

INVESTIGATION INTO TEACHING “GETTING STARTED” SECTION OF A UNIT IN TIENG ANH 10 TEXTBOOK AT A HIGH SCHOOL

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Ngày nhận bài: 07/01/2026

Ngày nhận bài sửa: 11/02/2026

Ngày duyệt đăng: 10/3/2026

Abstract: “Getting Started” is the first section of each unit in most English textbooks used in Vietnamese high schools. It is designed to introduce the topic, set the context as well as prepare students for the language competence and main language skills that follow. This study aims at studying the common problems that students face when participating in “Getting Started” section in English units at a High School in Hai Phong and proposing some solutions. The researcher used questionnaires as a tool to collect the data in the study. The results of the study revealed some problems related to interactive activities, teacher’s techniques, teacher’s giving instructions and students’ preparation before class. The findings of the study have provided several practical recommendations for teachers to improve the English language teaching method at high schools.

Keywords: English teaching method, “Getting Started” section, problems.

NGHIÊN CỨU VỀ PHƯƠNG PHÁP DẠY “PHẦN KHỞI ĐỘNG” CỦA MỘT ĐƠN VỊ BÀI HỌC TRONG SÁCH GIÁO KHOA TIẾNG ANH LỚP 10 TẠI TRƯỜNG TRUNG HỌC PHỔ THÔNG

Tóm tắt: “Khởi động” là phần đầu tiên của mỗi bài học trong hầu hết các sách giáo khoa tiếng Anh được sử dụng ở các trường THPT Việt Nam. Phần này được thiết kế để giới thiệu chủ đề, thiết lập bối cảnh và chuẩn bị cho học sinh về năng lực ngôn ngữ và các kỹ năng ngôn ngữ chính sẽ được học tiếp theo. Nghiên cứu này nhằm mục đích tìm hiểu những vấn đề thường gặp của học sinh khi học phần “Khởi động” trong các bài học tiếng Anh tại một trường THPT ở Hải Phòng và đề xuất một số giải pháp. Người nghiên cứu sử dụng phiếu khảo sát làm công cụ để thu thập dữ liệu trong nghiên cứu. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy một số vấn đề liên quan đến hoạt động tương tác, kỹ thuật dạy của giáo viên, hướng dẫn của giáo viên và sự chuẩn bị trước giờ học của học sinh. Những phát hiện của nghiên cứu đã giúp đưa ra một số khuyến nghị thiết thực cho giáo viên nhằm cải thiện phương pháp dạy tiếng Anh ở các trường THPT.

Từ khóa: Phương pháp dạy tiếng Anh, phần “Khởi động”, vấn đề.

1. Introduction

In “Getting Started” sections of Tieng Anh 10 textbooks, students are often exposed to vocabulary, short conversations, pictures, or questions related to the unit theme. These activities are aimed at encouraging students’ participation, raising curiosity, and gradually leading them into more complex tasks. However, despite its pedagogical importance, this session is sometimes underestimated or delivered in a mechanical way. If not handled well, it can fail to motivate students and negatively affect the entire lesson flow.

This study aims to explore the problems and propose practical solutions related to the teaching of the “Getting Started” section in the 10th-grade English curriculum at Tran Hung Dao High School in Hai Phong.

With the aims mentioned above, this study attempts to find answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the common problems that students face when participating in “Getting Started” section in English units at Tran Hung Dao High School?
2. What are the suggested solutions to the problems?

2. Literature review

2.1. Aims of “Getting Started” section

According to Hoang Van Van et al (2018:3), “Getting started” is the first section of the unit. It begins with a conversation which introduces the unit topic, some target vocabulary, and the grammar items. This is followed by a number of activities for checking students’ comprehension and helping them identify/or practise the vocabulary and grammatical structures presented in this section.”

This part also includes warm-up activities and pictures with the purpose to help students become familiar with the topic, get ready for the main skills lessons and feel more interested in the unit.

Harmer (2007) suggests that the first stage of a lesson is very important because it can help learners connect old knowledge with new content. If this step is done well, it can make students more focused and ready to learn. Similarly, Nunan (2014) points out that warm-up and pre-task activities can support students to understand the topic better and feel more confident.

Moreover, Ur (1996) explains that a meaningful and interactive start can enhance language input and retention. Therefore, delivering “Getting Started” in an engaging and appropriate manner is essential for teachers.

According to Harmer (2007), lesson openings play a vital role in capturing students’ interest, establishing the lesson's objective, and creating a comfortable atmosphere for language learning. Nunan (2014) emphasizes that the pre-teaching stage, which often includes warm-up and vocabulary activities, helps learners activate their background knowledge and facilitates better comprehension.

In short, the “Getting Started” part is not just for fun or for filling time but it can be a good opportunity for the teacher to see what students already know, introduce useful vocabulary and grammar, and create a friendly learning atmosphere.

2.2. Common difficulties in teaching “Getting Started” section

Although “Getting Started” is important, many teachers still face difficulties when teaching this part. One of the most common problems is the lack of time or materials. In

some classes, teachers follow the textbook too closely or skip the warm-up part because they are afraid of running out of time (Nguyen Quoc Hung, 2015). As a result, students may not fully understand the topic and the lesson may not go smoothly.

Another problem is that not all students enjoy or understand the activities in “Getting Started”. Some students feel shy to speak at the beginning of the class, while others do not know the vocabulary and get confused. If the activity is too difficult or not interesting enough, students may become passive and not want to join.

According to Ur (1996), when the first stage of the lesson is not effective, students often lose interest and it becomes harder for the teacher to manage the class later on. Besides, Nguyen Thi Phuong Thao (2021: 47,48) points out that the teachers do not design more tasks making use of modern technology to motivate students.

The previous studies have indicated some common problems such as the lack of time or materials, lack of fun and limited use of technology that need to be paid more attention in teaching the “getting started” section.

2.3. Strategies to improve teaching “Getting Started” section

There are some ways to make “Getting Started” more effective. Harmer (2007) recommends that using pictures, videos, or real objects make the topic clearer and more attractive. Lewis and Hill (1992) believe that games or small role-plays can help students feel more excited and willing to participate. Many researchers agree that games and interactive activities can be effective tools in language teaching, especially at the beginning of a lesson. In the “Getting Started” section, these

activities play a vital role in helping students feel relaxed, interested, and ready to participate. As Lewis and Hill (1992) indicate that games are not just for fun—they are a meaningful part of learning when used with clear goals.

Using games at the beginning of a lesson helps create a friendly classroom atmosphere, which encourages students to speak and share ideas without fear of making mistakes. Harmer (2007) points out that a relaxing environment makes learners more willing to experiment with the language and warm-up games are one way to achieve that.

When students are actively involved from the beginning, they are more likely to stay motivated throughout the rest of the lesson (Nguyen Quoc Hung, 2015).

Another method is to ask open-ended questions related to students’ lives, so they feel the topic is useful and real (Kramersch, 1992). Also, doing pairwork or groupwork during this stage can reduce pressure and give more chances for students to speak (Tanner & Green, 1998).

When teaching vocabulary, Nation (2001) emphasizes that vocabulary learning is most effective when words are learned through meaning-focused input and real communication. This suggests that new words should be presented in meaningful contexts instead of isolated lists.

In short, using pictures, videos, or real objects make the topic clearer and more attractive. Games and interactive activities can be effective tools at the beginning of a lesson and doing pairwork or groupwork during this stage can reduce pressure and give more chances for students to speak. If the teacher spends some time preparing for “Getting

Started” and makes it interesting and suitable for the students’ level, it can help improve the whole lesson.

3. Methodology

3.1. Description of the subjects of the study

The study was conducted with the participation of 116 students from 3 classes of English 10 at Tran Hung Dao High School, Hai Phong. These students have been learning English for several years and are currently following the English 10 textbooks under the national curriculum. They achieve an A2 level of proficiency according to the 6-level Foreign Language Competency Framework for Vietnam, and they come from a variety of learning backgrounds.

3.2. Description of data instruments and procedure

To collect data for the study, a structured questionnaire in Vietnamese was designed and delivered to the students. The questionnaire consisted of 9 multiple-choice questions related to the “Getting Started” section in English lesson units. The items aimed to investigate:

- Students’ difficulties when starting a new lesson

- Their preferences for warm-up activities and learning methods

- Their opinions on teachers’ instructions and materials

Each question provided four options (A, B, C, D), and students were asked to circle the most suitable one. The language used both in Vietnamese and in English in the questionnaire was simple and familiar to the students. The survey was conducted in class with the presence and permission of the class teacher. The questionnaire was chosen because it is practical, easy to analyze, and suitable for collecting large-scale feedback from students in a short period of time (Nunan, 2014). Wallace (1998) also notes that classroom-based research using tools like questionnaires allows teachers to make informed improvements based on real student responses.

After collecting the completed questionnaires, the researcher gathered the data and analyzed the results using percentage charts. Each question was processed and discussed to find out the most common patterns and difficulties that students faced when working with the “Getting Started” part.

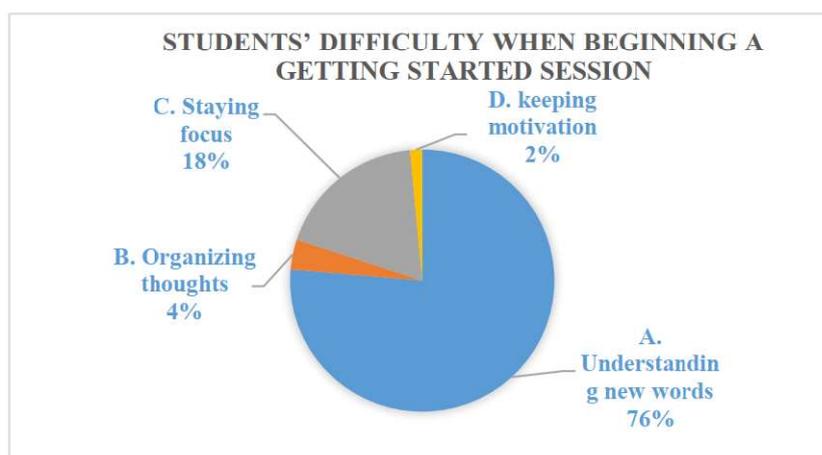


Figure 1. Students’ difficulty when beginning a getting started session

4. Results and discussion

It can be seen from Chart 1 that most of the students (62%) found vocabulary to be the biggest problem when starting a lesson. Only a few students (3%) had trouble organizing their thoughts, while some faced challenges with focus (15%) and motivation (20%).

This shows that vocabulary is still a major challenge in this session. Teachers should pay more attention to pre-teaching vocabulary using engaging methods such as images, examples, or short activities to help students feel more confident before beginning the main task.

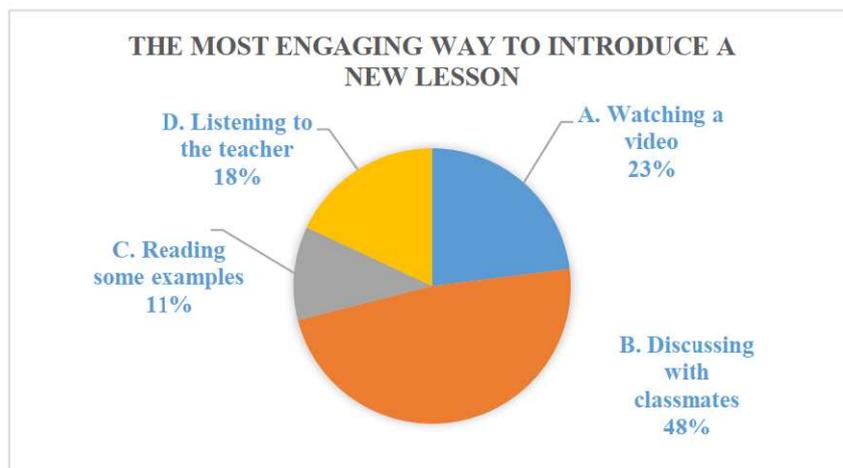


Figure 2. The most engaging way to introduce a new lesson

According to the chart, group discussion (48%) was considered the most interesting way to begin a lesson. Watching a video also received attention (23%), while reading texts and listening to the teacher were less preferred.

This indicates that students prefer interactive and collaborative learning environments. Teachers are recommended to incorporate more discussion-based tasks or pair/group sharing during “Getting Started” to boost interest.

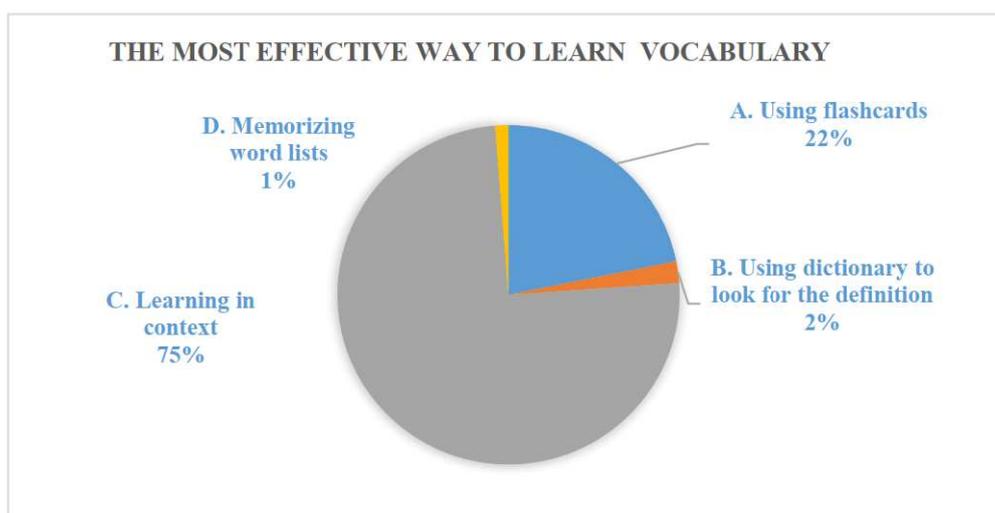


Figure 3. The most effective way to learn vocabulary

A large number of students (72%) chose learning vocabulary in context. Flashcards were chosen by 21%, while very few students chose dictionary definitions (3%) or word lists (4%).

This shows that context is of great importance to help the students understand the meaning more easily. Teachers should try to present new words in sentences or short stories instead of separate lists. This method not only improves understanding but also retention and usage.

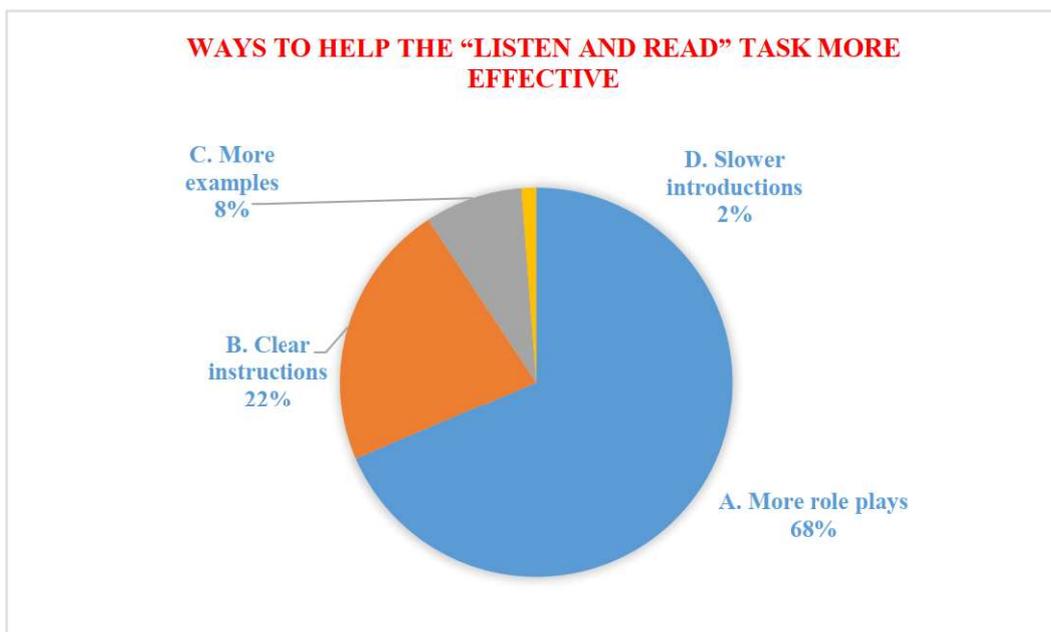


Figure 4. Ways to help the "Listen and read" task more effective

The chart shows that a large number of students (68%) believe that more role play activities would make the "Getting Started" section more effective. Clearer instructions were also chosen by 22% of the students. Meanwhile, fewer students thought that more examples (8%) or a slower introduction (2%) were necessary.

This result highlights the importance of *student engagement* in the first part of a lesson.

The fact that nearly 70% of students prefer interactive activities suggests that they

do not want to passively receive knowledge but want to be more involved in the learning process. Activities like games, pair discussions, or quick opinion-sharing tasks could help them connect to the lesson topic more naturally. In addition, the 22% who chose "clearer instructions" also indicate that students sometimes get confused at the beginning due to unclear guidance from the teacher. Therefore, the teacher should balance between *interaction* and *clarity* to make this stage both fun and focused.

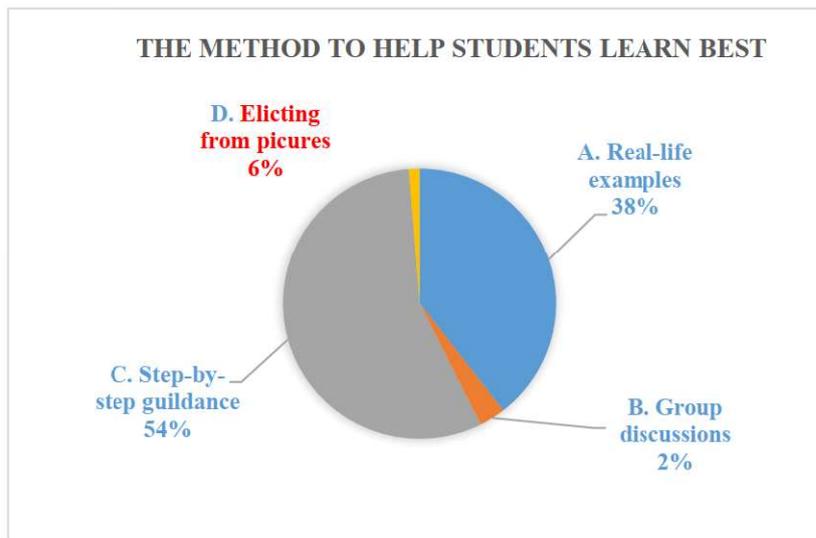


Figure 5. The method to help students learn best

According to Chart 5, more than half of the students (54%) feel that step-by-step guidance is the best way for them to learn. Real-life examples come second (38%), while only a small number of students choose eliciting from pictures (6%) or group discussions (2%).

These responses show that most students still rely heavily on the teacher's instructions when starting a new task. This may be due to their current learning style and level of independence. Step-by-step guidance helps

them avoid confusion and build confidence. However, the high percentage of students (38%) who like real-life examples suggests that learners also appreciate when lessons are practical and relevant. Therefore, teachers should give clear instructions but also include examples connected to students' lives to make learning more meaningful. This insight also implies that while independent learning is important, at the "Getting Started" stage, most students still need structured support.

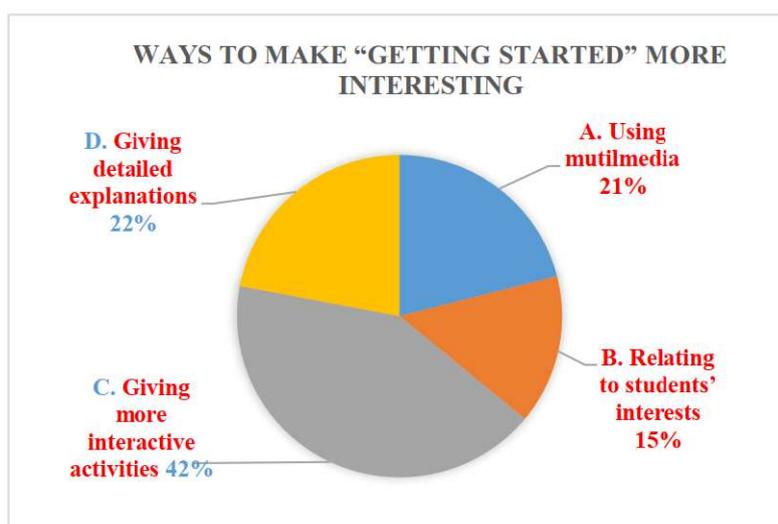


Figure 6. Ways to make "Getting Started" more engaging

In this chart, 42% of the students said that adding more interactive activities would make the “Getting Started” section more engaging. Using multimedia came next (21%), followed by giving more detailed explanations (22%), and relating the topic to students’ interests (15%).

This result once again confirms students’ preference for active participation. Interaction

seems to be the most important factor in attracting students' attention at the beginning of the lesson. While multimedia and interest-based content can also support engagement, the key lies in creating an environment where students can speak, move, or collaborate. Teachers should, therefore, prioritize designing warm-up tasks that involve movement, discussion, or quick decision-making, especially in larger or mixed-ability classes.

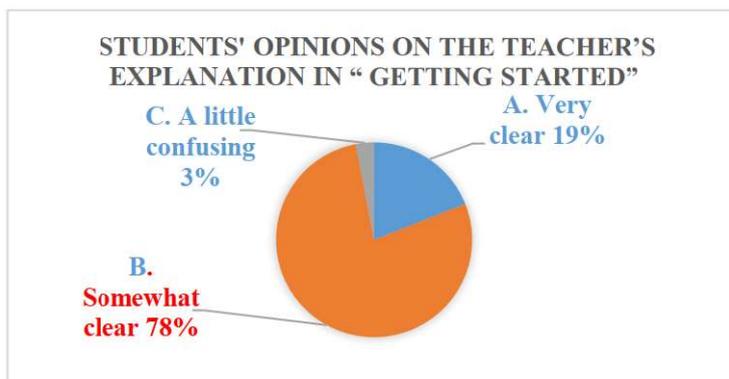


Figure 7. Students’ opinions on the teacher’s explanation in “Getting Started”

The majority of students (78%) felt that the teacher’s explanation was quite clear. Only 19% said it was very clear, while 3% found it a bit confusing.

This shows that while most students can follow the teacher’s instruction, they still need

more *contextualized support*. Teachers should avoid long, abstract explanations and instead illustrate ideas with sample texts, familiar situations, or even short guided practice. This helps students understand faster and reduces uncertainty, especially when dealing with new vocabulary or unfamiliar topics.

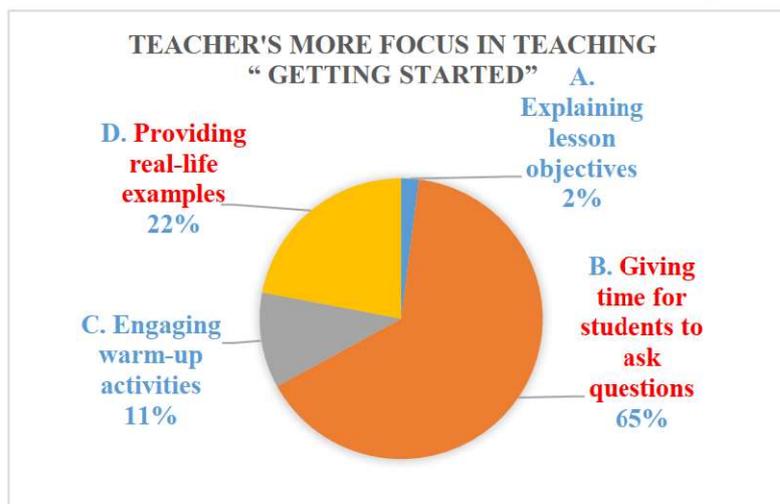


Figure 8. Teacher’s more focus in teaching “Getting Started”

Most students (65%) think teachers should give them more time to ask questions. Only 11% focused on warm-up activities, and 22% wanted real-life examples. Surprisingly, very few (2%) thought that lesson objectives were important. This indicates that students value *interaction and communication* more

than formal presentation. Teachers should create opportunities for students to ask questions, share ideas, or clarify confusing points early on. “Getting Started” should not be one-way delivery but a two-way conversation where learners feel comfortable asking and exploring.

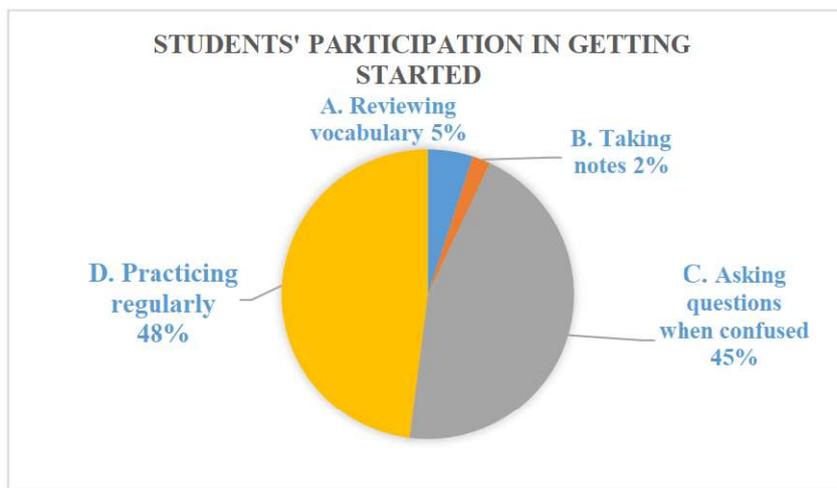


Figure 9. Students' participation in getting started section

Nearly half of the students (48%) said that they improve by practicing regularly. A slightly lower percentage (45%) rely on asking questions. Very few students review vocabulary or take notes beforehand.

These findings show that students are already aware of good learning strategies like practice and active questioning. However, the low number of students who review vocabulary in advance suggests a possible gap in preparation habits. Teachers may need to provide guidance on how to prepare effectively before class, and reinforce the value of previewing vocabulary to ease comprehension.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Main findings

After analyzing the results of the questionnaire distributed to the students of 3

classes at Tran Hung Dao High School, several key findings have been drawn.

Firstly, most students reported that their biggest challenge in the “Getting Started” section was dealing with new vocabulary. Many of them also expressed a preference for learning vocabulary in context rather than by memorizing word lists. Additionally, students preferred interactive activities such as group discussions and games, which help them feel more engaged and motivated at the beginning of the lesson.

Secondly, students highly appreciated clear, step-by-step instructions from the teacher, along with real-life examples. Many of them believed that when lessons were introduced in a structured and relatable way, they felt more confident and ready to learn.

Lastly, students shared that having time to ask questions and preparing questions before the lesson helped them feel more active and confident. This shows that learners value interaction and active thinking during the early stage of a lesson.

5.2. Recommendations

The results collected from the questionnaire show that many students still face difficulties when participating in the “Getting Started” part of the lesson. These include problems with understanding new vocabulary, lack of interest, and not knowing clearly what to do. Besides that, most students shared that they enjoy interactive activities, learning through real-life examples, and receiving step-by-step instructions from teachers.

From the findings of the study, the following suggestions are made to help teachers teach the “Getting Started” section more effectively:

Firstly, teachers need to guide students on how to take in basic materials: looking at paintings, setting scenes, character identification, and posing the questions and exercises found in the textbook.

Secondly, teachers should direct students to approach conversation rationally, helping the student to become more proactive in other activities such as problem-solving, question-answering, or using phrases or structures to communicate in real life.

While listening to the audio, students are helped to determine the stress, intonation, voice, or mood. Providing soft skills in conversation also helps them to develop positive, emotional, and academic attitudes.

Thirdly, teachers should instruct students how to take active observation and

take notes. Teachers need to encourage them to discuss, pose questions, and express their opinions. Therefore, new lessons become plentiful and engaging to students.

Fourthly, teachers should teach students to read and prepare the lesson at home before leaving for class. They should assign specific tasks and monitor their progress, checking the materials that students need: visual tools, dictionaries, reference books...

Fifthly, besides asking students to listen and read passively, teachers can apply warm-up games, role plays, or short discussions. These activities will help students feel more excited and motivated to start the lesson.

Sixthly, vocabulary should not be taught by listing and translating. It is better to show the words in real sentences, short texts, or elicit from pictures clearly (Nguyen Thi Duong: 2024). This makes it easier for students to guess the meaning and remember the words.

Seventhly, most students want step-by-step guidance. Teachers should avoid long explanations and give short, clear steps with examples so that all students, especially weaker ones, can follow.

Eighthly, before moving to the main part of the lesson, the teacher can give students 1-2 minutes to ask anything they do not understand in “Getting Started”. This helps them feel supported and more confident.

Last but not least, using multimedia technology can increase students’ motivation because visualisation can help attract their attention and they can understand the lessons more easily.

5.3. Limitations and suggestions for further study

Like any small-scale research project, this study has several unavoidable limitations.

Firstly, the number of participants was relatively small, with only 116 students from 3 classes at Tran Hung Dao High School. The findings might not fully reflect the situation of students in other classes, schools, or regions. A larger sample size would help to strengthen the validity and reliability of the results.

Secondly, the main research instrument used in this study was a questionnaire with multiple-choice questions. While this method is practical for collecting large-scale data quickly, it limits the depth of students' responses. In future research, it would be better to combine questionnaires with interviews, classroom observations, or focus groups to collect more qualitative data.

Thirdly, the study mainly focused on the students' perspective. Teachers' difficulties, teaching styles, and real classroom management challenges were not analyzed deeply. Including the teachers' point of view would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the problems and solutions related to teaching the "Getting Started" section.

In short, although this study provides some useful findings and practical recommendations, further research with a broader scope and deeper investigation is needed to gain a more complete and detailed picture of how to improve the teaching and learning of the "Getting Started" section in English lessons.

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