

# TOEFL iBT and language learning motivation: An investigation into teaching styles and influential factors for Vietnamese adolescents

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## Abstract

This study examined influential factors and teaching styles that affect language learning motivation among TOEFL iBT (Test of English as a Foreign Language internet-Based Test) learners in a sample of 21 Vietnamese adolescents. A questionnaire and semi-structured interview were used to collect data. Thematic analysis revealed that (a) teacher and teaching methods are the two most prominent influential factors affecting language learning motivation of TOEFL iBT Vietnamese adolescent learners; and (b) regardless of adolescence development stage, facilitator and delegator teaching styles motivate Vietnamese adolescent learners most in their TOEFL iBT studies. New insights into discussion on language learning motivation and on the nature of TOEFL iBT teaching in Vietnam are also addressed. The article provides some pedagogical implications for TOEFL iBT teachers in Vietnam and in similar EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts.

**Keywords:** EFL; TOEFL iBT; adolescents; teaching styles; language learning motivation; Vietnamese learners of English

## **TOEFL iBT and language learning motivation: An investigation into teaching styles and influential factors for Vietnamese adolescents**

### **1. Introduction**

An increasing number of Vietnamese school students learn English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and since the first introduction of Test of English as a Foreign Language internet-based Test (TOEFL iBT) in September 2005, there has been a growth in the number of Vietnamese students (usually school-age adolescents) who take TOEFL iBT tests and associated preparation courses (see IIG Vietnam, 2014; Q. Nguyen, 2014). While it appears that the motivations for learning English and undertaking the TOEFL iBT by Vietnamese learners are diverse, ranging from personal language acquisition to professional goals including enhancing the possibilities of overseas study and meeting tertiary graduate requirements, little research exists to confirm factors that may influence their motivations in learning TOEFL iBT.

It is understood that motivation plays an imperative role in driving language learning success (Dörnyei, 2001a; Ellis, 1994). It not only directly influences learners' efforts in learning strategies, language proficiency target and course-related achievement tests but also affects the extent to which learners maintain skills and interests in the language after language achievement is reached (Oxford & Shearin, 1996). Engagement in learning can be thought of as 'motivation in action' (Dörnyei, 2000; Martin, 2003). In terms of language acquisition, highly motivated learners are likely to be engaged and successfully acquire new language skills while unmotivated learners may be insufficiently engaged in learning and less likely to fully develop their potential language skills (Hamada, 2011). Motivation is thought to be the result of a complex interaction of a variety of personal and situational factors and is therefore, variable and changeable (Péter-Szarka, 2012). Motivation for learning is understood to be a variable that learners bring to the classroom but motivation can be cultivated and promoted through high-quality interpersonal relationships in learners' lives (e.g., student-level action, school-level action, teacher- and classroom-level action) which can make significant contributions to their academic motivation, engagement and achievement (Martin & Dowson, 2009; Winke, 2005).

Thus, the first aim of this study was to explore the factors that most influence language learning motivations among TOEFL iBT Vietnamese adolescent learners. Given that motivation and subsequent engagement for language learning has the potential to be positively influenced by quality interpersonal interactions between learners and their teachers, the second aim of this study was to the teaching styles that motivate learners most in their TOEFL iBT study.

The article firstly considers the context of English language education and TOEFL iBT teaching in Vietnam, followed by an overview of adolescents and learning motivation as well as the role of teacher and teaching methods in foreign language learning motivation. The subsequent sections present the purpose, research method, results and discussion along with some pedagogical implications for TOEFL iBT teachers in Vietnam and similar EFL teaching contexts.

### **2. Theoretical Background**

#### *2.1 English Language Education and TOEFL iBT in Vietnam: A Brief Overview*

Since the Doi Moi (Renovation) policy (see Arkadie & Mallon, 2004; Le & Le, 2000), English has gained priority over other foreign languages (e.g., Russian, French) in the Vietnamese education system starting from pre-school level to tertiary level (Viet, 2008). Previously, English was an obligatory subject since grade 6; however, since the 2000s, English has been a compulsory subject since grade 3. Recently, several high schools

started implementing bilingual education, teaching a range of subjects (e.g., Maths, Physics, Biology and Chemistry) in English (D. H. Nguyen, 2013). In addition, some tertiary institutions have begun using English language as a medium of instruction in their courses. The past five years have also seen the introduction of demanding requirements of English proficiency for graduates (Q. Nguyen, 2014). For example, all Vietnamese undergraduate students are now required to pass standardized tests of English proficiency (e.g., TOEIC, IELTS, TOEFL iBT, TOEFL PBT) prior to graduation. The minimum scores required to pass English assessments vary according to local tertiary institutions and training programs; however, would-be non-English major graduates must pass with scores relevant to level B1 of the Common European Framework for Reference (CEFR) (Q. Nguyen, 2014). In brief, English language proficiency has been richly promoted in the age of education reform in Vietnam.

In addition to the increasing presence of English language instruction in schools and tertiary institutions, many Vietnamese learners undertake the TOEFL iBT and associated preparation programs. It is widely known that TOEFL iBT test score is a compulsory English proficiency requirement in most of the international education institutions and universities (IIG Vietnam, 2014). According to the statistics provided by Vietnam International Education Development (Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training), the number of Vietnamese students learning abroad has increased by a factor of ten over the last decade (IIG Vietnam, 2014). TOEFL iBT preparation programs are commonly categorized into different course levels starting at preparatory level and progressing through 30, 45, 60, 80, 100 and 120 levels. Learners can undertake these TOEFL iBT courses either at foreign language centers or in private tutoring settings. Notably, washback- the influence of testing on teaching and learning- is evident in TOEFL iBT preparation courses which are widely designed to align the course content with the structure of TOEFL iBT test (Barnes, 2010). Previous studies on learner washback (e.g., Chu, 2009; Stoneman, 2006) have identified that tests can serve as a facilitator to motivate language learners in language learning (Pan & Newfields, 2012).

## *2.2 Motivation for Learning and Adolescent Learners*

The TOEFL iBT program is most frequently undertaken by school students aged from 14- 18 years, with learners of this age being commonly identified as adolescents. Adolescence is recognized around the world as a period of human development that involves significant physical, cognitive, emotional, social and behavioral changes. While most learners undertaking the TOEFL iBT program in Vietnam are adolescents, little appears to be known about influential factors that affect language learning motivation among Vietnamese adolescent learners.

Motivation can be thought of as an internal process that energizes, directs and maintains behavior over time (Krause, Bochner, Duchesne, & McMaugh, 2010) which, in an educational context, refers to a student's energy and drive to learn, work effectively and achieve to their potential (Martin, 2003). While motivation is recognized as a key determinant of learning achievement (Kaplan, 2004), adolescence is a period when motivation for schooling typically decreases due in part to a combination of factors including changes to interpersonal relationships, increased social commitments, the widening and deepening of interests in extra-curricular activities, higher expectations placed on them by others, school learning and the school environment being increasingly perceived as irrelevant (see Effeney, Carroll, & Bahr, 2013; Péter-Szarka, 2012).

Over the past decades, the body of research on motivation for language learning has been enriched by research on various facets of motivation including orientation (i.e., instrumental and integrative orientation) (e.g., Gardner & Lambert, 1959), motivation types (intrinsic and extrinsic motivation) (e.g., Ryan & Deci, 2000) to stages of student motivation (e.g., Dörnyei, 2003). Further, studies of motivation have also extended to include teachers' motivational practices (Papi & Abdollahzadeh, 2011) and pedagogical stages that promote foreign language learning motivation (e.g., Chambers, 1999; Dörnyei, 2001b; Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998). Zoltán Dörnyei (1994, 1998), proposed a motivation taxonomy which has made significant contributions to the bodies of research on components of language motivation. The motivation taxonomy comprised of three levels: the

language level, the learner level and the learning situation level. The language level comprehensively describes the motivation process by using traditional concepts of instrumental and integrative motivation (e.g., learning goals and language choice related to the culture, usefulness and community of the language). The learner level motivation involves the influence of diverse individual cognitive and affective traits of language learners (e.g., self-confidence, achievement need). The third level, the learning situation, considered influential factors such as intrinsic and extrinsic motives (e.g., affiliation, group-specific motives; teacher's personality, teaching style; course syllabus, teaching materials, learning tasks, teaching methods) (see Gilakjani, Leong, & Sabouri, 2012). Notably, each of the three levels of motivation operates independently of the others (Kaboody, 2013); and the learning situational level is "the one over which educators have the most control" (MacIntyre, 2002, p. 53).

Dimensions of motivation are diverse, ranging from age, gender, religion, task types, classroom environment, teaching-learning strategies (Schmidt, Boraie, & Kassabgy, 1996; Sung & Tsai, 2014) to learner achievement needs and self-confidence (see Gilakjani, Leong, & Sabouri, 2012; Schmidt et al., 1996). As reported by Abbas Pourhosein Gilakjani and his colleagues (2012), factors influencing motivation include 1) motivation and personal variables (e.g., the degree of confidence, personal motifs, peers' judgments, self-efficacy, mastery or performance orientation); and 2) attitudes and motivation (e.g., social attitudes, educational attitudes, gender difference). Taking the same vein, Andrew Martin (2007) identified correlations between learners' enjoyment of school, educational aspirations and class participation and learning motivation. In addition, high-quality interpersonal relationships in learners' lives (e.g., student-level action, school-level action, teacher- and classroom-level action) make significant contribution to their academic motivation, engagement and achievement (Martin & Dowson, 2009). Regardless of dimensions of motivation and its influencing factors, teachers can play a significant role in motivating individual learners and thus promote their language learning success (Dörnyei, 2001b; Oxford & Shearin, 1994).

### *2.3 The Role of Teacher and Teaching methods in Foreign Language Learning Motivation*

Research has confirmed the highly significant role that the language teacher can play in all the stages of learners' motivational process (see Gilakjani et al., 2012; Kaboody, 2013). Effective language teachers not only recognize, foster and maintain learner motivation but also take the nature of teacher- student interaction into consideration (Gilakjani et al., 2012). A highly effective language teacher, as pointed out by Gilakjani and his colleagues (2012), should have personal qualities (such as enthusiasm) and skills in a range of teaching methods that create a positive classroom atmosphere, acknowledge and stimulate the learner's ideas, provide extensive practice and constructive feedback, and encourage learner self-efficacy.

In a broad sense, teaching methods are frequently used interchangeably with the concept of teaching style. Grasha (1994) defines teaching style as a multidimensional construct that represents a pattern of needs, beliefs and behaviors that teachers demonstrate in their classrooms. Researchers have used variety of indicators to describe and categorize teaching styles resulting in a range of conceptualizations such as expressive, instrumental, holistic, analytical, authoritarian, authoritative and permissive teaching style (e.g., Bernstein, 2013; Evans, 2004; On-Stein & Miller, 1980). Grasha (1994, 1996) argues that there are five teaching styles: formal authority approach, demonstrator approach, facilitator approach, delegator approach and expert approach. Teachers who adopt the formal authority teaching style prefer to use structured teaching, focus on rules and expectations for learners and supervise learners according to standard practices. In the demonstrator teaching style, teachers teach by personal example. In other words, teachers suggest prototypes of behaviors and expect learners to observe and to emulate the illustrated methods.

The formal authority and demonstrator teaching approaches are considered to be teacher-centered (University of South Carolina, 2014) and result in learners who are typically quite passive in their studies. In contrast, the facilitator and demonstrator teaching styles provide learners with more active learning roles. To be specific, facilitator teaching style emphasizes on the nature of teaching-learning relationship, provides guidance with options to explore. The goal of this teaching style is to promote learner initiative, flexibility, responsibility

and independence. The delegator teaching style aims to develop the learners' ability to act autonomously. Learners are encouraged to take initiative and responsibility in solving tasks (e.g., a project) with the teacher assisting when needed (e.g., answering questions, reviewing learner progress) and functioning as an information resource for the learners. As a consequence, the facilitator and delegator teaching styles are considered to be learner-centered approaches (University of South Carolina, 2014).

#### *2.4 Significance of the Study*

Previous research into the motivation of Vietnamese learners of English was based upon learners of English programs at the tertiary level (e.g., Phan, 2011). As a result, little is known about the influential factors that affect language learning motivation among Vietnamese adolescent learners as they prepare for the TOEFL iBT test. Furthermore, a rich body of research has identified teaching strategies that motivate language learning motivation (e.g., Dörnyei, 2001a); however, specific approach-oriented teaching styles that may affect TOEFL iBT learning motivation have not been identified in contemporary research.

Additionally, in the context of Vietnam, the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training has promulgated educational policies promoting a learner-centered approach (Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training, 2014). However, social, political and infrastructural factors as well as people's perceptions (e.g., the Confucian heritage) have hindered the feasibility and effectiveness of the learner-centered approach in the Vietnamese educational context (see N. T. S. Le, 1999; P. T. H. Thanh, 2010; T. N. Thanh, Dekker, & Goedhart, 2008). Indeed, such approach-oriented teaching style as learner-centeredness has been promoted to replace teacher-centeredness approach in the context of English language education in Vietnam (H. V. Dang, 2006) but little is known about the extent to which teacher-centeredness (e.g., formal teaching approach, demonstrator approach) or learner-centeredness (e.g., facilitator approach, delegator approach) would influence language learning motivation of TOEFL iBT for Vietnamese adolescent learners. This article presents the findings of an exploratory study that identified and investigated: (a) the influential factors that significantly affect language learning motivation of TOEFL iBT Vietnamese adolescent learners; and (b) the teaching styles that motivate Vietnamese adolescent learners most in studying TOEFL iBT.

### **3. Methods and Methodology**

To identify and explore the influential factors that significantly affect language learning motivation of TOEFL iBT Vietnamese adolescent learners, and the teaching styles that motivate Vietnamese adolescent learners most in studying TOEFL iBT, a social constructionism approach was adopted and paired with thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Social constructionist epistemology is concerned with the nature of knowledge and how knowledge is constructed (Andrews, 2012). Social constructionism places significant emphasis on daily interactions between people and how they use language to construct their reality (Andrews, 2012). In this study, through classroom interaction and social meaningful reality of learning TOEFL iBT, Vietnamese adolescent learners perceive prominent influential factors affecting their language learning motivation. In addition, considering both Burr's (1995) power-related view that people can indeed be agents of change in social constructionism and Dörnyei's (1994) argument that the learning situational level is the one over which educators have the most control, it is the power of control of teachers and their teaching styles that may have specific impact on making language learners' motivation change. Simultaneously, thematic analysis was employed in this exploratory study.

As interpretivism, which is commonly used interchangeably with social constructionism (see Andrews, 2012), is suitable to investigate motivations and values of social patterns (see Raddon, 2010), latent thematic analysis- the interpretative level at which themes are identified (Braun & Clarke, 2006) - was appropriately employed in this study. Indeed, Braun and Clarke (2006) posit that thematic analysis can be a realist method reporting meanings, experiences and the reality of participants operating within society. As the study was to investigate prominent influential factors affecting language learning motivation rather than learner motivation

per se, thematic analysis utilizing a constructionist method was compatible to the study.

### 3.1 Participants

The participants in this study consisted of 21 volunteer TOEFL iBT Vietnamese adolescent learners (8 males, 13 females) in five TOEFL iBT private tutoring classes in Vietnam. At the time of the study, the participants had been learning TOEFL iBT for at least one year at both language centers and private tutoring settings (see Table 1). It should be noted that the language of instruction in TOEFL iBT classes of these participants was English.

**Table 1**

*Demographic background of the surveyed participants*

Mean Age	Mean English Language Learning Duration	Mean TOEFL iBT Learning Duration	Mean TOEFL iBT Scores
15 years 2 months	7 years 6 months	1 year 10 months	68.23 <sup>(*)</sup>

Note. <sup>(\*)</sup> TOEFL iBT Score ranges from 0 -120

Table 2 presents the demographic data for the six purposefully selected interviewees (3 males, 3 females): Mike, Kim, Helena, Andy, Victor and Selena. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the anonymity of the participants.

**Table 2**

*Demographic background of the interviewee participants*

Participants	Age in years	Years of English language learning	TOEFL iBT Learning Duration	TOEFL iBT Scores <sup>(*)</sup>
Mike	13	7 years	1 year 2 months	60
Kim	13	6 years	1 year	45
Andy	16	8 years	1 year 4 months	88
Helena	16	7 years 6 months	1 year 6 months	100
Victor	17	8 years	2 years	90
Selena	18	9 years	2 years	80

Note. <sup>(\*)</sup> TOEFL iBT Score ranges from 0 -120

### 3.2 Procedure

The recruitment of participants for this study began with the principal researcher making a short presentation to the students taking TOEFL iBT private tutoring classes. The goals of the project and the nature of the research were briefly explained and the students were invited to participate. There were 21 students who volunteered to participate. In accordance with accepted practice, the parents of the student volunteers were contacted via telephone or face-to-face communication in order to gain their consent.

The participants were requested to complete a questionnaire (see Appendix) that was designed to collect preliminary data regarding motivation for language learning in order to facilitate the in-depth interview procedure. The questionnaire was developed by the principal researcher and was composed of both open-ended questions and closed-response questions. The questionnaire was distributed to the participants in hard copy during break time in TOEFL classes and took the participants approximately 5 minutes to complete. The questionnaire was administered in English and was designed to be understood by qualified English proficiency participants with one year of TOFL iBT experience. To ensure that the participants could fully distinguish the differences among the four investigated teaching styles (i.e., formal authority, demonstrator, facilitator and delegator), the researcher provided detailed instructions and examples before the participants completed the questionnaire.

After filling in the questionnaire, the participants filled in their contact details in a circulated paper if they approved volunteer interview participation. There were 12 out of 21 participants informed the researcher that

they were willing to be interviewed. Six of these participants were purposefully selected according to (1) questionnaire results that provided critical contributions to the findings of the researched topics (e.g., participants that informed a specific teaching style that motivated their TOEFL iBT studies); (2) participants' TOEFL iBT study duration. It was assumed that for the same questionnaire answer, TOEFL iBT Vietnamese adolescent learner participants in each adolescent age group who had spent longer time studying TOEFL iBT would give more in-depth interview answers. The participants were contacted to arrange interview time and location of their convenience. Given that the participants were proficient in the English language, the interviews were all administered in English to fully unpack the investigated phenomena and the participants' experience.

The principal researcher conducted a face-to-face interview with each of the selected participants. Each interview commenced with a series of questions related to the TOEFL iBT learning backgrounds of the participants, followed by questions designed to elicit more information about the participant's responses to the questionnaire and their motivation for learning TOEFL iBT and the teaching style(s) that have motivated them the most. Each interview was audio-recorded and later transcribed.

#### **4. Data Analysis**

In this study, data collection and analysis was conducted concurrently. In light of latent thematic analysis, the development of themes and sub-themes of the study involves interpretive work; and "the analysis that is produced is not just description, but is already theorized" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 13). Indeed, in contrast to semantic approach within which the themes are identified within the surface or explicit meanings of the data, the latent level goes beyond description by identifying "*underlying* [original emphasized] ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 13). For example, rather than describing that teacher is a prominent influential factor; the interview question that "What have your teachers done that motivate you in your learning of TOEFL iBT?" could uncover and identify features of TOEFL iBT teachers that gave a particular form and meaning of "teacher is a prominent influential factor affecting TOEFL iBT learning motivation".

After verbal data were transcribed and checked with the original recordings for accuracy, the formal coding process began with initial codes (e.g., teacher, teaching method). Data were coded manually; all actual data extracts were coded and collated within each code. Within the scope of this pilot study, there were primarily two data set – all instances in the data corpus where a specific topic in the data is referred to (Braun & Clark, 2006): 1) prominent influential factors and 2) teaching styles that motivate learners most. Next, different codes identified across the two data set were sorted into potential themes (e.g., "Teaching method as a prominent influential factor affecting language learning motivation"); and all the relevant coded data extracts within the identified themes were also collated (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes and subthemes emerged from the data, then, were revised and refined at the level of the coded data extracts and at the level of considering the validity of individual themes in relation to the data set. The sub-themes were noted as being echoed by more than one interviewee across the data set.

To ensure that the developing themes and sub-themes were grounded in the original data, previous stages of the data analysis process were reread thoroughly before undertaking further analysis (see Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). In addition, to ascertain the authenticity and trustworthiness of the themes and sub-themes rose from the interviews as well as an accurate summary of the discussion, interview transcriptions and the draft findings were sent back to the interview participants to alter or confirm.

#### **5. Results and Discussion**

##### *5.1 Influential factors affecting TOEFL iBT learning motivation*

Data from the questionnaire (N = 21) revealed that among the investigated items, teacher and teaching methods are identified as the two most prominent factors influencing language learning motivation of the

investigated TOEFL iBT Vietnamese adolescent learner participants (Figure 1).

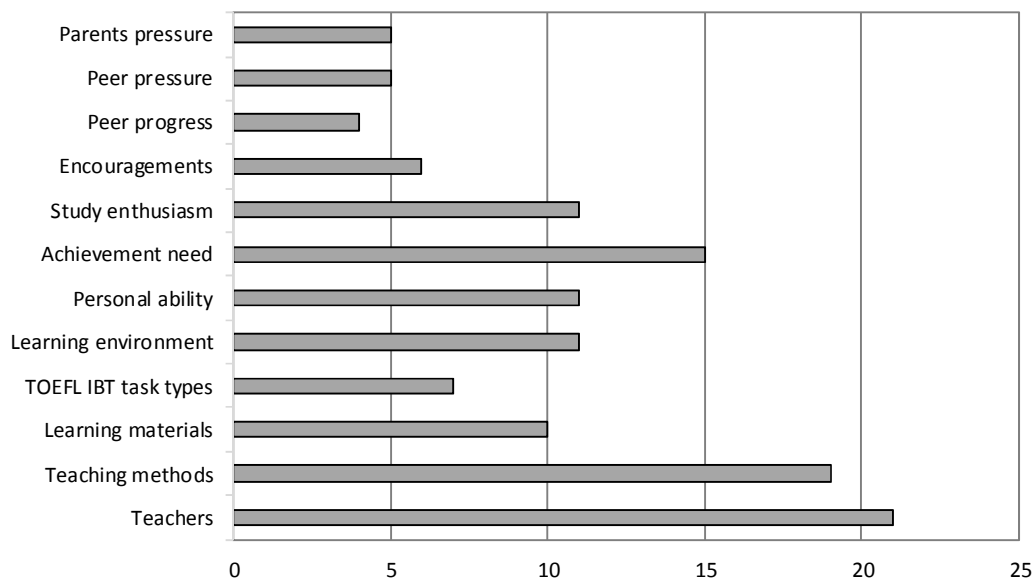


Figure 1. Factors influencing language learning motivation of TOEFL iBT Vietnamese adolescent learners

The participants belonged to all three developmental stages of adolescence (early adolescents: 2 males, 5 females (7); middle adolescents: 3 males, 5 females (8); late adolescents: 3 males, 3 females (6)). This distribution of ages allows for a deeper exploration of the data, with Figure 2 showing the data split by age grouping. Because the three age groupings contained different numbers of participants (7, 8 and 6 respectively), the data was scaled to a common factor of 10 to allow accurate comparisons to be made.

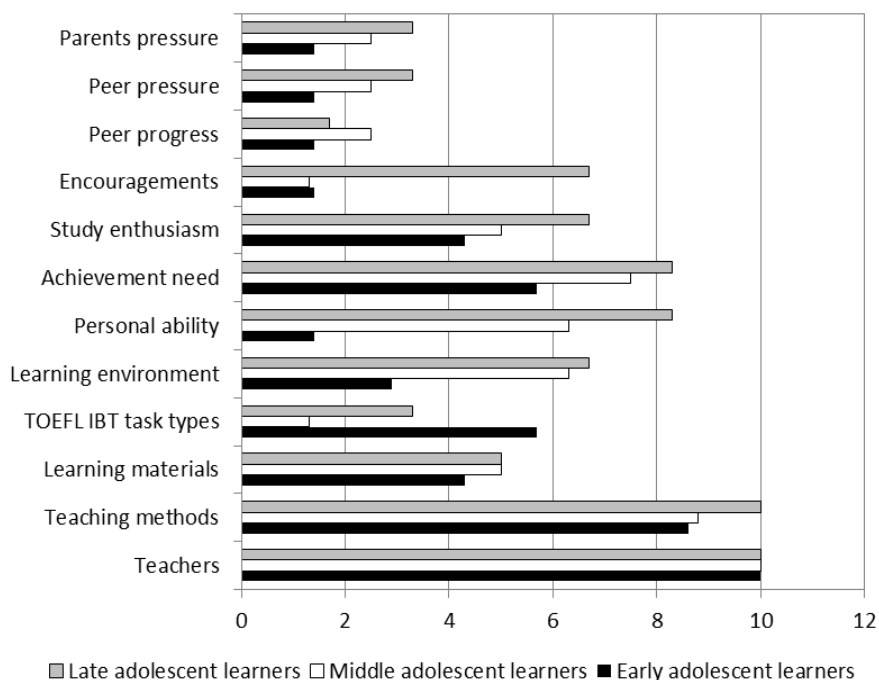


Figure 2. Factors influencing language learning motivation of TOEFL iBT Vietnamese adolescent learners by age grouping

Figure 2 shows that ‘Teachers’ and ‘Teaching methods’ were the factors most often identified by all age groups as being the key factors that influence their language learning motivation. This finding is in keeping with



numerous studies conducted on language learning motivation which highlighted the imperative role of teacher and teaching methods in language learners' motivation (e.g., Dörnyei, 2001b; Gilakjani et al., 2012). Figure 2 also suggests that the late adolescent group (grey colour) reported higher frequencies for most motivating factors than the younger groups. This was the case for all factors except the TOEFL iBT task types (e.g., independent task, integrated task) in which the youngest group was found to have the highest frequency. It would seem that the oldest participants in this study are either more open to a wider range of motivational influences or are more self-aware of the factors that influence them compared to the younger participants. Figure 2 also shows a relatively large difference between the youngest and oldest groups for 'Encouragements' and 'Personal ability', with the younger participants reporting lower frequencies for these factors than the older participants.

Since 'Teachers' and 'Teaching methods' were the most commonly identified motivational factor in the questionnaire, follow-up interviews were conducted to further explore this finding. Six participants were selected to participate in this phase of the pilot study. During the interview, the participants were invited by the principal researcher to elaborate on the ways teachers influence their language learning motivation and the teaching methods that they found most beneficial for their learning. In relation to the ways teachers influence their motivation for language learning, three themes emerged from the analysis of the interview transcripts: a) teacher competence, b) teacher personality and c) teacher support. The first theme of teacher competence was identified in comments made by all six participants. The participants identified competence as being knowledgeable of the English language and a fluent speaker of it. For example, Mike stated: *My teacher speaks English very well and fluently. I want to speak.... like her. So, I want to study TOEFL to improve my skills.* Mike's comment also illustrates that a competent teacher sets a good example that motivates and inspires the students.

This perspective was reinforced by comments from other participants such as Selena: *I look at my teacher as an example to follow.... when I study with a good teacher.... a teacher with broad knowledge, I would like to be like him or her...* More significantly, Helena recounted: *Some teachers are good at English but they are not well-trained TOEFL iBT [teachers]. They don't really know about the TOEFL iBT test. Maybe they will mislead their students. [...] So, they [students] will not know how to be well-prepared for their taking TOEFL iBT test.* The emergence of teacher competence as a theme in this study suggests to the authors that local language centers should create opportunities for institutional teachers to update TOEFL iBT teaching skills and to attend annual TOEFL iBT Propell Workshop conducted by IIG Vietnam- the country's exclusive official representative of the Educational Testing Service (ETS) (see IIG Vietnam, 2014). Anecdotal observations made by the principal researcher suggest that not all TOEFL iBT teachers in Vietnam have themselves experienced the TOEFL iBT tests and there may be great value in TOEFL iBT teachers from not only attending TOEFL iBT workshops but also by taking TOEFL iBT test to be able to instruct TOEFL iBT learners with authentic skills and test-taking experiences.

The second theme to emerge from the interview data was that of teacher personality. The participants identified teachers who were patient and caring as having a positive impact on their motivation for learning. Kim for example stated: *My teacher usually encourages me in my studies. She cares about my studies. For example, if I am not sure about one problem, she explains to me till I understand.* Victor appreciated the extra time that his teachers invested in his classes: *They [teachers] set time to talk about other things [after class] and they make me know about TOEFL. Although it [TOEFL iBT]'s very tough subject, it will help me a lot in my future.*

The third theme was that of teacher support. This support took the form of clear explanations by the teacher that typically went beyond the usual requirements. For example Victor explained that *I first learnt TOEFL iBT to know what it is; however, my teacher tried to make me know the importance of TOEFL certificate in my studies and my futures. Day by day, I [...] made more effort to study this.* Likewise, Helena identified clear explanations as being an important motivator: *My teachers explained to me what TOEFL iBT is, [...] and explained me clearly the individual part relating to four skills- Reading- Listening- Speaking- Writing. Then, she listed out the advantages I have when I have a TOEFL iBT certificate. So, those are the reasons why I have motivation in studying TOEFL iBT.* Mike identified the additional materials supplied by his teacher as being important to him:

*She [teacher] gives me some listening materials and TOEFL iBT software program [that] I can work at home. That motivates me in my studying TOEFL.*

The questionnaire revealed that ‘Teaching methods’ play an important role in motivation for the participants in this study. This was summed up by Andy who stated: *My teachers introduced many good lessons, interesting strategies. I always feel fresh and interested. So, I don’t feel bored.* It seems that good teaching methodology not only helps learners understand more about TOEFL iBT, but also inspires learners to focus on Listening and Speaking skills which are common challenges to most EFL Vietnamese learners of English. Andy explains this: *They [TOEFL iBT teachers] have very interesting methodologies and they inspired me to focus on Listening and Speaking skills instead of the two others [Reading and Writing]. They also have many interesting lessons and exercises.*

In addition, the participants who were interviewed revealed that computer practice was important to them. Victor, for example, suggested that teaching methods that provide learners with opportunities to practice with a computer to know how to work in the real test environment are considered as “perfect” teaching methods. More significantly, all the investigated participants commented that they feel more motivated in TOEFL iBT learning when participating in group work and discussion activities. For example, Victor felt that *Working in group is a very stimulating way for me to work. I can have a place to show my creativity and we can tighten my friendships.* Similarly, Andy felt that *I can share ideas and I can learn ideas from others. It’s also more noisy [sic], but it’s more interesting.* Other participants reported that they valued working with their peers: *When you study in group work, you have more people and you will feel more lively [sic] and it doesn’t make you bored (Helena); When working in groups, we find more ideas about some issues.... We can choose the best ideas for the group.... it’s better than when we work alone (Mike).*

The finding that group work is an important motivating factor for this sample group is significant as previous studies (e.g., Barnes, 2010) concluded that group work is unlikely to be incorporated into the TOEFL iBT preparation courses because these interaction skills are not tested in the TOEFL iBT. A recommendation for the incorporation of increased group work in TOEFL iBT courses is congruent with Dörnyei (2001a)’s suggested strategies of using communicative language teaching (CLT) - oriented group activities to promote learning motivation. This calls for attention from TOEFL iBT teachers and TOEFL iBT material writers to not only focus on the content of the TOEFL iBT test but also to design classroom interaction activities to enhance learners’ language motivation. In a study on TOEFL iBT writing, Loan Nguyen (2012) concluded that group work and classroom discussion are useful in building TOEFL iBT learners’ confidence in writing. Additionally, it is posited that there is a significant correlation between interactive activities and learners’ gradual learning autonomy enhancement (see T. T. Dang, 2010). The recommendation of integrating group work and classroom discussion into TOEFL iBT tasks, indeed, is consistent with guidelines of the Educational Testing Service (2013) that English language teachers play a significant role in helping learners build a foundation and improve English language skills through communication skills in English.

## *5.2 Facilitator approach and delegator approach: Two teaching styles motivating TOEFL iBT learning motivation*

Data from the questionnaire revealed that facilitator and delegator teaching styles are perceived to motivate Vietnamese adolescent learners most in their TOEFL iBT studies. Although the study was not targeted at comparing favored teaching styles among three cohorts of TOEFL iBT Vietnamese adolescent learners, it emerged from the data that the early adolescent learners who participated in this study are prominently motivated by facilitator teaching style while middle adolescent learners and late adolescent learners appear to be more motivated by the delegator teaching style. Significantly, none of the investigated middle adolescent learners feel motivated by formal teaching approach (Figure 3).

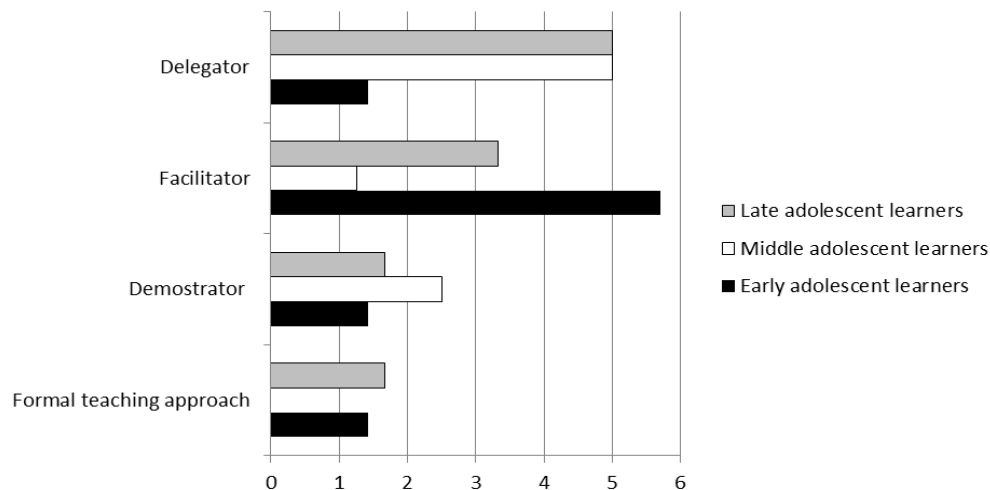


Figure 3. Perceptions of TOEFL iBT Vietnamese adolescent learners about teaching styles motivating their studies

The literature suggests that Vietnamese language learners prefer and primarily experience teacher-centered approaches (see Barnes, 2010; P. T. H. Thanh, 2010). However, the findings of this study suggest that language learners feel less motivated by such approaches. For example Selena stated that she feels discouraged when *'the teachers teach in a very forceful way'* and reports being more motivated in her TOEFL iBT learning when *'another [delegator] teacher teaches in a more flexible way [...] and I found it more interesting and that helps me a lot'*. It cannot be denied that demonstrator teaching style is *'more suitable for me as well as for Vietnamese students'*, as commented by Kim. However, Helena posited that demonstrator teaching style may hinder learner's problem solving skills. Helena reflected that *"I can have many mistakes in the way to solve the problem but when the teacher corrects me, I can remember it for a long time"*. More significantly, while the investigated participants are aware that with learner-centered approaches (i.e., facilitator and delegator teaching styles), learners work more than teachers, they are more motivated in their studies by these approaches.

This finding suggests that language teachers should aim to promote a learner-centered approach among TOEFL iBT Vietnamese adolescent language learners. Learner-centeredness has been found to promote positive effects such as increased learner motivation, learner engagement, learner satisfaction and academic achievement (e.g., Chung & Chow, 2004; Kemm & Dantas, 2007; McCombs, 1997). Specifically, research has identified that the facilitator teaching style incorporated with problem-solving strategies can lead to positive learning direction and promote cooperative learning (Adesoji, 2008; Grasha, 2003; Shaari, Yusoff, Ghazali, Osman, & Dzahir, 2014; Weimer, 2002) and is in keeping with the educational policies promoted by the promulgated a learner-centered approach (Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training, 2014).

A potential limitation of the study is that the study involved a small sample of TOEFL iBT Vietnamese adolescent learner participants. The results may not be generalized to other learner age groups or other TOEFL iBT teaching settings. To add greater depth of knowledge about the investigated phenomena and to further test the proposed pedagogical recommendations, future research could investigate larger samples of TOEFL iBT adolescent learners or of other TOEFL iBT age groups (e.g., adult learners) across TOEFL iBT settings. In addition, future research could investigate the perspectives of TOEFL iBT teachers about prominent influential factors affecting language learning motivation of EFL learners as well as teachers' experiences on the correlation between specific teaching styles and language learning motivation.

## 6. Conclusion

This study investigated the influential factors and teaching styles affecting language learning motivation

among TOEFL iBT learners in order to help guide TOEFL iBT teaching methods in the investigated country and similar EFL contexts. The study provides new perspectives of language education in Vietnam and on the nature of TOEFL iBT as well as of English language teaching and learning in Vietnam. Contrary to previous studies whose data revealed that teacher-centeredness is a favorable teaching approach in English language education in Vietnam in general (e.g., V. C. Le, 2007) and in TOEFL iBT classrooms in particular (e.g., Barnes, 2010), the data of the present study suggests that learner-centeredness (e.g., facilitator teaching style and delegator teaching style) is perceived as a significant language learning motivator among Vietnamese adolescent learners. Within the trajectory of globalization and internationalization on education, the quality of language learning in general and of TOEFL iBT in particular, has been increasing demand. Constructive pedagogical techniques tapping into learning motivation sources and prompt recognition of expectations of language learners would have the potential to contribute to the betterment of TOEFL iBT language learning success.

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## Appendix

### QUESTIONNAIRE

This survey questionnaire is designed for research investigating language learning motivation of TOEFL iBT Vietnamese adolescent learners. Your assistance in completing this survey is highly appreciated. All the information provided by you is solely for the research purpose. You can be guaranteed that all responses will be anonymous and confidentiality will be maintained.

**Instruction:** *The questionnaire is in two parts. Please put a tick in all the appropriate box; circle the letter (e.g., a, b, c); or give short answers in the provided space.*

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Gender:                    Male

Female

1. Age: .....

2. How long have you been learning English? .....

3. How long have you been studying TOEFL iBT? .....

4. How many teachers have you studied TOEFL iBT with? .....

5. What is your current TOEFL iBT score? .....

6. How do you rate your English proficiency?

a. Very good    b. Good.    c. Rather good    d. Not bad    e. Bad

MOTIVATION

**PART 1: FACTORS THAT MAY INFLUENCE YOUR MOTIVATIONS OF LEARNING TOEFL iBT**

Tick all the relevant factors that may influence your motivation in TOEFL iBT study:

- Teachers
- Teaching methods
- Learning materials
- TOEFL task types
- Learning environment
- Personal ability
- Achievement need
- Study enthusiasm
- Encouragements from others (e.g., parents, teachers)
- Peer's progress
- Peer pressure
- Parents' pressure
- Others: .....

**PART 2: THE ROLE OF TEACHING STYLES IN MOTIVATING YOUR LEARNING TOEFL iBT**

There are four common Teaching Styles (Grasha, 1994, 1996):

- a. **Formal Authority Approach:**  
Teachers use structured teaching, focus on rules and supervise learners according to standard practices.
- b. **Demonstrator:**  
Teachers teach by personal example; provide prototypes of behaviors and expect learners to observe and imitate the illustrated methods.
- c. **Facilitator:**  
This approach focuses on activities. Teachers provide guidance with options for learners to explore. Learners take initiative to meet the demands of various tasks.
- d. **Delegator:**  
Teachers place control and responsibility for learning on learners. Learners are encouraged to take initiative and responsibility in solving tasks with the teachers' assistance when needed.

Answer the following questions with relevant letter (s) of teaching types:

1. Which teaching types have you experienced when studying TOEFL iBT?
2. Which teaching types have motivated you most in your TOEFL iBT study?