

Enhancing Emotional Intelligence of Adult Learners in Online EFL Teaching: Insights from Vietnamese Educators

November 2024 – Volume 28, Number 3
<https://doi.org/10.55593/ej.28111a8>

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Abstract

This study investigates the strategies employed by Vietnamese EFL teachers to enhance emotional intelligence (EI) in adult learners within online learning environments. Utilizing a qualitative research design grounded in Mayer and Salovey's model of emotional intelligence and Knowles's theory of andragogy, the study involved semi-structured interviews with ten EFL teachers from two Vietnamese educational institutions. The thematic analysis of the interview data revealed several key strategies: reflective practices, interactive activities, technology integration, personalized feedback, collaborative learning, integration of real-life scenarios, self-awareness activities, development of emotional vocabulary, and creation of emotionally supportive environments. The findings illustrate a multifaceted approach to enhancing EI in online language education, highlighting the innovative adaptation of traditional classroom strategies to the digital realm. The study's unique contribution lies in its focus on the Vietnamese context, providing insights into how cultural nuances shape online teaching strategies for EI enhancement. The implications of these findings are significant for the field of EFL education, suggesting the need for holistic teaching approaches that integrate emotional competencies alongside linguistic skills.

Keywords: Adult learners, emotional intelligence, online EFL teaching, Vietnamese educators

The shift towards online learning environments, accelerated by global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, has brought forth significant changes in educational methodologies and strategies, particularly in the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) (Choi & Chung, 2021; Cobanoglu & Cobanoglu, 2021; Tas et al., 2021). This study focuses on a crucial aspect

of this digital transition, examining the strategies employed by Vietnamese EFL teachers to enhance the emotional intelligence (EI) of adult learners in online settings. EI, a concept popularized by Goleman (2011, 2021), plays a pivotal role in learning, encompassing the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions and empathize with others. Its importance is magnified in online learning environments, where the lack of physical presence and direct interpersonal interaction can pose challenges to both teaching and learning (Vlachopoulos & Makri, 2019).

This research is grounded in the theoretical frameworks of both EI, as conceptualized by Mayer and Salovey (2007), and grounded theory methodology, as developed by Glaser and Strauss (2017). The investigation centers around the following research question: "How do Vietnamese EFL teachers strategize to enhance adult learners' EI in online learning environments?" Understanding these strategies is vital, as EI is closely linked to learners' motivation, engagement, and overall success in language acquisition.

The significance of this study lies in its focus on a non-Western educational context, offering insights into culturally specific teaching methodologies that could be valuable in a global educational landscape. Additionally, the study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on online learning, a rapidly evolving field that has become increasingly relevant in today's digital age. As EFL learning continues to gain prominence globally, understanding the nuances of EI within this context becomes essential for educators and policymakers alike.

Literature Review

Debates on EI in Online Learning

The literature on EI in online learning presents a landscape of debates and discussions. On one hand, scholars like Tehranipour and Bagheri Masoudzade (2024) and Gunasekara et al. (2022) have argued for the central role of EI in fostering effective online learning environments, emphasizing its impact on student motivation and retention. These studies build on foundational works such as Goleman's (1996) early exploration of EI, which laid the groundwork for understanding its application in educational contexts, and Mayer et al.'s (2011) model, which provided a comprehensive framework for EI's role in personal and academic success. Conversely, critics such as Matthews et al. (2007) and Zeidner et al. (2008) have contended that the significance of EI is overstated and that cognitive skills play a more substantial role in online learning success. Further critiques by Shafait and Huang (2022) argued that the empirical evidence linking EI to learning outcomes is often inconsistent, pointing to methodological limitations in many EI studies. This dichotomy points to the need for further empirical research, particularly in how EI specifically influences language learning in digital contexts.

Cultural Contexts and EI

The application of Western models of EI in non-Western contexts is a topic of significant academic contention. While Goleman's (2011, 2021) model of EI is globally influential, its Western-centric approach has been challenged by researchers like Shao et al. (2015) and Groves et al. (2015), who have argued for a more culturally nuanced understanding of EI. These challenges are supported by Hofstede's (1991) research on cultural dimensions, which underscores the variability in emotional expression and management across cultures, suggesting that EI models must be adapted to fit different cultural contexts. This debate is

particularly relevant in the Vietnamese EFL context, where cultural norms and values may shape unique expressions and perceptions of emotions (Hoa & Thi, 2020). For instance, studies by Truong et al. (2017) highlighted the importance of understanding the collectivist nature of Vietnamese society, which influences both the teaching and learning processes.

Synthesizing Adult Learning Theories and EI

The intersection of adult learning theories, such as Knowles's andragogy, and EI in online learning environments is not extensively explored in current literature. Studies like those by Williams (2019) and Wlodkowski and Ginsberg (2017) begin to bridge this gap, examining how adult learners' emotional maturity influences their engagement in online courses. This line of inquiry is rooted in earlier work by Mezirow (1991), who emphasized the role of EI in transformative learning, particularly in adult education. However, the specific ways in which EFL teachers can leverage this relationship to enhance learning outcomes remains an underexplored area. Moreover, researchers like Merriam and Bierema (2013) have suggested that integrating EI into adult learning theories could lead to more personalized and effective educational experiences, though empirical studies in this area remain sparse.

EFL Teaching Challenges in Online Settings

The shift to online education has sparked a debate over the effectiveness of traditional EFL teaching strategies in virtual classrooms. While Ferri et al. (2020) highlighted the limitations imposed by the lack of physical presence, Chen Hsieh and Lee (2023) proposed that digital tools can actually enhance language teaching by enabling innovative, emotionally intelligent teaching strategies. This is further complicated by the findings of Hampel and Stickler (2012), who noted the challenges of maintaining student engagement in online language learning environments and the potential role of EI in mitigating these challenges. This ongoing debate underscores the need for research focused on effective teaching strategies in the online EFL context. The debates within these literature domains reveal a complex interplay of factors influencing the enhancement of EI in online EFL learning environments (Yavuzalp & Bahcivan, 2020). However, the existing literature does not fully address how these strategies can be adapted to different cultural contexts or how EI can be measured effectively in online settings, a gap this study aims to fill.

While there is a consensus on the importance of EI in education, the effective strategies for enhancing it, particularly in culturally diverse contexts like Vietnam, remain underexplored. Furthermore, foundational studies by researchers such as Fernández-Berrocal and Extremera (2006) and Akerjordet and Severinsson (2007) provide a basis for understanding the role of EI in educational settings but also highlight the challenges in operationalizing and measuring EI. This study seeks to fill this gap by investigating the specific strategies employed by Vietnamese EFL teachers, thereby contributing to the broader discourse on EI in online adult education. The grounded theory approach offers an opportunity to develop a theory directly from data, providing nuanced insights into the interaction between cultural context, EI, and language teaching strategies in an online environment.

Theoretical Frameworks Underpinning the Study

The foundational theoretical frameworks that inform this study are crucial for shaping the research methodology and interpreting the findings. Firstly, Mayer and Salovey's (2007) model of EI provides a comprehensive and nuanced perspective on EI. This model frames EI not just

as an intrinsic trait, but as a set of acquired skills that involve the perception, understanding, management, and regulation of one's own and others' emotions. Applying this framework allows the study to systematically explore how Vietnamese EFL teachers perceive and cultivate these aspects of EI in their online instructional strategies. It also aids in identifying the specific skills that teachers target to enhance EI among adult learners, considering the unique challenges and dynamics of the online learning environment.

Secondly, Knowles's (1978) theory of andragogy offers a vital lens through which the study examines adult learning processes in the context of online EFL education. This theory emphasizes that adult learners are inherently self-directed and possess a reservoir of experiences that they bring to the learning environment. Such a perspective is particularly relevant when considering the development of EI in adult learners. It suggests that adult learners might approach the learning of EI in a more experiential, self-guided manner, and that their prior experiences could significantly shape how they perceive and develop EI skills. This framework thus provides a basis for understanding how teachers can tailor their strategies to engage with and build upon the existing emotional skills and life experiences of adult learners in the online EFL context.

Integrating Mayer and Salovey's (2007) model of EI with Knowles's (1978) andragogical principles, the study aims to offer a thorough and contextually informed understanding of how EI is nurtured in adult online EFL learning. This dual-framework approach not only enriches the analysis of the collected data but also ensures a comprehensive exploration of the interplay between EI and adult learning theories in the realm of online language education.

Methods

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design, utilizing grounded theory methodology to explore the strategies Vietnamese EFL teachers employ to enhance adult learners' EI in online learning environments. Grounded theory, as developed by Glaser and Strauss (2017), is chosen for its strength in developing a theoretical framework directly from empirical data, thus allowing for the in-depth exploration of complex phenomena like teaching strategies and EI within specific cultural and educational contexts.

Participants

In this study, the selection of the ten Vietnamese EFL teachers as participants was meticulously conducted through purposive sampling methods, targeting instructors from two renowned educational institutions in Vietnam known for their adult language education programs. The purposive sampling approach was specifically chosen based on the need to select individuals who could offer in-depth, context-specific insights into the research focus. This sampling method was chosen for its effectiveness in identifying individuals who are most likely to provide rich, relevant, and diverse insights into the strategies for enhancing EI in online EFL settings.

The criteria for selecting the participants included their extensive experience in online EFL teaching, particularly with adult learners, their educational background, and their willingness to participate in a reflective teaching practice. Additionally, demographic factors such as age, gender, and educational qualifications were considered to ensure a diverse and representative sample. The rationale behind the choice of these specific participants lies in their direct

involvement and experience in teaching English online to adult learners. This experience is crucial for the study, as it ensures that the participants possess a deep understanding of the unique challenges and dynamics associated with online language instruction, particularly in the context of adult education. The inclusion of teachers from two different institutions further enriches the study by introducing a variety of teaching approaches and institutional cultures, thereby offering a more comprehensive understanding of the practices across different educational settings.

Furthermore, within purposive sampling, the study employed the criterion sampling strategy. The decision to maintain equal gender representation among the participants was made to ensure a balanced perspective. Criterion sampling was used to focus on teachers who meet specific predefined criteria essential to the research question, such as having at least three years of experience in online adult EFL education. By having five male and five female teachers, the study aims to capture a broad spectrum of experiences and viewpoints, considering that gender can influence teaching styles, interaction with students, and the approach to EI. This balance is crucial for avoiding gender bias and for providing a more holistic understanding of the research problem.

To uphold the ethical standards of research and protect the privacy of the participants, pseudonyms are assigned to each teacher. Particularly, male participants are named as Anh, Bao, Cuong, Dung, and Huy, while female participants are identified as Mai, Lan, Nga, Phuong, and Thao. This not only ensures confidentiality but also encourages participants to express their views more freely, without concerns about personal or professional repercussions. The use of pseudonyms is a common practice in qualitative research, particularly when dealing with sensitive topics or when there is a need to maintain the anonymity of the subjects involved. This ethical consideration is fundamental for maintaining the integrity of the research and fostering trust between the researcher and the participants.

These participants were chosen based on their experience in teaching English to adult learners in online settings, ensuring that they possess relevant insights and practical knowledge about the strategies for enhancing EI in such environments. The demographic information of the participants, including their age, gender, educational background, and years of teaching experience, was carefully recorded. The details provide context to their responses and contribute to a richer understanding of the data. Ages of the participants range from 28 to 45 years, reflecting a mix of relatively newer and more experienced educators. All possess a minimum of a bachelor's degree in English language teaching or a related field, with some holding additional qualifications in education or linguistics.

In terms of ethical considerations, the study adheres to stringent guidelines to protect the participants' privacy and confidentiality. Informed consent was obtained from each participant, ensuring they were fully aware of the study's purpose, the nature of their involvement, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Additionally, all data gathered from the interviews are treated with the utmost confidentiality and used solely for the purposes of this research. The ethical protocol also includes measures to prevent any potential power dynamics between the researcher and participants, such as ensuring voluntary participation and emphasizing the non-evaluative nature of the research. This careful attention to ethical issues not only aligns with standard research practices but also fosters a respectful and trusting environment for the participants, encouraging open and honest communication.

Data Collection

The primary method of data collection in this study was through semi-structured interviews with the ten selected Vietnamese EFL teachers. This approach provided the flexibility necessary to explore in-depth the strategies they employ in enhancing EI among adult learners in online settings. However, considering the potential critique regarding the reliance on self-reported data, particular attention was given to the development and validation of the interview instrument to enhance the study's validity. To ensure the effectiveness and relevance of the interview questions, a pilot study was initially conducted. This involved trialing the interview protocol with two EFL teachers who were not part of the main study. Based on their feedback and the initial insights gained, the interview questions were refined to better align with the study's objectives.

The refinement process included careful consideration of the correlation versus causation dilemma often associated with EI studies. The questions were designed not only to elicit self-reported strategies and perceptions but also to gather specific examples and evidence of how these strategies impact students' learning outcomes. The revised interview questions delved into various aspects of teaching practice and EI in the online learning context. Examples of these questions include: "How do you perceive the role of EI in online language teaching?", "Can you describe any specific strategies you use to enhance EI in your virtual classrooms?", and "What challenges have you faced in fostering EI among adult learners online, and how have you addressed them?"

In addition to these revisions, the interview instrument was thoroughly piloted and refined to ensure its robustness. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes, offering sufficient time to explore the topics in depth without causing fatigue to the participants. The interviews were conducted in places chosen by the participants for their convenience and comfort, often in quiet areas within their respective institutions or in private settings like their homes. To ensure clarity and ease of communication, all interviews were conducted in Vietnamese, the participants' native language. This choice was crucial for allowing participants to express their thoughts and experiences more naturally and precisely.

Recognizing the importance of accurate data capture and analysis, the interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants. These recordings were then transcribed verbatim, and for accuracy and consistency, a professional translator proficient in both Vietnamese and English was engaged to translate the transcriptions. This rigorous process, which included back-translation and cross-checking for consistency, further strengthened the instrument's reliability. This translation was necessary for the subsequent data analysis process, particularly given the involvement of researchers who might not be fluent in Vietnamese. The meticulous approach to data collection – from the pilot study to the actual interviews and transcription processes – was designed to ensure the richness, accuracy, and relevance of the data for the study's grounded theory methodology.

Data Analysis

The data gathered from the semi-structured interviews underwent a comprehensive thematic analysis, a method chosen for its effectiveness in identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2023). This approach began with a meticulous process of transcription and translation of the interview recordings into English, ensuring that the nuances of the participants' responses were accurately captured.

The first step in the thematic analysis was a thorough reading of the transcripts to gain an initial understanding of the data. This was followed by a more detailed examination, where initial codes were generated. These codes were derived inductively, closely reflecting the participants' own words and experiences. This coding process was iterative, involving constant comparison of data across different interviews to identify commonalities and differences. As codes began to proliferate, they were organized into potential themes. These themes represented broader patterns that encompassed the underlying ideas and concepts related to the strategies for enhancing EI in online EFL teaching. The thematic categorization was a dynamic and reflexive process, with themes being continuously reviewed and refined. This involved checking them against the coded extracts and the entire data set to ensure they accurately represented the data.

Following the generation of themes, a phase of review and refinement was undertaken. This phase was crucial for ensuring the coherence and distinctiveness of each theme. The themes were then defined and named, capturing the essence of what each represented in relation to the research question. The final stage of the analysis involved weaving the thematic analysis into an analytic narrative. In this narrative, the themes were presented and contextualized within the literature reviewed earlier in the study. This process not only highlighted the findings of the study but also situated them within the broader academic discourse on EI and EFL teaching in online settings. The thematic analysis, thus, provided a structured yet flexible approach for unraveling the complex data, enabling the study to construct a meaningful interpretation of the strategies employed by Vietnamese EFL teachers in the context of EI enhancement.

Findings

Reflective Practices in Enhancing EI

A key finding of the study is the use of reflective practices as a strategy to enhance EI among online EFL learners. This approach was reported by eight participants, with an equal split between genders: four males (Anh, Bao, Cuong, and Dung) and four females (Mai, Lan, Nga, and Thao).

Anh, one of the male participants, explained how he incorporates journal writing: *"I ask my students to maintain a journal in English, where they reflect on their daily emotional states and the reasons behind them."* This strategy aligns with the model of EI, particularly in fostering the 'perception' and 'understanding' of emotions. By reflecting on their emotions in a structured way, learners are practicing the identification and articulation of their feelings, a key component of EI. Simultaneously, from the perspective of the theory of andragogy, Anh's method leverages the self-directed nature of adult learning. By engaging with their emotional states through journaling, adult learners are given the autonomy to explore and connect with their experiences, a fundamental aspect of adult education.

Similarly, Lan, a female participant, shared her use of reflective discussions: *"During our online sessions, I allocate time for students to share their feelings about learning, their challenges, and achievements."* Lan's approach demonstrates an application of the EI model through the 'management' aspect of EI. By creating a space for open discussion of emotions, she encourages learners to express and regulate their emotions, facilitating an emotionally intelligent learning environment. Concurrently, through the lens of andragogy, Lan's strategy recognizes the value of learners' experiences and emotions. By inviting them to share and reflect on their emotional journey in learning, Lan aligns with the emphasis on the learner's

self-concept and the rich reservoir of experiences that adult learners bring to the educational setting.

Interactive Activities for EI Development

Another significant finding from the study is the implementation of interactive activities by the Vietnamese EFL teachers to foster EI in their online classrooms. This strategy was highlighted by seven of the participants, including three males (Bao, Cuong, Huy) and four females (Mai, Lan, Phuong, Thao).

Cuong, one of the male teachers, described his approach: *“I use role-play exercises where students have to respond to different emotional scenarios. This helps them practice empathy and emotional responses in a safe, controlled environment.”* Analyzing this through the model of EI, Cuong’s strategy targets the ‘management’ of emotions, as students actively engage in understanding and responding to diverse emotional states. This exercise also reflects the ‘perception’ aspect, as learners must identify and react to the emotions presented in the scenarios. From an andragogical perspective, role-play allows adult learners to draw upon their life experiences, bringing a depth of realism and relevance to the activity. This method respects the self-concept of adult learners by engaging them in experiential learning that is both reflective and participatory.

A female participant, Phuong, shared her use of group discussions: *“In my online classes, I create discussion groups where students talk about emotional challenges they have faced while learning English. This fosters a sense of community and mutual understanding.”* Phuong’s method aligns with the ‘understanding’ and ‘management’ components of EI as per the EI model. By discussing emotional challenges, students enhance their ability to understand and articulate emotions, both their own and those of others. In the context of andragogy, this group discussion format taps into the principle of the learners’ need to know, as adult learners are motivated by understanding the relevance of learning to their real-life situations. It also promotes a collaborative learning environment, a key aspect of adult learning, where experiences and insights are shared, thus enriching the learning experience for all participants.

Utilization of Technology to Foster EI

A notable finding from the study is the strategic use of technology by Vietnamese EFL teachers to enhance EI in online learning environments. This approach was identified by six participants, including three males (Dung, Huy, Bao) and three females (Mai, Thao, Lan).

Dung, a male participant, explained his method: *“I incorporate EI apps that provide scenarios and quizzes, helping students identify and navigate various emotional situations.”* This approach reflects the EI model, particularly the ‘perception’ and ‘understanding’ aspects. By engaging with technology-based scenarios, students practice identifying and interpreting different emotions in a controlled, interactive setting. From the perspective of the andragogy theory, this technology integration aligns with the concept of self-directed learning. Adult learners are provided with tools that they can explore independently, catering to their need for autonomy and control over their learning process.

Similarly, Thao, a female teacher, shared her experience: *“I use video conferencing tools to facilitate emotionally charged discussions, allowing students to express and interpret emotions through both verbal and non-verbal cues.”* This method connects with the ‘management’ aspect of the EI framework, as it provides a platform for students to practice regulating and expressing

emotions in a socially aware manner. In terms of andragogy, this use of video conferencing technology respects the learners' need for a more personal, humanized learning experience. It allows adult learners to utilize their personal experiences and emotional maturity in real-time discussions, enhancing the learning process through practical, interactive engagement.

Personalized Feedback as a Tool for Emotional Growth

A further important finding from this study is the emphasis Vietnamese EFL teachers place on providing personalized feedback to foster EI among adult online learners. This approach was highlighted by seven of the ten participants, including four males (Anh, Cuong, Dung, Huy) and three females (Lan, Nga, Thao).

Anh, a male participant, shared his approach: *"I make it a point to give individual feedback on assignments, focusing not just on language skills but also on emotional expression and empathy shown in their work."* This method aligns with the EI framework, particularly the 'understanding' and 'management' components. By offering feedback that is personalized and attentive to emotional aspects, Anh aids his students in recognizing and understanding their emotional expressions, as well as managing them effectively in communicative contexts. From an andragogical perspective, this individualized feedback caters to the adult learner's need for self-direction and respect for their personal learning journey. It allows for a reflective learning process where adult learners can introspect and improve upon their EI skills in relation to language learning.

Nga, a female teacher, emphasized the motivational aspect of her feedback: *"I ensure my feedback encourages self-reflection and growth, helping students see how understanding and managing emotions can enhance their communication."* This approach reflects the EI model by facilitating the development of EI through constructive reflection on emotional experiences. Moreover, through the lens of the andragogy theory, Nga's strategy acknowledges the importance of internal motivation and the value of personal growth in adult learning. By linking feedback to the learners' potential for emotional and communicative growth, she taps into the intrinsic motivations of adult learners, which are critical in fostering a positive and engaging learning environment.

Encouraging Collaborative Learning for EI Development

An additional significant finding from the study is the emphasis placed by Vietnamese EFL teachers on promoting collaborative learning activities to enhance EI among adult learners in online environments. This strategy was mentioned by six of the participants, including three males (Bao, Cuong, Huy) and three females (Mai, Phuong, Thao).

Cuong, a male participant, described his approach: *"In my online classes, I often organize group projects where students must work together to solve language-related tasks. This not only improves their language skills but also their ability to empathize and collaborate."* Cuong's strategy aligns with the model of EI, especially in the 'relationship management' aspect. By engaging students in group work, he fosters their ability to navigate social interactions and work effectively with others, a critical component of EI. From the perspective of the andragogy theory, this collaborative approach is beneficial for adult learners, who often value the opportunity to share their experiences and learn from peers. This communal learning aligns with their need for social interaction and practical application of skills.

Phuong, a female teacher, highlighted the emotional aspect of collaboration: *“I find that when students collaborate, they share not just knowledge but also feelings and perspectives. This mutual sharing builds emotional understanding and support among learners.”* Phuong’s method incorporates the concept of ‘emotional understanding’ by creating a platform for students to express and understand emotions within a group. Furthermore, in line with the andragogy principles, this approach leverages the adult learners’ accumulated life experiences, facilitating learning through social interaction and mutual understanding, which are key components of adult education.

Integration of Real-life Scenarios for Emotional Engagement

A crucial finding from this study is the use of real-life scenarios by Vietnamese EFL teachers to engage learners emotionally in the online learning environment. This strategy was brought to light by five participants, including two males (Anh, Huy) and three females (Mai, Lan, Nga).

Anh, one of the male teachers, explained: *“I incorporate scenarios from everyday life which my students might encounter. Discussing these in class helps them connect emotionally and linguistically with the content.”* This approach resonates with the model of EI, particularly in enhancing the ‘perception’ and ‘understanding’ of emotions. By using real-life scenarios, Anh facilitates an authentic context in which students can identify and interpret emotional cues, thus deepening their understanding of both language and emotions. From an andragogical standpoint, this theory underlines the importance of relevance in adult learning. Anh’s strategy aligns with this principle by linking learning content to real-world situations, thus enhancing the learners’ engagement and motivation.

Lan, a female participant, shared a similar approach: *“I often use situations that my students might face at work or in personal interactions. This helps them to see the practical application of EI in their daily lives.”* Lan’s method exemplifies the ‘application’ aspect of EI as described in the EI framework. By situating learning within the context of real-life situations, Lan encourages her students to apply emotional understanding and management skills beyond the classroom. In accordance with the andragogy theory, this approach taps into the adult learners’ desire for learning that is immediately applicable and relevant to their life experiences, thereby fostering a more engaging and practical learning experience.

Emphasis on Self-Awareness Activities

A noteworthy finding from this study is the focus on activities that promote self-awareness as a means to enhance EI in online EFL teaching. This strategy was identified by six participants, including three males (Bao, Dung, Huy) and three females (Lan, Phuong, Thao).

Dung, a male teacher, elaborated on his approach: *“I encourage my students to engage in activities that require them to introspect and analyze their own emotions. For instance, I use self-assessment questionnaires that prompt them to reflect on their emotional reactions during learning.”* This strategy is closely aligned with the model of EI, particularly in its emphasis on the ‘self-awareness’ component. By encouraging students to engage in introspection, Dung aids them in recognizing and understanding their own emotional states, which is fundamental to EI. Moreover, in line with the theory of andragogy, such self-assessment activities cater to adult learners’ preference for self-directed learning. These activities not only allow adult learners to

reflect on their experiences but also to integrate their learning into personal and professional contexts.

Phuong, a female participant, mentioned a similar tactic: *“I often ask students to analyze how their emotions affect their communication in English. This reflection helps them understand the impact of emotions on language learning.”* This approach dovetails with the ‘self-awareness’ aspect of the EI model, enabling students to understand the interplay between emotions and language use. Additionally, from an andragogical perspective, this reflective practice leverages the principle that adult learners benefit from understanding the ‘why’ behind their learning. By connecting emotional self-awareness with language skills, Phuong helps learners appreciate the relevance of EI in practical, real-world communication.

Development of Emotional Vocabulary

An additional key finding from this study is the deliberate emphasis on expanding and developing emotional vocabulary among adult learners in online EFL classes. This strategy was highlighted by five participants, including two males (Anh, Cuong) and three females (Mai, Nga, Thao).

Anh, one of the male teachers, described his approach: *“I integrate specific lessons focused on emotional vocabulary. It is not just about learning new words; it is about understanding the emotions these words convey.”* Anh’s method aligns with the model of EI, particularly in the ‘perception’ and ‘understanding’ of emotions. By enhancing students’ emotional vocabulary, he is enabling them to more accurately identify and articulate feelings, a fundamental aspect of EI. From an andragogical perspective, this strategy meets the principle of making learning relevant and practical. By equipping adult learners with the language tools to express emotions, Anh is directly linking language learning to real-world communication needs.

Nga, a female teacher, highlighted the practical application of this strategy: *“I often have my students practice using emotional vocabulary in different speaking and writing scenarios. This helps them to not only use the language but also connect emotionally with what they are saying or writing.”* Nga’s approach addresses the ‘application’ component of EI model. Through practical exercises, she encourages students to apply their emotional vocabulary in diverse contexts, thereby enhancing their EI in communication. In terms of andragogy, these activities resonate with adult learners’ preference for learning that is directly applicable to their personal and professional lives. By practicing emotional vocabulary in varied scenarios, learners see the immediate utility of their language skills.

Creating Emotionally Supportive Learning Environments

A significant finding from this study is the effort by Vietnamese EFL teachers to create emotionally supportive learning environments in their online classrooms. This approach was noted by seven of the participants, including four males (Bao, Cuong, Huy, Dung) and three females (Lan, Phuong, Thao).

Bao, one of the male teachers, shared: *“I strive to establish a classroom atmosphere where students feel safe to express their emotions and discuss their challenges. This support is crucial in an online setting.”* Bao’s method is in line with the model of EI, specifically in fostering an environment conducive to the ‘management’ of emotions. By creating a safe and supportive space, he encourages students to express and manage their emotions effectively. This approach

also resonates with the theory of andragogy, as it acknowledges the adult learner's need for a respectful and supportive learning environment, which is essential for self-directed learning.

Phuong, a female participant, highlighted the importance of teacher empathy: *"I make an effort to understand and empathize with my students' emotional states, especially during stressful times. This empathy helps build trust and encourages engagement."* Phuong's approach aligns with the 'understanding' component of EI. By demonstrating empathy, she fosters a deeper emotional connection with her students, enhancing the overall learning experience. From an andragogical perspective, this empathetic interaction supports the principle of considering the learners' emotional background and experiences, thereby facilitating a more inclusive and engaged learning process for adult learners.

Discussion

The findings of this study contribute significantly to the field of EFL teaching, especially in the context of enhancing EI in online learning environments. Each identified strategy aligns with, yet distinctively extends, existing literature, highlighting the unique contributions of this research. The emphasis on reflective practices, such as journaling and self-reflection, echoes previous studies that have recognized the value of reflection in developing EI (e.g., Byrne, 2009; Imperato & Strano-Paul, 2021). However, this study extends the discourse by illustrating how these practices are specifically adapted to the online EFL context, demonstrating their practical application in language learning, a nuance less explored in existing literature. The use of interactive activities like role-plays and discussions to enhance EI has parallels in studies by Lewkowicz (2006) and Valdes (2019). However, the current study underscores the effectiveness of these methods in online settings, providing insights into how these activities can be reimaged for virtual classrooms, thus addressing a gap in the current understanding of EI strategies in digital learning environments.

While the use of technology in online education is well-documented (e.g., Bates, 2005; Winter et al., 2021), this study reveals specific ways technology is employed to enhance EI. Unlike general applications, the findings demonstrate the use of emotion-focused apps and video conferencing as tools for EI development, thereby contributing a novel perspective to the integration of technology in language education. The study's focus on personalized feedback aligns with existing research on the importance of feedback in education (Korkmaz & Toraman, 2020; Winstone & Boud, 2022). However, it diverges by highlighting how feedback can specifically target emotional growth in adult learners, an aspect not extensively explored in previous studies, thereby enriching the understanding of feedback's role in EI development. While collaborative learning is a recognized educational strategy (Chatterjee & Correia, 2020; Qureshi et al., 2023), this study uniquely demonstrates its specific application in fostering EI among adult EFL learners. It offers insights into how collaborative tasks can be designed to enhance not only language skills but also emotional competencies, a contribution that extends beyond the typical focus of collaborative learning research. The use of real-life scenarios to enhance emotional engagement in online learning environments adds a new dimension to existing literature. Unlike general language teaching strategies (e.g., Dos Santos, 2020; MacIntyre et al., 2020), this approach directly links EI development with practical language use, offering a concrete method for applying theoretical EI concepts in real-world contexts.

The study's findings on self-awareness activities contribute to the broader discussion on EI by showcasing specific exercises that facilitate self-awareness in online learning (Atmojo et al.,

2020; Yao et al., 2022). This focus provides a practical extension to the theoretical understanding of self-awareness in EI development, particularly in the context of adult language education. The emphasis on emotional vocabulary development is an area where this study particularly distinguishes itself. While the importance of vocabulary is recognized in language learning (Schmitt & Schmitt, 2020; Vu & Peters, 2021), its specific role in enhancing EI is less explored. This study fills this gap by showing how emotional vocabulary can be strategically developed to support EI, providing a nuanced understanding of vocabulary teaching in EFL contexts. Finally, the strategy of creating emotionally supportive online environments resonates with broader educational research emphasizing the importance of supportive learning climates (Bailey et al., 2021; Parmaxi, 2023). However, the current study extends this by illustrating how such environments can be fostered in the specific context of online EFL teaching and how they contribute to EI development, thereby offering new insights into the creation of effective online educational settings.

Conclusion

The study aimed to explore the strategies employed by Vietnamese EFL teachers to enhance EI among adult learners in online learning environments. Grounded in the model of EI and the theory of andragogy, the research utilized qualitative methods, specifically semi-structured interviews, to gather in-depth data from ten EFL teachers. This approach allowed for a detailed exploration of their experiences and strategies. The findings revealed several key strategies: the use of reflective practices, interactive activities, technology integration, personalized feedback, collaborative learning, real-life scenarios, self-awareness activities, development of emotional vocabulary, and creation of emotionally supportive environments. These strategies underscored the multifaceted approach teachers take to develop EI in online settings, highlighting their adaptability and innovation in the face of the unique challenges posed by online education.

The implications of these findings are significant for the field of EFL education. First, they suggest that enhancing EI in online language teaching requires a holistic approach, encompassing not only linguistic skills but also emotional competencies. The study's emphasis on strategies like reflective practices and interactive activities highlights the importance of engaging learners in ways that go beyond traditional language instruction, fostering a deeper understanding of both emotional and linguistic nuances. Furthermore, the integration of technology in EI development represents a critical area for future curriculum development. As online education continues to grow, the creative use of technology to enhance emotional understanding and empathy becomes increasingly vital. This study suggests that technology, when used strategically, can be a powerful tool in fostering emotional growth alongside language proficiency. Additionally, the study's focus on personalized feedback and emotionally supportive environments points to the need for teacher training programs to incorporate modules on EI and learner psychology. Such training can equip teachers with the skills to create nurturing learning spaces, tailor feedback for emotional growth, and thus, enhance the overall effectiveness of language education.

In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights into the strategies used by Vietnamese EFL teachers to enhance EI in online learning environments. The findings suggest that a comprehensive, empathetic, and technologically integrated approach is crucial in teaching languages effectively in digital platforms. As the field of online education continues to evolve, these insights offer guidance on how to adapt teaching methods to meet the emotional and

educational needs of adult learners, thus contributing to more effective and engaging language learning experiences.

Limitations and Recommendations for Further Studies

This study, while providing valuable insights into the strategies Vietnamese EFL teachers use to enhance EI in online learning environments, has certain limitations that must be acknowledged. Firstly, the sample size of ten teachers, though adequate for qualitative depth, may not fully represent the diversity of teaching approaches across Vietnam or other cultural contexts. This limitation suggests that the findings might not be generalizable to all online EFL teaching scenarios. Additionally, the study's focus on qualitative data, though rich in detail, lacks the quantitative measures that could provide a broader overview of the effectiveness of the identified strategies in enhancing EI. Another limitation lies in the sole reliance on teacher perspectives; the inclusion of student feedback would have offered a more holistic view of the efficacy of these strategies.

Addressing the limitations of the current study on Vietnamese EFL teachers' strategies for enhancing EI in online learning environments, future research could embark on a more expansive journey. A key direction would be to diversify the participant pool by including EFL teachers from various regions and potentially different countries. This expansion would allow for a richer exploration of how cultural contexts and regional educational norms influence the development of EI in online language teaching. Such a cross-cultural examination could uncover unique strategies or variations in teaching practices that are culturally specific, providing a more global perspective on EI enhancement in online language education.

Further, integrating a mixed-methods approach would significantly deepen the understanding of these strategies' impact. By combining the qualitative richness of teacher interviews with quantitative methods like surveys or controlled experimental studies, future research could offer a more robust analysis. This approach would allow for the measurement of the direct effects of specific teaching strategies on learners' EI and language proficiency, providing empirical evidence to support or challenge the findings of the current study.

Incorporating the perspectives of adult learners is another vital area for further investigation. Understanding learners' experiences, perceptions, and responses to these teaching strategies would provide critical insights into their effectiveness from the learners' point of view. This inclusion could reveal gaps between teacher intentions and learner experiences, guiding the development of more learner-centered, effective teaching practices.

By exploring these avenues, future research would not only address the current study's limitations but also significantly contribute to the broader field of online language education. Such studies would enhance the understanding of how EI can be effectively integrated into language learning, leading to teaching practices that are not only academically sound but also emotionally enriching and engaging for learners worldwide.

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To Cite this Article

Thao, L., & Thuy, P. T. (2024). Enhancing emotional intelligence of adult learners in online EFL teaching: insights from Vietnamese educators. *Teaching English as a Second Language Electronic Journal (TESL-EJ)*, 28(3). <https://doi.org/10.55593/ej.28111a8>

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