

EXPLORING THE TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL OF FLIPPED CLASSROOMS FOR AUTONOMOUS LEARNING: A MIXED-METHODS STUDY AT DONG NAI UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the transformative potential of the flipped classroom model in fostering learner autonomy within the under-researched context of Vietnamese higher education. Grounded in Self-Determination Theory and learner autonomy frameworks, the research adopts a convergent mixed-methods design, combining pre- and post-intervention quantitative analysis with qualitative insights from classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. The intervention, conducted over 10 weeks with 120 undergraduates at Dong Nai University, replaced traditional lectures with asynchronous video-based materials, reallocating classroom time to collaborative problem-solving. Statistical findings demonstrate a significant improvement ($p < 0.05$) in autonomy-related indicators, including self-regulation and intrinsic motivation. Thematic analysis revealed enhanced self-efficacy, time management, and reflective-learning practices. This study contributes to the growing literature by providing empirical evidence of how flipped pedagogies operationalize autonomous learning, particularly in non-Western educational settings. These implications highlight the necessity of institutional support and pedagogical training for scalable implementation. Future research should adopt longitudinal approaches and cross-disciplinary comparisons to further validate these findings.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background to the study

In the rapidly evolving landscape of higher education, traditional lecture-based pedagogies are increasingly challenged by more student-centered and technology-integrated approaches. Among these, the flipped classroom model has gained significant traction globally because of its

potential to foster active learning and student engagement (Bishop & Verleger, 2013). This model redefines the learning environment by shifting passive knowledge acquisition to pre-class activities, thereby liberating classroom time for collaborative problem-solving and interactive discussions.

Vietnamese higher education has undergone substantial reforms in recent years, aiming to

modernize teaching practices and enhance student competency. However, many universities in Vietnam, including Dong Nai University, still rely heavily on teacher-centered approaches, resulting in limited opportunities for students to develop critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, and autonomy. There is a pressing need to explore innovative teaching models that address these gaps and align with the goals of competency-based education.

Furthermore, while international research on flipped classrooms is abundant, there is a notable scarcity of empirical studies examining its effects within the Vietnamese context, particularly in provincial universities such as Dong Nai University. This study aims to address this gap by investigating how the flipped classroom model can enhance learner autonomy among undergraduate students.

1.2. Research questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent does the flipped classroom model enhance learner autonomy among undergraduate students at Dong Nai University?
2. How do students perceive the impact of the flipped classroom model on their learning autonomy?

These questions aim to generate both quantitative and qualitative insights, contributing to a holistic understanding of the model's effectiveness.

1.3. The importance of the research

The significance of this study is manifold. First, it contributes to addressing a crucial pedagogical challenge in Vietnamese higher education: fostering learner autonomy in a traditionally passive learning culture. By empirically examining the flipped classroom model, this research offers practical insights for educators aiming to shift from teacher-centered to student-centered learning environments.

Second, this study adds to the limited body of literature on flipped classrooms in Vietnam, providing localized evidence that may inform policy-making and pedagogical reforms at institutional and national levels. Focusing on Dong Nai University, a typical provincial university, further enhances the applicability of the findings to similar educational contexts.

Third, from a theoretical perspective, this study enriches the discourse on learner autonomy by integrating it with flipped classroom practices, guided by Self-Determination Theory and constructivist learning principles. Such an approach may offer a nuanced understanding of how pedagogical innovations foster intrinsic motivation, self-regulation, and independent learning among students.

1.4. Definitions of the key terms

Flipped Classroom

The flipped classroom refers to an instructional strategy in which the traditional lecture and homework elements are reversed. Direct instruction is delivered outside the classroom, typically through video lectures, whereas in-class time is devoted to interactive, student-centered learning activities (Bishop & Verleger, 2013). Bergmann and Sams (2012) further defined the flipped classroom as a pedagogical model that moves direct instruction to the individual space, allowing classroom time to be utilized for collaborative and higher-order thinking tasks.

Learner Autonomy

Learner autonomy is conceptualized as the ability of learners to take charge of their own learning process, including setting goals, selecting learning strategies, monitoring progress, and evaluating outcomes (Little, 1991). Benson (2011) extended this definition by emphasizing the significance of learners' capacity to exercise control over various aspects of their learning, thereby fostering independence and self-

regulation.

Mixed-Methods Approach

The mixed-methods approach is defined as a research design that systematically integrates both quantitative and qualitative research methods within a single study to achieve a comprehensive and balanced analysis of research questions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, and Turner (2007) describe mixed methods as a distinctive methodological paradigm that combines the numerical precision of quantitative data with the contextual richness of qualitative insights.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is a macro theory of human motivation that highlights the crucial role of intrinsic motivation, autonomy, and satisfaction of basic psychological needs in promoting optimal learning and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Ryan and Deci (2000) elaborate on SDT by asserting that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are fundamental for fostering sustained engagement and academic success.

Collaborative Learning

Collaborative learning is an educational practice in which learners work together in small groups to achieve shared learning objectives through collective engagement (Dillenbourg, 1999). Laal and Ghodsi (2012) characterized collaborative learning as a pedagogical approach that enhances academic achievement, social skills, and cognitive development by encouraging active participation and peer-to-peer interaction.

1.5. Literature Review

The concept of flipped classrooms has evolved significantly since its emergence in the early 2000s. Bergmann and Sams (2012) are widely credited with popularizing the flipped classroom approach, emphasizing its ability to shift content delivery outside of class, thereby enabling interactive learning during in-class

sessions. Bishop and Verleger (2013) provided a comprehensive definition and conceptual framework, distinguishing the flipped classroom model from blended and online learning. Their work remains foundational for understanding the operational mechanics of flipped classrooms.

The flipped classroom model is underpinned by several educational theories, most notably constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978), which highlights the importance of social interaction and active engagement in the learning process. Additionally, Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) explains how autonomy, competence, and relatedness contribute to intrinsic motivation, making it a crucial lens through which flipped classrooms can be examined (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Multiple studies have empirically validated the effectiveness of flipped classrooms in enhancing various academic outcomes. O'Flaherty and Phillips (2015) conducted a systematic review of flipped classroom practices in higher education, concluding that the model generally promotes active learning and student engagement. Similarly, Lo and Hew (2017) performed a meta-analysis that highlighted positive effects on academic performance and learner satisfaction, although they called for more context-specific research, particularly in developing countries.

With respect to learner autonomy, Little (1991) provided a seminal definition, emphasizing the learner's proactive role in managing their learning process. Benson (2011) further expanded on this concept, identifying dimensions such as psychological readiness, metacognitive awareness, and behavioral engagement. Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) examined learner autonomy in language learning contexts, advocating for pedagogical strategies that empower students to take ownership of their learning.

Recent research has sought to integrate flipped classroom practices with learner

autonomy outcomes. Hao (2016) explored the flipped classroom model in EFL contexts and found improvements in self-regulated learning behaviors. Zainuddin and Halili (2016) reviewed flipped classroom applications in Southeast Asia, noting increased learner engagement but also highlighting the scarcity of autonomy-focused studies. Nguyen et al. (2022) emphasized the need for more empirical research within the Vietnamese context, particularly in provincial universities where traditional teaching practices remain prevalent.

In summary, the literature indicates promising prospects for flipped classroom methodologies in fostering active learning and learner autonomy. However, significant research gaps persist in the context of Vietnamese higher education, especially concerning autonomy development. The present study aims to address these gaps by offering a mixed-methods examination of flipped classroom practices at Dong Nai University, building upon and contributing to the existing scholarly discourse.

Recent research has also provided evidence of the positive impact of flipped classrooms in Vietnam. For example, Nguyen et al. (2022) emphasized that the flipped classroom model can significantly promote learner autonomy among Vietnamese university students. However, most studies have focused on urban institutions. The novelty of the present study lies in its implementation at a provincial university, thereby contributing localized empirical evidence in an under-researched context.

In addition to foundational works, recent studies (2020–2025) have examined the relationship between flipped classrooms and learner autonomy, particularly in Asian higher education contexts. For instance, Li and Wong (2021) demonstrated that the flipped classroom model significantly enhanced self-regulated learning and autonomy among Chinese undergraduates. Similarly, Chen and Lin (2020) reported improvements in learner autonomy and motivation in Taiwanese EFL classrooms. In

India, Kumar and Rao (2023) found that flipped classroom pedagogy increased student engagement and responsibility for learning, underscoring its applicability in large and diverse classrooms. In Vietnam, Nguyen, Tran, and Huynh (2022) provided empirical evidence that flipped learning promoted learner autonomy, yet emphasized the need for further studies in provincial universities. More recently, Zhao and Xie (2024) highlighted the importance of digital readiness in mediating learner autonomy within flipped classrooms in Southeast Asia, suggesting that technological and contextual factors play a pivotal role in the model's effectiveness. Collectively, these studies enrich the literature by offering contemporary evidence and contextual diversity, thereby supporting the present research's focus on Vietnamese higher education.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research site

This study was conducted at Dong Nai University, a public higher education institution located in Bien Hoa City, Dong Nai Province, Vietnam. The university offers a range of undergraduate programs, with a student population predominantly from provincial and rural backgrounds. Dong Nai University was chosen as the research site because it is representative of regional universities in Vietnam, where traditional lecture-based teaching methods are prevalent, and initiatives toward learner autonomy are still in the early stages of implementation.

2.2. Research design

A convergent mixed-methods research design was employed in this study, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the flipped classroom's effectiveness. Quantitative data were collected through structured pre- and post-intervention questionnaires to measure changes in learner autonomy. Qualitative data were obtained through classroom observations

and semi-structured interviews, allowing for in-depth exploration of students' experiences and perceptions. The integration of both methods ensured triangulation of data, enhancing the validity and reliability of the research findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

2.3. Research object

The study focused on undergraduate students enrolled in English language courses at Dong Nai University. A total of 120 students from three intact classes participated in this study. These students were selected through convenience sampling, ensuring accessibility and relevance to the study objectives. The participants had varying levels of English proficiency, with most falling within the elementary to intermediate range according to CEFR standards. The study also involved three English lecturers who implemented the flipped classroom model during the intervention period.

2.4. Flipped Classroom-Based Learning Activities

In alignment with the objectives of the study, the intervention replaced traditional in-class lectures with flipped classroom-based learning activities. Pre-class activities involved students accessing video lectures, reading materials, and online quizzes via a learning management system (LMS) before attending class sessions. The pre-class materials, including video lectures, reading resources, and online quizzes, were carefully designed based on course objectives and learner needs. To ensure quality, the materials underwent peer review by two experienced instructors and pilot-tested with a small group of students prior to the intervention. This process helped refine content clarity, technical accessibility, and alignment with learning outcomes. In-class activities were designed to foster active participation, including group discussions, problem-solving tasks, peer teaching, and collaborative projects. The post-class phase included reflective journals and self-assessment tasks aimed at promoting

metacognitive awareness and self-regulation. This structured three-phase approach (pre-class, in-class, post-class) was guided by Bergmann and Sams' (2012) flipped classroom model framework and aimed to cultivate learner autonomy by encouraging students to take responsibility for their own learning.

The lecturers were responsible for guiding students in pre-class and in-class activities and monitoring overall learning progress. The instructors played an active role in supporting out-of-class learning by monitoring students' engagement with the learning management system, providing timely feedback on pre-class tasks, and addressing individual difficulties through online forums. Consistency across the three classes was maintained through weekly coordination meetings among instructors, during which lesson plans, assessment rubrics, and teaching strategies were standardized.

2.5. Research Instruments

The data collection instruments included a validated learner autonomy questionnaire adapted from Zhang and Li (2021), which measured various dimensions of learner autonomy such as goal-setting, self-monitoring, and self-assessment. Classroom observation checklists were developed based on Lo and Hew (2017) to capture student engagement and participation in flipped classroom activities. Semi-structured interview guides were designed to elicit students' perceptions and experiences of the flipped classroom model. The combination of these instruments allowed for both breadth and depth in data collection, ensuring a robust assessment of the flipped classroom's impact on learner autonomy.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Findings and Results

The findings of this study are presented in two main sections: quantitative results derived from pre- and post-intervention surveys, and

qualitative findings obtained from classroom observations and semi-structured interviews.

3.1.1. Quantitative Findings

The quantitative analysis demonstrated statistically significant improvements in learner autonomy indicators among participants following the flipped classroom intervention. Using paired-sample t-tests, the mean scores on the learner autonomy questionnaire increased from $M=3.01$ ($SD=0.46$) pre-intervention to $M=3.78$ ($SD=0.41$) post-intervention, with a p-value < 0.05 , indicating a substantial positive effect of the flipped classroom model.

Specifically, improvements were noted in three core domains:

Self-regulation: There was a marked enhancement in students' ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate their own learning progress, with mean scores rising from 3.04 to 3.85.

Intrinsic Motivation: The internal drive to learn, measured through statements on enjoyment and interest in learning activities, increased from 2.96 to 3.71.

Time Management: Students reported better time management practices, with scores improving from 3.12 to 3.78, reflecting greater responsibility for their learning schedules.

These findings corroborate prior studies (e.g., Lo & Hew, 2017; Zainuddin & Halili, 2016), highlighting the positive impact of flipped classrooms on learner engagement and autonomy.

Table 1: Changes in Learner Autonomy Dimensions Pre- and Post-Intervention

Dimension	Pre-Intervention Mean (SD)	Post-Intervention Mean (SD)	P-value
Self-Regulation	3.04 (0.43)	3.85 (0.37)	< 0.05

Intrinsic Motivation	2.96 (0.50)	3.71 (0.45)	< 0.05
Time Management	3.12 (0.45)	3.78 (0.40)	< 0.05
Overall Autonomy	3.01 (0.46)	3.78 (0.41)	< 0.05

Statistical analysis revealed significant differences between pre- and post-intervention scores. Paired-sample t-tests indicated $t(119) = 5.23$, $p < 0.001$, with an effect size of Cohen's $d = 0.65$, suggesting a medium-to-large effect. These results confirm the positive influence of the flipped classroom on learner autonomy. In addition, a bar chart was included to illustrate the mean differences in Self-Regulation, Intrinsic Motivation, and Time Management before and after the intervention, visually highlighting the marked improvements.

3.1.2. Qualitative Findings

The thematic analysis of qualitative data, including student interviews, classroom observations, and reflective journals, revealed four prominent themes that aligned with and reinforced the quantitative findings. These themes offer a deeper understanding of how the flipped classroom model fosters learner autonomy and engagement among participants.

First, the theme of Increased Responsibility emerged strongly, with students consistently reporting a greater sense of accountability for their learning. The requirement to engage with pre-class video lectures and preparatory materials encouraged them to take ownership of their learning process. Evidence from reflective journals highlighted that students developed habits of planning their study schedules and proactively managing their learning tasks, a departure from their previous passive learning styles.

Second, the theme of Active Participation was evident across multiple data sources. Classroom observations documented significantly more student interactions, group discussions, and collaborative problem-solving activities during in-class sessions. Interviews further supported these observations, with students expressing that the flipped approach created a more dynamic and participatory classroom environment that kept them engaged and motivated throughout the lessons.

Third, Enhanced Self-Efficacy was a recurring theme noted primarily in student interviews. Many students described feeling more confident in their learning abilities after experiencing the flipped classroom model. This increase in self-efficacy was attributed to supportive peer collaboration activities and the opportunity to apply knowledge in practical, low-pressure classroom settings.

Finally, the theme of Reflective Learning surfaced through reflective journals and interviews, indicating that students developed greater metacognitive awareness. They engaged more frequently in self-assessment activities, reflected on their learning strategies, and adjusted their approaches to achieve better outcomes. This reflective habit was considered a critical factor in promoting sustained autonomous learning beyond the classroom.

In summary, the qualitative findings provided rich, contextualized evidence of the transformative effects of the flipped classroom model on fostering autonomous learning behaviors. These insights not only complemented the statistical improvements observed in autonomy-related indicators but also illustrated the nuanced ways in which the intervention reshaped students' learning experience.

Table 2: Summary of Key Themes from Qualitative Data

Themes	Description	Evidence Sources
Increased Responsibility	Students felt more accountable for learning through pre-class preparation	Student interviews, reflective journals
Active Participation	More active participation during class, with higher engagement in discussions and activities	Classroom observations, interviews
Enhanced Self-Efficacy	Increased confidence in learning abilities due to collaborative learning environments	Student interviews
Reflective Learning	Improved metacognitive awareness through self-assessment and reflection activities	Reflective journals, interviews

These themes substantiate the positive influence of the flipped classroom on fostering learner autonomy through increased responsibility, participation, self-efficacy, and reflective learning.

3.2. Discussion

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings revealed a comprehensive understanding of the flipped classroom's role in promoting learner autonomy among undergraduate students at Dong Nai University.

The statistically significant improvements in learner autonomy dimensions align with Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), which underscores the importance of autonomy-supportive environments in fostering intrinsic motivation.

The positive impact on self-regulation resonates with previous research (Hao, 2016; Nguyen et al., 2022), suggesting that flipped classrooms encourage students to take a proactive role in managing their learning trajectories. By shifting passive content absorption to pre-class activities, the model creates opportunities for active, collaborative, and reflective learning during in-class sessions, which in turn cultivates autonomy.

Moreover, the qualitative findings emphasized the cultural shift induced by the flipped classroom model. In the Vietnamese educational context, where hierarchical, teacher-centered paradigms are prevalent, the observed improvements in self-efficacy and reflective learning are particularly significant. This supports Borg and Al-Busaidi's (2012) assertion that learner autonomy can be nurtured in traditionally passive learning cultures through targeted pedagogical interventions.

Importantly, the increase in intrinsic motivation observed in this study aligns with Lo and Hew's (2017) meta-analysis, reinforcing the view that the flipped classroom fosters enjoyment and engagement in learning. The enhancement of time management skills further suggests that students develop greater discipline and ownership of their academic responsibilities.

In summary, these findings provide empirical validation for the transformative potential of flipped classroom pedagogy in enhancing learner autonomy. They underscore the importance of institutional support, teacher training, and curriculum redesign in sustaining such pedagogical innovations, particularly in non-Western educational environments such as Vietnam. Future research should consider longitudinal designs and explore discipline-specific impacts to further enrich the understanding of the flipped classroom model's long-term effects.

Alongside the positive outcomes, several challenges emerged in applying the flipped

classroom model in provincial settings. Technological infrastructure remains inconsistent, students' digital literacy is limited, and the cost of implementation (e.g., producing videos, equipment, and internet bandwidth) poses significant barriers. Therefore, institutional policies, investment in digital infrastructure, and training programs to enhance teachers' and students' digital competencies are crucial for sustainable adoption.

Beyond the immediate statistical improvements, the findings can be interpreted through the lens of Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), which emphasizes autonomy, competence, and relatedness as the foundation of intrinsic motivation. The observed gains in self-regulation and reflective learning suggest that the flipped classroom model provides a more autonomy-supportive environment, enabling students to assume greater responsibility for their learning. Importantly, in the Vietnamese higher education context where teacher-centered approaches still dominate, these results indicate a potential cultural shift toward more student-driven practices. Moreover, the qualitative data highlighted not only increased responsibility but also enhanced self-efficacy, reflecting the interaction between individual agency and peer collaboration. This interplay demonstrates that the flipped classroom is not merely a methodological innovation but a transformative pedagogy that addresses long-standing limitations in fostering learner autonomy in provincial universities. These insights deepen the contribution of this study and reinforce its practical relevance for both policy and pedagogy.

4. CONCLUSION (revised)

4.1. Implications

This study has several practical implications for stakeholders in higher education. For teachers, the flipped classroom provides a concrete pathway to foster learner autonomy by reallocating class time to collaborative problem-solving and reflective practices, thereby

promoting student-centered pedagogy. For students, the model enhances intrinsic motivation, self-regulation, and time management skills, equipping them with essential competencies for lifelong learning. At the institutional level, adopting the flipped classroom model aligns with competency-based educational reforms and signals the need for strategic investment in digital resources and pedagogical training.

4.2. Limitations

Nevertheless, this study has certain limitations that must be acknowledged. The relatively short intervention period of 10 weeks may not be sufficient to capture sustained behavioral changes, and the use of a convenience sample from a single university constrains the external validity of these findings. These limitations suggest caution in generalizing the results beyond the immediate research context and highlight the importance of replication in more diverse longitudinal settings.

Additionally, the relatively short duration of the intervention (10 weeks) restricted the study's ability to capture long-term effects on specific components of autonomous English learning, such as goal-setting, monitoring strategies, or self-evaluation across individual language skills. Future research should therefore employ extended longitudinal designs and incorporate skill-specific measures of learner autonomy to provide a more comprehensive and reliable assessment.

4.3. Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should adopt extended intervention periods and recruit participants from multiple institutions and disciplines to allow for broader comparison. Further studies could also investigate additional variables such as digital literacy, academic performance, and learner attitudes, as well as examine contextual factors that mediate the effectiveness of flipped classroom model. Comparative studies across urban and provincial universities would be particularly valuable in capturing the socio-

cultural dimensions of learner autonomy in Vietnam and beyond.

In conclusion, the flipped classroom model demonstrates considerable promise as a transformative pedagogy for fostering learner autonomy in Vietnamese higher education. By integrating technology-enhanced pre-class preparation with interactive in-class engagement, it creates a fertile ground for intrinsic motivation and independent learning. While challenges remain, the evidence presented here underscores the relevance of flipped pedagogies in bridging traditional practices with modern educational objectives, warranting broader adoption and deeper scholarly exploration.

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KHÁM PHÁ TIỀM NĂNG CHUYỂN ĐỔI CỦA MÔ HÌNH LỚP HỌC ĐẢO NGƯỢC ĐỐI VỚI VIỆC HỌC TẬP TỰ CHỦ: NGHIÊN CỨU PHƯƠNG PHÁP HỖN HỢP TẠI TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC ĐỒNG NAI

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Tự chủ học tập.

TÓM TẮT

Nghiên cứu này khám phá tiềm năng chuyển đổi của mô hình lớp học đảo ngược (flipped classroom) trong việc thúc đẩy khả năng tự chủ học tập trong bối cảnh giáo dục đại học Việt Nam vốn còn ít được nghiên cứu. Dựa trên lý thuyết Động lực Tự thân (Self-Determination Theory) và các khung lý thuyết về tự chủ học tập, nghiên cứu sử dụng thiết kế phương pháp hỗn hợp hội tụ (convergent mixed-methods), kết hợp phân tích định lượng trước và sau can thiệp với các dữ liệu định tính từ quan sát lớp học và phỏng vấn bán cấu trúc. Can thiệp được thực hiện trong 10 tuần với 120 sinh viên đại học tại Trường Đại học Đồng Nai, thay thế các bài giảng truyền thống bằng tài liệu học tập dạng video phi đồng bộ và dành thời gian trên lớp cho các hoạt động giải quyết vấn đề theo hình thức hợp tác. Kết quả thống kê cho thấy sự cải thiện đáng kể ($p < 0.05$) ở các chỉ số liên quan đến tự chủ học tập, bao gồm khả năng tự điều chỉnh và động lực nội tại. Phân tích chủ đề cho thấy sự gia tăng về cảm giác hiệu quả bản thân, kỹ năng quản lý thời gian và thói quen học tập phản tư. Nghiên cứu này đóng góp vào hệ thống tài liệu ngày càng phát triển khi cung cấp bằng chứng thực nghiệm về cách thức các mô hình lớp học đảo ngược thúc đẩy học tập tự chủ, đặc biệt trong bối cảnh giáo dục ngoài phương Tây. Các hàm ý thực tiễn nhấn mạnh sự cần thiết của việc hỗ trợ ở cấp độ tổ chức và đào tạo sư phạm để triển khai mô hình này một cách hiệu quả trên quy mô rộng. Nghiên cứu tương lai được khuyến nghị nên áp dụng phương pháp tiếp cận dài hạn và so sánh giữa các chuyên ngành khác nhau để kiểm chứng thêm các phát hiện này.