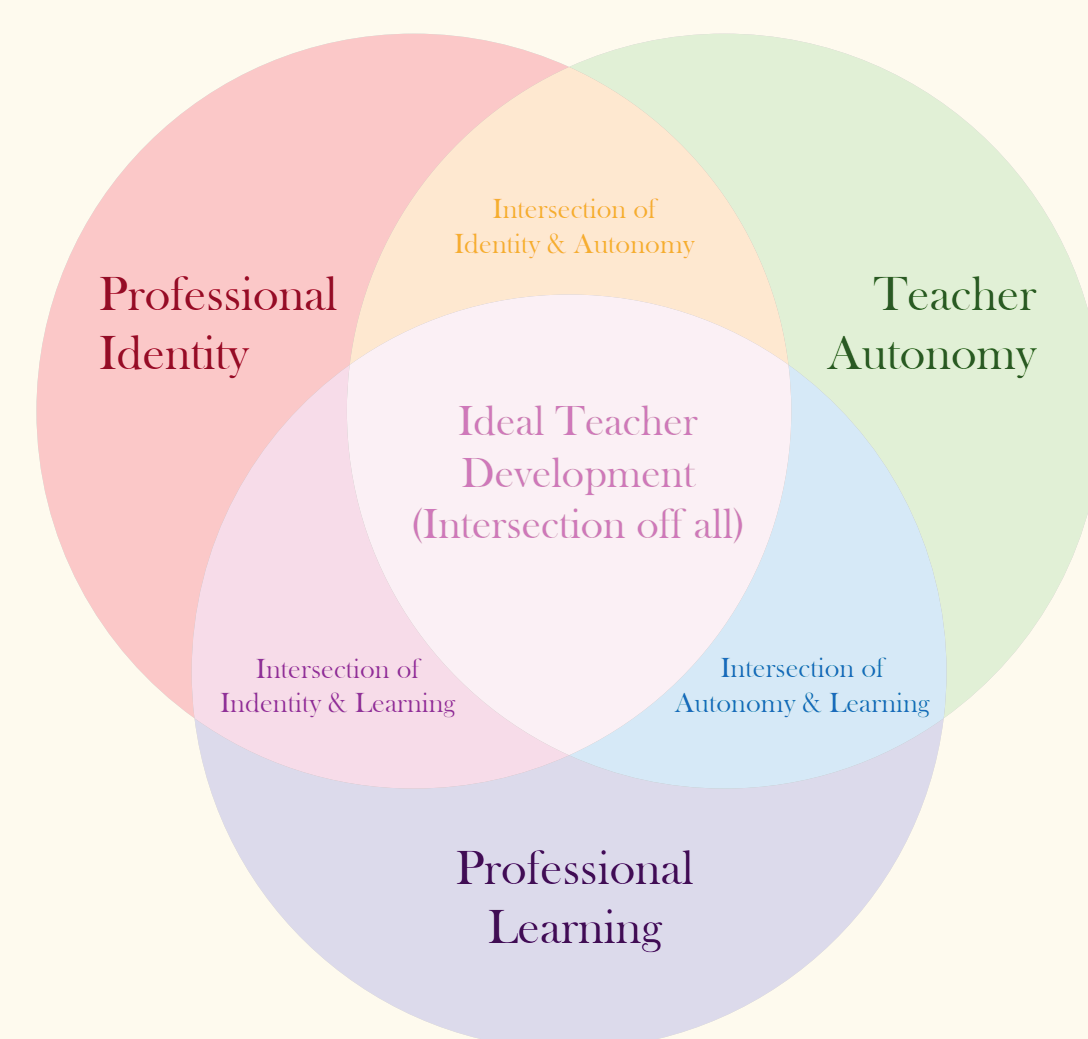


MY JOURNEY AS A RURAL EFL TEACHER: NAVIGATING PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY, INNOVATION, AND LEARNING IN VIETNAM

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Introduction/Overview

Teaching English in rural Vietnam has brought both challenges and valuable learning experiences. **How have the challenges of teaching English in rural areas influenced professional identity?** Through overcoming these obstacles, my professional identity as a teacher has evolved. This poster highlights how teacher autonomy—the freedom to innovate and adapt—combined with continuous professional learning has driven my growth and improved my students' outcomes. I also explore potential policy changes to better support teachers in similar rural contexts. Additionally, these experiences can serve as a case study for rural educators in other countries facing similar challenges. Through sharing these insights, I aim to contribute to the global discourse on improving English education in underserved and resource-limited regions.



Objectives

This presentation aims to:

- Explore practical solutions:** Identify effective strategies and innovative methods for teaching English in rural Vietnam that align with current educational trends and promote student engagement.
- Enhance student opportunities:** Discuss ways to ensure equitable access to quality English language learning experiences for all students, particularly those in resource-limited settings.
- Promote teacher autonomy:** Advocate for increased teacher autonomy to adapt instructional methods based on the unique needs of students and the challenges faced in rural classrooms.
- Encourage policy reform:** Highlight the need for policy changes that support teachers in rural contexts, enabling them to implement creative and effective teaching practices.

New Challenges in English Teaching

2024 Education Reform and Student Motivation:

Challenge: In the 2024–2025 school year, English became an elective subject in Vietnam, leading to decreased student motivation, with only 15% of 12th graders choosing it for their university entrance exam.

Solution: To counter this, I introduced engaging activities like video projects, fostering community and increasing peer interaction, making English relevant to students' interests.

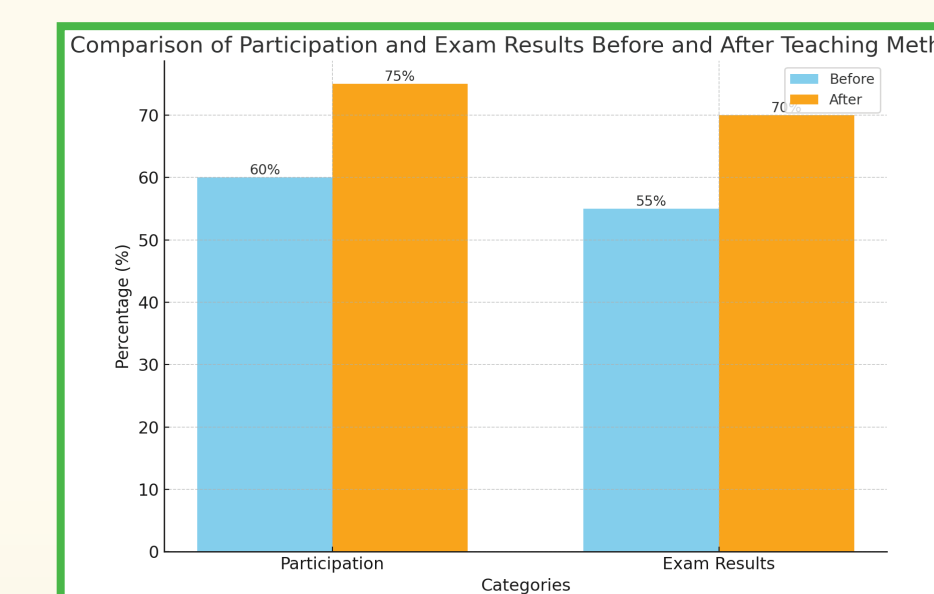
Research Element and Insights

Filling the Research Gap:

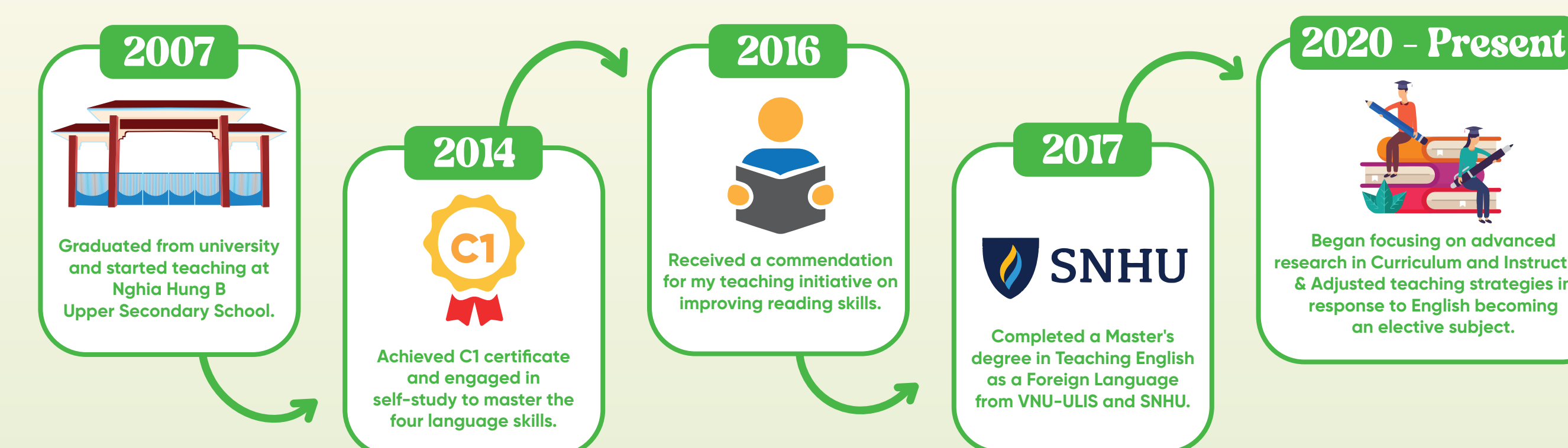
Research on rural education often overlooks specific cultural and resource challenges in Vietnam. My experiences show that giving teachers more freedom to adapt their methods can effectively address these barriers, contributing to discussions on rural education reform.

Data and Impact:

By introducing interactive activities like group projects, video presentations, and English clubs, I saw a **15% increase in student engagement** and better exam results. These improvements show the power of creative, student-centered teaching methods, even in resource-limited settings. This suggests that teacher autonomy, combined with innovative approaches, can significantly enhance learning outcomes, especially in rural areas.



Story, Motivation, and Lifelong Learning:



Story: Growing up in a small village in Nam Dinh, I faced limited opportunities to learn English. After starting my teaching career in 2007, I realized traditional methods weren't enough. I pursued a C1 certification in 2014 while balancing teaching and personal responsibilities. Despite challenges, I grew professionally, earning recognition from the Nam Dinh Department of Education for my research on teaching reading skills. In 2017, I completed a Master of Teaching English as a Foreign Language from a joint program between VNU-ULIS and Southern New Hampshire University. While the program provided valuable insights, adapting those methods to my rural school required time and effort.

Motivation: My passion stems from seeing even small improvements in my students. This fuels my commitment to continually innovate and find relevant, practical ways to make learning accessible.

Lifelong Learning: Every challenge taught me to refine my teaching. I'm now focused on research in Curriculum and Instruction to address the ongoing challenges of integrating English as a second language in Vietnam, and I aim to contribute to educational reforms that better serve students in rural areas.

Personal Experience

Students greatly enjoy interactive learning, communication, and project-based activities, such as video projects. However, many students still lack confidence, largely due to the emphasis on theoretical learning and grades, which limits their communication abilities. Nevertheless, significant progress has been observed since incorporating projects into lessons, showing improvement compared to when the focus was solely on theory.

Key Insights and Learnings:

1. Professional Identity through Autonomy:

The freedom to customize my teaching methods according to my students' needs greatly enriched my professional identity. Autonomy allowed me to innovate and implement effective practices, especially in a challenging rural setting.

2. Resilience through Continuous Learning:

My resilience as a teacher stems from a commitment to lifelong learning. Collaborating with colleagues, reflecting on my practices, and remaining adaptable have been crucial in overcoming challenges and fostering my professional growth.

3. Challenges as Opportunities for Growth:

Each challenge I faced—whether managing personal responsibilities or meeting professional demands—served as an opportunity for growth. I developed essential skills in time management, creativity, and adaptability throughout this journey.

Conclusions and Implications:

Greater teacher autonomy empowers adaptation.
Interactive learning improves engagement and skills.
Policies should focus on rural teacher support.
More research on autonomy's impact is needed.

For Teaching Practice:

Greater autonomy empowers educators to adapt methods to student needs, fostering innovation and engagement. My transition to interactive learning improved outcomes in both academics and soft skills, even amidst the new elective subject reform.

For Policy:

Policies should focus on increasing teacher autonomy, especially in rural settings. This, combined with professional development, can significantly enhance teacher satisfaction and student achievement.

For Future Research:

More research is needed on the impact of teacher autonomy on professional identity and student outcomes across various educational contexts.



Personal Challenges & Solutions

1. Pressure on Grades Over Essential Skills



Challenge:

Students were overly focused on memorizing for exams, which limited their development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills.



Solution:

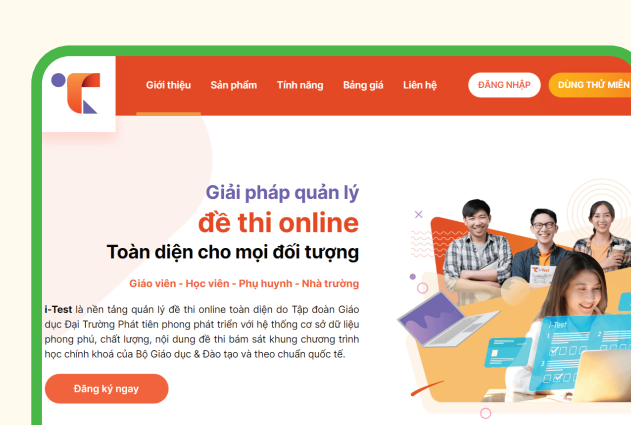
I introduced group projects and real-world activities to help students understand that learning is about preparing for life, not just grades.

2. Limited Resources and Technology



Challenge:

The lack of textbooks and access to technology restricted my ability to deliver engaging and dynamic lessons.



Solution:

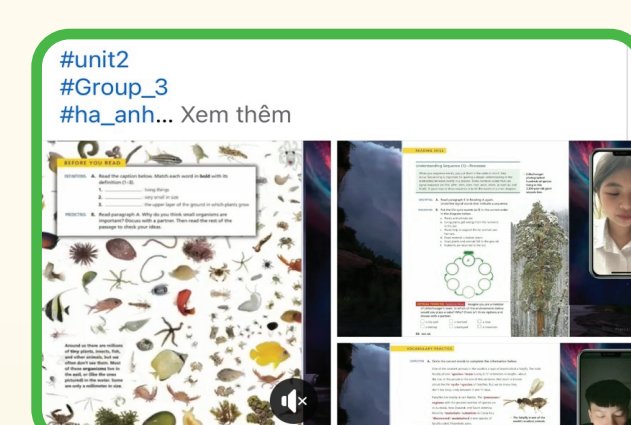
I created low-cost, innovative teaching materials and used my phone for multimedia instruction. This made lessons more interactive and engaging, even without advanced resources.

3. Lack of Practice Environments



Challenge:

Students had minimal opportunities to use English outside of the classroom, which made it difficult for them to see the relevance of learning the language.



Solution:

I organized English clubs and connected classroom activities to real-world opportunities. Students were encouraged to record video presentations and share them with their peers, which promoted both practice and peer learning, increasing their motivation.

4. Theory-Focused Curriculum

Challenge: The curriculum was heavily theory-based, leading students to excel in memorization but struggle with practical applications, particularly in writing and conversation.

Solution: I incorporated role-playing, group discussions, and project-based learning to bridge the gap between theory and practice. These activities fostered collaboration and enhanced communication skills by giving students hands-on experience with the language.

5. Traditional Teaching Methods in a Changing World

Challenge: Teacher-centered methods dominated rural schools, leading to passive learning and limited student engagement.

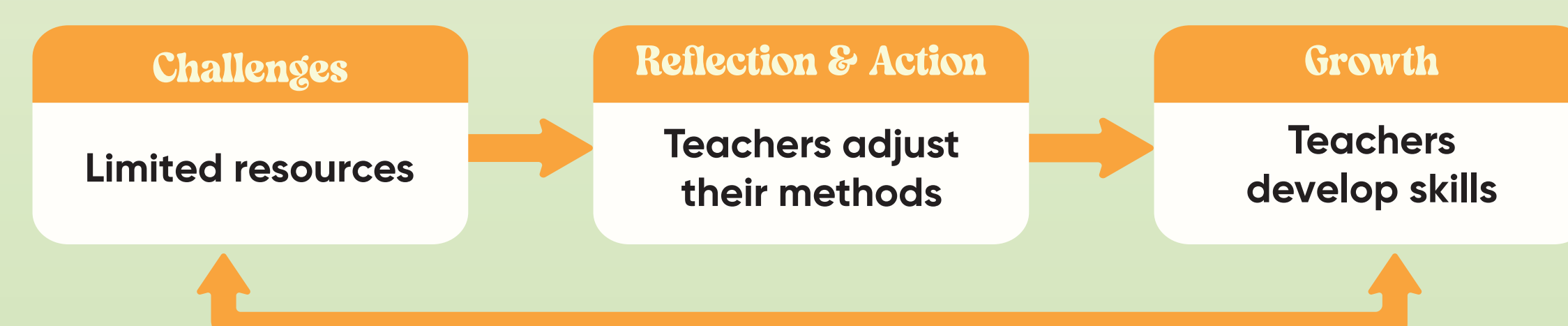
Solution: I transitioned to interactive, student-centered activities like collaborative group work and project-based tasks. This shift promoted critical thinking, engagement, and active participation from students, preparing them for the demands of a modern world.

6. Difficulty Applying New Methods in Resource-Limited Schools

Challenge: After completing my Master's in Teaching English as a Foreign Language, I wanted to apply various innovative methods in my teaching. However, due to the lack of equipment and teaching resources at my school, I could implement very few of these methods.

Solution: To overcome this, I focused on adapting the methods that required minimal resources, such as role-playing, group discussions, and using locally available materials for interactive activities. I also collaborated with colleagues to share resources and ideas, ensuring that even with limited tools, students could benefit from engaging and effective lessons.

How Challenges lead to Reflection & Action, which drives Growth



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