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RESEARCH-BASED ARTICLES

Vietnamese EFL Teachers' Emotional Experiences in a Short-term Online Graduate Course: A Situated Expectancy-Value Theory Perspective

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This qualitative multiple-case study examines Vietnamese English as-a-foreign-language teachers' emotional experiences of a short-term online graduate course through Situated Expectancy-Value Theory. Five practicing teachers who had completed a Master's program at a public university in Vietnam's Mekong Delta participated in two-round semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis generated five themes: (1) convenience with consequences: utility value, intrinsic value, and emotional engagement; (2) a screen between us: social context and situated task value; (3) present but passive: expectancies for success and active participation; (4) some weeks online: perceived cost, workload, and emotional fatigue; and (5) completed online, unfulfilled academically: utility value, attainment value, and retrospective appraisal. Participants also valued online delivery for its convenience and compatibility with teaching responsibilities, yet they also described varying levels of interaction, participation, and emotional involvement. The intensive course schedule increased attention to time and effort costs. Retrospective reflections further indicated that course completion and perceived learning value carried different meanings. The current findings contribute an international perspective on emotional experiences in online graduate teacher education in a Global South context and beyond.

Online graduate education has gained increasing relevance for professionals pursuing advanced qualifications alongside existing employment. Such relevance is particularly evident across the Global South, given the geographical distance, occupational commitments, and restricted study time faced by many working professionals. For practicing teachers, online graduate study enables further academic-professional development alongside existing teaching responsibilities. Such access, however, offers only one dimension of the graduate learning experience. How learners participate, interact, manage academic demands, assess learning value, and experience their studies also matters (Jiang & Koo, 2020; Kee, 2021).

Among these dimensions, emotional experiences warrant particular attention because graduate learning involves personal investment, demanding academic tasks, and continual judgments concerning progress and value. Comfort and enjoyment, in fact, may coexist with frustration, anxiety, detachment, or disappointment, giving emotional experiences an important

place in learners' interpretations of graduate education (Ferguson & Schussler, 2025; Strukel et al., 2023). This consideration is particularly pertinent to short-term online courses, in which intensive schedules, restricted interaction, and professional responsibilities converge within a limited period. Yet scholarship on emotions in online and graduate education has given comparatively limited attention to practicing teachers in Global South contexts undertaking short-term online graduate courses. In addition, teachers' retrospective emotional experiences during the course and their perceptions of learning value after course completion remain underexplored.

A closer examination of such experiences requires attention to how learners assess their academic capabilities, the value of course activities, and the costs associated with participation. Situated Expectancy-Value Theory (SEVT) offers a useful conceptual basis for this purpose, linking expectancies for success, subjective task values, perceived costs, and emotional experiences within situated learning contexts. Accordingly, this study examines Vietnamese English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers' emotional experiences of a short-term online graduate course at a public university in Vietnam's Mekong Delta. Situated within a Southeast Asian Global South context, the study contributes to international scholarship on online graduate education in two respects. First, it brings empirical attention to practicing teachers whose graduate learning occurs alongside established professional responsibilities, adding a context that remains comparatively less visible in international discussions of online graduate study. Second, it connects emotional experiences with expectancy, value, and cost within a short-term online course, offering an account of how teachers make sense of both academic demands and learning value. These insights contribute to international discussions of graduate teacher education by demonstrating the importance of attending to learners' emotional experiences alongside access, flexibility, and academic provision.

Literature review

Emotional Experiences in Graduate Education

Emotions are considered integral to graduate learning (Strukel et al., 2023) since graduate students may (re)interpret academic demands in relation to personal expectations, professional objectives, and perceived education-driven values (Ferguson & Schussler, 2025; Kee, 2021). Accordingly, graduate education itself also encompasses intellectual challenges, performance demands, and substantial individual investment, probably generating emotional experiences (e.g., interest, enjoyment, confidence, anxiety, frustration, and disappointment). These emotional experiences offer much-needed insights into how students evaluate academic demands and assess the value of their learning. For practicing EFL teachers as graduate students, this level of education carries particular significance (Alzaanin, 2024; Li & Zhang, 2024). In reality, they enter graduate programs with classroom knowledge and experiences, alongside aspirations for further knowledge, pedagogical

competence, and career development (Derakhshan & Bai, 2025; Talbot & Mercer, 2018). It is said that their emotional experiences may depend on the perceived relevance and value of course learning. Meaningful learning and the well-perceived value of such learning, correspondingly, are more likely to foster positive experiences, and vice versa.

Related Studies

Research on emotional experiences in graduate education has developed across different contexts and perspectives. Woloshyn et al. (2019) examined graduate student well-being from faculty members' perspectives and identified academic, social, and emotional support as important dimensions of graduate education. Jiang and Koo (2020) moved attention toward online learning, documenting positive emotions such as enjoyment and happiness alongside frustration and disappointment among non-traditional graduate students. Kee (2021) examined graduate students' emotional responses during the sudden transition to online education and identified fear, anxiety, frustration, disappointment, and concerns about learning effectiveness. Strukel et al. (2023) further examined emotional experiences across traditional and non-traditional graduate students, linking positive experiences with self-fulfillment motives and negative experiences with stress and anxiety. More recently, Ferguson and Schussler (2025) examined graduate students' emotional and cognitive responses to unexpected events, demonstrating the importance of appraisal and reappraisal in understanding emotional responses during graduate education.

These reviewed studies share an understanding of graduate education as an experience with substantial emotional dimensions, yet their research contexts and analytical emphases differ. Woloshyn et al. (2019) focused on faculty perspectives and institutional support; Jiang and Koo (2020) examined emotional presence in online learning; Kee (2021) addressed emotional disruption during emergency remote education; Strukel et al. (2023) traced psycho-motivational predictors across student groups; and Ferguson and Schussler (2025) examined appraisal processes surrounding unexpected events. Such variation broadens understanding of graduate students' emotions, yet short-term online coursework remains less examined. Limited attention has also been given to practicing EFL teachers who undertake graduate education alongside their teaching-related responsibilities.

The current study addresses this gap with an examination of Vietnamese EFL teachers' emotional experiences in a short-term online graduate course. Guided by SEVT, the study examines how teachers' expectations, subjective task values, and perceived costs connect with their emotional experiences during course participation.

Theoretical Framework

This study uses SEVT as its standalone theoretical framework. This theory builds on the expectancy-value tradition of achievement motivation and explains achievement-related choices through the interplay of individuals'

beliefs, values, experiences, and social contexts (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020). As Eccles and Wigfield (2020) further asserted, the development of this theory draws on social cognitive, developmental, and sociocultural perspectives, connecting graduate students' histories and surroundings with judgments formed in particular situations. Academic choices, from this perspective, acquire their meaning within the circumstances in which they occur. Eccles and Wigfield (2020) characterized SEVT as "situationally specific and culturally bound" (p. 10), pointing to the influence of immediate circumstances, personal histories, and sociocultural experiences on graduate students' expectancies and values.

Two components hold particular relevance for this study: expectancies for success and subjective task values. Expectancies refer to graduate students' beliefs about their capacity to succeed in an online learning situation. Subjective task values encompass intrinsic value, attainment value, utility value, and cost, capturing the extent to which graduate students find a task interesting, personally important, professionally useful, or demanding in terms of time and effort (Loh, 2019; Wang & Xue, 2022). These appraisals have implications for how graduate students experience and respond emotionally to academic situations. SEVT fits this study because Vietnamese EFL teachers enter graduate education with prior teaching experience, professional aspirations, and established beliefs about learning. A short-term online course places these teachers in a distinct educational situation, bringing course duration, online interaction, learning demands, and perceived professional relevance into their evaluations. As Eccles and Wigfield (2020) noted, "the processes underlying the SEVT model occur over time and are very much influenced by the immediate situation in which each decision is taking place" (p. 10). This emphasis is seen as relevant to a short-term course in which teachers' expectations, perceived values, and perceived costs may be connected to their emotional experiences.

Methods

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative multiple-case study design to examine Vietnamese EFL teachers' retrospective emotional experiences of a short-term online graduate course. Each participant constituted an individual case, with attention given to the participant's personal account of the course experience. Five cases were first examined individually, followed by comparison across cases to identify convergent and divergent patterns. Eccles and Wigfield's (2020) SEVT guided the study theoretically and informed the interview protocols and interpretation of participants' insights. Particular attention was given to expectancies for success, subjective task values, perceived costs, and their connections with emotional experiences.

Table 1. Participant Demographic Information

Case	Gender	Age	Teaching experience	Teaching institution
Case 1	Female	24	2 years	Private language center
Case 2	Male	26	4 years	Public school
Case 3	Female	28	5 years	Private language center
Case 4	Male	30	7 years	Public school
Case 5	Female	33	9 years	Private language center

Setting and Participants

This multiple-case study focused on a short-term online course offered in 2024 as part of a Master's program in English language teaching at a public university in Vietnam's Mekong Delta. At the time of the course, all participants were enrolled in the graduate program. The focal course was delivered fully online over three weeks, with two to three sessions each week. Course assessments were also submitted online. Yet, other courses in the program were conducted onsite, making this course a distinct online learning experience within the participants' graduate education.

Data were collected in 2026, after participants had completed the program. Purposive sampling was used to identify former students who could provide retrospective accounts of the focal course. Eligibility required participants to meet three criteria: (1) completion of the research program, (2) completion of the focal online course in 2024, and (3) willingness to participate in the current study. A pool of 30 eligible graduates was initially identified. Five participants were selected as individual cases, with variation sought across different variables (e.g., age, gender, teaching experience, and teaching institution) (see Table 1).

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection took place in 2026 and involved two rounds of in-depth semi-structured interviews. The first interview invited participants to recall their experiences during the 2024 course, focusing on their expectations, emotional responses, perceptions of learning value, and perceived costs. A second interview followed approximately two to three weeks later. Participants were invited to revisit issues raised during the first interview and reflect further on the course experience from their position as graduates who had completed the program. Each interview lasted 46 to 63 minutes and was conducted online at a time arranged with each participant. With informed consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Data collection continued until sufficient depth and variation in the participants' accounts had been achieved, with no substantially new insights emerging across all cases.

The interview protocol was aligned with SEVT's constructs. Questions addressed participants' expectations for successful course participation, subjective task values, perceived costs, professional relevance, and emotional

experiences during the course. Open-ended questions formed the basis of each interview, with follow-up prompts used when participants introduced experiences requiring further elaboration or clarification.

Interview transcripts were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. The analysis began with repeated reading of the transcripts, followed by initial coding of segments relevant to the research question. The resulting codes were examined for conceptual connections and organized into candidate themes. Themes were then reviewed against the relevant transcripts and refined to ensure coherence within and across cases. Analysis proceeded at two levels: each participant's account was first examined as an individual case, followed by cross-case comparison. SEVT informed the interpretation of connections between participants' motivational appraisals and emotional experiences.

Ethical Considerations and Trustworthiness

All procedures followed in the current study were conducted in accordance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki of 1975, as revised in 2000. Participants received information about the study before data collection and gave informed consent prior to the interviews. Participation was voluntary, meaning that participants could withdraw from the study without any consequences. Case labels replaced participants' names in the transcripts and manuscript, and identifying information was removed from the dataset.

Trustworthiness was addressed according to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria (i.e., credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability). Credibility was supported by two rounds of interviews, in-depth engagement with each case, and member checking. Transferability was addressed with detailed descriptions of the research setting, graduate program, focal course, participants, and research procedures. Dependability involved documentation of sampling, data collection, coding, and analytical decisions. Confirmability was supported by an audit trail containing interview transcripts, coding records, theme development, and analytical notes.

Findings

Cross-case analysis generated five themes concerning participants' retrospective emotional experiences. The findings point to a recurring tension between the practical accessibility of online delivery and participants' emotional and academic engagement. This tension appeared in perceptions of convenience, interpersonal connection, participation, workload, and the perceived value of learning after course completion.

Convenience with Consequences: When Online Learning Saved Time but Reduced Engagement

Convenience was one of the most appreciated aspects of online delivery. Participants valued the opportunity to attend classes without travelling to campus, particularly as they were working as English language teachers during their graduate education. Case 1 recalled, "It was very convenient because

I could join the class after work without travelling anywhere. I could stay at home, open my computer, and attend the session immediately." Case 3 expressed a similar appreciation: "The online format saved me a lot of time. If we had to go to university for every session, it would have been much more difficult for me to manage my teaching schedule."

The value of convenience, nonetheless, was accompanied by a weaker sense of engagement in some cases. Case 1 explained:

"It was easy to attend, but sometimes I felt that I was only there because I had to attend the class. I could join the session quite easily, but I did not always feel that I was really involved in what was happening."

Case 4 shared a comparable experience, describing a link between physical attendance and emotional involvement:

"When I studied online, I could attend the whole session and complete what the teacher asked us to do. Still, I did not always feel that I was really participating in the class as I would in a face-to-face lesson."

In these reflections, learning convenience carried clear utility value, yet its merits did not automatically generate greater emotional investment. The reduced need to travel made course participation more manageable, but the same arrangement could make attendance feel less demanding and less personally involving. Case 2 summarized this tension: "The course was convenient. That was important for me as a working teacher. At the same time, I think the convenience made it easier for me to attend without being emotionally engaged."

A Screen Between Us: Emotional Distance in Online Interaction

Interpersonal connection was another important dimension of participants' emotional experiences. Several cases described the virtual classroom as adequate for transmitting course content but less effective in creating a sense of connection with lecturers and peers.

Case 2 recalled:

"I could hear the lecturer clearly and ask questions when I needed to. However, I still felt that there was a distance between us because we were all behind our screens, and I did not feel the same connection that I usually had in a classroom."

A similar reflection was expressed in Case 5:

"I knew my classmates were there, and I could see their names on the screen, but I did not feel that we were learning as a group [...] Most of the time, everyone seemed to focus on their own computer."

Case 3 also associated the online setting with limited peer interaction:

"Most of our communication was about the lesson or the assignment. We did not really have many opportunities to talk to each other [...] You know, I felt that I was studying alone even though there were many other students in the class."

The accounts indicate that communication remained possible, yet participants attached emotional meaning to the quality of interaction. Case 4 made a direct comparison with onsite courses:

"In the classroom, I could talk to my friends before and after the lesson. We could discuss something quickly or ask each other about the assignment. Online, once the session finished, everything just ended."

Recognizably, such experiences led to the feelings of detachment and reduced social involvement. From an SEVT perspective, participants evaluated the value of online learning within a particular social and educational situation. The virtual format affected not only how they accessed course content but also how they experienced connection with people in the course.

Present but Passive: When Online Attendance Replaced Active Participation

A third pattern concerned the distinction between being present online and being actively involved in learning. In fact, some participants generally attended the required sessions, yet several accounts indicated that online attendance could occur with limited verbal or interactive participation.

Case 2 described this experience:

"I usually listened to the lecturer rather than speaking [...] Unless the lecturer asked me directly, I did not say much because it was easier to stay quiet online than to speak in front of everyone."

Case 5 expressed a similar sentiment:

"I attended the sessions and followed what the teacher was saying, but sometimes I just listened and waited for the class to finish [...] I was present, but I would not say that I was actively involved in every activity."

Case 1 also associated online learning with reduced spontaneous participation:

"I felt more comfortable staying quiet online. In a face-to-face classroom, I might ask a friend something or join a discussion naturally, but online I waited for the teacher to tell us what to do."

The pattern was not identical across cases. Case 3 described greater participation when the teacher incorporated interactive activities:

"When the teacher asked us to discuss something in small groups, I became more involved. I think the activities made me feel that I had a reason to participate instead of simply listening to the lecture."

This contrast suggests that online passivity was connected with both the learning environment and participants' perceptions of their own participation. Online delivery created conditions in which attendance could be maintained with limited interaction. At the same time, activities that demanded contribution could increase participants' involvement. Within SEVT, such experiences can be considered in relation to expectancies for success, as participants' willingness to contribute was partly connected with how comfortable and capable they felt in the online setting.

Some Weeks Online: Compression, Pressure, and Emotional Fatigue

The short duration of the course added another layer to participants' experiences. Three weeks of online learning, with two to three sessions each week and online assessments, compressed course activities into a limited period. Participants were also managing teaching responsibilities during the course.

Case 3 described the pace as demanding:

"Three weeks was very short for a graduate course. We had to attend the classes, understand the lessons, complete the activities, and finish the assignments. I must say that I felt that everything happened too quickly."

Case 1 similarly connected the course schedule with pressure:

"Sometimes I felt that I was learning just to keep up with the course schedule. I wanted to understand the content better [...] I also had to think about the next session and the assignments that needed to be submitted."

Professional responsibilities added another source of pressure. Case 4 explained:

"I had my teaching work during the day, so when I joined the online class at night, I was already tired. I still attended because the course was important for my degree, but sometimes it was difficult to concentrate for the whole session."

Case 2 shared this concern, although with a different emphasis:

"The course was manageable, but there was not much time to process what we learned. We moved from one session to another quite quickly, so I sometimes focused more on completing the requirements than thinking deeply about the content."

The emotional consequences varied across participants. Case 5 recalled feeling "tired more than excited about the course," whereas Case 3 described the experience as "sometimes stressful because there were many things to complete within a short time." These accounts position time and effort as important components of perceived cost. The compressed schedule increased the demands placed on participants' attention and emotional energy, particularly when graduate education competed with their teaching responsibilities.

Completed Online, Unfulfilled Academically: The Emotional Afterlife of a Short Course

The final theme concerned participants' evaluation after completing the Master's program. Looking back from 2026, participants distinguished between fulfilling a course requirement and gaining meaningful learning. All five participants had completed the course and subsequently graduated, yet their reflections indicated different degrees of satisfaction with what the course had contributed to their learning.

Case 1 reflected:

"At that time, my main goal was to finish the course because it was one of the requirements of the program. Now that I have graduated, I realize that I do not remember much of what I learned from that course."

Case 3 offered a similar assessment:

"I completed everything and received the result I needed, but I cannot say that the course changed much about my teaching. I expected a graduate course to give me something that I could use for a longer time."

Case 2 adopted a somewhat more positive position:

"I learned some useful things, especially from the assignments, but I expected more from a graduate course. Maybe the short duration and online format made it difficult to go deeper into the content."

A comparable experience appeared in Case 4:

"For me, completing the course was successful because I finished all the requirements [...] However, when I think about what I actually learned, I feel that the experience could have been more meaningful."

Case 5 expressed the strongest sense of detachment:

"I remember completing the assignments and attending the sessions, but I do not remember many things that stayed with me after the course [...] It feels more like something I completed for my degree than something that became part of my professional learning."

These retrospective accounts are important because participants were speaking as graduates rather than as students immediately after completing the course. Their evaluations incorporated later academic-professional experiences. The distinction between completion and learning value consequently became more visible in their reflections.

Across the five cases, the findings point to a recurring tension within short-term online graduate education. Online delivery increased accessibility and reduced logistical demands, yet these advantages coexisted with emotional distance, passive participation, time pressure, and uncertainty about learning value. Participants' retrospective accounts suggest that successful course completion and a satisfying graduate learning experience can carry different meanings. The question of whether the course was "worth it" or not consequently depended less on its successful completion than on whether participants felt that the online experience had justified the time, effort, and expectations invested in it.

Discussion

This study examined Vietnamese EFL teachers' emotional experiences of a short-term online graduate course, with SEVT guiding data interpretation. Findings indicate that participants' emotions were closely associated with their experiences of online participation, interpersonal interaction, course demands, and perceived learning value. These experiences suggest that the emotional quality of online graduate learning was tied to how participants evaluated what they could accomplish, what they valued, and what they had to invest in the course.

Participants' emotional experiences were first connected with how capable they felt within the online learning environment. Although participants generally felt capable of attending sessions and completing course requirements, several described weaker confidence or involvement in interactive activities. Feelings of comfort and ease could consequently coexist with passivity, detachment, or reduced enthusiasm. This distinction is consistent with Eccles and Wigfield's (2020) explanation that SEVT addresses "the constructs and processes that underlie both within- and between-persons' differentiated task valuing and expectancies for success" (p. 4). The online setting was particularly relevant to these experiences because participation depended on how comfortable participants felt communicating within a virtual classroom. Some participants could remain attentive as listeners, yet felt less prepared to speak, initiate interaction, or maintain active involvement. Their emotional experiences consequently extended beyond completion of formal requirements. Feeling successful also involved being able to participate meaningfully, maintain concentration, and connect with lecturers and peers. As Eccles and Wigfield (2020) stated, "the processes underlying the SEVT model occur over time and are very much influenced by the immediate situation in which each decision is taking place" (p. 4). The short course duration, virtual interaction, and participants' professional responsibilities formed important aspects of this immediate situation.

Participants' emotional experiences also reflected how they valued different aspects of online learning. Convenience generated positive feelings because participants could attend classes without travelling to campus. For practicing teachers, this accessibility reduced logistical pressure and made graduate education easier to accommodate alongside professional responsibilities. Feelings of comfort and relief were consequently connected with the practical value of online delivery. The emotional picture became less positive when participants considered interaction and learning value. Several appreciated the convenience of online attendance but felt emotionally distant from lecturers and peers, participated less actively, or questioned how much they had gained from the course. Online learning consequently carried clear utility value, yet its intrinsic and perceived academic value was less consistent. Eccles and Wigfield (2020) characterized SEVT as "situationally specific and culturally bound" (p. 10), which fits the present findings because participants evaluated the online experience within their circumstances as practicing teachers and graduate students. Perceived cost further shaped these emotional experiences. The three-week schedule, two to three weekly sessions, online assessments, and teaching responsibilities concentrated academic demands within a limited period. Some participants consequently experienced pressure and fatigue alongside the convenience of online attendance. The same feature of online learning could thus carry different emotional meanings: avoiding travel reduced practical burden, whereas concentrated academic demands increased

feelings of pressure. Participants' emotional responses were consequently connected with the balance they perceived between what the course offered and what participation required.

The present findings converge with previous research in identifying mixed emotional experiences in online and graduate education, yet they offer a more focused account of how these emotions connect with short-term online coursework. Similar to Jiang and Koo (2020), participants experienced enjoyment, comfort, frustration, and disappointment, with these emotions closely associated with online convenience, interpersonal distance, passive participation, and compressed course demands. The findings also resonate with Kee (2021), particularly regarding anxiety, frustration, disappointment, and concerns about learning effectiveness, although the present study concerns a planned online course within an established graduate program instead of an abrupt pandemic-related transition. The findings further add contextual depth to Strukel et al.'s (2023) links between positive graduate experiences, self-fulfillment, stress, and anxiety, as participants connected their emotions with course duration, interactional opportunities, teaching responsibilities, and perceived learning value. Ferguson and Schussler's (2025) emphasis on appraisal and reappraisal is also relevant, since participants retrospectively evaluated a course taken in 2024 after completing their graduate degree. Distinct from Woloshyn et al. (2019), who approached graduate well-being from faculty perspectives, this study centers practicing EFL teachers' own emotional accounts. Its distinctive contribution lies in bringing together practicing EFL teachers, planned short-term online graduate coursework, and retrospective emotional evaluation, offering insight into how online convenience can coexist with emotional distance, successful participation with passivity, and course completion with disappointment about learning. This perspective positions emotional experience as an important dimension of the perceived quality and value of short-term online graduate education.

Arguably, the findings position emotional experiences at the heart of participants' evaluations of short-term online graduate education. Online accessibility generated comfort and practical relief, yet limited interaction, passive participation, compressed demands, and uncertain learning value contributed to less positive emotions. SEVT helps connect these emotional experiences with participants' expectancies, task values, and perceived costs within a particular learning situation. For practicing EFL teachers, the perceived worth of short-term online graduate learning depended on whether the course felt engaging, manageable, meaningful, and professionally worthwhile.

Implications for Online Graduate Education

The current findings carry several implications for online graduate education. First, accessibility alone may not guarantee a positive learning experience. Short-term online courses need sufficient opportunities for interaction, discussion, and meaningful participation so that convenience

does not become associated with passivity or emotional distance. Course design can incorporate structured peer interaction, small-group discussion, instructor feedback, and activities that connect academic content with participants' emotional experiences. Second, course duration deserves (re)consideration. Compressing graduate learning into three weeks may increase convenience, yet concentrated sessions and assessment demands can also generate pressure and fatigue. Online graduate programs may benefit from balancing scheduling flexibility with sufficient time for reflection, interaction, and consolidation of learning. This consideration becomes particularly important for practicing teachers who manage graduate education alongside professional responsibilities. Third, assessment practices warrant attention. Online assessments can support accessibility and course completion, yet assessment design needs to align with intended learning outcomes and the desired learning experience. Tasks that encourage reflection, application, discussion, and professional relevance may contribute more meaningfully to participants' perceived learning value than requirements focused primarily on completion. Finally, online graduate education should attend to emotional experience as part of educational quality. Program administrators and instructors can consider learners' feelings of engagement, connection, pressure, and satisfaction alongside attendance and academic performance. Such attention can help online graduate programs move beyond a focus on access and completion toward learning experiences that participants perceive as meaningful.

Limitations and Methodological Recommendations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. The study involved five cases from one public university in Vietnam, limiting the range of institutional and program contexts represented in the data. Participants completed the course in 2024 and discussed their experiences retrospectively after graduation, so their accounts may have been influenced by subsequent graduate experiences and later evaluations of the course. The study also focused on one short-term online course within a Master's program, limiting comparisons across different course formats, durations, and delivery modes.

Future research could recruit participants from multiple universities and graduate programs to examine whether similar experiences occur across different institutional and program contexts. Longitudinal designs could collect data during the course, immediately after completion, and at later stages of graduate education, allowing changes in emotional experiences and course evaluations to be examined longitudinally. Comparative studies with short-term online, extended online, and onsite courses could clarify how delivery mode and course duration relate to emotional experiences. Future multiple-case studies could also incorporate course observations, learning artifacts, and instructor perspectives alongside participant interviews. Mixed-

methods research combining measures of expectancy, task value, cost, and emotional experience with qualitative accounts could further examine the connections identified in this study.

Conclusion

This study examined Vietnamese EFL teachers' emotional experiences of a short-term online graduate course through SEVT. The findings indicate that online learning generated a mixture of comfort, convenience, frustration, detachment, pressure, and disappointment. Participants valued accessibility and reduced travel demands, yet limited interaction, passive participation, compressed course demands, and uncertain learning value influenced their emotional experiences. The study adds a situated account of emotional experiences in short-term online graduate education, with particular attention to practicing EFL teachers who retrospectively evaluated their learning experience after graduation.

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