# TRAINING - ONE OF THE COMPULSORY SUBJECTS IN THE ENGLISH-LANGUAGE COURSE AT THE FACULTY OF ENGLISH – HANOI OPEN UNIVERSITY

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***Abstract:** This article mentions some views and assessments of the students of the Faculty of English, Hanoi Open University regarding the subject **Countries Study** applying credit training. The article uses qualitative and quantitative analysis methods, based on the documents, the result of research works of previous scholars, and results from the questionnaires obtained from 100 students (course 2020-2024) who have studied the subject **Countries Study** at the Faculty of English for the academic year 2021-2022. The article will outline a comprehensive picture of the teaching and learning process of this subject. On that basis, some suitable solutions can be proposed to improve the learning efficiency of the subject.*

***Keywords:** assessments, credit training, the subject, Countries Study, Faculty of English*

## I. Introduction

Understanding the customs, history, and people... of the countries that speak English as an official language is an essential requirement for English-majored students at the Faculty of English, Hanoi Open University. In recent years, the development of information technology has brought several advantages to teachers in preparing lessons and lectures, as well as students in the learning and research process. The teaching and learning of the subject *Countries Study* for students of the Faculty of English at Hanoi Open University also received positive impacts from these changes.

The subject *Countries Study* is being taught to full-time students and *second-degree* students at the Faculty of English, Hanoi Open University. Students have 30 hours of class time, equivalent to two credits in the course. In this article, the authors want to analyze the teaching and learning process at the Faculty of English, Hanoi Open University to get an overview of the current situation of teaching and

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learning the subject *Countries Study* according to the credit system, to analyze the attitude and assessment of studentsand lecturers towards the contents, theteaching methods which have been proposed and implemented, to find out the advantages and drawbacks of the teachingand learning process. Based on the collected data, the authors will propose some solutions to improve the quality of teaching the subject *Countries Study* for English-majored students at the Faculty ofEnglish, Hanoi Open University.

## II. Literature Review

### 2.1. Teaching and learning methods in credit-based training

The teaching method is the link between theory and pedagogical practice, helping students to acquire knowledge, practice problem-solving ability, develop intelligence, and form personality. In most universities in Vietnam, credit-based training with active learner-centered teaching methods has become popular and dominant in the education system.

Training according to the credit system meets the needs of a modern, increasingly dynamic society (Trexler, 2008), and realizes the goal of massing higher education through the explosive development of information and communication technology. In the knowledge economy and globalization, the popularization of higher education is considered the optimal measure to provide society with human resources with increasingly high knowledge and raise people's intellectual level. Massification of higher education is also an effective measure to implement the motto of

"lifelong learning" that the education systems of advanced countries are pursuing, creating favorable conditions for many people to be able to access higher education, regardless of age, meeting the student's study time budget, with graduation status based on the number of credits they accumulate.

The changing role of learners also entails changes in the role of the teacher, the curriculum, the teaching methods, etc. These changes are a requirement of objective reality and to improve the training quality.

### 2.1.1. The role of learners in credit-based training

The credit system is a training method in which students activelychoose each subject according to several predefined constraints to accumulate each part towards completing the entire training program to be awarded a diploma. The credit system also creates the maximum conditions to personalize the training process and empowers students to takethe initiative in registering and arranging class schedules, arranging study time at school, and graduation time... The application of the credit system not only requires changes on the part of the school, on the part of the teachers but also the part of the students, especially in improving the students' initiative in learning plans, planning to register for courses, selecting subjects from the very beginning for the whole four- or five-year study program (Tran Thanh Ai, 2010). Students must actively learn the course outline, then prepare to read the material before class, actively participate in class discussions, as

well as do exercises, write essays, and do projects at home.

Students trained under the credit system will have access to new teaching methods. Students are acquainted with the spirit of independent work, and self-study. They can plan their training process, depending on the time budget to plan to complete the study program in the appropriate time and circumstances.

In addition, students also participate in deciding how to learn each subject. The credit-based training requires learners to change their attitudes towards learning, to build their knowledge through the process of self-study. Therefore, classroom time is considered a place of "rubbing" between the knowledge that learners get from many different sources.

In short, training under the credit system is to strengthen learners' sense of responsibility for their training and to democratize education. Learners participate in all stages of their training process, from structuring subjects based on an elective system to planning a roadmap to carry out that training process depending on their conditions and abilities, financial resources, and their time.

### 2.1.2. *The role of the teacher in credit-based training*

The essence of credit-based training is to personalize education and democratize the whole training process, that is, to meet as much as possible the needs and learning conditions of individuals to have a democratic working environment.

The credit system treats teachers like scholars. As scholars, teachers need

training and practice to carry out teaching and retrain students from the site of study to the site of learning how to problem-solve and think mentally, work hard, and take risks and challenges (Zjhra, 2008). The change from the teacher-centered concept to the learner-centered concept has led to a fundamental change in the role of teachers. The method of imparting knowledge or a content approach to give learners as much knowledge as possible is replaced by a goal approach that helps learners achieve the goal of building high skill levels, such as analysis, synthesis, judgment, criticism, decision-making, problem- solving, etc. Therefore, the teacher's task is no longer just to impart knowledge, but to guide, support and advise students to find and process information, to help students switch from passive learning to active learning (Stiggins, 1996). Teachers must understand the needs of learners and organizations so that they can manage their time, and at the same time encourage them to actively participate in the process of improving their cognitive and thinking capacity, guiding and helping them develop independent learning skills such as self-determination of their own goals, self-seeking and information processing, self-assessment of their learning capacity and quality ... so that students, trained products of universities, can be entities that continue to grow after graduation.

### 2.2. *Application of information technology in the teaching and learning process*

The outstanding advantage of applying information technology in teaching is to help teachers improve their creativity and become more flexible in

their teaching process. The huge and diverse knowledge data banks that are connected have facilitated the preparation of teachers' lessons. In addition, teachers are not only limited to the amount of existing knowledge but also learn more about other specialties such as informatics and learn skills in using images and sounds in lesson design. The multimedia environment has maximized the sensesof learners. Experiments and materials are provided with many visual channels, text channels, and vivid sounds, making them easy to see and absorb for students. Thanks to the application of information technology in teaching, teachers are more active in their lesson plans, easily find resources for lectures, and create a link between knowledge units more naturally and reasonably (Daniel, 1996).

The application of information technology in teaching also changes the content and methods of communication in teaching. The computer's multimedia tools such as text, graphics, images, sounds, animations, etc., will help teachers build lively lectures, attract learners' attention, and easily express pedagogical methods such as case teaching methods, problem-based teaching methods, conduct a comprehensive and objective assessment and learning assessment right in the learning process, increase the ability to actively participate in learning. The application of information technology in teaching has helped students access a new teaching method that is more attractive than the traditional reading and copying method. In addition, the interaction between teachers and students has also improved significantly. Students have many opportunities to express their views and opinions. This not only helps students become more confident but also allows teachers to understand more about the student's abilities, personalities, and knowledge acquisition levels, thereby making appropriate and scientific adjustments (Cuban, 2002). Moreover, having much exposure to information technology in the classroom also gives them the necessary computer skills right from the time they are in school. This will be a great platform and support to help students diversify and create presentations in front of the class and enhance their ability to find information for their lessons. They will be familiar with forms of self-study such as online learning and learning via videoconference.

Although there are many benefits, according to Carlson & Gadio (2002), the application of information technology in teaching still faces some difficulties such as teachers are not brave, afraid of difficulties, and unwilling to learn and improve. With high computer skills, some teachers have not yet designed and used their E-learning courses but copied others', designing e-lessons without pre-prepared scriptsand documents. They have been confusedin arranging presentation content, fonts, colors, font sizes, and effects, abusing information technology instead of writing tables or using too many image and text channels, not knowing how to use a variety of teaching software, investing in designing interactive activities (games, drag-and-drop activities...) Besides, teaching facilities, equipment to serve the teaching of informatics and the application of information technology have many limitations, with not good quality.

In summary, being aware of the role of learners and teachers in the credit system, as well as the importance of applying information technology to the teaching and learning process, will help the authors make suggestions to improve the teaching and learning of the subject of *Countries Study* at The Faculty of English, Hanoi Open University.

## III. Research Methodology

### 3.1. Research background

*Countries Study* is a subject that is considered very useful for English learners, especially students majoring in English. The subject helps learners to have a deep and broad knowledge of the history, culture, geography, economy, education, etc… of English-speaking countries as an official language such as the United Kingdom, the USA, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand... This subject has been taught to second-year students (4th term) and second-degree students at the Faculty of English, Hanoi Open University at the intermediate level of English under the credit system to put learners at the center of the teaching and learning process. The subject has received positive feedback from conscious learners. In the process of teaching and learning this subject, students' self-study which is valued and included in the content and duration of the program will reduce the cramming of knowledge by teachers, and thus, promote their initiative and creativity. Students are recipients of knowledge, but at the same time, they are also active creators of knowledge, aiming to meet the needs of the labor market in society.

### 3.2. Research purpose

The purpose of this article is to improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning *Countries Study* under the credit system for students of the Faculty of English - Hanoi Open University.

### 3.3. Research Participants

To obtain the data as a basis for the analysis, the authors conducted a survey based on 5 questions related to the teaching and learning process. These survey questions are sent online to second-degree and second-year students (course 2020-2024), with intermediate English proficiency, who have completed three semesters at the Faculty of English. The survey questionnaire posted on the Learning Management System of Hanoi Open University has received positive feedback from students. However, the authors only analyzed 100 responses to get data for the research.

In addition to the statistics from the survey, the authors also had private discussions with the teachers involved in teaching the *Countries Study* subject. These exchanges help the authors get more information about teaching activities, how to design lessons, interactions between lecturers and students in class, and difficulties faced by teachers in the process of lesson preparation, and classroom management, as well as teachers' comments on students' learning attitudes.

### 3.4. Research scope

The article focuses on studying the situation of teaching and learning the subject *Countries Study* at the Faculty

of English, Hanoi Open University, and uses the survey results from 100 second-year full-time and second-degree students of the Faculty of English - Hanoi Open University.

### 3.5. Research tasks

The article presents two research tasks that are 1) surveying the current situation of teaching *Countries Study* under the credit system; 2) finding a solution to improve the quality of teaching and learning the *Countries Study* subject under the credit system for studentsof the Faculty of English, Hanoi Open University.

### 3.6. Research methods

The article uses quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative method was used to conduct a systematic survey on the status of the teaching and learning of the subject *Countries Study* under the credit system at the Faculty of English - Hanoi Open University. The qualitative method is used to collect in-depth insights of teachers and learnersin objectively evaluating materials, curricula, programs, etc., which are being used to teach this subject.

### 3.7. Research tools

The research is mainly based on the information obtained from questionnaires. The content of the survey questions focused on:

1. Students' attitudes towards the subject before and after a few lessons

2. Student's assessment of the material being used for the course

3. Teaching methods

4. Difficulties and factors affecting the quality of teaching and learning

5. Suggestions from students to improve the quality of teaching and learning

### IV. Findings and Discussion

***4.1. The present situation of teaching and learning the subject Countries Study- one of the compulsory subjects in the English language course at the Faculty of English, Hanoi Open University***

After surveying to collect the opinions of the students who have participated in the course, both second-year students and second-degree students, the authors have obtained very useful data related to the process of teaching and learning the subject which will carefully be analyzed to serve as a basis to propose some solutions to improving the quality of teaching the subject *Countries Study* under the credit system.

In the survey questionnaire, the first question asked about students' attitudes towards the subject before the course. Many students (75%) feel anxious before taking the class, several students are not much interested in the subject (19%), and 6% are not interested in what they will learn. This reaction of the students canbe explained by the fact that they heard that this is a difficult subject (82%), and the test is assessed in the form of a very serious question and answer (95%). In addition, students must prepare and study lessons before coming to class (88%). Although some students said that they did not care much about the subject, when they were informed about the curriculum,

they were very concerned about preparing lessons and making presentations in every class (92%) and the method of grading attendance and scoring 20% (95%). This subject requires students to study previous lessons, so students are still concerned about the long lesson (87%), and many words in difficult fields such as politics and economics (86%).

In the first lesson, the teacherclearly stated the purpose, requirements, and assessment methods of the subject. Students are required to accumulate the knowledge they have learned, prepare, and learn relevant knowledge before each lesson. Students have been relieved of some concerns and try to prepare to be in the best mood during the class.

After the first 3 classes, the students' attitudes changed very positively. The number of students interested in the subject has increased significantly (82%), 12% are still worried and 6% are not interested. Students who do not care about the subject often do not care about studying either. At the request of the teachers, before going to class, 86% of students review previous lessons, read, and look up new words (67%), and refer to more relevant information (42%). However, there are still students (3%) doing nothing.

With the questions about subject content, 93% of the respondents rated the content of the subject as diverse, and directly related to the objectives of the subject. Regarding the layout of the coursebook, 95% think that the content of the course's lectures is arranged appropriately and logically. Most students surveyed highly appreciated the

course materials such as textbooks and supplementary materials. 91% think that the course materials have updated new knowledge and skills, the course content is useful, and highly practical (90%) and the subject's reference materials are various (88%). 92% think that the time spent on the subject, with the rich content of the program, has met the subject's objectives.

Regarding the teaching method, 95% confirmed that the lecturer informed the students how to prepare to learn this subject well, right at the beginning of the course. 93% agree that the teachers' teaching methods help them think critically or be more creative in thinking. In addition, the teaching techniques of the lecturers train them to think and relate the issues in the subject to reality (90%). The results obtained from the survey can indicate positive evaluations from students participating in the subject. 94% of students responded that the lecturers are enthusiastic about teaching, communicating with a polite attitude, and willing to listen and share learning experiences. Although the number of teachers teaching the subject is not large (5 teachers), they are assessed as having high expertise and lively teaching methods, creating learning excitement (91%). During the lessons, the lecturers convey the content clearly and understandably (93%) and provide activities and requirements for research exercises to help students achieve the objectives (92%). Lecturers always offer advice in the academic field, helping to connect issues in theory and practice (93%). They effectively use teaching aids (93%) and make full use of the allotted time for the

subject (94%). Evaluations such as student commendations will become a source of motivation for lecturers to continue promoting their teaching capacity and enthusiasm.

The students who participated in the survey mentioned some issues suchas limited time for group activities, discussions, and presentations (26%) especially because there were many sessions in the previous school year. Due to the covid epidemic, it was difficult to make group presentations and discussions (66%). This means that if the course were to be taught online, the instructor would need some changes in the method of teaching. In addition, students also mentioned difficulties such as strange and difficult knowledge (43%), the whole lesson in English (48%), words belonging to political issues that are quite difficult to understand (64%), or quite broad knowledge so it is difficult to grasp it all (24%).

A high percentage of the students answered (79%) were satisfied with facilities such as lecture halls, air conditioning, lighting, etc. This is an important factor to keep students more excited in learning. In addition, students highly appreciated the rich and interesting lesson content, fields of English-speaking countries (91%). Most students found the course very useful in supplementing the student's background knowledge, applying theory to real life (91%) with lectures associated with practical examples (90%). With the love for the enthusiastic, qualified teaching staff (84%), studentsare willing to discuss the lesson and supplement their knowledge about the country and people... (78%) and enhance other language skills such as listening, speaking, and presentation (81%).

With the survey question about how to teach the subject effectively, it is a good thing that very few students (2 students participated in the survey ~ 2%) wanted to reduce the course content, and no student wanted to reduce homework or translate lessons into Vietnamese. Most students believed that to increase the effectiveness of understanding the content of this subject, the teachers need to combine many different teaching methods and activities to help students learn effectively (91%), creating group activities, allowing students to actively participate in the learning process (94%), motivating and encouraging students to ask questions and discuss to understand deeply the lesson content (93%). In addition, the teachers need to guide students to use supplementary textbooks and introduce reference materials to help them better understand or expand their understanding of the subject content (91%). A very important thing to make the student's learning process more effective is that students are guided on how to self-study outside the class (87%).

To increase the effectiveness of class time, the students want to have a variety of activities in class (95%) and improve forms of assessment (85%) to enhance objectivity in the organization, examinations, and assessment of learning outcomes. Besides, they also want to increase interaction with lecturers and other students (79%), add different types of exercises in class (75%) and need teachers to more closely evaluate the

professionalism of the students (74%) to increase the rigor in class, encourage active students and push those who are not self-disciplined.

When it comes to the teacher's teaching methods, 100% of teachers apply student-centered teachingmethods, promoting students' initiative and creativity. They apply different teaching methods to diversify ways of imparting subjects such as teaching with a constructivist approach (60%), a lesson study method (40%), and a presentation method (80%). The project-based teaching method has not been applied by any teachers.

Survey results from the lecturers and the students for the subject *Countries Study* have reflected the current state of learning the subject in recent years, expressed through the following basic points:

- Most students have realized the importance of the subject, making efforts to fulfill the requirements of the lecturer. However, some still are not actively learning.

- Students appreciate the diverse content of the subject, a lot of necessary practical information about history, geography, people, political system, economy, education... Students are also satisfied with the facilities system for the subject, with the teaching method of the lecturer, and appreciate the efforts of the lecturer in conveying the lesson content.

- Students expect teachers to combine many teaching methods, create group activities, allow students to actively participate in the learning process, and encourage students to ask questions and discuss to understand the content of the lesson in depth. In addition, students want to be guided in the use of supplementary textbooks, introduce reference materials to better understand or expand their understanding of subject content, and be guided on how to self-study outside the classroom hour.

- The main difficulties faced by students in the learning process are that the technology level is not high, students are sometimes afraid to communicate directly with teachers and friends, and many students are not active. Somestudents do not study voluntarily, goingto school just to attend. In addition, manylectures are not diverse and do not meet the requirements of the students…

- Some students (especially second-degree students) still maintain a passive attitude and have not prepared the lessons carefully. The subject *Countries Study* requires a relatively high level of self-discipline and interaction during the class time between teachers and students, so if students do not review previous lessons and prepare new ones carefully, they will face many difficulties in understanding the lesson. This issue also prompts teachers to think about how to integrate diverse and rich activities into the lesson to create excitement for students.

The survey results in this section have helped the authors to get the necessary information about the teaching methods and techniques, the difficulties, the motivational factors, and the suggestions from the students to help them learn this subject well.

### 4.2. Some solutions to effectively teach, learn, and evaluate the subject Countries Study

Based on the results of the survey, to overcome the difficulties in the process of teaching and learning the *Countries Study*, teachers and students will have to make great efforts. Below the authors wouldlike to suggest some solutions to improvethe quality of lectures:

- *About the teachers*:

The teachers involved in teaching the subject are experienced and dedicated people. They always try to find effective teaching methods. However, teachers need to improve their technical level to improve the quality of lectures, as well as encourage students to self-study and access relevant websites.

To improve the quality of lessons, in addition to applying technology, teachers should also consider changing the method of teaching. With the characteristics of the subject *Countries Study*, the teachers can consider the form of Flip Learning. According to the Wikipedia encyclopedia, in a flipped classroom, students will research the content of the lectures in advance. Class time is spent on exercises and projects. Teachers and students have interactive activities, discuss the content of the lectures more deeply, and participate in practical activities. The lecturer tests students' ability to apply knowledge.In the traditional classroom teachingmodel, the teacher is often the focus ofa lesson and the primary disseminator of information throughout the lesson. The flipped classroom shifts instructional instruction to a learner-centered model, where classroom time is used to further explore topics and create meaningful learning opportunities.

• The flipped classroom formatcan be a great fit for the *Countries Study* teaching. The teacher will ask students to research the lesson and related materials in advance. This resource is extremelyrich, but the teachers need to orient the students with materials related to the content of the lesson. During class time, teachers and students will exchange and discuss the issues in the lesson through activities such as question and answer, quizzes, games, etc.

- *About the students*

To obtain the maximum amount of knowledge in each lesson, each student must put in much effort on their own. If students only come to class with luggage and a book and wait to copy what the teacher shows, the lesson will not be effective. Therefore, in additionto the dedicated guidance of teachers, students need to make efforts, promote their diligence, and make the most of the convenience of technology and the abundance of knowledge resources on the Internet to grasp knowledge more easily and create inspiration, increase interaction with teachers during class time.

- *About the coursebook, supporting documents, and facilities*

The *Countries Study* subject has a set of textbooks suitable for basic knowledge and a detailed system of exercises to consolidate knowledge. Besides, there are rich resources on the Internet to help teachers and students diversify the lesson content.

One thing we cannot deny is that the electronic lecture of the *Countries Study* subject, which is designed for E-learning students at Hanoi Open University, has been compiled to meet the online teaching and learning needs of lecturers and students. These electronic lectures provide lecture content as slides, clips, and exercises in the form of multiple choice with answers. Teachers can help students access lessons to review and consolidate knowledge.

*- About the method of testing and evaluation*

A very important factor leading to the success of the course is the assessment stage. Although in this study the author has not analyzed the assessment forms of the subject, this subject is usually assessed in the form of 10% attendance, 20% mid-course, and face-to-face quizzes or essays and online quizzes for the full course score (70%). With the online essay and interviews, students can actively choose a research problem under the guidance of the teacher, conduct an analysis of information related to the selected problem, and finally, can directly demonstrate their understanding. With online assessment, students can listen to their friends' presentations and listen to the teacher's evaluations and comments on the essays to learn from their assignments. With this assessment, students can answer questions online or in person.

In addition to the final exam, during the learning process, the teachers can design a variety of classroom activities to enhance interaction with students, and this can also be used as a basis for attendance assessments of 10% and 20% for students.

### V. Conclusion

In short, with lecture halls that meet the requirements for teaching and learning, with rich and interesting lesson content, with opportunities to enhance other language skills such as listening, speaking, and making a presentation, etc… and a team of enthusiastic, qualified teachers, most students find the *Countries Study* course very useful in supplementing students' background knowledge, applying theory to real life, and helping students learn more about the country, the people... of the English-speaking countries.

The article has shown the evaluations of the students during the study of *Countries Study* at the Faculty of English, Hanoi Open University, what has been done and not done, advantages and disadvantages... of teaching and studying this subject. This subject has been evaluated as a useful subject and has received positive feedback from the lecturers and the students. However, to effectively teach and learn this subject, it is necessary to have the support of the University and the Faculty in improving the quality of facilities, techniques, etc., encouragement to improve the quality of the lecture content, to promote the dynamism and creativity of students in the learning process, to improve their understanding of the background knowledge of the ethnic groups in the English-speaking community.

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