

VIETNAMESE STUDENTS' FOREIGN LANGUAGE ABILITY AND ATTITUDE ON FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

Pham Thi Hong Tham¹ and Vu Thi Thanh Huong²

¹College of Chinese Language and Literature, Wuhan University

²Department of Language Studies, Torondo University

Received: November 9, 2018 / Revised: May 24, 2019 / Accepted: May 27, 2019

Abstract

In the context of strong international development, foreign language ability has become a necessary requirement. Inevitably, each country including Vietnam has to develop its foreign language teaching. The existing foreign language teaching in our country lacks systematic and long planning. In order to guarantee that in the future more Vietnamese students will have sufficient foreign language ability, the country should have a specific development plan to master the teaching of foreign language in order to ensure that the plan meets the goals, requirements, and the country's future requirements.

Keywords: Foreign language, Foreign language teaching, Vietnamese students

Introduction

The introduction of Foreign Language Teaching Proposal for the period of 2008-2020 in the Vietnamese National Education System is a very important foreign language development policy, to reflect the country's determination to develop and improve foreign language ability of its human resources. Vietnam regards foreign languages as its future growth advantage. The proposal for the 2008-2020 period aims to have 100 percent of university students receiving foreign language teaching and 30 percent of the national cadres and officials have reached the third grade of CET-6. In order to achieve the above goals, students must learn foreign languages for at least 10 years (starting from the third grade of primary school to the third grade of high school).

The goals are as follows:

(1) After graduating from primary school, students are able to reach the first level of Foreign Language International Standard;

(2) After graduating from junior high school, students are able to reach the second level of Foreign Language International Standard;

(3) After graduating from high school, students are able to reach the third level of Foreign Language International Standard;

(4) Students of university (non-foreign language majors) are able to reach the third level or above of Foreign Language International Standard;

(5) Students of university (major in foreign languages), are able to reach the fourth or fifth level above of Foreign Language International

Standard.

(6) The 10-year foreign language regulations for general schools in Vietnam have been piloted since 2010.

Based on the above objectives, the research on the current situation of foreign language learning in Vietnam is an urgent need to help educational administrators to fully understand the current situation of foreign language learning in Vietnam.

In this study, we focus on language learning at all levels in Vietnam. This paper gives a comprehensive outline of the current situation and attitude of foreign language learning in primary schools, middle schools and non-professional levels in Vietnam.

This study is one of the few comprehensive studies on foreign language learning in Vietnam.

Literature Review

In the 2016-2017 academic year, Vietnam has received 12 national and ministerial science missions, 54 school science missions, 199 papers published in domestic and foreign science journals, including one paper published in international science journal ISI/SCOPUS (Nguyen, 2017).

However, at present, foreign language studies in Vietnam are scattered and not concentrated, and lack of systematicness and continuity (Nguyen, 2017).

The study is one of the few with a broad, in-depth, and nationwide survey to provide comprehensive information to the ministry of education, Vietnamese authorities, and

administrators. Education has reason to adjust the teaching and learning of foreign languages in the future.

Research Objectives

More recently, along with the promotion of the quality of Vietnamese students' teaching and foreign language students, the study of the capacity of students is also strongly promoted. The study focuses on the following directions:

- (1) the foreign language capacity of students
- (2) the student's language mechanics
- (3) the real-quality training-solutions
- (4) the quality of foreign language training

Research Methods

1. Inspection method

We used questionnaires for students to fill in. There were 33 questions for students and 38 questions for university students. There were 673 students who completed the questionnaire which are from the fifth grade students of primary school to the third grade students of high school, and there were 196 university students from the first year to the fourth year.

2. Research subject

Research subjects are students and also non-language major university students. The table below shows the students' information we surveyed.

Table 1 Basic statistics information of the students

Characteristic	Students	University Students
1. Gender		
Man	301 (44.7%)	56 (28.6%)
Woman	372 (55.3%)	140 (71.4%)
Total	673 (100%)	196 (100%)
2. Type of foreign language		
English	658 (99.2%)	194 (99%)
Russian	5 (0.8%)	1 (0.5%)
France	187 (28.2%)	4 (2%)
Mandarin/Chinese	19 (2.9%)	18 (9.2%)
Japanese	27 (4.1%)	7 (3.6%)
Korean	24 (3.6%)	4 (2%)
3. Start learning foreign languages		
At the time of birth	6 (0.9%)	1 (0.5%)
Kindergarten	30 (4.4%)	2 (1%)
Primary School	604 (90%)	65 (33.7%)
Junior High-School	25 (3.7%)	104 (53.4%)
High School	18 (2.6%)	9 (4.7%)

As can be seen from Table 1, there is a great difference between students and university students, reflecting the contemporary shifting trend in Vietnamese society:

(1) Number of students chose to learn English are more common: over 99%, there are fewer than Russian and Korean, which also reflects the development direction of Vietnamese foreign language education today. Only 2% of university students had studied French but 28.2% of students under university level. In contrast, fewer students chose to learn Chinese, only 2.9% of Students, and only 9.2% of university students.

(2) In the question “Do you learn multiple languages?” We find that how many languages

they learned. There are far more students who learn two or more languages than those college students.

(3) Start to learning foreign language earlier: about 90% of student learn foreign language from primary school, and about 33.7% at university.

Research Results

1. Foreign language capability

In order to speculate the foreign language ability of students and university students, we let them to self-evaluate their foreign language level, including listening, speaking, reading and writing. These four aspects are as follows: not very good, fair, good, and not known.

Table 2 Listening and Speaking Skills

Listening and Speaking Skills	Not very good	Fair	Good	Not known
Pronunciation				
Primary School	1.1%	62.4%	35.5%	1.1%
Junior High-School	12.7%	60.1%	23.5%	3.7%
High School	21.3%	59.0%	17.0%	2.7%
University	34.7%	51.7%	12.5%	1.1%
Speaking				
Primary School	3.4%	68.5%	23.6%	4.5%
Junior High-School	19.6%	52.1%	23.0%	5.3%
High School	39.0%	44.7%	10.0%	6.3%
University	51.7%	37.4%	8.0%	2.9%
Listening (TV, NEWS)				
Primary School	47.7%	20.5%	22.7%	9.1%
Junior High-School	34.7%	35.9%	17.0%	12.4%
High School	46.8%	37.1%	8.4%	7.7%
University	64.2%	23.3%	5.7%	6.8%

Table 3 Reading skills

Reading skills	Not very good	Fair	Good	Not known
Can understand simple content				
Primary School	0%	64.9%	35.1%	0%
Junior High-School	11.9%	45.5%	39.6%	3.0%
High School	10.0%	43.7%	45.0%	1.3%
University	14.2%	54.5%	30.7%	0.6%
Can read novels, journals, etc.				
Primary School	47.3%	20.4%	28.0%	4.3%
Junior High-School	21.2%	42.4%	27.7%	8.7%
High School	28.3%	46.0%	17.7%	8.0%
University	48.6%	38.0%	10.6%	2.8%

Table 2 to Table 4 show that there is a huge difference between self-evaluation of foreign language skills of primary school, junior high-school, high school students, in comparison with those of university students. More junior high-school students including high school students and university students think that their listening and speaking skills are relatively poor. On the contrary, primary school students

are more optimistic about their listening and speaking skills. A lot of people say they are not very good at listening especially in listening to the TV and news. In terms of reading ability, considerable number of respondents, especially primary school and university students, think that they are able to read the simple content, however, they feel it difficult to read novels and journals.

Table 4 Writing Skills

Writing Skills	Not very good	Fair	Good	Not known
Simple content (writing letters, etc.)				
Primary School	38.0%	39.1%	22.8%	0%
Junior High-School	14.2%	45.3%	36.7%	3.7%
High School	14.3%	50.7%	31.7%	3.3%
University	22.2%	59.3%	18.0%	0.5%
Complex content (writing papers, articles, etc.)				
Primary School	48.4%	29.7%	18.7%	3.3%
Junior High-School	39.0%	37.1%	13.5%	10.4%
High School	48.5%	36.5%	6.4%	8.7%
University	63.9%	22.7%	7.2%	6.2%

Most of the respondents who participated in the questionnaire thought that their skills in writing simple content (writing letters) are better, but consider writing papers are more difficult.

Overall, university students' self-evaluation of their foreign language skills is higher than those students in primary, junior high-school, and high school. Compared to other grades, primary school students are more optimistic about their assessment of foreign language skills.

Although this is only the subjective opinion of students and university students, but the results are similar to some of the previous investigation and teacher evaluations.

The "Study for English within the year of the third grade primary school" pilot project summary report points out that after one year of the English language teaching pilot project, the students in the pilot test of foreign language proficiency scored better, and those with good results reached more than 70%. There is no official assessment for non-foreign language major students and university students, but some fragmented studies also provided the information on the teaching of foreign language for students and university students.

The UK conference and the APOLO English Centre conducted a survey of 20 countries in English teaching in ordinary schools. The results showed that Vietnamese students ranked eighth in their writing and reading skills, but their listening and speaking skills were only ranked 18th and 19th, and their English level were comparable and they reached comparable.

The second level of the 6th level in International Foreign Languages.

The results of the college entrance examination for the 2009-2010 academic year at the Industrial University of Ho Chi Minh City shows that 90% of the students fail to pass the foreign language. Another study, "The level of English of college students in Ho Chi Minh City", showed that non-foreign language majors had a low level of foreign language when they graduated, and the TOEFL scored only 360-370 points, which means that it did not reach the third level of international foreign language (Vu & Vu, 2018).

Having poor foreign language ability, limits individual in finding a job after graduation. An English teacher believes that "university students have poor ability on four aspects which are listening, speaking, writing and reading, their intonation is not standard, lack of vocabulary, and even not grammatically correct".

In response to the question "Have you encountered difficulties in learning a foreign language?", about 475 students and 174 college students responded, mostly experienced difficulties. The higher the grade, the more difficult it is (62% of primary school students, 92% of university students), and more number of males than female respondents reported the existence of difficulties (96% of boys and 82% of girls).

The table below reflects some of the difficulties they have encountered. As we can see from the shown in, the most common

difficulty mentioned by the two groups of students are no opportunity to use (58.7% for students, 76.9% for university students) and

poor teaching methods (33.7% for students, 51.7% for university students).

Table 5 Difficulties encountered in learning foreign languages

Difficulties in learning a foreign language	Students	University
1. too much people in the class		
have	20.2%	35.6%
have not	79.8%	64.4%
2. Don't have time		
have	24.2%	16.1%
have not	75.8%	83.9%
3. High tuition fees		
have	14.5%	32.2%
have not	85.5%	67.8%
4. The teacher's teaching method is not very good		
have	33.7%	51.7%
have not	66.3%	48.3%
5. Do not know learning goals		
have	7.4%	5.2%
have not	92.6%	95.8%
6. No opportunity to use		
have	58.7%	76.9%
have not	41.3%	24.1%

This result is more in line with the evaluation of the ability of foreign language teachers (Vu, 2013). The reason is that teachers' teaching viewpoints still focus on knowledge rather than on training skills. They only provide knowledge for examinations, but do not give students the opportunity to practice their skills.

More university students mentioned the problem of high tuition fees (32.2%) and many people in the class (35.6%). Many people in the class will also affect the learning atmosphere. Some teachers believe that students have to study many subjects, resulting in no time at home to learn foreign languages, so the results

are less than ideal. However, it can be seen from the statistics that they actually do have time to learn foreign language (24.2% of students and 16.1% of university students). Primary and secondary school students spend an average of 1-4 hours a week at home to learn a foreign language, while college students spend 2-6 hours learning a foreign language, which is equivalent to the amount of time spent in foreign language classes. In addition to classroom learning in foreign language classes, many students participate in various foreign language activities, and more than 60% attend tutoring classes, foreign language clubs, and foreign language summer camps. The proportion of pupils participating in the school reached more than 70%.

2. Attitudes of Students and College Students towards Foreign Language Teaching

Some of university foreign language teachers said that the reason why university students have low levels of foreign languages is because they do not focus on learning goal. Most of them think they just need to pass the test and get the high score, after the test they will forget about it (Vu, 2013). However, it can be seen from the statistics table that 92.6% of the students and 95.8% of the university students think that they clearly know the benefits of learning a foreign language. Of the four learning reasons given by us, few people think that learning a foreign language is just an elective course. Primary and junior high school students have sentimental insights. Learning a foreign language is simply because of their likes. High school and University students have different understandings. They can realize the value and function of foreign languages.

Table 6 Reasons for Learning a Foreign Language

Reasons	Because it is an international language	Because Vietnam needs a foreign language	Because it is a required courses	Because I like it
Primary School	22.9%	24.0%	8.3%	44.8%
Junior High-School	11.4%	36.2%	14.2%	32.7%
High School	25.4%	34.1%	19.2%	16.0%
University	20.7%	35.1%	23.9%	13.8%

Primary and junior high-school students like to study with teachers or classmates or in a small group, this preference is relatively rare among high school students and university students. The higher the grade, the more

students like to study or communicate with foreigners. The results show that foreign language teaching should not only pay attention to the content of lectures, but also to the psychological characteristics of students

of different ages and choose suitable teaching methods for them, only in this way can a good teaching effect be achieved.

The answers about the favorite contents and skills are giving us some interesting information. Most people dislike learning pronunciation and translation because they find it difficult and the results are poor. Primary school students prefer to learn listening, reading and writing. High school students and university students like to learn about vocabulary and grammar.

It is inevitable that improving the teaching method should utilize student's innate strong point and interest by emphasizing more on using foreign language skills and knowledge and these

are more favorable for the students as a better learning approach.

Self-assessment of both primary, junior high-school, high school, and university students regarding their (1) foreign language ability, (2) difficulties encountered in foreign language learning, and (3) learning content and skills, all are in line with their level of satisfaction of the school foreign language class. The highest levels of satisfaction were found among primary school students, and the higher the grade, the lower the satisfaction (Table 7). This illustrates the need for high school and university to improve its foreign language teaching methods, to meet the expectations of students and the demands of society.

Table 7 Foreign language teaching satisfaction

Are you satisfied with the foreign language class?	Yes	No
Primary School	94.8%	5.2%
Junior High-School	84.8%	15.2%
High School	59.3%	40.7%
University	57.5%	42.5%

Conclusions

Through the above survey results, we can see the true abilities of students and college students, and we can also see their views on foreign language subjects. For primary and high school students, learning a foreign language is a very interesting thing, but for college students, speaking a foreign language is a task, which leads to each object's awareness and learning

attitude.

Listening and speaking is one of the least effective subjects in foreign language learning. Most foreign language learners in Vietnam rely on many factors, but this is still an open learning environment. Under such circumstances, it is difficult to guarantee that 100% of Vietnamese youth will be able to speak a foreign language fluently by 2018-2020 according to the

foreign language education goal. Therefore, from now on, the Government of Vietnam should take strict measures to give priority to foreign language development, at the same time, take measures to improve the ability of

foreign language teachers and promote foreign language learning for students and students, it is possible that in the future, Vietnam may want to improve the quality of foreign language education.

References

- Hoang, T., Le, T. & Pham, T. (2015). Learning Motivation Students in Hanoi High School, Vietnam Education Forum “Scholars motivation and teachers’ responsibility, facts and measures. *Hanoi National Publication Press*, 12, 90-98. [in Vietnamese]
- Le, T. & Pham, T. (2014). *Vietnam’s student of study engine, national institute for education strategy and curriculum [Special issue]*. Hanoi: Institute of Science and Education. [in Vietnamese]
- Ministry of Education of Vietnam. (2008). *Proposal for foreign language teaching in the National Education System for the period 2008-2020*. Hanoi: Ministry of Education. [in Vietnamese]
- Nguyen, Q. T. (2017). Scientific research and foreign language training in universities. *Scientific Journal*, 16(3), 42-53. [in Vietnamese]
- Vu, A. & Vu, H. (2018). The Foreign Language Ability of University Students. *Journal of Education*, 2(2), 60-63. [in Vietnamese]
- Vu, H. (2012). Vietnam’s foreign language needs and public attitudes towards foreign language education policy. *Journal of Languages*, 45(8), 13-25. [in Vietnamese]
- Vu, H. (2013). A study of Vietnam’s current use of foreign languages. *Journal of Languages*, 46(2), 37-44. [in Vietnamese]
- _____. (2013). Vietnam's foreign language needs and teachers' attitudes towards foreign language education policy. *Journal of Languages*, 46(1), 23-28. [in Vietnamese]



Name and Surname: Pham Thi Hong Tham

Highest Education: Literature Institute of HaNoi Nomal University,
Vie Nam

University or Agency: Literature Institute of Wuhan University, China

Field of Expertise: Education

Address: Room 313, 2nd Building, Wuhan University International Student
Dormitory, Wuchang District, Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China



Name and Surname: Vu Thi Thanh Huong

Highest Education: Ph.D. Linguistics Institute of Torondo University, Canada

University or Agency: Vietnamese Language Institute

Field of Expertise: Language application

Address: Vietnamese Languages Institute, Hanoi, Viet Nam

PANYAPIWAT
INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT

สถาบันการจัดการปัญญาภิวัฒน์