensure quality. "*I am satisfied with the level of monitoring and evaluation conducted by the GE training program to ensure the quality of teaching and learning outcomes*" received a mean score of 3.25 (a moderate level of

satisfaction) and was ranked fourth. "*The GE training program implements QA approaches to ensure the effectiveness of the curriculum*" received a mean score of 3.19 (a relatively lower level of confidence) and was ranked fifth.

Overall, the data suggests that participants positively perceived the program's integration of QA approaches and continuous improvement efforts. However, there is a relatively lower level of confidence in the program's implementation of QA approaches for curriculum effectiveness. The program's monitoring and evaluation efforts were moderately satisfactory, and the overall effectiveness of QA approaches was perceived positively.

The findings can be used to affirm the literature that there is a lack of consistent and effective procedures for QA in GE training program.

Table 3.

Feedback on QA approaches in GE training

	Factors	Mean	Std. Deviation	Ranking
1.	The quality assurance measures implemented in my GE training program effectively ensure the delivery of high-quality instruction.	3.22	0.85	2
2.	The quality assurance procedures are in place within my GE training program.	3.09	1.07	3
3.	The quality assurance procedures in your GE training program adequately address the needs and expectations of the learners.	3.00	0.85	4
4.	I am confident in the effectiveness of the quality assurance measures in improving the overall quality of GE training.	3.09	0.83	3
5.	The quality assurance approaches in my GE training program align with current industry standards and best practices.	3.41	0.67	1

The data in Table 3 represents the ratings and rankings of various factors related to QA measures in GE training programs. The mean scores and standard deviations provide insights into these measures' perceived effectiveness and alignment. "The QA approaches in my GE training program align with current industry standards and best practices" received the highest mean score (3.41) and was ranked first. This indicates that participants generally believed that the program's QA approaches align with industry standards and best practices. "The QA measures implemented in my GE training program effectively ensure the delivery of high-quality instruction" got a mean score of 3.22 and was ranked second. This suggests that participants generally felt that the implemented measures were effective in ensuring the delivery of high-quality instruction. "The QA procedures are in place within my GE training program" and "I am confident in the effectiveness of the QA measures in improving the overall quality of GE training" both carried mean scores of 3.09. Although their mean scores were the same, they were ranked differently due to their standard deviations. These factors were ranked third, indicating that participants were confident in the presence and effectiveness of QA procedures in improving overall training quality. "The QA procedures in your GE training program adequately address the needs and expectations of the learners" received a mean score of 3.00 and was ranked fourth. This suggests that participants perceived the program's QA procedures

to address the needs and expectations of the learners only adequately, indicating room for improvement.

Generally, the data, from the viewpoint of the surveyed lecturers and program directors, suggests that the GE training program's QA measures were generally perceived as effective and aligned with industry standards and best practices. However, there is room for further improvement in addressing the learners' needs and expectations.

Evaluation of the application feasibility of accreditation schemes in QA in General English training

Table 4.

The application feasibility of accreditation schemes in QA in General English training

	Factors	Mean	Std. Deviation	Ranking
1.	Accreditation schemes serve as a QA mechanism for General English training programs at Vietnamese higher educational institutions	3.41	0.56	5
2.	Accreditation schemes cover various aspects of a program including curriculum, teaching methodologies, resources, and faculty qualifications of Vietnamese higher educational institutions	2.87	0.67	7
3.	Accreditation schemes promote consistency and continuous improvement for General English training programs.	2.90	0.74	6
4.	Accreditation schemes enhance program visibility for General English training programs.	3.41	0.56	5
5.	Accreditation schemes facilitate student mobility.	3.87	0.56	3
6.	Applying accreditation schemes could promote professional development for teachers at your HEIs.	4.25	0.63	1
7.	The accreditation scheme could help standardize the quality of general English training programs at Vietnamese higher educational institutions.	3.41	0.56	5
8.	Applying for accreditation would involve a significant administrative burden for Vietnamese higher educational institutions.	4.16	0.52	2
9.	Applying accreditation schemes would be perceived positively by stakeholders in the Vietnamese higher educational sector (e.g., students, employers, government agencies).	4.25	0.72	1
10.	Applying accreditation could support meaningful innovation to General English training programs at Vietnamese higher educational institutions.	3.48	0.85	4

The data represents the mean, standard deviation, and ranking for different factors related to accreditation schemes in the context of General English training programs at Vietnamese higher educational institutions.

The results show that informants highly believe that applying accreditation schemes could promote professional development for teachers and be perceived positively by stakeholders.

However, they also believe that applying for accreditation would involve a significant administrative burden (4.16). Ranked as the third most important factor, accreditation schemes

are believed to facilitate student mobility (3.87). The following are supporting meaningful innovation, serving as QA mechanism, enhancing program visibility, standardizing the quality of programs, promoting consistency and continuous improvement, and covering various aspects of a program.

In summary, the data suggests that stakeholders perceive applying accreditation schemes positively and could promote teacher professional development. However, it also indicates that there may be concerns about the administrative burden involved. The factors related to program visibility, consistency, and standardization are also considered important. Facilitating student mobility and supporting meaningful innovation are also moderately important factors in the context of General English training programs at Vietnamese higher educational institutions.

Interview results

Interviews with three program directors (coded as PD1, PD2, and PD3) were categorized into four themes. Accordingly, program directors highly evaluated accreditation schemes specific to English language teaching institutions in America, Canada, Europe, and some Middle Eastern countries. They believed that those schemes could serve as valuable references for assuring the quality of GE training at HEIs in Vietnam. From their viewpoints, these schemes offer potential approaches that can be adapted to the Vietnamese context.

First, Vietnamese authorities can compile assessment standards for GE training programs at their institution, taking inspiration from the principles and criteria used by these accreditation schemes. PD1 stated that

> "*the Vietnamese authorities can develop their own set of assessment standards for GE training programs by referencing the principles and criteria of the existing accreditation schemes.*"

PD3 added that stakeholders such as educators, students, employers, and industry experts must be consulted when developing assessment standards for GE training programs.

Second, it is implicated that program administrators in Vietnam can assess GE training programs using criteria similar to those employed by Accreditation UK, CEA, Languages Canada, NEAS, and EAQUALS. It is up to the institution's real context to pick relevant assessment criteria. PD2 clarified that program administrators in Vietnam have the option to evaluate GE training programs by employing criteria that are similar to those used by Accreditation UK, CEA, Languages Canada, NEAS, and EAQUALS during program evaluations. In addition, PD3 believed that evaluations should cover program content, teaching staff, resources, and management systems.

Third, as accreditation schemes aim to foster continuous improvement in English language teaching institutions, HEIs can adopt similar principles in GE training programs to identify areas for improvement, search for resources to facilitate necessary changes for the sake of internal QA. PD 1 emphazised that promotion of ongoing improvement is a built-in aspect of those mentioned accreditation schemes. This feature can be adopted by HEIs in Vietnam.

Fourth, accreditation UK, CEA, Languages Canada, NEAS, and EAQUALS have established benchmarks for quality in English language education. HEIs in Vietnam can likewise establish

quality benchmarks for GE training programs, ensuring that all programs meet high standards. PD3 summarized that accreditation bodies such as Accreditation UK, CEA, Languages Canada, NEAS, and EAQUALS have set standards that serve as benchmarks for quality in English language education. Similarly, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Vietnam can establish their own quality benchmarks for GE training programs, ensuring that all programs meet rigorous standards.

Discussion

The quantitative data shed light on the current context of QA in GE training programs. The findings indicated that overall, the QA measures implemented in the GE training programs at the studied HEIs were considered effective and satisfied industry standards and best practices. This suggests that the program successfully maintained a certain level of quality and ensured that learners were equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills required by the industry. By adhering to these standards, the GE training programs likely prepared learners to meet the demands of the job market and perform effectively in their roles.

To recap, while the QA measures in the GE training program were generally perceived as effective and aligned with industry standards, the findings of the current suggest the need for further improvement to address the specific needs and expectations of learners. These results are aligned with those found by Ranson *et al.* (2005), exploring the gap between ESL learners' expectations and what they were supported. The paper examining their views and expectations about English language learning needs and support reveals a notable discrepancy between these students' expectations and the existing university support services, even though the cultural, social, and academic challenges international ESL students face in Australia are well-known. By actively seeking feedback, customizing the learning experience, and continuously evaluating the program, GE can ensure that its training program remains relevant, engaging, and valuable to the learners it serves.

The qualitative data revealed the informants' evaluation of the feasibility of applying existing accreditation schemes in English Language Teaching into Vietnamese HEIs' GE programs. Accordingly, stakeholders view accreditation schemes positively due to their perceived ability to enhance teacher professional development and improve education quality. However, concerns exist regarding the administrative burden associated with accreditation. Despite that undeniable hindrance, the idea in this current study of using an existing accreditation scheme as a framework for internal assurance of a language teaching program is in line with Stroupe (2013) stating that making use of national and international standards is an opportunity for institutions to bring objectivity to the self-evaluation process. It also plays a vital role in standardizing program quality and promoting consistency across institutions. Additionally, accreditation encourages continuous improvement and covers various aspects of a program. Importantly, the implications of accreditation should be considered within the context of specific programs and institutions.

Conclusion

In summary, the study confirms the positive hypotheses that applying accreditation schemes is a viable QA approach for assuring the quality of GE training at HEIs in Vietnam. The findings of this study provided valuable insights into the potential utilization of current accreditation schemes in GE training at HEIs in Vietnam. It arouses a chance for HEIs in Vietnam to benchmark to enhance their own training quality.

One limitation of this study is the small sample as it is time-consuming for experts to read through accreditation schemes that are quite unpopular. Additionally, the study only focused on GE training at some HEIs in Vietnam, so the findings may not be generalizable to other contexts or language programs.

This study serves as a preliminary examination of the QA aspect of an English language teaching program. In the future, the author's research will investigate the influence of a specific scheme – NEAS on the efficacy of General English instruction within two educational institutions in Vietnam, namely RMIT and Hoa Sen University.

Acknowledgments

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Biodata

As an experienced lecturer at the Industrial University of Ho Chi Minh City, with 19 years of teaching experience, Quach Thi To Nu is currently a PhD student at Hochiminh City University of Social Sciences and Humanities - Vietnam National University, Vietnam. My research interests lie in enhancing English teaching skills and ensuring quality assurance in education for future generations.

Professor Dr. Nguyen Loc specializes in education management. He has authored various book chapters published by Springer, contributed to higher education textbooks, and played a significant role in language policymaking, including involvement in the Vietnamese National Foreign Language Projects.