



Original Article

Summer Classes in Higher Education: A Qualitative Study of Lecturer and Student Views

Truong Cong Bang*

*University of Economics and Law, Ho Chi Minh City,
Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam*

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Abstract: Summer classes have become increasingly prevalent in higher education institutions worldwide, offering students opportunities to accelerate their learning, reduce course loads, and maintain academic momentum. This qualitative study explores the perspectives of lecturers and undergraduate students on the benefits, drawbacks, and strategies for success of summer classes. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten students and two lecturers from a university in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The findings reveal that the primary perceived benefits of summer classes include the ability to complete courses more quickly, have a lighter subject load during the regular year, and improve academic performance. However, the drawbacks cited were the sacrifice of leisure time or income from part-time work and the added pressure of condensed timelines. Recommended strategies comprise proactive promotion of summer class advantages to increase student awareness, careful selection and compensation of skilled instructors, and incorporation of recreational activities to support student well-being. This study contributes qualitative insights to inform the development of effective, student-centered summer programs in higher education.

Keywords: Summer class, higher education, program effectiveness, academic progress, accelerated learning, knowledge retention.

1. Introduction

Summer classes have become increasingly popular in higher education institutions around the world, with many universities offering various summer programs to their students [1]. Similarly, a growing number of universities in

Vietnam have also adopted the practice of offering summer courses to their students. The growing popularity of summer classes can be attributed to their potential benefits for students, such as the ability to catch up on subject debt, accelerate their learning, and reduce the number of courses required for the upcoming semester [2, 3].

Research has shown that students often experience a decline in academic skills and knowledge after a long summer break if they do

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: bangtc@uel.edu.vn

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not engage in learning activities [4, 5]. This is particularly problematic for university students who have a longer summer break, as the extended period of inactivity can exacerbate the potential for learning loss. Moreover, studies have found that students from more affluent backgrounds often outperform their low-income counterparts in academic performance, largely due to their ability to afford and attend summer classes, which helps them maintain and improve their knowledge and skills during the summer break [6, 7].

While the benefits of summer classes in higher education have been well-documented, there is a need to explore the perspectives of both lecturers and students on the effectiveness of these programs and the strategies that can be employed to enhance their success. The existing literature has primarily focused on the quantitative aspects of summer classes, such as their impact on academic performance and credit accumulation [2, 8]. However, there is a lack of in-depth, qualitative research that examines the lived experiences and perceptions of the key stakeholders, the lecturers and students, who are directly involved in these summer programs. Particularly in the context of Vietnamese universities, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, this is the first study that investigates the benefits, drawbacks, and strategies for the success of summer classes from the perspectives of both lecturers and students. By analyzing the insights and experiences of these key stakeholders, the study will provide a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of summer programs and offer strategies for universities to create more efficient and engaging summer classes that contribute to students' academic success.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Benefits of Summer Classes in Higher Education

The existing literature has documented a range of benefits associated with summer classes in higher education. One of the primary advantages is the opportunity for students to

catch up on subject debt and accelerate their learning [3, 9, 10]. By allowing students to retake or complete courses during the summer, universities can help them stay on track with their degree requirements and avoid delays in graduation [11, 12].

Furthermore, research has shown that summer classes can contribute to reducing students' course load during the regular academic year, potentially leading to improved time management and focus [13, 14]. This, in turn, can facilitate on-time graduation and earlier entry into the workforce, which can have long-term positive implications for students' career trajectories and earning potential [15, 16].

In addition to these academic benefits, summer classes have also been linked to the maintenance of academic momentum and study habits [11]. By engaging in continuous learning throughout the year, students may be less likely to experience significant knowledge and skill decay during extended breaks, which can enhance their overall academic performance and outcomes [8, 17, 18].

2.2. Challenges and Drawbacks of Summer Classes in Higher Education

Despite the numerous benefits, the existing literature also highlights several challenges and drawbacks associated with summer classes in higher education. One of the primary concerns is the potential for students to forgo the opportunity to work part-time and earn income during the summer months [3]. This can be particularly problematic for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, who may rely on summer employment to support themselves and their families [7].

Another key drawback is the increased pressure that students may experience to complete assessments and coursework within the condensed timeframe of the summer semester [14, 19]. The accelerated pace of summer classes can lead to a more intensive workload, which may be mentally and physically taxing for some students, potentially compromising their overall well-being and work-life balance.

Furthermore, research has noted that the lack of leisure and relaxation time during the summer semester can be detrimental to students' overall well-being and ability to recharge for the upcoming academic year [3]. The demanding nature of summer classes may leave little room for recreational activities and socialization, which can be important for maintaining a healthy work-life balance and preventing burnout.

2.3. Strategies for the Success of Higher Education Summer Classes

Ensuring the success of summer classes in higher education institutions necessitates a multifaceted approach. One crucial aspect is enhancing student awareness and understanding of the potential benefits associated with summer course offerings. By educating students on the potential advantages, such as accelerated learning and reduced course loads, universities can encourage greater participation and engagement in these programs [13].

Furthermore, the quality of teaching and faculty engagement plays a pivotal role in the effectiveness of summer classes [20]. Careful planning and selection of highly qualified and experienced instructors are essential, coupled with providing them with adequate resources and support to deliver high-quality instruction during the summer semester.

3. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the perspectives of lecturers and undergraduate students regarding the benefits, drawbacks, and strategies for the success of summer classes in higher education. The participants included students majoring in

economics and law who had enrolled in summer English language courses, as well as the lecturers responsible for teaching these courses. The specific methods used in this investigation are outlined below.

3.1. Research Design

The researcher conducted a qualitative, interview-based study in order to gain in-depth insights into the experiences and perceptions of both lecturers and students involved in summer classes. This approach was chosen to provide a rich, nuanced understanding of the topic from the key stakeholders' points of view. The aim was to gather comprehensive information about the advantages and disadvantages of summer instruction, as well as strategies to enhance the quality of summer class education.

3.2. Sampling, Participant Characteristics, and Class Structure

The study involved a total of 12 participants, comprising ten undergraduate students and two lecturers from a university in Ho Chi Minh City. The student participants were all second-year students who had elected to enroll in summer English language courses, which were designed to be more intensive than the regular semester courses, following the same curriculum but meeting more frequently to expedite completion. In addition to English, the university offered summer courses in other subjects related to the students' majors, such as economics and law. The characteristics of the summer courses, which include options for English language instruction as well as major subjects like economics and law, are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of Summer Courses

Course Type	Curriculum	Subjects Offered
Summer	Same as regular term	English, Economics, and Law

The researcher, who is an English teacher at the same university, facilitated the process of recruiting research participants. The lecturer

participants were colleagues of the researcher, and they all agreed to take part in the investigation. To recruit the student participants,

the researcher visited three summer course classes taught by the lecturer participants. In each class, the researcher explained the purpose of the study and asked for volunteers, with a minimum requirement of three students per class. A total of ten students expressed their willingness to participate and provided their contact information

for scheduling individual interviews. These students included seven females and three males, with ages ranging from 19 to 20 years old. To provide a clear understanding of the student participants' demographics, Table 2 summarizes their age, gender, and year of study.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Student Participants

Participant Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Year of Study	Volunteer Class
Huyen	19	Female	2 nd year	1
Hoa	19	Female	2 nd year	1
Tung	19	Male	2 nd year	1
Truc	19	Female	2 nd year	2
Hien	19	Female	2 nd year	2
Khanh	19	Male	2 nd year	2
Linh	20	Female	2 nd year	3
Lan	19	Female	2 nd year	3
Thanh	19	Male	2 nd year	3
Hue	19	Female	2 nd year	3

The two lecturers who participated in the study were an experienced male lecturer with a Master's degree in English and a female lecturer with a PhD. Both had extensive experience teaching English at the university,

with more than 5 years of involvement in summer course instruction. The professional characteristics of the lecturer participants, including their qualifications and teaching experience, are outlined in Table 3.

Table 3. Professional Characteristics of Lecturer Participants

Participant Pseudonym	Gender	Degree	Years of Experience	Courses Taught
Hoang	Male	MA	5+	English
Ngoc	Female	PhD	5+	English

3.3. Data Collection Procedures

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the data collection method, as this approach not only allows the researcher to establish a framework of predetermined questions but also provides the opportunity for probing and asking follow-up questions [21, 22]. Semi-structured interviews offer flexibility and give informants the freedom to express their views [23].

In the current study, the same sets of questions were posed to each student and lecturer participant. This interview structure

enabled the researcher to modify questions, explain areas of confusion, ask follow-up questions, and probe responses as needed. The interview questions were divided into three main categories: i) The advantages of taking summer classes; ii) The disadvantages of taking summer classes; and iii) Strategies the university should implement to improve teaching quality and student engagement in summer programs.

The individual interviews lasted approximately 15 minutes and were recorded.

To protect the privacy of the participants, all names used in this research are pseudonyms. Additionally, to enhance the validity of the data, the technique of member checking was employed, whereby all participants were given the opportunity to review and confirm the accuracy of their interview responses [24].

3.4. Data Analysis Methods

The interview data was transcribed and analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. The researcher followed Saldana's two-stage coding process, which involved initial coding to identify common topics and themes, followed by the development of broader categories and sub-themes [25]. The analysis was conducted manually, without the use of specialized software, to allow for a more nuanced and contextual interpretation of the data.

By employing these rigorous qualitative methods, the researcher aimed to provide a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the key stakeholders' perspectives on summer classes in higher education.

4. Findings

The analysis of the interview data revealed several salient themes that capture the perspectives of lecturers and undergraduate students regarding the benefits, drawbacks, and strategies for success of summer classes in higher education.

4.1. Benefits of Summer Classes

A predominant advantage cited by the majority of students (80%) was the opportunity that summer courses afford to accelerate degree progress. Illustrative of this view, one female student, Hien, stated, *"I see the summer semester as an opportunity to complete the courses more quickly"*. Corroborating this perspective, a lecturer, Ngoc, shared, *"I believe that for those students who did not pass the course during the school year, the summer semester will be an opportunity for them to repay the course debt and accelerate the learning process"*.

The next two most commonly cited benefits were a lighter course load during the regular year (60% of responses) and enhanced academic performance (40%). Students posited that the concentrated scheduling of summer courses, meeting more frequently each week, facilitates improved retention compared to once-weekly meetings during the conventional terms, as articulated by Thanh: *"If I study in the summer, I will take fewer subjects throughout the year and be less busy"* (male student), and Truc: *"In the summer, there will be more time to focus on that subject, such as studying that subject two or three times a week, knowledge will not be forgotten as much as studying once a week"* (female student).

Similarly, both lecturers interviewed corroborated observing stronger academic achievement among students enrolled in summer sessions. They attributed this to the reduced course load allowing greater focus, as well as elevated motivation levels among students opting for accelerated summer study, some making up for failed courses. As Ngoc stated, *"They don't study many subjects, ... the students' academic results are better because they focus more on summer subjects"* (lecturer). Hoang added, *"Some students who fail a subject are also strongly motivated to attend summer courses to pay off the course debt. I see that students sign up for summer classes for a variety of reasons. In general, students are highly motivated to study, so the course completion rate is also high"* (lecturer).

Four students cited summer study as beneficial for maintaining productive academic habits, exemplified by Tung: *"Summer learning maintains study habits such as doing exercises and reading documents"* (male student). Three students perceived summer classes allowing instructors more preparation time due to reduced teaching loads, thereby enhancing instruction quality, as Lan remarked: *"Lecturers are better ones. Perhaps because there are fewer classes, lecturers are under less pressure and have more time to prepare the lecture"* (female student).

One lecturer mentioned summer terms enabling the university to optimize facility usage. Additionally, summer teaching provides income supplementation opportunities for faculty, noting, *"By organizing the summer semester, the university will be able to take advantage of the available facilities. Teachers can also earn extra money. Due to the additional labor required, summer semester lecturers are paid more than regular semester lecturers during the academic year, encouraging them to sign up to teach"* (Ngoc, lecturer).

4.2. Drawbacks of Summer Classes

Regarding challenges posed by summer terms, a majority of students (60%) felt it required sacrificing leisure time or income from jobs, as exemplified by Hoa: *"You must get up early to go to the university, then do your homework; you cannot sleep like other students"* (female student). Khanh highlighted, *"Some students use their summer vacation to look for part-time work. Students enrolled in summer courses, on the other hand, can't work part-time"* (male student).

Meanwhile, 40% of students found the condensed summer schedule stressful for completing assignments, with Truc stating, *"A subject that is typically studied twice or three times per week can end quickly, but we are extremely busy because we have to turn in assignments on time"*.

Additionally, a lecturer observed that summer classes deprive students of downtime and recreation needed to recharge before the upcoming term.

4.3. Strategies for Improving Summer Programs

Though 40% of students acknowledged summer classes' benefits, not all were well-informed. Thus, the university should better promote understanding of advantages like accelerated progress and uninterrupted

enrollment, as suggested by Huyen: *"There are numerous advantages to attending summer courses. But not everyone sees it. Some students suggested working part-time to supplement their income. The income benefit I see is minor compared to the benefit of continuing my studies and completing the course early if I attend summer courses. I believe the university should publicize and advise students to comprehend"*.

One lecturer recommended strategic planning and competitive compensation to recruit a high-quality summer instructional team, leveraging reduced class sizes, as stated by Ngoc: *"When it comes to the quality of education, I believe that it is necessary to discuss the quality of lecturers. The university should plan for summer semester teaching subjects ahead so that lecturers can register. In addition, the remuneration is reasonable and appealing enough to allow the best lecturers to participate in the lecture. Summer classes typically have fewer classes, so they don't require as many instructors, making it easier to select a good teaching team"*.

While acknowledging summer programs' value, one lecturer proposed complementing academics with opportunities for revitalization through organized recreational travel for summer students, generating auxiliary revenue. As Hoang explained, *"As I previously stated, a summer program is essential. Students, however, require time to rest and recharge their batteries. Should the university organize short-term trips for summer class students? As a result, the students have summer study while also having time to relax, and the university has an additional source of income from tourism activities"*.

The key benefits, drawbacks, and strategies identified from the summer classes are summarized in Table 4, providing a clear qualitative evaluation of the research outcomes.

Table 4. Qualitative Evaluation Checklists for Summer Classes

Category	Checklist Items
Benefits of summer classes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accelerated degree progress. - Lighter course load during the regular year. - Enhanced academic performance due to concentrated scheduling. - Maintenance of productive academic habits. - Improved quality of instruction due to reduced teaching loads for lecturers. - Optimization of university facility usage. - Income supplementation opportunities for faculty.
Drawbacks of summer classes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sacrifice of leisure time or income from jobs. - Stressful condensed schedule for completing assignments. - Lack of downtime and recreation for students before the next term.
Strategies for improving summer programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Better promotion of summer classes' benefits. - Strategic planning and competitive compensation to recruit high-quality instructors. - Complementing academics with recreational opportunities for revitalization.

5. Discussion

5.1. Interpretation and Contextualization of Findings

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the perspectives of both lecturers and undergraduate students on the benefits, drawbacks, and strategies for the success of summer classes in higher education. The data reveals that the primary advantages of summer classes, as perceived by the participants, include the opportunity to accelerate learning, reduce course load during the regular academic year, and improve academic performance.

These findings align with the existing literature, which has highlighted the potential for summer classes to help students catch up on subject debt, maintain academic momentum, and ultimately enhance their chances of on-time graduation [3, 11]. The increased focus and intensity of summer courses appear to contribute to better knowledge retention and academic outcomes, as observed by the lecturers interviewed.

However, the study also identified several challenges associated with summer classes,

such as the inability of students to engage in part-time work and the added pressure to complete assessments within a condensed timeframe. These drawbacks echo the concerns raised in previous research, which has noted the potential for summer classes to limit students' opportunities for leisure and work-life balance [3, 14, 19].

5.2. Implications for Universities, Students, and Lecturers

The insights gained from this study hold several important implications for stakeholders in higher education. For universities, the findings suggest the need to proactively promote the benefits of summer classes and educate students on the available opportunities. This could help increase enrollment and ensure that more students can take advantage of the potential academic and professional benefits.

Additionally, the study highlights the importance of maintaining high-quality teaching during the summer semester. By carefully selecting and adequately compensating skilled lecturers, universities can help create an engaging and effective learning

environment for students. Furthermore, the suggestion of incorporating leisure and recreational activities into summer programs may contribute to a better balance between academic rigor and student well-being.

For students, the study underscores the need to be aware of the potential advantages of summer classes, such as accelerated learning and reduced course loads. This knowledge can empower students to make more informed decisions about their academic trajectories and potentially improve their overall success.

Lastly, the findings have implications for lecturers, who play a crucial role in the delivery and quality of summer programs. The study suggests that by being proactive in their engagement and preparation, lecturers can contribute to the effectiveness and long-term viability of summer classes.

5.3. Contributions and Limitations of the Study

This study contributes to the existing body of literature by providing a qualitative, in-depth exploration of the perspectives of both lecturers and undergraduate students on the benefits, drawbacks, and strategies for the success of summer classes in higher education. By capturing the nuanced experiences and insights of these key stakeholders, the study offers a more comprehensive understanding of this important aspect of university education.

However, the study is not without its limitations. The relatively small sample size and the focus on a single university in Ho Chi Minh City may limit the generalizability of the findings.

5.4. Future Research Directions

Building on the findings and limitations of this study, several avenues for future research can be identified. Expanding the scope of the study to include participants from multiple universities and diverse academic programs could provide a more representative and generalizable understanding of the phenomenon.

Additionally, the research of the long-term academic and professional outcomes of students who have participated in summer classes compared to those who have not could offer

valuable insights into the lasting impact of these programs.

Moreover, a comparative analysis of summer class strategies and their effectiveness across different institutional and cultural contexts could yield valuable insights for universities seeking to optimize their summer offerings.

6. Conclusion

This qualitative study has offered a comprehensive exploration of the perspectives of both lecturers and undergraduate students on the benefits, drawbacks, and strategies for the success of summer classes in higher education. The key takeaways from this research provide valuable insights that can inform the development and implementation of more effective summer programs at universities.

The findings indicate that summer classes are viewed by participants as an opportunity to accelerate learning, reduce course loads during the regular academic year, and ultimately improve academic performance. These benefits align with the existing literature on the advantages of continuous engagement in educational activities throughout the year [2, 3, 13]. However, the study also identified several challenges associated with summer classes, such as the inability of students to engage in part-time work and the increased pressure to complete assessments within a condensed timeframe [14, 19]. These drawbacks underscore the need to carefully balance the academic rigor of summer programs with opportunities for rest, relaxation, and work-life balance.

To address these challenges and enhance the effectiveness of summer classes, the study suggests several strategies for universities to consider. These include proactive marketing and awareness campaigns to educate students on the potential benefits, as well as the careful selection and adequate compensation of skilled lecturers to ensure high-quality instruction. Additionally, the incorporation of leisure and recreational activities into summer programs may contribute to a healthier balance between academic demands and student well-being.

By implementing these recommendations, universities can work towards creating summer class offerings that are not only academically rigorous but also responsive to the needs and preferences of both lecturers and students. This, in turn, can lead to improved educational outcomes, enhanced student satisfaction, and the long-term sustainability of summer programs in higher education.

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