

## Integrating Community Service Learning into University Curriculum: Perspectives from EFL Teachers and Students

Vien Truong<sup>1</sup> , Hung Bui Phu<sup>2</sup> , & Liem Truong Thi Tu<sup>3</sup> 

### Abstract

Community service learning (CSL) has been regarded as a pedagogical tool which provides students with opportunities to participate in a service activity to meet social needs and simultaneously gain benefits for themselves. There has been a tendency in the world to include CSL in higher education training programs. This study aims to investigate Vietnamese EFL teachers' and students' perceptions of CSL and their practices of a CSL-integrated course at a university of foreign languages in central Vietnam. The study involved 61 teachers and 201 students and employed quantitative and qualitative approaches. The findings revealed that both teachers and students showed strong support for CSL, and that the teachers, especially more experienced teachers, had more positive beliefs than the students about the five categories surveyed: perceptions of CSL, role of the school, benefits for teachers, benefits for students, and feasibility of CSL integration. Also, the participants believed that CSL was to be a tool to help students develop professionally, personally, and academically.

**Keywords:** Community service learning (CSL), higher education, CSL-integrated course, experiential learning

Received: 11 October 2020  
Received in revised form: 22 October 2020  
Accepted: 12 November 2020

1. Corresponding author, Associate Professor, Department of English, University of Foreign Languages, Hue University, Hue City, Vietnam; *Email:* [truongviensp@gmail.com](mailto:truongviensp@gmail.com); **ORCID:** 0000-0002-0191-0888
2. PhD, Department of Foreign Languages, University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam; **ORCID:** 0000-0003-3468-4837
3. MA, Department of English for Specific Purposes, University of Foreign Languages, Hue University, Hue City, Vietnam; **ORCID:** 0000-0001-7189-1785

## 1. Introduction

Community service learning (CSL), or service learning, is a relatively new concept in the field of teacher education, even though it is currently gaining popularity as a useful tool of teaching pedagogy in higher education (Butcher et al., 2005). This tool of teaching pedagogy links the curriculum of different disciplines to community service to address social issues (Cummings, 2000; Giles & Eyer, 1994). It proves mutually beneficial for the students participating in the CSL-related courses and the target community (Carney, 2004; Hart, 2006). In the field of teaching practice, authentic knowledge and experience is vital for student teachers to deal with, and CSL classes of English are supposed to provide the students with many aspects of a real language classroom for their teaching practice (Bowie & Cassim, 2016). Opportunities to participate in CSL are available at colleges and universities in America (Liu et al., 2009), Australia (Chambers & Lavery, 2012), Myanmar, Oman, Taiwan and other countries in the world (Guo, 2013; Barwani et al., 2010; Smolen et al., 2013).

In Vietnam, CSL is a new concept, and therefore still in its initial stage of conceptualization and application. Recent workshops, conferences and projects have been conducted across disciplines at higher education levels all through the country so as to make CSL more realistic and feasible (Pham & Huynh, 2019; Lai, 2017; Dinh et al., 2017). Viewpoints exchanged from the scientific forums and preliminary research results found from these projects showed positive support for CSL and the integration of CSL into university curricula. However, opinions from teachers and students will provide implications for integrating CSL into the English language curriculum.

### Research Questions

The present study attempts to seek answers to the following questions:

1. How do the teachers and students perceive the integration of Community Service Learning into school curriculum?
2. What are the students' responses after implementing a course of integrating Community Service Learning into the school curriculum?
3. What are the challenges faced by the students and the teachers when integrating CSL into curricula?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. What Is CSL?

CSL is grounded in the experiential learning theory, which provides a connection between cognition and action (Overall, 2010, Tran & Tran, 2020). In the study of the progressive Education Movement, Dewey (1997) emphasized an education of, by and for experience. Community service activities, therefore, provide experiential learning and help students link course materials with real-world experience (Cook, 2008). The concept of experiential learning was extended into a four-phase cycle, i.e. (1) concrete experience, (2) reflective observation, (3) abstract conceptualization and (4) active experimentation (Kolb, 1984), and this cycle was regarded as a model as well as a theoretical framework for integrating CSL in curricula (Petkus, 2000; Salam et al., 2019b).

CSL first appeared at some national institutes in the US in the 1960s up to 1990s, with practical materialization of community service and learning and integration of CSL in higher education curriculum (Kesten, 2012; Butcher et al., 2003). More than a third of American universities and colleges have offered courses in service learning (Student Horizons, Inc., 2008). CSL has also been widespread in other countries in the world (Salam et al., 2019a).

CSL can be defined in a number of ways. Kaye (2010) states that CSL is a form of experiential learning where students apply academic knowledge and critical thinking skills to address genuine community needs. Bringle and Hatcher (1996) defined service-learning as “a credit-bearing, educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and reflects on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of the course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility.” (p. 112). Barwani et al. (2010) confirm that *service* implies volunteering, community action, citizenship, and so on, while *learning* refers to the process of acquiring knowledge and skills, questioning, reasoning, thinking, reflecting, and evaluating the information gathered. In the field of L2 learning, CSL has received growing attention from administrators and language educators because it provides language learners with opportunities to contextualize the target language and thus facilitates authentic language use (Guariento & Morley, 2001). Duff (2007) indicates that L2 learning is effective

through experiential learning and opportunities for socialization in the target language community.

In summary, CSL is a tool of teaching pedagogy from which students reflect on what they have gained through organized activities from different forms of community services so as to meet the needs of their target community as well as obtain experiences from reality for their professional development and other benefits. This is also the conceptual approach of this research.

### ***2.2. Benefits of CSL***

CSL can be beneficial to all community partners such as faculty members who act as facilitators, organizers and coordinators between academic institutes and community members and students who are involved in CSL (Salam et al., 2019b). CSL shows to help students promote social awareness, sense of civic responsibility and gain vital skills in terms of communication, independent work, teamwork, critical thinking, and problem-solving (Bowie & Cassim, 2016). Wade (1997) argued that CSL offers students many opportunities to enhance their teaching strategies, to form a student-centered atmosphere, and to have a wide range of vision, concerning other roles for prospective teachers.

This pedagogical shift to CSL will provide institutions with three academic benefits related to educational approaches, which can be summarized in terms of pedagogy discrimination, content comprehension and application, and civic engagement (Daniels, Patterson & Dunston, 2010). CSL offers benefits for faculty members by giving them opportunities to perform action research (Darby & Newman, 2014) as well as enhance their teaching ability and instructional productivity while actively taking part in fieldwork with students (Kinloch et al., 2015). Community members, as a recipient, are considered as the most important community partner in any service learning project (Bowie & Cassim, 2016).

### ***2.3.Challenges of Implementing CSL***

Barwani et al. (2010) state that higher education institutions have a clear obligation to take account of society's needs, but many people feel that it is not necessary to require service-learning for students. Another challenge involves the belief that ethics and social matters can be taught within the classroom setting and managed by

the university. The authors also mention the final challenge regarding how CSL can be integrated into the existing curriculum given the limited time available in university (Barwani et al., 2010). Community-based learning can meet numerous challenges during preparation and teaching stages.

#### **2.4. Previous Studies**

A review of empirical research studies integrating CSL into university curriculum revealed that CSL has been adopted across academic disciplines and in different countries (Salam et al., 2019a; Barwani et al., 2010; Kesten, 2012). For example, Bender and Jordan (2007) investigated students' attitudes and perceptions of CSL before starting a course at a university. The survey instrument was in the form of a questionnaire and given to 168 third-year students. The result revealed that pre-service teachers with prior knowledge of and/or participation in a community service project showed greater willingness to enroll for a course in CSL, especially if it would add value to their career development, bear credits, and enhance their personal and social development. Kesten (2012) examined pre-service teachers' evaluation of a CSL-integrated course taught at a university in Turkey. Five prospective teachers were chosen to participate in a semi-structured interview. The participants stated that CSL had great contributions not only to the professional development but also to human relations and leadership. CSL also helped university students build up a good relationship with local communities. Moreover, it helped improve students' self-confidence, maturity, social adaptation, and responsibility. The researcher also mentioned some problems experienced in a CSL course such as transportation, and support from the society, university and their supervisors. Barwani et al. (2010) investigated problems and challenges faced by EFL pre-service teachers when they implemented CSL activities at a university in Oman, using a questionnaire. The results showed that there was recognition of the value of service-learning as a necessary and effective method of learning and that it could be a viable solution for the development of skills and attitudes for citizenship and engagement in the society. Challenges faced by the respondents included lack of administrative support, lack of a service learning curriculum, lack of appropriate service-learning sites, lack of faculty preparedness to use service-learning as a teaching method, and lack of sufficient time to implement CSL.

In Vietnam, Wee et al. (2012) carried out an intercultural leadership program that involved 39 undergraduate students from six different countries. In this program, the students were made to visit poor village entrepreneurs and offer assistance in business improvement. The study aimed to investigate students' understandings and attitudes of CSL. Findings of the study revealed the students' high satisfactions and expectations in CSL and that they showed to be competent for civic action, justice oriented, and personally responsible. They also improved high civic accountability and enjoyed the service learning experience in the village. Another CSL-integrated project was conducted at a university in Central Vietnam (Lai, 2017). The students were guided to get involved in a communication class for handicapped children or boat service people, and then write reflections. The results from reflections showed that all of the students had positive attitudes towards CSL, which provided many of them with new and interesting learning experiences. In the practicum course, the lessons were said to become more realistic and the students showed to be more patient and self-confident.

So far, perceptions and practices of CSL by pre-service teachers or undergraduates in the world have been substantially examined. However, in the Vietnamese context, there has still been little research on CSL, especially on how to integrate CSL into higher education curricula on a large scale and with the participation of both EFL faculty and students. Moreover, most of these research studies were project-based. Therefore, this study focused on CSL and university curriculum, and was conducted to examine both teachers' and students' perspectives of implementing a CSL-integrated course in the current higher education curriculum, with the hope to fill this research gap.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Research Design and Setting

This descriptive research study combined quantitative and qualitative approaches with the use of 5-point Likert scale questionnaires and open-ended questions for data collection and analysis. This study was conducted at the English Department of University of Foreign Languages, Hue University, Central Vietnam, where there were two discipline majors, namely, Pedagogy and English Language. The Teaching Practicum course, which was coded Methodology 6A, was intended for fourth-year students of English belonging to the Pedagogy sector. This course



included 2 credits with three mark components: 1. attendance accounting for 10%; 2. class observation at a secondary class of English accounting for 30%; and 3. teaching practice, accounting for 60%. In reference to benefits of CSL to pre-service students, especially opportunities to gain vital skills and contact authentic learning environment (Bowie & Cassim, 2016, Lai, 2017), the course instructor, also researcher of this study, had won the school's official approval to allow the students to visit a community English class. The students had about 16 hours to get to know the learners, make class observations, design lesson plans, and finally do micro-teaching within 15 minutes. The micro-teaching was observed by peers and the class instructor, and videotaped. The students were then guided to write reflections after the CSL visit. And all the lesson plans, class observation sheets, written reflections and videotapes were sent back to the unit instructor for marking, which accounted for 30% of the total marks.

### **3.2. Participants**

The study involved a survey of 61 teachers and 201 undergraduates of University of Foreign Languages, Hue University, Central Vietnam. The first group was composed of 35 teachers from the English Department and 26 teachers from the Department of English for Specific Purposes, of the university. This group included 52 females and 9 males, whose work experiences ranged from 1-20 years (33 teachers) and 21-40 years (28 teachers). 25 teachers of the group had had experiences in CSL and 36 teachers had not had the chance to participate. The second group consisted of 201 third- and fourth-year students of the English Department. In the second group, 175 students were females and 26 were males; 102 students belonged to the Pedagogy sector and 99 were from the sector of English Language. 78 of the student group who belonged to the pedagogy sector registered to participate in the Teaching Practicum, in which CSL was integrated and considered as one course component.

### **3.3. Instruments**

This study mainly employed two questionnaires to explore teachers' and students' perceptions of integrating CSL into curriculum. One big advantage of questionnaires is the potential to obtain lots of information from a large population

(Wheatley, 2009). Another benefit of questionnaires is that they can be used to collect information concerning attitudes, perceptions or opinions that was not straightforward to observe (McMilan & Schumacher, 2001). That is why questionnaires were used in the current study. The questionnaire for teachers included 34 close-ended items categorized into 5 categories, namely, (1) perceptions about CSL, (2) role of the school, (3) benefits for teachers, (4) benefits for students, and (5) feasibility of CSL integration. The items were arranged on a 5-point Likert scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The questionnaire for students included 47 close-ended items categorized into 6 categories and also arranged on a 5-point Likert scale. Categories 1-5 had similar number of items and content to those in the teachers' questionnaire, and were administered to 201 students in order to gain data on students' perceptions of CSL and CSL-integrated curriculum. Category 6 included 13 items similar to Category 4 in terms of number and content. The only difference was in the wording of the items: whereas Category 4 focused on the students' perceived benefits of CSL and CSL-integrated curriculum, Category 6 emphasized the students' responses to benefits after implementing the CSL-integrated course. Only 78 students who got involved in the CSL-integrated course were requested to respond to Category 6 of the students' questionnaire. Table 1 shows the question framework of the two questionnaires:

**Table 1**  
*Question Framework*

Questionnaire	Category (items)	Description
For teachers and students (n = 262)	1. Perception about CSL (5 items: 1 > 5)	Necessity of CSL and CSL-integrated curriculum at higher education level
	2. Role of the school (5 items: 6 > 10)	Tasks performed by the school in making CSL and CSL-integrated curriculum possible
	3. Benefits for teachers (5 items: 11 > 15)	Teachers' and students' perceived benefits for teachers in integrating CSL into curriculum
	4. Benefits for students (13 items: 16 > 28)	Teachers' and students' perceived benefits for students in integrating CSL into curriculum
	5. Feasibility of CSL integration (6 items: 29 > 34)	Conditions and requirements for CSL-integrated courses to be set up and managed
For students (n=78)	1. Benefits for students (13 items: 35 > 47)	Benefits gained by the students after implementing the CSL-integrated course



Besides, in order to gain more ideas from EFL teachers, who are among essential constituencies to make CSL possible, in the final part of teachers' questionnaire, there were two open-ended questions regarding: 1/challenges both teachers and students may encounter, and 2/ their suggestions related to CSL and/or the CSL-integrated course. These two questions were also given to the students (n=78), who were participants in the CSL-integrated course. The open-ended questions aimed to gain qualitative data which were from respondents' thoughts and feelings (Schuman & Presser, 1979).

### **3.4. Procedure**

The questionnaires were first pilot-tested with 15 teachers and 15 students in the department. These participants were not involved in the main study, and the data collected was used for revising the questionnaires. After the pilot study, some items in the categories were linguistically refined to facilitate the participants' answers. The Cronbach Alpha values of the teacher and student questionnaires were .943 and .938, respectively.

The quantitative data from the participants' responses to the questionnaires were input into SPSS 22 for statistical analysis. After the teachers' and the students' responses through the five categories were compared, a quantitative analysis of independent variables of teachers' work experience and students' CSL implementation/non-CSL implementation was conducted through the five categories to see if there were similarities or differences in CSL and CSL integration into curriculum within each group of participants.

Qualitative data collected from the open-ended questions were analyzed following content analysis approach deductively and inductively, involving both classifying related contents corresponding to identified themes (Polit & Beck, 2012; Chau & Truong, 2019) and coding, creating themes, and sub-themes (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Besides, frequency was added to each of the themes and sub-themes to make the qualitative data more objective (Becker, 1990; Hammersley, 2008). In the current questionnaire, two themes were provided by the researchers, namely, challenges for teachers and suggestions from teachers. The teachers' responses to these themes were inductively analyzed and classified into codes, sub-themes and frequency (See Table 8).

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Teachers' and Students' Perceptions of CSL and Integrating CSL into University Curriculum

#### 4.1.1. Comparing teachers' and students' mean scores of the five surveyed categories

**Table 2**

*Comparing Teachers' and Students' Categories in Integrating CSL into Curriculum*

Categories (n= 262)	Teachers (n=61)						Students (n=201)					
	M	SD	t	df	p	$\alpha$	M	SD	t	df	p	$\alpha$
Perception about CSL	4.44	.426	26.48	60	.000	.85	4.29	.461	39.77	200	.000	.78
Role of school	4.22	.443	21.59	60	.000	.80	4.07	.454	33.45	200	.000	.76
Benefits for teachers	4.23	.407	23.69	60	.000	.81	4.19	.445	37.78	200	.000	.78
Benefits for students	4.22	.387	24.72	60	.000	.90	4.19	.411	40.85	200	.000	.88
Feasibility of integrating CSL into curriculum	4.29	.397	25.40	60	.000	.84	4.12	.434	36.60	200	.000	.80

*Test value = 3*

Table 2 shows that all the participants (n=262) who got involved in the research had positive attitudes towards the five categories of research, with the highest mean score of 4.44 (necessity of CSL from teachers' perspective) and with the lowest one of 4.07 (role of school in CSL from students' perspective). However, the mean scores of the five categories from the teachers were generally higher than those from the students. Two categories receiving strongest support from the teachers included the necessity of integrating CSL into the curriculum (M=4.44), and feasibility of integrating CSL into curriculum. The strongest support received from the students included the necessity of integrating CSL into the curriculum (M=4.29) and benefits for teachers (M= 4.19) and for students (M= 4.19) when integrating CSL into the curriculum.

#### 4.1.2. Perception of CSL

**Table 3**  
*Teachers' and Students' Perception of the Necessity of CSL*

Statements (n= 262)	Teachers (n=61)		Students (n= 201)	
	M	SD	M	SD
1. CSL is a pedagogical methodology that brings schools closer to society.	4.52	.537	4.25	.590
2. CSL is a strategy that links theory to practice.	4.55	.534	4.36	.568
3. CSL is an educational way of experiencing that helps grasp knowledge through personal experiences.	4.45	.534	4.37	.651
4. CSL helps make teaching and learning effective via situations related to students' expertise.	4.37	.520	4.21	.675
5. CSL is a good method that assists students to get closer to community and with a sense of responsibility.	4.47	.566	4.29	.645

As can be seen from Table 3, the mean scores of all the items from the teachers were higher than those from the students. The statement regarding CSL as a strategy that links theory with practice received the strongest support from the teachers (M=4.55), whereas the statement emphasizing CSL as a way of experiential learning that helps students grasp knowledge through personal experiences had the strongest support from the students (M=4.37). However, both teachers and students showed less strong support for the idea that CSL helps make teaching and learning effective via situations related to students' expertise (M=4.37 and M=4.21, respectively).

#### 4.1.3. Roles of school

**Table 4**  
*Roles of School in Integrating CSL into Curriculum*

Statements (n= 262)	Teachers (n=61)		Students (n=201)	
	M	SD	M	SD
1. School needs to have consistent strategies in linking school to society.	4.33	.510	4.07	.629
2. School needs to have a more comprehensive network of evaluating the combination between theory and practice.	4.28	.585	4.03	.620
3. School needs to have a body to handle CSL activities in the whole school.	4.20	.605	4.14	.628

Statements (n= 262)	Teachers (n=61)		Students (n=201)	
	M	SD	M	SD
4. School may use CSL to facilitate the implementation of the learner-centered approach.	4.05	.723	4.17	.652
5. School may use CSL to have products that are relevant to needs of society.	4.27	.516	3.95	.650

Table 4 clearly shows the teachers' and the students' responses to the role of the school in integrating CSL into the curriculum. The teachers had strong support for the school to employ a consistent strategy of bringing school closer to society (M=4.33), whereas the students focused on the idea of learner-centeredness in CSL implementation (M=4.17). This idea, on the contrary, received the least strong support from the teachers (M=4.05).

#### 4.1.4. Benefits for teachers and students when integrating CSL into curriculum

Regarding the benefits that CSL offers for teachers, the quantitative data shows that the teachers supported most positively the idea that CSL is an opportunity for teachers to understand more about roles and impacts of this educational method (M=4.30), whereas the students had the strongest support for the idea that CSL is an opportunity for teachers to contact reality in the community so as to supplement their subject area knowledge and profession (M=4.33). Concerning the category of perceived benefits that CSL offers for students, both the teachers and the students had strong support for the idea that CSL helps students have opportunities to get closer to the community, people of different walks of life, and improve civil responsibility (M=4.38 and M=4.32, respectively).

#### 4.1.5. Feasibility of integrating CSL into curriculum

**Table 5**  
*Feasibility of Integrating CSL into School Curriculum*

Statements (n= 262)	Teachers (n=61)		Students (n=201)	
	M	SD	M	SD
1. School needs to have a strategy of educational organization towards a model of CSL all through the school.	4.17	.526	3.94	.617
2. There needs to be a policy to support CSL in terms of administration, finance, and means.	4.25	.508	4.13	.611

Statements (n= 262)	Teachers (n=61)		Students (n=201)	
	M	SD	M	SD
3. CSL should be included in the school curriculum with concrete content.	4.25	.541	4.12	.616
4. There should be a detailed and scientific plan to organize, keep track of, and evaluate.	4.35	.515	4.20	.594
5. CSL needs to be made known to all school staff and students.	4.35	.515	4.13	.627
6. School and departments should set up stable CSL units for students.	4.47	.536	4.21	.621

It can be seen from Table 2 (*Comparing teachers' and students' mean scores of the five categories*) that the teachers had second strong support (M=4.29) for the Category of the feasibility of integrating CSL into curriculum, whereas this category received fourth strong support (M=4.12) from the students. Table 5 shows that both teachers and students supported the ideas that schools and departments were advised to set up stable CSL units for students (M=4.47 and M=4.21, respectively), and that they had a detailed and scientific plan to organize, keep track of, and evaluate CSL activities (M=4.35 and M=4.20, respectively). Besides, they also suggested that CSL had to be made known to all school staff and students (M=4.35 and M=4.13, respectively).

#### 4.1.6. CSL in comparison with teachers' work experience

**Table 6**  
*CSL in Comparison with Teachers' Work Experience*

Category Work (n= 61)	experience	Necessity of CSL	Role of school	Benefits for teachers	Benefits for students	Feasibility of CSL
1-20 years (n=33)	M SD	4.30 .576	4.05 .510	4.26 .443	4.18 .439	4.11 .392
21-40 years (n=28)	M SD	4.50 .453	4.23 .414	4.28 .443	4.35 .399	4.23 .485

Table 6 shows the category of CSL and CSL-integrated course implementation in comparison with the teachers' work experience. Of the two age groups, the

groups whose age ranged from 21 to 40 had stronger support for all the five categories of research. The teachers of this age group had more remarkable support on areas of the necessity of CSL (M=4.50 vs. M=4.30), role of school (M=4.23 vs. M=4.05), and then benefits for teachers, benefits for students, and feasibility of CSL integration.

## 4.2. Attitudes of the Students Who Experienced the CSL-Integrated Course

### 4.2.1. Students' perceived benefits versus benefits after CSL implementation

**Table 7**

*Students' Perceived Benefits from CSL and benefits after CSL Implementation*

Statements (n = 279)	Perceived Benefits (n=201)		Benefits after implementation (n=78)	
	M	SD	M	SD
1. CSL helps / helped students to apply subject area knowledge and improve their profession.	4.19	.674	4.29	.686
2. CSL assists / assisted students to experience authentic classroom activities.	4.18	.662	4.27	.696
3. CSL brings / brought students to get closer to community, people of different walks of life, and improve civil responsibility.	4.32	.600	4.41	.673
4. CSL gives / gave students opportunities to polish communication skills, leadership, guiding, and skills of problem solving.	4.35	.590	4.39	.570
5. CSL helps / helped students with opportunities for interaction to develop their profession effectively.	4.20	.700	4.27	.638
6. CSL helps / helped students with opportunities to develop their personal perceptions on their subject area and profession in the future, and on their learners and community.	4.27	.545	4.42	.610
7. CSL helps / helped students with opportunities to evaluate an activity or a phenomenon in a many-sided way.	4.12	.600	4.28	.682
8. CSL helps / helped students with opportunities to do teamwork with colleagues.	4.24	0.61	4.33	.696
9. CSL makes / made students more aware of and more responsible for other school subjects to serve their profession after graduation.	4.23	.614	4.49	.503
10. CSL enables / enabled students both to cultivate their subject area knowledge and to practice their home class teacher skills.	4.05	.716	4.26	.653



Statements (n = 279)	Perceived Benefits (n=201)		Benefits after implementation (n=78)	
	M	SD	M	SD
11. CSL encourages / encouraged students step by step realize that serving others is happiness.	4.05	.719	4.37	.584
12. In CSL students are / were guided to do CSL activities through course descriptions.	4.08	.631	4.41	.591
13. In CSL students are / were kept track of carefully and evaluated objectively through an organized CSL plan.	4.14	.671	4.38	.629
Category mean score	M = 4.18		M = 4.32	

Students' benefits after CSL implementation versus students' perceived benefits are showed in Table 7. The students' benefits after CSL implementation (M=4.32) were found to be more positive than their perceived ones (M=4.18). The students who got involved in the course had more positive support for all the 13 aspects in the category in comparison with the students who did not participate in the course. After the implementation, students revealed that they had opportunities to develop their personal perceptions on their subject area and profession in the future, and on their learners and community (M= 4.42 versus M=4.27). They also got closer to the community, people of different walks of life, and improve civil responsibility (M= 4.41 versus M=4.32). Besides, the students had strong support for the idea that in the CSL-integrated course, they were guided carefully to do CSL activities through detailed course descriptions (M=4.41 versus M=4.08).

#### 4.2.2. CSL in terms of students' CSL implementation/non-CSL implementation

The statistical data shows the similarities and differences between the group of students' CSL implementation and the group of students' non-CSL implementation. Even though two groups of students stated positive support all through the five categories of research, the CSL implementation group's support revealed to be more positive than the non-CSL implementation group. Three categories that received more positive support from the CSL implementation group included the necessity of CSL (M=4.47 vs. M=4.17), benefits of CSL for teachers (M=4.37 vs. M=4.06), and benefits of CSL for students (M=4.35 vs. M=4.07).

### 4.3. Challenges and Suggested Solutions

The following are the challenges and suggested solutions by the teachers and students when they responded to the final two open-ended questions in the survey.

Since open-ended questions were not obligatory, only 50 teachers responded to the two open-ended questions. Two themes were mentioned in the questionnaire, namely, challenges for teachers and suggestions from teachers. Their responses to these two themes were categorized into codes, sub-themes and frequency as follows.

**Table 8**  
*Teachers' Challenges and Suggestions*

Themes	Sub-themes	Codes	Freq.
Challenges for teachers	Perception	- Little knowledge about CSL in the whole school	41
		- CSL: interest of the whole society, not only universities	37
	Conditions for CSL feasibility	- Heavy work load at school	36
		- Time constraints	38
		- (Lack of) school policy for CSL & CSL curriculum development	25
		- (Lack of) school/department bodies responsible for CSL & CSL curriculum	28 20
Suggestions from teachers	CSL	- Making CSL known to the whole school	44
	Awareness	- CSL as a school educational approach	42
	Preparation	- A consistent policy on CSL in school	30
		- Collaboration between school and departments	26

Most of the teachers shared the challenges related to teachers' perceptions of CSL and CSL integration. Above all, the question of the necessity of CSL should be dealt with seriously and convincingly among management staff. One teacher said "This concept should be made known to all people in the school through seminars, workshops and conferences." Also, heavy academic load at school and time constraints prevented the teachers from thinking of CSL and handling CSL activities. Consequently, the teachers worried about how to make CSL-integrated curriculum feasible and sustainable. Therefore, they suggested that CSL needed to become an educational approach in the school policy for implementation across disciplines, and there should be units responsible for CSL at all levels in the school.

One teacher suggested “*Looking for CSL sites and doing needs analysis for CSL in the community on a collaborative and regular basis was among the suggestions made by most of the teachers.*”

Only 65 students responded to the two open-ended questions in the survey. Their responses were coded and categorized into themes and sub-themes as follows.

**Table 9**  
*Students’ Challenges and Suggestions*

Themes	Sub-themes	Codes	Freq.
Challenges for students after implementation	Perception	- Little or no knowledge about CSL	65
	Implementation	- Improper time arrangement for CSL course & activities	26
		- Guidelines: not detailed	15
		- CSL sites: far from school	30
		- CSL sites: not well-equipped	25
Suggestions from students after implementation	CSL awareness	- Making CSL known to all teachers and students	59
		- Creating similar CSL-integrated courses	40
	Measures	- Organizing seminars/conferences on CSL	40
		- Making tasks in phases of CSL class visit more detailed	29

The students said they also faced the challenge of having received very little knowledge and information about CSL before implementing the CSL-integrated course. During the implementation, they encountered such obstacles as time arrangement, transport, and distance between school and CSL sites. They also needed more concern and support from course instructors and the school staff. One student said “*Limited and poor equipment at the CSL sites was also a real challenge to make CSL classes effective.*” Regarding further suggestions, most of the students said that CSL should be included in the school curriculum across disciplines thanks to its significance and benefits. Concerning CSL activities, one student said “*More detailed guidelines for post-observation activities during CSL visit should be provided to make teaching practice experiences better and more authentic.*”

## 5. Discussion

The researchers learned from analysis of the data related to Research Question 1 that all the participants had strong support for all the five categories of the research, especially the necessity of CSL. Undoubtedly, all the participants were in favor of the practical aspect of CSL and agreed that CSL is really a pedagogical approach that provides experiential learning and helps students link course materials with real-world experience. The finding confirms the study by Cook (2008), and is particularly important and meaningful in the Vietnamese higher education context where CSL is still rather new and needs more scientific and practical foundations for consideration and implementation. Besides, both the teachers and the students, especially more experienced teachers and students who experienced CSL-integrated course instruction, had strong support for the idea that CSL brings theory closer to practice and helps students grasp knowledge through personal experiences (Table 6). They were strong supporters of integrating CSL into curricula. The skills and practical experience which students gain from CSL can increase their employability later (Raitskaya & Tikhonova, 2019). The findings related to vital benefits gained by the students show to support claims of Bowie and Cassim (2016), and Wade (1997) in the theoretical background. Additionally, CSL also assists the faculty to enhance their teaching ability, instructional productivity, and engagement in civic responsibility (Daniels, Patterson, & Dunston, 2010; Kinloch et al., 2015). Also, community members receive a great number of benefits from CSL projects (Bowie & Cassim, 2016). The findings from this research totally help confirm these views by pointing out that in conducting CSL activities, university teachers have opportunities to gain insights into content, roles, and impacts of CSL, as well as to contact reality in community so as to supplement their subject area knowledge and profession. However, some reservations collected from open-ended questions and challenges among some teachers in relation to their perceptions of CSL and regarding CSL as a school pedagogical approach revealed that it took time to make this concept of integrating CSL into curriculum possible. More insights into the issue of CSL in terms of projects, CSL-integrated courses, and related empirical research studies from both international and local settings should be provided for CSL to be conceptualized and adopted as a pedagogical approach all through the school.

In relation to Research Question 2, the data showed the success of the CSL-integrated course both quantitatively and qualitatively. Table 7 showed the students' perceived benefits versus benefits after CSL implementation through category mean

scores as well as mean scores of individual items in each category, which confirmed the positive attitudes of the students after the CSL-integrated course implementation. Three most important elements that made CSL successful included the elements of helping students realize their responsibility in learning to develop their profession in the future; getting closer to community people of different walks of life, improving their civil responsibility; and having opportunities to develop their perceptions on their subject area and profession in the future, and on their learners and community. The success of the CSL-integrated course was also due to the organization of the course through course descriptions and a detailed plan of monitoring and evaluation (Items 12 and 13 in Table 7). Moreover, data from open-ended questions showed more qualitative information about the 78 students' attitudes towards the CSL-integrated course in terms of awareness, challenges, and suggestions. This qualitative data analysis adds a more comprehensive picture to the role of CSL in assisting students to have opportunities to develop their qualities not only as students but also as teachers. Additionally, CSL possibility was confirmed by the students who experienced the CSL-integrated course in comparison with those who did not have any experience in this course (Table 7). These findings are also in harmony with those by Bender and Jordan (2007) and Kesten (2012) in the previous studies. It is then clear that the data analysis proves the feasibility of CSL-integrated courses in higher education context from the students' perspectives in Vietnam given the conditions necessary for the implementation mentioned in Table 5.

Regarding Research Question 3, the participants revealed a number of challenges that were categorized into sub-themes such as perceptions, preparation, implementation, and measures (Tables 8 and 9). Most of these challenges were mentioned by Barwani (2010). The most notable sub-theme is the perceptions of CSL by administrators, teachers and students in the school. This sub-theme substantially prevents CSL from being considered and realized into curriculum. The data analysis from Research Questions 1 and 2 proved that once CSL was introduced in an organized way and particularly experienced by the students, the implementation of CSL-integrated courses was totally possible thanks to the participants' CSL knowledge and determination. If this first challenge concerning perceptions is overcome successfully, the following three themes, together with suggested solutions, will serve as factors to modify it and keep a CSL-integrated course travel in the right direction. These suggested solutions by the participants,

which are practical and context-specific, will make the implementation of CSL more possible. For example, one of the challenges in the findings was looking for possible CSL sites, and doing needs analysis was supposed to be one good solution (Lai, 2017). These challenges belong to measures in the preparation and the administration stages that are essential for the sustainability of CSL.

## **6. Conclusion**

One of the main issues found from the findings is the positive attitudes towards CSL by the participants, especially those who were involved in CSL experiences. Since CSL is still a new teaching approach in Vietnam, reservations, even negative views are a reality among those who have neither heard about nor had a chance to experience it. To deal with this issue, CSL and CSL experiences, especially successful CSL-integrated course implementations and related empirical research studies all through the world and in Vietnam should be introduced and shared in seminars, workshops, and conferences. If school administrators, teachers and students all have positive attitudes towards CSL, then CSL-integrated curricula all through disciplines will just be a matter of time.

Another issue arisen from the findings is how to implement a CSL-integrated course effectively in the higher education context where the application is in its initial stage. One recommendation is that there should be a consistent policy of regarding CSL as a pedagogical approach that can be materialized into curricula. CSL-integrated courses will be successful if they are offered in an organized way through steps from identifying CSL needs in the community and establishing CSL in curriculum, course description and keeping track, to reflections and evaluation. All constituencies including school and department administrators, faculty, students, and community members should be taken into consideration so that all CSL-integrated courses would be properly designed and the instruction successfully carried out.

A final issue is related to the sustainability of CSL. In this case, all the challenges from the findings have to be considered. Looking for CSL sites, arranging time for managing and doing CSL activities on the part of teachers and students, and gaining support from school and faculty are among the challenges to be dealt with. One recommendation is that there should be collaboration among school administrative staff and departments to find ways so as to overcome these challenges, and this collaboration should be built on a regular yearly basis so that



CSL-integrated projects and courses are designed and conducted effectively and constantly through semesters.

In conclusion, the research study on integrating CSL into a course at University of Foreign Languages, Hue University, Central Vietnam is a manifestation of how CSL can be conceptualized as a pedagogical approach that benefits community members, students, teachers and schools. First, the results showed both teachers' and students' strong support for CSL and CSL-integrated course implementation. Teachers, especially, senior lecturers revealed more positive attitudes towards the CSL-integrated course implementation. Secondly, all the participants emphasized the important role of the school, the teaching staff, and other constituencies in making CSL-integrated classes feasible. Thirdly, the successful implementation of the CSL-integrated course indicated the feasibility of integrating CSL into university curricula. The research also dealt with teachers' reservations, challenges, as well as their suggestions so as to make the research focus more feasible and even sustainable. All of these main findings can be regarded as a good example of how CSL can be regarded as a pedagogical approach or method in higher education context.

This research study still has some limitations. First, it only focused on one discipline major and involved limited numbers of participants. Secondly, the scope of research was limited to one university. Therefore, the evidence should be considered suggestive rather than conclusive. New empirical research studies related to the research topic should be conducted more extensively with the involvement of more universities and discipline majors, and the engagement of more participants in terms of number and constituencies, in order to confirm the validity and reliability of the findings from this study, and to make CSL and CSL-integrated courses more practically realistic in higher education environments like Vietnam.

**Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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**About the Authors**

<sup>1</sup> **Vien Truong** is currently senior lecturer of English at the Department of English, University of Foreign Languages, Hue University, Vietnam. His areas of interest include Second Language Acquisition, Professional Development, Language Testing, Community Service Learning, TESOL Teacher Education, and Pragmatics.

<sup>2</sup> **Hung Bui Phu** is currently lecturer of English at University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City. His areas of interest include TESOL teacher education, Teaching EFL from different linguistic perspectives. He is well-known reviewer of many international journals of linguistics and language education.

<sup>3</sup> **Liem Truong Thi Tu** is a PhD candidate at Department of Linguistics, Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia. She is also a lecturer at the Department of English for Specific Purposes, Hue University of Foreign Languages, Hue University, Vietnam. The main focus of her PhD project is investigating teachers' and students' voice in EMI programs in Vietnam. Her research interests also include TESOL and ESP teacher education.

