STUDY OBJECTIVES (1,075 words)
Field of Study: TESOL

English is taught throughout the world, by all sorts of teachers to all sorts of learners. Schools and classrooms differ greatly in their wealth and their provision of equipment. But whatever the conditions in which you are working, how to teach English the most communicatively and thus most effectively seems to have been a vital issue for many English language teachers to settle.

I have been fortunate to spend quite a lot of my time working alongside foreign experts in language teaching and professionals from many parts of Vietnam. Years of traveling and running teacher training courses with them, meeting them in conferences and talking with them in many occasions have earned me lots of experience in language teaching. But I believe that experience is not everything, particularly for a persons like me, who is expected to update about 700 English teachers working in high schools around _____ province in terms of methodology. It was not at all an easy task. I have excellent English classrooms in my school, where the class size is limitted to 25-30 students and where there is no room for traditional methods. I have given demonstration lessons to pint out to the teachers in my locality the possibility of applying the communicative approach in their 50-60 student classrooms. I have worked in many workshops in the hope of helping my colleagues with the use of communicative language teaching skills in their work. Many people think that I have made significant contributions to the local education but I do not think exactly the same way. I graduated from university in 1990. Vietnam in the late 1980s was a multicolored picture of the old and the new, the conservative and the innovative in all fields of society. Communicative language teaching was something we, English teachers, heard about, but not a serious thing that we had to practice. Even at the moment I am sure that you cannot enroll in an official teacher training course in Vietnam simply because there is not one. Therefore, there are still things I do not know and things I know little about. My most important study objective: only when I can pursue my study in the U.S., the cradle—I strongly believe—of modern English language theory and practice will I be able to perfect my field. I want to see how things work there in the field of language teaching so that I can learn and bring them home and make them useful for my colleagues and students one day. Another objective is that I wish to meet and work with TESOL students from different parts of the world. I can imagine now a very interesting environment where we have the opportunity to exchange ideas, share our knowledge and experience, give presentations, discuss issues and practice teaching English under guidance of U.S. instructors. Obviously, the kind of program that I expect to undertake is a course of study in an American university where I will be able to develop my theory and skills of English language teaching, practice it as a classroom teacher and strengthen my workshop techniques.

I was trained at a graduate level to be an English language teacher for five years and have been in the teaching career long enough to share the same feeling with many other Vietnamese teachers in the way that communicative language teaching is not still very popular or even seems alien to teachers who live and work in rural or mountainous areas of the country. In urban areas the situation is just better in major cities, but for towns and

smaller cities there was little more than a vague sign of progress. Teachers get salaries anyway but students receive nothing except for embarrassment, confusion and difficulties when using English to communicate. A number of problems arise. Some have been solved; many have not. The following problems in Vietnamese pedagogical contexts also explain why my study objectives have been set and why I have established a motive to study in the United States.

The first problem dates back to the late 1980s when, in Vietnam, the economic open-door policy pursued by the Government required all state schools to teach English as English was perceived to be the language of trade and commerce and thus an essential tool in the development of the country's economy. On the one hand the need for good communicators in English created a great demand for English language teachers, but on the other the Government's conception presented a number of difficult tasks for them. For many, it meant they were asked to teach a program for which they were ill-prepared--a program in which the Ministry of Education required teachers to teach communicatively while using texts that were firmly grounded in traditional methods of teaching. The next problem is that the severe shortage of staff many years ago has resulted in a considerable number of teachers of English being employed in haste, without undergoing careful consideration. These teachers seem to be neither efficient in the task of teaching nor able to bring communicative language teaching into their classrooms. Besides, teachers own different beliefs in English language teaching. For many of them, any alteration to the "instant lessons" in the textbooks are considered insecure or risky. Another problem that locks the communicative approach outside the classroom is the traditional view of the teacher-student relationship. This view supports teacher-centered methods and a structured curriculum. The teacher is supposed to be the only provider of knowledge and therefore is highly respected by the students, students' parents, and society as a whole. These facts, as a result, affected their students' study of English. It is quite common to find students embarrassed, confused, and passive during their English lessons. They refuse to do anything. The new communicative methods do not work owing to the teacher's methodological defects, inflexible applications, and above all complete absence of confidence in communicative language teaching.

I have been teaching English for 14 years and quite understand what I could do for my country. Deep in my heart, there is always been a voice telling me that those problems will be solved sooner or later. I am standing a chance to pursue my study in the States and if succeed in getting access to an American university, I will spend a lot of my time finding solutions to the problems. I will do my best for dramatic changes in the regional education after I return home.