

Innovating The Non-Major English Curriculum to Meet Human Resource Demands in the Context of Digital Transformation at Thu Dau Mot University

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ABSTRACT: Digital transformation is profoundly reshaping workforce quality requirements, in which English proficiency integrated with digital skills has become a key criterion in the contemporary labor market. In this context, innovating non-major English curricula at higher education institutions is increasingly essential. This study examines the current state of the non-major English program at Thu Dau Mot University under the impact of digital transformation, employing document analysis and synthesis of academic literature, educational policies, and human resource development orientations. The findings reveal several limitations, including insufficient alignment with disciplinary needs, limited integration of digital technologies and artificial intelligence, and learning materials that are weakly connected to the local socio-economic context. Based on these findings, the study proposes curriculum innovation solutions focusing on digital technology integration, localization of learning materials, and pedagogical reform. These solutions aim to enhance students' English proficiency and professional adaptability, thereby contributing to the improvement of human resource quality in the era of digital transformation.

KEYWORDS: digital transformation; non-major English; curriculum innovation; higher education; human resources.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of deep globalization and the increasingly rapid pace of digital transformation, enhancing the quality of human resources has become a strategic priority for nations and higher education systems. Foreign language competence, particularly English as an international language, is widely regarded as a core competency that enables students not only to access global knowledge but also to meet workforce demands in the digital age and integrate more easily into the international labor market.

Numerous domestic and international studies have confirmed that English proficiency combined with digital skills is closely associated with occupational competence and employability. Tran Le Huu Nghia et al. (2024) emphasize that English constitutes a critical component in shaping students' professional competence, enhancing their competitiveness and expanding employment opportunities in an increasingly globalized labor market. Similarly, Pham Huy Cuong (2021) argues that foreign language competence is one of the key factors enabling graduates to better meet employers' expectations. These findings suggest that effective English communication skills significantly enhance sustainable employability and labor market competitiveness. Consequently, improving English proficiency in the context of digital transformation has become a prominent trend in higher education.

Currently, the non-major English curriculum at Thu Dau Mot University, as well as at many higher education institutions nationwide, is widely implemented across most academic disciplines. This program has yielded certain positive outcomes, including raising students' awareness of the importance of English for academic and professional development and providing a basic linguistic foundation for accessing international academic materials and engaging in global integration.

However, similar to challenges reported in other Vietnamese universities (Le Thi Tuyet Hanh, 2019; Nguyen Huu Anh Vuong & Tu Thi Anh Thu, 2024; Nguyen Thuy Linh & Pham Thuy Hang, 2025; Vo Tu Anh, 2024; Truong To Loan, 2025), the non-major English curriculum at Thu Dau Mot University still exhibits several limitations. These include content that is insufficiently tailored to the specific needs of different disciplines in the digital transformation context; a lack of authentic language situations related to digital work skills and professional communication; teaching methods that remain heavily reliant on traditional approaches and underutilize modern technologies and artificial intelligence tools for personalized learning and instructional optimization; and students' English proficiency that, although improved to some extent, remains inadequate to meet the increasingly demanding expectations of domestic and international employers.

These limitations not only reduce students' competitiveness in the labor market but also constrain their opportunities for personal development in digitally transformed workplaces (Huynh Thi Thu Suong & Nguyen Thi Thu Hien, 2024; Mai Thi Quynh Lan, 2022; Nguyen Thi Hue, 2024; Nguyen Thi Quynh Anh & Nguyen Thu Trang, 2024).

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Given this context, innovating the non-major English curriculum in response to digital transformation has become an urgent and strategic requirement for Thu Dau Mot University. Such innovation is expected to enhance interaction, self-directed learning, and immediate feedback mechanisms, thereby fostering overall language competence (Alotaibi, 2024; AlTwijri & Alghizzi, 2024; Nguyen Thi Anh Thu, 2025; Truong To Loan, 2025). Curriculum innovation should not only update content and teaching methods but also effectively integrate digital technologies aligned with labor market demands and essential soft skills, ultimately producing a competitive workforce capable of thriving in a digitalized environment.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a document analysis approach by collecting and synthesizing materials related to human resources, digital transformation, non-major English curricula, educational development policies, and workforce orientation in the digital era. The selected materials include scientific reports, specialized books, and academic journal articles. The collected data are analyzed to establish a theoretical foundation for the study.

3. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. The Role of Thu Dau Mot University in Supplying Local Human Resources

Established in 2009, Thu Dau Mot University is a public, multidisciplinary institution of the former Binh Duong province, now part of Ho Chi Minh City. The university plays a vital role in training and supplying high-quality human resources to support socio-economic development and international integration in Ho Chi Minh City and neighboring regions.

In the 2024–2025 academic year, the university offered 40 academic programs with nearly 18,000 undergraduate and postgraduate students enrolled. To date, approximately 30,000 graduates have entered the labor market across various sectors, including public institutions, private enterprises, and foreign-invested companies. These graduates contribute significantly to meeting labor demands in Ho Chi Minh City, the Southeast region, and surrounding areas, highlighting the university's substantial role in providing qualified local human resources.

3.2. The Non-Major English Program at Thu Dau Mot University

Throughout their studies, students at Thu Dau Mot University are required to study one of the main foreign languages offered, such as English, French, Chinese, or Korean.

English instruction is emphasized through two forms:

- + English for Majors: Designed for English language majors, focusing on comprehensive language skill development.
- + Non-Major English: Designed for students of other disciplines, aiming to develop basic communicative competence and the ability to use English in professional contexts.

Non-major English is integrated into the curricula of all academic programs to produce graduates with both disciplinary expertise and sufficient foreign language proficiency to meet post-graduation employment requirements.

For English learning outcomes, students may choose one of four assessment formats: TOEFL iBT, TOEIC, IELTS, or EPT–TDMU. Approximately 95.8% of students select EPT–TDMU.

The EPT–TDMU is an English proficiency assessment developed in alignment with Vietnam's Six-Level Foreign Language Competency Framework issued by the Ministry of Education and Training (Circular No. 01/2014/TT-BGDĐT, January 2014). The instructional content emphasizes the development of students' overall English competence, as outlined below.

Table: Characteristics of the Non-major English Curriculum

Course	Textbook	Teaching Content	Course Description
English 1	Outcomes Elementary (2nd ed.)	Units 1–8; Reviews 1, 2, 3, 4; Writing 1, 2, 3, 4	English 1 provides students with basic English knowledge through simple and familiar topics such as people and places, free time, home, holidays, shops, and education. The course focuses on basic pronunciation features (e.g., fast pronunciation such as do you; repetition of sounds /l/, /r/, /w/, /j/, /k/, /g/, /s/, /z/; understanding fast speech) and essential grammatical structures, including be, present tense, there is/there are, past simple, present continuous, comparatives, auxiliary verbs, going to, would like, etc.
English 2	Outcomes Elementary (2nd ed.)	Units 9–14; Reviews 5, 6, 7; Writing 5, 6, 7	In English 2, students continue learning familiar topics such as experiences, travel, food, feelings, nature, and opinions. Key grammatical points include the present perfect and past participle; too much/too many/not

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			enough; superlatives; me too/me neither; auxiliary verbs; expressing quality; should/shouldn't; connectors (because, so, after); might, be going to; present perfect for duration; will/won't. Students also practice writing informal emails or personal letters on clear and familiar topics (e.g., visiting friends, describing food or photos, short messages).
English 3	Outcomes Elementary (2nd ed.)	Units 15–16; Review 8; Writing 8	English 3 consists of six lessons and introduces relatively less familiar topics such as technology, love, jobs, shops, getting around, and food. Major grammatical focuses include be thinking of + V-ing, adverbs, past continuous, comparatives, and the present perfect. In terms of skills, students are required to successfully write a short paragraph with clear organization and topic relevance.
	Outcomes pre-intermediate (2nd ed.)	Unit 1-4 (Pre-intermediate) Review 1,2 Writing 1,2	
English 4	Outcomes Pre-intermediate (2nd ed.)	Units 5–10; Reviews 3, 4, 5; Writing 3, 4, 5	English 4 consists of six lessons. The topics remain similar to those in English 3 (e.g., technology, love, jobs, shops, getting around, food). Grammatical content includes superlatives, have to/don't have to, will/won't, first conditional, and second conditional structures.
English 5	Outcomes Pre-intermediate (2nd ed.)	Units 11–16; Reviews 6, 7, 8; Writing 6, 7, 8	English 5 covers topics such as science and nature, telephone communication, culture, possessions, money, and events. Grammatical focuses include past perfect simple, passive voice, reported speech, noun phrases, present perfect continuous, relative clauses, time phrases and clauses, and articles. In terms of writing skills, students practice composing formal emails for various purposes, such as writing plans and schedules, complaints, and invitations.
English 6	Textbook for General English – 6	Four-skill practice based on TDMU materials	English 6 consolidates and systematizes students' knowledge of English grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation at the B1 level, while providing ample opportunities for students to develop the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

To achieve the targeted proficiency levels, Thu Dau Mot University employs two textbook series—Outcomes Elementary and Outcomes Pre-Intermediate (Dellar & Walkley, 2024)—and an internally developed set of materials for English 6. Upon completing the six levels, students attain a basic English proficiency. Nevertheless, several shortcomings remain:

- + Limited specialization: The curriculum remains largely standardized and insufficiently tailored to specific disciplinary needs due to the large number of academic programs (40 disciplines), making it difficult for students to apply English in authentic professional contexts.

- + Insufficient integration of technology and AI: Traditional teaching methods still dominate, and although some students independently use applications such as Duolingo, Grammarly, or YouGlish, these tools have not been systematically integrated into the curriculum.

- + Lack of localized content: English learning materials do not adequately reflect the socio-economic characteristics of Ho Chi Minh City and the Southeast region, limiting students' opportunities to practice English in locally relevant industrial, service, and cultural contexts.

3.3. Innovating the Non-Major English Curriculum to Meet Human Resource Demands in the Digital Transformation Context

To address the existing shortcomings, curriculum innovation should be implemented comprehensively across multiple dimensions, including the integration of digital technologies, the renewal of teaching methodologies, and the standardization of learning outcomes. These measures not only enhance students' English proficiency but also strengthen their competitiveness in the labor market, particularly in a context where digital transformation is rapidly advancing across all sectors.

- Integration of digital technologies and artificial intelligence (AI): To enhance the modernity and effectiveness of instruction, digital technologies and AI should be systematically incorporated into the curriculum.

- + Application of online learning platforms: Tools such as Moodle, Edmodo, virtual reality (VR) applications, and learning management systems (LMS) can be utilized to organize lessons, online assessments, and multimedia learning resources. Students

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may practice in simulated environments, participate in virtual meetings, or deliver presentations in English. Additionally, they can complete online vocabulary tests with immediate feedback or access video lectures on professional email writing skills in English.

- + Application of AI for personalized learning: Applications such as ChatGPT and Grammarly can be integrated into writing and presentation tasks to support the development of students' writing, pronunciation, and vocabulary skills. AI-based tools provide detailed and personalized feedback, enabling learners to improve their language competence more effectively. For example, tourism students may use ChatGPT to prepare English scripts introducing tourist destinations, while business administration students can practice writing commercial emails using Grammarly and receive feedback on sentence structure and domain-specific vocabulary, thereby better preparing for real workplace tasks.

- Localization of learning materials: English learning materials should be designed in alignment with local characteristics, enabling students to apply foreign language knowledge in practical contexts.

- + Integration of socio-economic themes of Ho Chi Minh City: Learning materials should incorporate topics such as manufacturing industries, eco-tourism, and smart urban development, which are key sectors of the locality. For instance, business administration students may learn to negotiate export contracts for Minh Long ceramics in English, or transportation-related content may be embedded in lessons addressing urban traffic systems in Ho Chi Minh City.

- + Integration of authentic business-related scenarios: Learning content can be developed based on real-life situations from major industrial zones such as VSIP or Becamex IDC. Simulated tasks may include job interviews or presentations to foreign investors in large industrial parks, thereby enhancing students' exposure to authentic professional communication contexts.

- Renewal of teaching methodologies: Teaching approaches for non-major English courses should be reformed to better align with the digital transformation era.

- + Project-based learning: Students are assigned group projects that foster the use of English in real-world situations. For example, information technology students may undertake application design projects and deliver English presentations on the features and functionality of their products.

- + Experiential learning: Extracurricular activities or enterprise visits can be organized to provide students with opportunities to practice English with foreign professionals or experts. For example, a field trip to VSIP may enable logistics students to develop English communication skills in an authentic working environment.

Innovating the non-major English curriculum not only enhances students' language competence but also enables them to better meet the demands of the digital transformation era.

- + From the students' perspective: Students become more confident in using English, more capable of applying it in professional contexts, and better positioned to enhance their career prospects.

- + From the enterprises' perspective: Employers gain access to a high-quality workforce capable of meeting international integration requirements across industrial and service sectors.

- + From the perspective of Ho Chi Minh City: Curriculum innovation contributes to building a highly qualified labor force, promoting socio-economic development, and attracting foreign investment.

The proposed curriculum innovation is expected to serve as a foundation for Thu Dau Mot University to further affirm its pioneering role in training high-quality human resources for both the local community and the nation.

4. CONCLUSION

Innovating the non-major English curriculum at Thu Dau Mot University represents an essential step toward meeting the demand for high-quality human resources while aligning with the rapid digital transformation taking place in Ho Chi Minh City. In a socio-economic context that increasingly requires a workforce capable of international communication and effective use of technological tools, the integration of digital technologies into the curriculum has become a critical factor. At the same time, updating instructional content through localization and close alignment with the socio-economic realities of Ho Chi Minh City enhances the practicality, relevance, and overall effectiveness of the program.

This innovation extends beyond improving basic communicative English proficiency to fostering critical thinking, intercultural competence, and the ability to adapt swiftly to digital technologies. In particular, students are equipped with essential digital skills that enable them to perform effectively in digitalized working environments, thereby gaining a competitive advantage in an increasingly integrated labor market. Moreover, the reformed curriculum aims to establish a positive learning environment in which teaching methods are redesigned to promote interaction, personalization, and learner autonomy. This transformation represents not merely a technical enhancement but a comprehensive shift in educational philosophy, seeking to maximize learners' potential.

These innovations reaffirm Thu Dau Mot University's role in training high-quality human resources that support the socio-economic development strategy of Ho Chi Minh City, while also contributing to the country's sustainable development in the context of international integration and digital transformation. The university thus serves not only as an educational institution but also as a

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vital bridge between knowledge and practice, nurturing generations of competent professionals who are well prepared to adapt to the challenges and opportunities of the technological era.

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