

Perceptions and Practices of Warm-Up Activities by English Teachers in Thai Nguyen

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Abstract- English is the most widely used language in the world, which has a great influence on students' future job opportunities. That is the reason why this subject has been put into the curriculum of Vietnamese students at an early age with the purpose of helping them master this language. There are many factors that affect students' ability and teaching method is one of the most important factors. Although warm-up activities are not the key things in the teaching and learning method, it has contributed to creating an effective learning environment and inspiring them to learn. In this way, students can feel more relaxed before learning. This research aims at investigating the perception and practice of warm-up activities by English teachers in Thai Nguyen. A sample of 6 teachers and 197 students from three different secondary schools in Thai Nguyen city participated in this study. There were several data collection instruments used, including teachers' interviews, observation, and students' questionnaires. The results of this research showed that all teachers have a positive opinion towards using warm-up activities in their classes. They also have some similarities and principles in implementation. Hopefully, this study will make a small contribution to clarify the perception as well as the practice of teachers in using warm-up activities in English classes.

The students have 3 English classes per week and each lesson lasts 45 minutes. All classrooms at these schools were equipped with full of facilities for teaching and studying. The teachers have enough equipment to organize their warm-up activities, such as blackboards, whiteboards, posters, speakers, projectors, tables, and chairs. In addition, all of these teachers have their own laptops to serve their teaching job.

This study was conducted from May 2021 to February 2022.

Participants

This study involved 20 teachers from different secondary schools in Thai Nguyen city. The selected teachers need to meet these two requirements. Firstly, they must have over two years of experience in teaching English to secondary students. Secondly, these teachers have used warm-up activities in their classes. These criteria play an integral part in collecting comprehensive data. As stated above, due to the Covid 19 pandemic, the writer could focus mostly on 6 teachers at the Son Cam 1, Tan Long, and Hoang Van Thu schools. Therefore, the table below only describes the detailed information of the observations at these schools.

Table 1: Detailed participants

School	Teachers	Class
Son Cam 1 secondary school	A	7A
	B	8A
Tan Long secondary school	C	7A
	D	8A
Hoang Van Thu secondary school	E	7A
	F	8A

I. THE STUDY SETTING

The study was carried out to investigate the perceptions and practices of English teachers in Thai Nguyen on using warm-up activities in their classes. Thai Nguyen is a mountainous province, which is located in the North of Viet Nam. Due to the difference in economic growth among the parts of the province, the language ability of Thai Nguyen is, therefore, different. In some parts, students have chances to expose to English early since kindergarten; however, in other areas, they start learning English later since primary level.

In the chosen schools, students started learning English at the same level (primary level). Generally, they can understand simple conversations, words, and phrases. They can use English to introduce their name, hometown, and class. Many of them can ask and answer questions related to popular topics. Some can understand and deal with less familiar topics.

Data collection instrument

This study aims at finding out the teachers’ perceptions and practices on warm-up activities, so some data collection instruments were used.

Questionnaires

Babbie (1990) defined questionnaires as a document that consists of kinds of questions to collect appropriate information for analysis. Acharya (2010) also illustrated the definition of questionnaires as well as gave the importance of having suitable questionnaires since it can cause misleading the research. A questionnaire has been considered as one of the most common ways to gather data with a large number of participants. Therefore, to collect data from 20 teachers to learn about their perceptions and practices, this instrument is completely suitable for this study. Table 2 below gives main information of the questionnaire.

Table 2: Main information of the teacher’s questionnaires

Type	Number of questions	Number of respondents
Questionnaire	8	20

The questionnaire consists of 8 questions, which can take the respondents no more than 10 minutes to complete. Questions 1 to 7 are close-ended questions, which were designed to collect teachers’ opinions on the importance of warm-up activities, how they organize the warm-up part, and the types they often use. In question 8, teachers selected the five types of warm-up activities they use frequently and provide information on other types which were not listed. Also in question 8, the teachers are asked to number each of the five types that they selected in the order of the least to the most frequency.

Observation

In the Oxford dictionary, observation is defined as "the act of watching somebody or something carefully in a period of time, especially to learn something". The writer also observed the lessons of each teacher to find out how those participants organized warm-up activities in their classes. Aside from questionnaires and teachers’ interviews, the writer chose different lessons to observe as listed below:

Table 3: Details of the class observation

School	Class	Lessons
Son Cam 1 secondary school	7A	26
	8A	25
Tan Long secondary school	7A	26
	8A	25
Hoang Van Thu secondary school	7A	26
	8A	25

The observation collected data from 6 classes at three secondary schools as shown in table 3. The classes are selected based on the schedule of the author and the teachers at these schools. The lessons were chosen unintentionally due to the school boards’ permission. The author managed to observe the same lesson for each grade so that the data classification and analysis would be more reliable.

The information needed to be collected and analyze includes the types and time duration of warm-up activities, the participation of students and how teachers deal with problems (if any) when organizing these activities.

Interviews

Besides questionnaires and observations, the writer decided to choose interviews as another chosen data collection instrument. This type is one of the most commonly used instruments in studies. A group of authors whose names are Mathers. N, Fox. N, and Hunn. A stated that "there are a range of approaches to interviewing, from completely unstructured in which the subject is allowed to talk freely about what they wish, and highly structured in which the subject responses are limited to answering direct questions". The writer interviewed 6 teachers in Son Cam 1, Hoang Van Thu, and Tan Long secondary schools.

There are five interview questions, which took from 10 to 15 minutes for each teacher to answers. All of the questions are open-ended in order to get detailed opinions from these teachers to analyze their perceptions and practices of using warm-up activities in their lessons. The information of the interviews can be summarized as follows:

Table 4: Main information of the teachers’ interview

Type	Number of questions	Number of respondents
Interview	5	6

Questions 1 and 2 focus on the teachers’ opinions about the importance of warm-up activities. Question 3 was designed to collect the problems in organizing warm-up parts. Questions 4 and 5 will look into the solutions which the teachers applied to overcome difficulties.

Data collection procedure

This study was carried out from May, 2021 to February 2022. To collect data, the write implemented the following steps:

Preparation

Firstly, the writer reviewed the research questions to determine the data collection instruments. After that, the writer made a detailed schedule for each data collection instrument, including observation, questionnaires, and interviews. Then, after studying related theories and previous studies, the writer wrote items for each instrument. Those items were reviewed by peer teachers to limit the subjectiveness before being delivered to the respondents. It would take a lot of time for the writer to meet and deliver the questionnaire to each respondent in person. Therefore, the questionnaire was created online for convenience.

After finishing the preparations of data collection instruments, the writer contacted the school boards of the selected school to ask for permission so that the writer could come and carry out the research. Finally, the writer discussed with the respondents to make arrangements based on their schedules.

Implementation

Questionnaires: After making sure that all of the respondents know how to fill out the questionnaire forms, the

author sent the link of the questionnaire to the respondents. When all of the 20 respondents filled in the form, the writer was available to support if necessary.

Interviews: The author met each respondent, explained the procedures, interviewed, and recorded their responses.

Observation: Based on the agreed schedules, the writer came to each selected school to observe selected lessons. The lessons were filmed so that they could be used in the next stages. The writer mostly recorded the warm-up part in each class.

Planning for data analysis

To prepare for data analysis, all of the data collected were processed by the author.

The data collected from questionnaires were statistically synthesized for the analysis process. All of the recordings from teachers' interviews were transcribed and grouped. Teaching videos recorded from the observation stage were watched carefully so that the data could be classified.

Data analysis

Data from the questionnaires was collected and processed into IBM SPSS Statistics 20. The qualitative data collected from the interviews and observations were also summarized and classified. All of the data were quantitatively analyzed and illustrated by a system of charts or tables.

Analyzing the figures helped in illustrating the perceptions and practices of using warm-up activities of English teachers in Thai Nguyen. They were categorized in terms of the importance of warm-up activities, the types of warm-up activities that are often used, the problems that the teachers had when organizing warm-up activities, and the solutions that the teachers found to deal with the problems.

II. FINDINGS

A. Result of the interviews

Perceptions of warm-up activities by the English teachers in Thai Nguyen city

The importance of warm-up activities

To find out the perception of English teachers towards using warm-up activities, the researcher interviewed their opinion about the importance of these activities. When being asked, all these six teachers agreed that warm-up activities play an important part in their teaching. They also gave different explanations about their answer.

Teacher A considered warm-up a key part since it helps review the previous lessons and brings an enjoyable learning environment. In this way, students can have better preparation.

Teacher B also had the same opinion as teacher A about the importance of warm-up activities. Besides, she added that those activities bring fun and energy to motivate learners of all ages.

Aside from listing benefits and affirming the importance of warm-up activities, teacher D figured out the reasons why students need to be warmed up at the beginning of every class.

The rest of the teachers also stated the importance of warm-up activities and explained the same ways as the teachers mentioned above. It could be seen that all of the teachers appreciate the importance of warm-up activities.

However, when being asked whether they omit the warm-up stages due to some reasons, such as the length or the difficulty levels of the lessons there were different ideas among them. Teachers A, C, D, E, and F continued to emphasize the significance of warm-up activities and affirmed that the warm-up stage is the indispensable part of every lesson. Teacher F also shared her solutions to deal with this situation.

"Some lessons are quite difficult for students to understand so it takes teachers more time to explain. When there are difficult lessons, I often choose short warm-up activities such as singing a song or something like that. Maybe it isn't related to the lesson but at least my students are relaxed before a difficult lesson."

(Teacher F)

In contrast, teacher B admitted that sometimes she had to begin the lessons without warming up as she worried that she could not cover all of the knowledge of the lesson.

It can be seen that although all of the teachers understand that warm-up activities are important and can list the benefits of warm-up activities, there is still a teacher who chose not to organize warm-up activities due to the limit of time.

Challenges of using warm-up activities in English classes

When being asked whether they have encountered any difficulties when using warm-up activities in English classes, all of the teachers said "yes". However, each one has her own problems. From their ideas, we can summarize the list as follow:

- 1) Students refuse to participate in activities;
- 2) They are unhappy when their team lose in a competition;
- 3) They do not know what to do; therefore, it takes time for teachers to explain;
- 4) They are not willing to start a new period after break time;
- 5) They overuse their first language in class;
- 6) They do not get on well with each other;
- 7) They are so keen on the activities that they do not want to stop;
- 8) They became over-excited and noisy;
- 9) They do other things (like talking with each other) instead of doing the tasks.

Practice of using warm-up activities by the English teachers in Thai Nguyen city

As previously stated, all of the teachers encountered problems when organizing warm-up activities in their class. However, they all found their own solutions to deal with the problems. Although the measures cannot completely eradicate the issues, they really work in limiting the problems.

Five out of six teachers said setting classroom rules right from the beginning and sticking to them are effective in limiting students' misbehaviors. Teacher F suggested using some signs to help students notice their mistakes. For example, when they speak Vietnamese, the teacher can point to the sign so that students stop speaking Vietnamese. This way can also work when students make a lot of noise or do other things instead of doing their tasks. Teacher A also recommended that teachers should set rules for each activity so that it can limit students' misbehaviors.

For those who do not want to join the activities, teacher A suggested *"it is important to know the reasons why they behave that way before finding the solutions. For example, if it is due to low language levels, teachers should organize more simple*

activities or if it is because they are shy or unconfident, they should be allowed more time for preparation.”

According to teacher C, teachers can start the lesson with a “time challenge”. Teachers challenge students to do certain tasks in a short time, to see who can do the fastest. This way students will feel less stressed after break time and be ready for the new lessons.

In teachers B, D, and E’s opinions, teachers should understand students’ profiles before organizing any activities. When they know clearly about their students’ interests, language levels, etc., they can make suitable decisions on what types of activities to choose and how to organize them. In addition, teacher B advised other teachers to use short and simple instructions so that all students understand what to do.

In sum, though all of the teachers had several problems when organizing warm-up activities in their class, they could find ways to solve the problems. Although the solutions cannot guarantee a “problem-free class”, they can greatly help the teachers restricts the negative points.

B. Result of the questionnaires

The questionnaires were delivered to 20 secondary teachers in Thai Nguyen city. In the questionnaires, the teachers had to decide how much they agree with the statements provided and specify the types of warm-up activities they often use in their class. The data collected on teachers’ opinions can be summarized in the table below:

Table 5: The perceptions and practice of using warm up activities in English classes

Statements	Opinions (Unit: Person/ People)				
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
1. Warm-up activities are integral to English lessons.	0	0	0	2	18
2. I always organize warm-up activities for every lesson.	0	0	2	2	16
3. Warm-up activities always start at the beginning of every lesson.	0	0	0	0	20
4. Warm-up activities last from 5 to 7 minutes.	0	1	3	5	11
5. I use different activities for the warm-up part.	0	0	3	5	12
6. I can manage the whole class when organizing warm-up activities.	0	3	2	14	1
7. All of my students feel excited when I organize warm-up activities.	0	1	3	2	14

The importance of warm-up activities

According to the data collected 100% of the teachers recognized the importance of warm-up activities.

The frequency of doing warm-up activities

As shown in table 5, 16 teachers strongly agreed that they always organize warm-up activities for every lesson. 10% agree and the same number of teachers had neutral ideas. It could be concluded that although teachers understand the significance of warm-up activities, they do not always organize them in their class.

How to organize warm-up activities

100% teachers agreed that warm-up activities always start at the beginning of every lesson. However, they have different ideas on the length of the activities. While the majority (80%) strongly agreed and agreed that warm-up activities should last from 5 to 7 minutes, 15 % had neutral ideas and 5% disagreed.

Talking about the use of different activities for the warm-up part, 12 teachers claimed they organized various activities, making up 60%. 5 teachers agreed, whereas the rest were neutral.

About how to manage the activities, the number of teachers who strongly agreed that they could manage the whole class when organizing warm-up activities was only 5%. While 60% agreed, there were 10% who had neutral opinions, and 15% disagreed.

60% strongly agreed that their students felt excited when they organized warm-up activities. Two other teachers (equivalent to 10%) agreed that the warm-up part brought excitement to their students. Nevertheless, 15% stayed neutral, and the minority of 5% disagreed. Though a large number of students have positive feelings about the warm-up parts, teachers are sometimes not able to satisfy the whole class.

Types of warm-up activities often used

Teachers were asked to select the five types of warm-up activities that they organize frequently in their class. The five most frequently-used activities include Q&A, Storytelling, Games, Pictures/Videos, and Songs.

Games and Songs are the top used activities, which were selected by all of the teachers. Pictures/Videos chosen by 12 teachers (equivalent to 60%) came second. Storytelling with 20%, Q&A with 12% are the next frequently used warm-up activities.

C. Results of observation

The results of observation process include the types of warm-up activities, the time appointed to the warm-up part, the participation of students in warm-up activities and the teacher’s solutions for problems.

Types of warm-up activities

Among the types of warm-up activities that the teachers organized during their lessons, games and songs, which were used by 4 teachers, took the first place. The other two teachers selected Q&A and Pictures/Videos. During the observation time, no teachers used Storytelling, Role play, or other activities for the warm-up part.

The average time of the warm-up part

All of the teachers spent no more than 7 minutes organizing warm-up activities. Two-thirds of the teachers used from 3 to 5 minutes to do warm-ups for their class. One teacher held warm-up activities for a shorter time (between 3 and 5 minutes) and another one spent a longer time (between 5 and 7 minutes).

The participation of students in warm-up activities

The writer classified how students participated in the warm-up activities into three groups:

- (1) those who actively participate in the activities;
- (2) those who participate in the activities;
- (3) those who do not participate in the activities.

Students in group (1) were recognized for their eagerness to join the activities. They were willing to volunteer or make contributions to their group. They focused on the activities and used English most of the time. Students who were put in group (2) are those who followed the teacher's instructions. However, they did not raise their hands or contribute ideas. They accepted their teacher's or classmates' suggestions. Sometimes they used their first language to confirm with friends. Finally, students classified into group (3) are those who did other things during the activities. Some of them pretended to follow the instructions but in fact, they took no notice of the activities. A few others do not understand the teacher's instructions but had no attempts to do so. The table below illustrates how students participated in warm-up activities.

Table 6 The participation of students in warm-up activities

Students' participation:	Percentage (%)
Students actively participate in the activities	67.5
Students participate in the activities	23.9
Students do not participate in the activities	8.6

Over two-thirds of the students actively joined the activities, which is really a good sign. It means the warm-up activities could draw their attention and satisfied most of the students. There were 47 students who just participate in the activities, equivalent to 23.9%. There remained 17 students who did not join the activities, accounting for 8.6%.

The problems arose during warm-up activities and teacher's solutions

Based on the specification in the observation sheets, four main problems arose in the classes:

- (1) Students did other things (talked to each other, did the exercises of other subjects, sleep);
- (2) Students did not like the activities (right after listening to the instructions of the activities, students became discouraged and refused to join);

- (3) Students made a lot of noise.
- (4) Students did not understand what to do

For problem 1, teacher C asked students to stop doing other things and told one student sitting nearby to keep an eye on each. Meanwhile, teacher E used her sign rules to ask students to stop, and she stood next to those students to make sure they started joining the activities. Teacher F had those students stand up and answer her questions (she used Q&A as a warm-up activity).

To deal with problem 2, teacher A asked the students to be the referees. Those students seemed to be interested in the new role and got more engaged. Teacher B reminded the students that they have to participate because that was a part of the lesson. The students were quite reluctant and joined passively. Teacher D encouraged the students to join, but the students continued to lose focus after a few minutes. About teacher F, she talked to the student and accepted him not to participate in the activity after asking him to promise to behave better next time. Although the student did not participate, she did not bother the other students. About solutions for problem 3, teacher A came and stood close to the group making the most noise. Teacher B spoke so softly that students had to turn their voices down to listen to her. Teacher C played a piece of music to attract students' attention. Teacher E asked the class to stand up and sit down three times until students became less noisy.

For the last problems, both teachers D and F explained the rules for the students one more time and checked whether they understood or not. Teachers A and E asked their teammates to explain to them.

In conclusion, all of the teachers could address the problems arising in their class and found their own ways to deal with them.

III. DISCUSSIONS

What are English teachers' perceptions on the use of warm-up activities in English classes?

The results from questionnaires, interviews, and observations all showed that English teachers highly value the role of warm-up activities in their teaching process. They understand the positive impacts of warm-up on their students and their teaching environment. Therefore, most of them claimed to use different types of warm-up activities for their lessons. The most frequent types include songs, games, Q&A, storytelling, pictures/videos, and role play. Among those types, songs and games proved to be the most favorite types of the teachers, based on the results of the questionnaires and the observations.

How do the English teachers implement warm-up activities in their classes?

Based on the results of questionnaires, interviews, and observations, it is clearly shown that the frequency and the way to implement warm-up activities of these English teachers are slightly different. Some of them have warm-up activities every day, while the others do not. However, they all said that this part is important and they always try their best to organize with the regardless of time limitation.

Furthermore, the time they spend on warm-up activities is also not similar among the teachers. While most of the teachers

used from 3 to 5 minutes, it took the others longer (5 to 7 minutes) or shorter (3 to 5 minutes). These teachers shared the same ideas that this part needs to be organized within a reasonable amount of time (no more than 7 minutes) to avoid affecting the other parts of the lessons.

In terms of activities used, most of the teachers said that they use different types of activities for warm-up. The majority of them strongly agreed and agreed that their students were excited during the warm-up part.

The participating teachers also understand the significance of classroom management during warm-up parts. Specifically, they could list the main problems that they encountered and proposed solutions for each of them. Based on the interviews, there were 9 main problems while based on the observations, there were 4. In general, these problems are related to students' understanding and their behaviors. The solutions that were most proposed by these teachers included simple class instructions, setting classroom rules, and understanding students.

In conclusion, teachers could anticipate the possible problems in their class and suggested solutions. During their lesson, when there were problems, they could recognize the issues and had their own ways to handle them. However, some solutions worked well while others did not.

IV. CONCLUSION

This research was done to investigate the perceptions of English teachers in Thai Nguyen on the use of warm-up activities and how they implement these activities in their own classes. The study used interviews, questionnaires, and observations as data collection instruments. All of the data were processed and analyzed quantitatively and illustrated in the form of tables and charts. The findings from all of the study instruments were consistent, which ensures the reliability of the results. The study results can be summarized as follows:

Firstly, most of the teachers appreciate the role of warm-up activities in teaching and learning. They clearly understand the benefits of the warm-up parts. The mentioned advantages included creating a positive environment, reviewing previous lessons, and relieving stress. As the teachers know the influence of warm-up activities on their students, the majority of them consider warm-up an indispensable part of the teaching procedures. However, there remains an idea that when the lessons are long or difficult, the warm-up can be omitted to save time for other stages.

To draw the interests of the students, most of the teachers applied different types of warm-up activities for their lessons. The top five warm-up types that are often used by teachers consist of games, songs, pictures/videos, storytelling, and role-play. Among these types, games, and songs are chosen by most of the teachers (33.3% votes for each type).

Although warm-up plays an important part in the lesson, all of the teachers agreed that it should not last long. To be more detailed, based on the observation results, all teachers spent less than 7 minutes on this part. It took two-thirds of the teachers to organize this part.

Moreover, teachers could name major problems which often occurred during classes. The problems listed included refusing to participate in the activities, being discouraged when losing in a competitive activity, not understanding teachers'

instructions, being unwilling to study after break time, using Vietnamese too much, having conflicts with classmates, not wanting to stop, making loud noise, and losing focused.

The teacher also took steps to deal with the problems. The main solutions proposed involved setting classroom rules, understanding students, making class instructions more simple and clearer. The observation results showed that most of the teachers could manage over two-thirds of the class well (67.5 students actively participated in the activities). When there occurred problems, each teachers resolved them in different ways. Some measures could work well but other did not.

In short, the study presented the importance of warm-up activities in the views of English teachers. The frequently used activities, the problems when organizing the activities, and solutions to deal with them were also illustrated and analyzed. Therefore, the results of the study could be a good source of reference for English teachers in organizing warm-up activities.

V. LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Limitations: Due to the lack of time and the complicated pandemic situation, the study could not be conducted with a large number of participants. The writer could collect the opinions of only 20 secondary English teachers in Thai Nguyen for the questionnaire surveys. Also because of the pandemic, the writer could contact only three secondary schools to ask for permission to carry out the research there. Therefore, the interviews were implemented with only 6 participants, and the observations were made in only 6 classes.

Recommendations

For English teachers

Implementing warm-up activities is a great way to gain students' attention and achieve the objectives of lessons. When organizing warm-up activities, teachers should have a clear understanding of their students so that they can choose suitable and useful activities. Besides, as warm-up could help in revising the previous lessons, improving the class atmosphere, preparing good conditions for the students to learn new lessons, it should not be skipped. Teachers also need to distribute the time for warm-up activities properly so that it will not last for too long and affect other parts of the lessons.

Teachers also should use a variety of activities for this part as each warm-up type can develop different skills for students. When organizing activities, anticipating the possible problems and thinking of the solutions in advance could be a good idea to help teachers avoid problems in the class. Teachers should give clear and simple instructions so that students with low language ability can understand what to do. Besides, setting classroom rules and sticking to them are also good ways to help limit students' negative behaviors.

For further researchers

There is still more room for other researchers who are interested in this topic. The main focus of this study is the perceptions of English teachers in Thai Nguyen on the use of warm-up activities and how they implement these activities in their own classes. It means that the studies just presented the findings based on the data collected. Researchers could focus

deeper on the problems when organizing warm-up activities and analyze the feasibility of possible solutions for them.

Secondly, as the participants of the study are English teachers in Thai Nguyen, further studies could be conducted for teachers in other areas. Moreover, the study was conducted with limited numbers of participants, researchers could carry out the study with larger scale to collect more data.

Another suggestion is to investigate deeper in warm-up activities for certain school levels so that researchers could find the most suitable types of warm-up activities for students at different age and language levels.

However, with the regardless of those limitations, the writer expects that this research can make way for further studies so that there will be more sources of reference for teachers. In this way, teachers could have more ideas in teaching and improve their teaching methods.

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