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Vietnamese EFL Lecturers' Favored Instructional Strategies for Teaching Productive Skills in Online and Face-To-Face Teaching Environments

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Abstract

This study investigates the instructional strategies Vietnamese EFL lecturers prefer to employ to teach productive skills of general English in online and face-to-face teaching environments. Thirty-eight lecturers from 6 Vietnamese universities participated and responded to a questionnaire with 29 close-ended questions detailing instructional strategies. Four of the participants were invited to join the semi-interview about the reasons for their preference for instructional strategies. The collected data were analyzed with descriptive statistics for Quantitative data and content analysis for qualitative data. The findings indicate that the most favored strategy in both teaching environments is describing pictures while opinion sharing and group discussion are much more favorable in the face-to-face than in the online teaching environment. Additionally, certain strategies are preferred in the face-to-face setting over instruction in the online setting and vice versa. Some primary reasons for lecturers' preference for instructional strategies were identified and participants gave some recommendations of choosing appropriate strategies for teaching productive skills via interviews. These findings highlight EFL lecturers' preferences in selecting instructional strategies to teach English productive skills in the two teaching contexts and underscore implications for choosing proper instructional strategies.

Keywords: EFL instructional strategies, face-to-face teaching, online teaching, productive skills

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1. Introduction

In the last few decades, education has inevitably experienced many changes under the effect of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, which has deeply formed learning opportunities, educational policies, and instructional methods (Alakrash & Kazak, 2022). According to Alakrash and Kazak (2022), the Internet has significantly enhanced curriculum design and helped innovate teaching methods. It is also anticipated that future advancements in blockchain, cloud computing, and cybersecurity will improve learning opportunities further and ensure the long-term preservation of students' activities (Elayyyan, 2021). Moreover, social networking has become a part of education as it offers teachers and students platforms to improve the learning process, work together on lessons, and explore new communication opportunities (Wang, 2023). In terms of English language teaching, the Fourth Industrial Revolution has made students more flexible in time and location arrangements, boosted their confidence, independence, and motivation, and encouraged teachers to integrate information technology into the teaching and learning process (Arsaf, 2020).

In 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic emerged and caused education to experience the toughest period when it made the whole global educational system from elementary to tertiary level collapse (Mishra et al., 2020). The social distancing to deal with COVID-19 closed schools at all levels and teaching modes were switched from face-to-face to the online setting with the utilization of available technology. This adaptation exposed major gaps in EFL teachers' digital competence and their use of information and communication technologies in English language teaching, despite previous efforts towards educational digitalization (Morata-Garrido et al., 2023).

In EFL teaching, though online education provides easy access to materials and various online tools, it also has some major drawbacks such as the inability to adapt the teaching methods and techniques to meet the needs of an online classroom (Chowdhury & Zannat, 2021), limited interaction and insufficient scaffolding, or limitations in pair work, group work and providing feedback (Chowdhury & Zannat, 2021; Nayman & Bavli, 2022), issues regarding internet access, and learner-related challenges (Nayman & Bavli, 2022). Therefore, teachers have struggled to engage students when teaching productive skills online and often try to use online tools to enhance lesson effectiveness. In reality, EFL lecturers have tried to implement suitable instructional strategies to enhance students' motivation in online English

lessons, but they face the challenges of pedagogical and technical factors (Chowdhury & Zannat, 2021; Zekri & El Moussaoui, 2024). According to Chowdhury and Zannat (2021), the inability to adapt teaching methods and techniques for online classrooms, and network issues that disrupt effective communication and time management are the main problems in teaching English productive skills online. Lecturers have difficulties engaging students in pair and group work for speaking and writing activities and giving them feedback in synchronous lessons. Based on their online surveys and interviews with 205 lecturers of English in Algeria, Zekri and El Moussaoui (2024) also concluded that teachers' unfamiliarity with and inaccessibility to online teaching were significant barriers.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Vietnamese teachers were unexpectedly requested to shift from face-to-face to online teaching, and they have gradually adapted to this teaching context (Mai & Khac, 2021). Although this switchover was temporary, online education has proved its usefulness in integrating and facilitating effective teaching and learning. Online education has been widely recognized in Vietnamese higher education and approved by the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) with Circular No. 08/2021/TT-BGDĐT dated March 18, 2021, regulating that up to 30% of the total volume of the university training program (full-time and part-time) is carried out online. Since then, online teaching has been applied in higher education and universities, and technological facilities have been increasingly equipped to serve online teaching and learning. To utilize these facilities, many universities in Vietnam have designed totally online curricula, blended courses, and curricula with some synchronous lectures. Vietnamese EFL lecturers also believe that it is likely to enhance students' English communication skills by implementing communicative approaches and student-centered methods (Vu, 2023). However, how to adapt teaching methods to fulfill the online teaching requirements has not been widely investigated in Vietnam. Therefore, it will be highly significant to identify favored strategies in online and face-to-face productive skills teaching, and lecturers' recommendation of choosing instructional strategies, enabling other EFL lecturers to consider adapting them to enhance students' performance in their teaching practice. To address this issue, this research aimed to answer the following question:

RQ: What are the favored instructional strategies Vietnamese EFL lecturers use for teaching productive skills in face-to-face and online settings?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Instructional Strategies

Instructional strategies, also considered teaching strategies, have been conceptualized with various perspectives and interpretations and there are two main conceptualizations. On the one hand, instructional strategies are defined specifically as instructors' techniques (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001; Akdemir & Koszalka, 2008), activities (George et al., 2018), or comprehensive sets of tasks (Hirumi, 2013) selected by educators for classroom implementation. On the other hand, instructional strategies are considered general approaches educators choose to deliver learning materials to students within a particular learning environment (Akdeniz, 2016; Colombo, 2011). Despite being described as specific "techniques" or broad "approaches," instructional strategies' goal is mainly promoting learners' development and achievement. However, approach and technique are distinct concepts in language teaching.

According to Anthony (1963), as cited in Richards & Rodgers (2001), three components of ELT methodology are approach, method, and technique. Anthony conceptualized that an approach consists of assumptions and beliefs regarding language and language learning, a method outlines a plan to apply the theories into practical teaching for specific skills and content, while a technique is a typical trick, stratagem, or contrivance used to achieve an immediate objective. When revising Anthony's conceptualization, Richards and Rodgers (2001) used 'method' as an umbrella term to specify the relationship between theory and practice, and stated that approach and method determine objectives, syllabus, content, teachers' and learners' roles, and instructional materials at the design level. On the other hand, they used 'procedure,' a more comprehensive term for the level of technique or implementation. Theoretically, a method aligns with an approach, organized by design, and identified in practice through procedures (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p.20). Celce-Murcia (2004, p.9) supported the conceptualization that 'approach' is general, 'method' and 'technique' are specific, and defined that a method refers to a set of procedures relevant to an approach, and a technique is a typical learning activity employed in a method or some methods (Celce-Murcia, 2004, p. 9).

This study focuses on instructional strategies EFL lecturers implement in their English lessons. Therefore, instructional strategies are consistent with the definition that instructional strategies are typical techniques or activities applied to engage learners in the learning process.

2.2. Teaching Environments

Currently, some teaching environments include traditional or face-to-face classrooms, virtual or online classes, blended learning, and flipped classrooms, as mentioned in the research conducted by Thai et al. (2019). This study focused on the first two types of environments: the face-to-face and the online teaching environments.

According to Black (2002), in a face-to-face environment, teachers and students gather in a physical classroom where they can directly interact, and students can draw motivation from their instructors and peers. This teaching environment brings important benefits, such as enhancing students' social awareness, providing opportunities for interaction within the physical setting, and allowing teachers to observe how students react through their facial expressions and body language. In addition, collaborative activities in a face-to-face setting promote students to engage actively, facilitating their deep comprehension as students can exchange and respond to each other's ideas (Wuensch et al., 2008). Moreover, instructors deliver lectures directly to students, which fosters collaborative discussions through guiding questions and providing immediate feedback (Redmond, 2011).

Since the rise of the internet and digital devices, the popularity of online learning across various contexts has increased (Hsieh, 2010; Kuama, 2016; Luyt, 2013). In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has increased interest in online classes worldwide (Al-Obaydi et al., 2023). Derakhshan and Shakki (2024) also argued that the rapid development of technology is causing online education to overshadow face-to-face education with its access to educational tools and resources; however, online education also faces significant challenges related to pedagogical and technical factors. Due to the long-lasting influence of teachers on students, motivating, engaging, and testing techniques in online classes are highly important (Al-Obaydi et al., 2023).

In the online environment, students and instructors are not required to be in the same physical classroom; instead, instructors utilize communication technologies such as digital platforms and social networks on the Internet to deliver lessons (Tallent-Runnels et al., 2006; Wang, 2023). This environment consists of two primary modes: asynchronous and synchronous (Afifi & Alamri, 2014; Hrastinski, 2008; Moore et al., 2011). In the synchronous mode, teachers and students engage in real-time interaction via virtual conferencing tools (Hrastinski, 2008), while the

asynchronous mode allows for flexibility, as it does not require the simultaneous online presence of teachers and students. In the asynchronous mode, teachers deliver lessons and media-supported learning activities through email, discussion boards (Hrastinski, 2008), and currently, via learning management systems (LMS) and other online applications, which empowers students to manage their learning independently and conveniently in their preferred location (Black, 2002). This research mainly focuses on the real-time teaching process between the face-to-face and the online setting, so the synchronous mode of online instruction represents the online teaching environment in this study.

2.3. Productive Skills and Instructional Strategies for Teaching Productive Skills

In language teaching, the four basic skills are grouped into receptive skills (listening and reading), skills of receiving information, and productive skills (speaking and writing), skills of producing language (McDonough et al., 2013). Particularly, productive skills involve transmitting information through speaking or writing via the support of receptive skills, which provide the foundation for using grammar structures, vocabulary, and sounds in a foreign language (Golkova & Hubackova, 2014).

Richards (2006) suggested various instructional strategies for teaching speaking, such as information gap, jigsaw, task completion, information gathering, opinion sharing, information transfer, reasoning gap, and role play (Richards, 2006, p. 18). In particular, strategies like puzzles, games, and map-reading belong to task completion, while surveys and interviews are examples of information-gathering (Richards, 2006, p. 19). Among the strategies suggested by Richards (2006), Roleplay is frequently used in teaching speaking (Anjaniputra, 2013; Hakim, 2017; Maulidar et al., 2019; Mulyanti & Nadrun, 2021) because role play engages students in learning actively (Mulyanti & Nadrun, 2021). However, role play, information gap, jigsaw speaking, and information gathering were not employed in teaching speaking by teachers in the research conducted by Nurbaktiah et al. (2021), instead, teachers implemented task completion, opinion sharing, information transfer, reasoning gap, questioning, brainstorming, and scaffolding. In addition, other strategies that can be listed in teaching speaking include drilling (Anjaniputra, 2013; Syafrizal, & Rohmawati, 2017, Purwaningsih et al., 2019; Maulidar et al., 2019; Nurbaktiah et al., 2021), storytelling (Alfallah et al., 2023; Hakim, 2017; Mulyanti & Nadrun, 2021), discussion (Hakim, 2017; Maulidar et al., 2019), interview (Hakim, 2017; Mulyanti & Nadrun, 2021), describing pictures (Maulidar

et al., 2019; Mulyanti & Nadrun, 2021), and cooperative activities like think-pair-share, and creative tasks (Anjaniputra, 2013; Apriyanti & Ayu, 2020; Syafrizal, & Rohmawati, 2017; Purwaningsih et al., 2019).

Graham and Perin (2007) suggested 11 strategies for teaching writing, including strategy instruction, summarization, cooperative writing, specific product goals, word processing instruction, sentence combining, idea generation or organization in pre-writing, and inquiry activities to help students develop ideas and content for a particular task, as well as process writing, modeling, and writing to learn or writing for content area learning. Jurianto et al. (2015) interviewed five English teachers at a senior high school in Indonesia and discovered that teachers frequently implement five out of the eleven strategies suggested by Graham & Perin (2007), which were collaborative writing, sentence combining, prewriting, studying writing models, and inquiry activities. Lubis (2021) suggested using strategies like identifying key concepts, providing comprehensible input, visualizing lessons, modifying vocabulary, linking new information, modifying testing, and cooperative learning strategies in teaching descriptive writing. In teaching online, Munir (2022) discovered two groups of strategies called cognitive strategies (including questions and answers, comprehension and understanding, and teaching media) and affective strategies (such as writing topics selected from students' favorites and experiences). In addition, teachers can alleviate students' writing anxiety by motivating their confidence, creating an enjoyable classroom, implementing self-selected topics, using a writing process approach, combining automated writing feedback tools, providing both oral and written feedback, and assigning peer feedback (Kurniasih et al., 2023).

In summary, common instructional strategies for teaching productive skills include information gap, task completion, information gathering, opinion sharing, information transfer, reasoning gap, role play, discussion, storytelling, interview, drilling, games, describing pictures, brainstorming, scaffolding, and think-pair-share.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

To investigate the instructional strategies preferred by EFL lecturers and the reasons behind their choices, a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative methodologies, was employed as this combination provides deep

insights and innovative approaches to understanding the data, thereby enriching our understanding of the research problem (Creswell, 2015). The research process was conducted in two phases.

Phase 1 focused on collecting quantitative data on the instructional strategies favored by participants for teaching productive skills in face-to-face and synchronous online settings. Phase 2 examined the reasons for lecturers' preference for instructional strategies and their recommendation of choosing appropriate strategies for teaching productive skills via semi-interviews with open-ended questions.

3.2. Research Setting and Participants

The study participants with varying teaching experiences and different geographical locations were purposively chosen to answer the questionnaire in phase 1 of this study. Particularly, lecturers from Ho Chi Minh City, Can Tho City, and some provinces within the Mekong Delta were conveniently selected as the researcher lives and works in a province belonging to the Mekong Delta area. Thirty-eight tertiary EFL lecturers who teach non-major or general English participated in the survey. All of them are well-qualified for the criteria of Vietnamese university lecturers, which means they hold at least an MA degree in TESOL or Applied Linguistics, a certificate of information technology, and some extra qualifications. These participants were categorized into three groups based on teaching experience: "experienced" (6 to 15 years), "more experienced" (16 to 25 years), and "very experienced" (over 25 years). Eighteen of them come from universities in central cities and 20 from universities come from provinces within the Mekong Delta. In the second phase, four participants from different universities and groups of experience were invited to participate in interviews. They were all assigned Pseudonyms.

Table 1
Statistics of Participants

Phase	Gender		Workplace		Degree		Experience		
	M	F	Central city	Provinces	MA	PhD	<15	16-25	>25
1	15	23	18	20	35	3	24	11	3
2	3	1	1	3	4	0	2	2	0

3.3. Data Collection Instruments

There were two data collection instruments including a questionnaire and a semi-interview. The questionnaire consists of two main sections. The first section focuses on identifying the instructional strategies lecturers favor for teaching productive skills, with 29 closed-ended questions detailing instructional strategies. The questions were arranged into 2 closed-ended groups for the face-to-face and the online teaching environment. The Likert 5 scale items including (1) Really dislike, (2) dislike, (3) neutral, (4) like, and (5) Really like were utilized, which requires participants to choose one of the responses to best reflect their opinion of each strategy. This session also included one open-ended question regarding other strategies participants love to apply in teaching productive skills. The second part of the questionnaire includes five background questions or demographic questions, with 3 close-ended questions with sub-questions, and 2 open-ended questions. This part aims to collect the participants' names, ages, gender, teaching experience, and workplace.

Among the four lecturers who participated in the interview, one comes from Ho Chi Minh City, one from Can Tho City, and the other two from provincial universities. The interview questions are mainly open-ended to be able to offer flexibility, permitting the interviewer to delve deeper if desired or to clarify any uncertainties. There were main questions and sub-questions to ensure that the data collected serve the research question well.

3.4. Data Collection and Analysis Procedure

The questionnaire was checked by two EFL lecturers who have over 15 years experience of teaching English at universities. They were also interviewed about the reasons for their choice of instructional strategies.

Based on the lecturers' answers and comments in the pilot study, the researchers made some minor adjustments to the questionnaire and interview questions. The questionnaire was then delivered to 50 EFL lecturers via Google Forms to conveniently collect data from various locations, and 38 of the lecturers completed the questionnaire. Subsequently, quantitative data from the questionnaire were analyzed with SPSS 22 software, utilizing descriptive statistics.

Based on location, experience, and willingness, four participants were invited to

interviews lasting approximately 20 minutes each. Before interviewing, all the interviewees signed consent letters and all interviews were recorded. The recordings were transcribed and analyzed via the content analysis method.

4. Findings

4.1. Reliability of the Questionnaire

Cronbach's alpha α was implemented to check the reliability of the quantitative survey items. The result of Cronbach's alpha $\alpha = 0.980$ indicated the high internal consistency among the items. Therefore, the Questionnaire was a reliable instrument to explore the instructional strategies favored by Vietnamese EFL lecturers in teaching productive skills in both face-to-face and online teaching environments.

4.2. Analysis of Quantitative Data on EFL Lecturers' Teaching Strategies

SPSS 22 was utilized to analyze the data from the questionnaire to examine the extent of lecturers' preference for instructional strategies for teaching productive skills. the extent of lecturers' preference was identified by comparing the mean scores of items collected from Descriptive Statistics with the values of the 5-level Likert scale as follows.

1.00 – 1.80: Really dislike

1.81 – 2.60: Dislike

2.61 – 3.40: Neutral

3.41 – 4.20: Like

4.21 – 5.00: Really like

The extent to which EFL lecturers favor various instructional strategies for teaching productive skills in different educational settings is illustrated in Table 2 below:

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Preference for Instructional Strategies to Teach Productive Skills in Online and Face-to-face Environments

Items	N	Online		Face-to-face	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation
Information gaps	38	3.71	.898	3.95	.837
Jigsaw speaking	38	3.53	.862	3.82	.834
Puzzles	38	3.53	.951	3.79	.905
Games	38	3.79	.935	4.05	.899
Interviews	38	3.76	.852	4.03	.915
Story-telling	38	3.50	.862	3.71	.802
Think – Pair – Share	38	3.89	.924	4.16	.973
Opinion sharing	38	4.13	.777	4.26	.724
Transferring information	38	3.82	.834	3.97	.788
Reasoning gap	38	3.66	.847	3.82	.896
Roleplay	38	3.55	.950	3.84	.973
Questioning	38	4.13	.665	4.18	.652
Brainstorming	38	4.11	.764	4.08	.912
Scaffolding	38	3.97	.854	3.87	1.018
Group discussion	38	3.76	.883	4.24	.751
Describing pictures	38	4.21	.741	4.21	.811
Introducing learning strategies	38	3.84	1.027	3.79	1.044
Summarizing	38	3.92	.818	4.05	.804
Shared writing	38	3.84	.945	3.87	.906
Sequencing	38	3.55	.921	3.71	.927
Story chains	38	3.39	.916	3.82	.834
Sentence combination	38	3.55	1.005	3.68	.989
Identifying key concepts	38	3.63	.970	3.82	.982
Providing comprehensible input	38	3.87	.844	4.03	.788
Visualizing	38	3.92	.712	4.11	.863
Free writing	38	3.76	1.025	3.89	1.060
Modelling	38	3.50	.862	4.03	.915
Providing both oral and written feedback	38	3.76	.971	4.11	.981
Selecting the writing topics from students' favorites and experiences	38	3.82	.926	3.89	1.034
Valid N (listwise)	38				

(Source SPSS 22)

Based on the results presented in Table 2, the instructional strategies that lecturers most enjoy implementing in their face-to-face teaching of productive skills include opinion sharing, and group discussion, with mean scores of 4.26 and 4.24 respectively compared to mean scores of 4.13 and 3.76 in the online environment. This is propable due to the more convenience of utilizing interactive strategies in the face-to-face setting than in the online one. Describing pictures got the third highest mean score in face-to-face but the highest in online environment with a

mean score of 4.21 in both settings, which can be infer that this strategy can be applied as easily online as in teaching face-to-face because of the appication of technology in teaching. The story chain activity, which requires students to develop a story by writing the next sentence or part of the story passed to them, is not favored in online teaching (mean score of 3.38, belonging to the neutral scale), but favored in face-to-face teaching (mean score of 3.82, belonging to the like scale). Maybe, it is easier to get students to engage in writing a story together and control the writing process in teaching face-to-face than online. Other strategies for teaching productive skills are well-liked in both face-to-face and online teaching environments, with mean scores ranging from 3.5 to 4.18. However, most strategies are more favored in face-to-face classes than in online courses, except for brainstorming, scaffolding, and introducing learning strategies which are more preferred in teaching online. Scaffolding is more favored in online teaching than face-to-face, which conflicts with the result of the study conducted by Chowdhury and Zannat (2021) who stated that limited insufficient scaffolding is a drawback of online classes. Probably, lecturers can utilize modern apps on the internet to scaffold students. In addition, online learning requires students to be more responsible with their studies, so introducing learning strategies to students plays a crucial role in online teaching. However, this strategy had high standard deviations in the online and face-to-face environment, 1.027 and 1.044, respectively, indicating the inconsistency in lecturers' evaluation. Similar to introducing learning strategies, the strategy called free writing also got a high rate of difference in lecturers' evaluation with a standard deviation of 1.025 online and 1.060 face-to-face. The reason for the inconsistency is probably due to the unfamiliarity with these strategies.

Overall, EFL lecturers prefer to apply nearly all suggested instructional strategies for teaching productive skills in a face-to-face environment rather than online. Notably, EFL lecturers particularly favor brainstorming, scaffolding, and introducing learning strategies in online teaching.

4.3. Analysis of Qualitative Data on EFL Lecturers' Teaching Strategies

Results of the interviews show that EFL lecturers prefer strategies that can help control learning activities and create meaningful, communicative environments so that students can effectively develop their skills when they teach productive skills in online and face-to-face settings. The findings revealed the key strategies for

teaching productive skills, differences in applying strategies between online and face-to-face teaching, and some practical recommendations.

4.3.1. Key strategies for teaching productive skills

Most interviewed lecturers stated that they utilize a wide range of strategies to help students generate ideas and enhance their speaking and writing skills. They suggested some common strategies, including brainstorming, opinion sharing, think-pair-share, visualizing, collaborative writing, and peer feedback.

Lecturers emphasize the importance of collaborative activities in teaching productive skills. As one lecturer noted, *"In face-to-face teaching, I like to use a variety of activities such as pair work, group work, think-pair-share, role play, presentations, and feedback"* (MD). In online teaching, she also suggested utilizing the functions of online tools such as Zoom, Google Meet, and Microsoft Teams to organize interactive activities. *"In online teaching, I sometimes put students in chatting rooms for group work, for instance, working together to prepare ideas for a topic"* (MD). Another highlighted the step-by-step approach: *"I like to control learning activities, create realistic and meaningful communication environments, guide students in making outlines, and create various types of exercises"* (NT1).

4.3.2. Differences between online and face-to-face teaching

In face-to-face teaching environments, communicative and collaborative strategies are more favored as lecturers find it easier to control classes and facilitate group activities. They believe instructional strategies like pair work, group work, role play, and collaborative writing are more effective in these settings. One lecturer claimed, *"Students work better in groups, peer feedback is more diverse, and the TBL (Task-Based Learning) strategy is more effective"* (NT2). Another lecturer confirmed, *"I like to use visual methods (images, videos, charts), communicative methods (group work, discussions), and experiential methods (real-life activities like storytelling and interviews as they can engage students and I can manage their learning)"* (MD).

In online teaching environments, one lecturer prefers individually focused strategies due to the challenges of controlling group activities remotely. He found it

difficult to control group work online. He argued, *“When I join a room, students are working together, but I don’t know whether students are discussing in chatting rooms or not when I am out”*. Therefore, instructional strategies such as questioning and individual presentations are more commonly used. *“I find brainstorming helps students generate ideas, and having them present individually works well”* (CT).

4.3.3. Lecturers’ recommendations

The findings from interviews also recommend that lecturers choose instructional strategies that suit the lesson’s objectives and create an interesting atmosphere. One lecturer emphasized the learning outcome when she said, *“During the teaching process, instructors of speaking and writing should choose suitable strategies that meet the lesson’s objectives to achieve the best effectiveness for learners”* (NT1). Another lecturer recommended creating interesting lectures. She suggested, *“To engage students in online lessons, I recommend using games through apps like Kahoot, Quizizz, and Mentimeter to make the lessons more interesting”* (MD).

However, there was a lecturer who suggested applying strategies focusing more on individuals than on groups in online teaching as difficulty in controlling group discussion. He argued, *“In my opinion, when teaching online, instructors should apply strategies that focus on individuals and help students develop learning strategies, while group activities should be applied in the face-to-face environment where they are easier to control”* (CT). With the developments in technology and the trend of online learning in Vietnam, this suggestion should be considered and more research should be done on this issue.

Moreover, frequent feedback to students on speaking and writing activities was also appreciated by participants as one participant noted, *“To help students develop speaking and writing skills, frequent feedback is very helpful (providing both oral and written feedback)”* (NT2).

Overall, based on the findings there can be some recommendations for EFL lecturers. Firstly, it is essential to choose instructional strategies aligning with lesson objectives, which can help students engage in the lessons. Secondly, lecturers should leverage group activities in face-to-face teaching to enhance collaborative learning and peer feedback and consider the probability of controlling the online learning process to decide whether to utilize more individual or group activities. Additionally, frequent oral and written feedback on speaking and writing activities

is crucial for motivating students and helping them effectively improve their performance. Moreover, technology is highly recommended to use in teaching productive skills. Lectures can make lessons more engaging and interactive by applying tools such as Kahoot, Quizizz, and Mentimeter in both teaching settings as students can find it funny and easy to participate in games designed in Kahoot and Quizizz or share their ideas on Mentimeter. It is also important to balance individual and group activities as group activities are generally more effective in face-to-face settings, but it is important to consider how to apply group activities successfully in online teaching.

5. Discussion

The first major finding of this study was that most of the suggested instructional strategies for teaching productive skills are enjoyed in both face-to-face and online teaching environments, except the story chains activity is not favored in online teaching. Typically, the quantitative data analysis revealed that most strategies are more favored in face-to-face classes than in online courses, except for brainstorming, scaffolding, and introducing learning strategies and which are more preferred in teaching online. The qualitative data analysis confirmed part of the findings from quantitative data analysis and emphasized that communicative and collaborative strategies like roleplay, discussion, and collaborative writing are more favored in teaching productive skills in face-to-face classrooms than in the online teaching environment where it is challenging to control student learning activities. This result aligns with Chowdhury and Zannat (2021) and Nayman and Bavlı (2022) who found that online teaching had some drawbacks such as limited interaction and insufficient scaffolding, or limited pair and group work for speaking and writing activities. However, Siahpoosh and Mahdavi (2024) proved that pair and group work in online classrooms helps students perform better than individual activities, so lecturers should consider incorporating technology with pair and group work in online classes to address the drawbacks of online teaching.

The findings also indicated that lecturers prefer strategies focusing on individuals (questioning, and interviews) when they teach productive skills online. This is supported by Munir (2022) who discovered that teachers implemented cognitive strategies (including questions and answers, comprehension and understanding) and affective strategies (such as writing topics selected from

students' favorites and experiences) when teaching writing online. In this research, it was also found that giving frequent feedback to students on speaking and writing activities is appreciated in motivating students to learn. This finding is in line with the result of the previous study by Kurniasih et al. (2023) who stated that combining automated writing feedback tools, providing both oral and written feedback and assigning peer feedback can help alleviate students' writing anxiety.

The findings of this study significantly contribute to the research on investigating the popular instructional strategies for teaching productive skills in different environments, but there are some limitations. First, the population to obtain the data is quite small, with 38 EFL lecturers mainly from the provinces. Future studies should collect data from a wider population to enhance their validity. Second, this study analyzed the qualitative data through content analysis, which centers on the content alone and overlooks broader contextual factors, so this method potentially limits the analysis's depth.

Despite these limitations, this study has some fundamental implications for EFL lecturers who would like to enhance the quality of their teaching productive skills in online and face-to-face environments. The findings indicate that collaborative strategies are more favored in face-to-face than in online classes, while it is advisable to apply individual-focused strategies in teaching online, as lecturers can control the learning activities easily. However, if lecturers can solve the problem of managing collaborative activities like pair and group work in the online setting, it is expected to see positive results. In short, selecting appropriate strategies to meet the teaching objectives and bringing the best results to learners should be the priority

6. Conclusion

This research was an endeavor to explore instructional strategies that EFL lecturers love to implement in teaching productive skills in online and face-to-face teaching environments. The findings revealed that collaborative strategies such as pairwork, groupwork, discussion, roleplay are more favored in face-to-face than online teaching while strategies like questioning, interviews, and brainstorming are more popular in online teaching. The reason underpinning these findings is that lecturers want to create meaningful and communicative environments for students to effectively develop their speaking and writing skills but they would like to control the learning activities as well. The findings also posed a question of how to enhance

the effectiveness of pair and group work in the online setting. Considering this, we can conclude that lecturers should select and modify the instructional strategies to meet the teaching and learning objectives and suit the context of the teaching environments.

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