



Research Article

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Integrating Culture in Foreign Language Teaching: Case of Teaching Vietnamese for Foreigners in Vietnam

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Abstract

Cultural integration in foreign language teaching is one of the ways to help learners develop language competence. In foreign language teaching, there have been many successful models of cultural integration. Vietnamese is also a foreign language of interest in some countries. In Vietnam, a cultural integration model in teaching Vietnamese to foreigners has been initially implemented with good results. The program was based on a number of culturally integrated teaching models to help foreigners learn Vietnamese effectively, including such elements as cultural experience (learning to sing folk songs and taking part in plays), and using literary texts (songs, proverbs). The purpose of this article is to report on a study of the effectiveness of this cultural integration program teaching Vietnamese to overseas students at the Thai Nguyen University of Education. The study involved scrutiny of documents, curricula and teaching methods, along with a survey of international students' perceptions of three particular aspects of the program focused on cultural integration. The study also sought to gauge whether the Vietnamese language ability of the international student learners had been improved by engagement in the new program in comparison with student performance from the previous year. While such improvement was evident, the study offers suggestions for further improvement of the program.

Keywords: *cultural integration; teaching Vietnamese; language-culture model, foreign language teaching*

1. Introduction

In the current international integration context, learning a foreign language is an important requirement to increase understanding and performance (Ali et al., 2015). There are many models in the world aiming to enhance the quality of foreign language teaching (Bakirova, 2020; Basal, 2015; Johnson, 2018; Ju & Mei 2018; Sun 2017). The culturally integrated foreign language teaching model has been discussed by several authors (Chen & Yang, 2016; Maijala, 2020; Omer & Ali, 2011). To raise the standard of foreign language instruction, one of the factors to pay attention to is the development of cultural competence in learners (Babae & Yahya, 2014; Cakir, 2006; Li, 2016; Sercu et al., 2004; Torrano-Guillamón et al., 2019). Many works have shown that language is used as a primary means through which culture is expressed (Cakir, 2006), and culture plays a very important role in foreign language teaching (Ali et al., 2015; Li, 2016; Omer & Ali, 2011). Some aspects of culture have been used in teaching foreign languages such as idioms (Liontas, 2017; Orfan, 2020; Yağiz & Izadpanah, 2013)

and forming language skills through literary genres (Babae & Yahya, 2014; Gabriel, 2019).

The reality of teaching foreign languages according to the model of cultural integration shows that the opportunities for culture to appear in foreign language teaching classroom activities are limited. Many teachers are not aware of the role of culture or have not effectively used cultural integration in foreign language teaching. In teaching Vietnamese to foreigners, some methods of improving quality have been noted by researchers, such as using blogs (Ho, 2011) and using videos and crossword puzzles (Nam, 2021). However, the integration of cultural elements through experience or through using literary texts to improve the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing have not been discussed. Teaching Vietnamese as a foreign language for foreigners and overseas Vietnamese children has appeared in a number of countries around the world including Australia, France, Korea and Vietnam (Ho, 2011). In Korea in particular, there are four universities with Vietnamese language or Vietnam study faculties or subjects. In addition to teaching activities, the ways culture is intertwined with learning Vietnamese as a foreign language has also been noticed. Therefore, the issue of improving the quality and effectiveness of such Vietnamese language teaching is an issue that needs to be researched.

It is clear that teaching foreign languages is a bridge connecting people with the world. Cultural integration is one of the effective methods for teaching a second language. In the above studies, the authors have confirmed the role and advantages of cultural factors in foreign language teaching. However, it is essential to identify the advantages of cultural integration in foreign language teaching and to establish what effective teaching models are when integrating culture in teaching Vietnamese to foreigners in Vietnam.

To this end, our article reports on strategies to improve the effectiveness of teaching Vietnamese, imbued with culture, to foreigners, based on the current use of culturally integrated teaching of Vietnamese to foreigners at Thai Nguyen University of Education. The study was carried out on the basis of a qualitative survey of the Vietnamese language learning process of international students at Thai Nguyen University of Education.

2. Literature review

2.1 Integrating culture in foreign language teaching

Currently, we live in a multicultural and multilingual world, so foreign languages play an important role. Foreign languages have opened the door to access to world culture, increased job opportunities, and the ability for people to live in many parts of the world (Johnson, 2018). Therefore, many effective foreign language teaching models have been introduced by researchers in the past 5 years. Bakirova (2020) believes that mastering the terms will help learners understand vocabulary and how to use words in foreign language teaching. It is necessary to implement strategies for using language in foreign language teaching, in which the role of the mother tongue when approaching foreign languages should be promoted (Anh, 2010; Hismanoglu, 2000; Jeffery & van Beuningen, 2020). Given the role of modern technology, the strategies of teaching foreign languages using information technology at universities or combining face-to-face and online foreign language classes have demonstrated high efficiency (Ju & Mei, 2018; Sun, 2017). The 'flipped' classroom model in English teaching also helps students to actively access knowledge through videos, and teachers are only observers and guides (Basal, 2015). The above foreign language teaching models all show positive results, contributing to the improvement of the quality of foreign language teaching.

In improving the quality of foreign language teaching, the role of culture is a factor to which many authors pay attention. Affirming the important part of culture in foreign language teaching, Chen and Yang (2016) argue "Culture as the core in language instruction needs to be integrated in language instructions" (p. 168). Language and culture, especially artistic elements, are inseparable components (Omer & Ali, 2011), where culture represents the conventions and customs that help shape the meanings in language. Therefore, foreign language learning is not only learning new

structures, vocabulary and expressions, but equally importantly a combination of cultural signifiers (Chahak & Basirizadeh, 2013; Qu, 2010). The integration of culture in foreign language teaching helps to form intercultural and multicultural competence in learners for international integration (Amerian & Tajabadi, 2020; Razi & Tekin, 2017). Some authors have affirmed the necessity of developing cultural awareness in foreign language teaching (Cakir, 2006; Kostikova et al., 2018; Sercu, 2004). Some other authors argue that, despite understanding the important role of culture in foreign language teaching, teachers still face many difficulties in integrating culture in foreign language classrooms (Ali et al., 2015; Chen & Yang, 2016). It is also important to acknowledge the role of literary works as important cultural factors contributing to improving the quality of foreign language teaching (Babae & Yahya, 2014; Yağiz & Izadpanah, 2013; Williams, 2005). The research literature has shown that the use of idioms or literary genres in teaching foreign languages has helped learners to understand deeply and use foreign languages well in real life. Thus, cultural content in foreign languages is very important and there are many effective models in the world to help improve the quality of culture-imbedded foreign language teaching. Cultural integration model has been discussed by many authors and has been shown to help foreign language learners approach the language well and effectively. So, it can well be asked: in teaching Vietnamese as a foreign language, is cultural integration an effective model to improve quality? The article analyzes the current approach used in Vietnamese language teaching at Thai Nguyen University of Education to answer this question.

2.2 *Cultural integration in teaching Vietnamese as a foreign language*

Facing the need and the fact that every year numerous foreign students learn Vietnamese both in Vietnam and abroad, the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training promulgated the Vietnamese Language Competency Framework for Foreigners (Ministry of Education and Training, 2015). The competency framework is an important basis for learners to comprehend the content and requirements for each level and self-assess their Vietnamese language ability. This is also an important basis to help teachers build learning programs and organise testing and assessment activities suitable for each level of competence (On et al., 2019). The Competency Framework stipulates that the integration of language and culture teaching is necessary to help learners meet its requirements. Teaching Vietnamese according to the model of cultural integration has been of interest to researchers teaching in both traditional and current settings. Nam (2021) believes that teaching Vietnamese in the online form also needs to pay attention to the cultural factors of learners. Moreover, reading and blogging skills in teaching Vietnamese also need an understanding of cultural background (Ho, 2011). The situations where Vietnamese culture and behaviour can be integrated in the lessons were provided by the author as practical exercises. Some cultural codes related to communication strategies, politeness, respect, suggestions and requests have already been introduced to learners for use when using Vietnamese.

Through the abovementioned articles, the issue of teaching Vietnamese to foreigners has been identified, especially from the perspective of cultural integration. Articles have demonstrated effective models for teaching Vietnamese with cultural considerations in mind. Nevertheless it is important to know how cultural integration in language learning can be achieved through experiential activities or the use of literary works? How does the implementation of models help improve the quality of Vietnamese language teaching for foreigners in Vietnam? Our article clarifies these issues, offering an effective cultural integration model for teaching Vietnamese as a foreign language. We study the content of teaching through specific documents and teaching methods used in teaching Vietnamese at Thai Nguyen University of Education. From this, some models of Vietnamese language teaching through activities are proposed such as: reality experience, dramatisation of literary works, learning to sing songs and playing folk games. This approach is qualitatively surveyed among foreign students studying Vietnamese at Thai Nguyen University of Education.

3. Research Setting

From the fact that learners' needs and requirements for assessing Vietnamese language ability have changed, Thai Nguyen University of Education has made many plans to improve the quality of training, in which attention is paid to the method of integrating cultural education and training in teaching Vietnamese to foreign students. This is reflected in two aspects: cultural integration in teaching materials and curricula and cultural integration through Vietnamese language teaching methods.

3.1 Cultural integration in teaching materials and curricula

In order to guide Vietnamese learners to achieve the standards that meet the Vietnamese Language Curriculum Framework of the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training, Thai Nguyen University of Education has focused on compiling documents to meet the training requirements for students with regard to all four skills: Listening - Speaking - Reading - Writing. Therefore, the university did not use existing textbooks when teaching Vietnamese (for example, *Elementary Vietnamese* by Nguyen [2019]; *Intermediate Vietnamese* by Nguyen [2017]). Regarding teaching materials and curricula, Thai Nguyen University of Education has compiled its own textbooks, outlines, and course outlines so that learners can practise Listening - Speaking - Reading - Writing skills effectively. Specifically, the materials are compiled according to skills and topics related to real life. Cultural integration is evident in the content of the lesson topics. The content of cultural integration in the topics of elementary levels (levels A1 and A2) and intermediate levels (levels B1 and B2) is presented in Appendix A and Appendix B.

In total, there are 26 topics at 4 levels. All topics are compiled according to the skills of Reading - Writing - Speaking - Listening and attention is paid to cultural integration in the teaching content (*Cultural Integration Content* section). Depending on the requirements of each level (elementary or intermediate) and different types of topics, there are appropriate culturally integrated contents. Those are the parts of knowledge that help learners understand deeply about the language, through the culture, living habits, customs and behaviours of Vietnamese people.

For the elementary level (levels A1 and A2), the materials used usually incorporate familiar, frequent and common language structures in order to guide learners to grasp common vocabulary to communicate and use Vietnamese in the context of daily life on familiar topics. This assists students in learning how to utilise simple phrases to fulfill specific communication requirements: introducing oneself as well as other people; providing personal information such as their residence, relatives/friends, and other acquaintances; expressing basic needs such as shopping, asking for directions, jobs. Learners will be able to communicate about simple and familiar situations, such as describing themselves and their surroundings and stating matters of basic need. They will also be able to communicate on simple topics.

For the intermediate levels (levels B1 and B2), the materials focus on social and specialised issues to help learners gain rich knowledge and vocabulary about Vietnam's social and cultural life, economy and politics. They can describe their experiences, events, desires, and briefly explain their reasons, opinions, and plans. In addition, they will be able to deal with the majority of circumstances in which Vietnamese is spoken. Moreover, they will also be able to comprehend the major points of a rather complicated work on a range of themes and speak within their field of expertise. They will also be able to speak with Vietnamese people fluently and spontaneously. Finally, students can write clear and extensive texts on a variety of themes and express their point of view on a topic, highlighting the benefits and drawbacks of various solutions.

In compiling Vietnamese language textbooks and materials for foreigners, the lecturers have integrated the cultural features of the Vietnamese people through the language and grammar models with familiar proverbs and folk songs. Similarly, short fables are often included to help learners understand multi-meaning, synonyms and contexts better, so they can use correct words in

Vietnamese. Some texts on the lifestyle and psychology of Vietnamese people in modern society are also provided as materials for learners to increase their understanding of the reality of current life.

Thus, in the document, the curriculum for teaching Vietnamese to foreigners at Thai Nguyen University of Education, we have selected appropriate topics to achieve the goal of Vietnamese at B2 level or higher. In particular, in the content of topics, the issue of cultural integration has been paid attention. This has brought about a change in the curriculum, contributing to enhancing the standards of Vietnamese language teaching in all four skills: Listening - Speaking - Reading - Writing.

3.2 *Cultural integration in Vietnamese teaching methods*

Cultural integration in Vietnamese language teaching methods is reflected in activities such as: experiencing cultural places, participating in festivals, traditional cultural activities with native people, and theatricalising songs and fables in the classroom.

3.3 *Experiencing cultural sites*

In the plan of language teaching and learning for foreign students of Thai Nguyen University of Education, apart from the class schedule, there is also a schedule of cultural experiences for international students. In each course, international students visit some famous cultural relics of Vietnam and the Thai Nguyen province such as: the Ethnic Culture Village in Hanoi, Ha Long Bay - World Natural Heritage recognized by UNESCO, Tan Cuong Tea Village - Thai Nguyen, Museum of Cultures of Ethnic Groups in Vietnam. The objective is that the learners increase their vocabulary and gain a deeper understanding of Vietnamese culture and of the identities of its people. From practical experiences, foreign students learn about the natural life, geographical area and culture of the ethnic groups in Vietnam; they come to understand and love the land and people of Vietnam through the cultural journeys that they have made. Through these experiential activities, foreign students' cultural knowledge, vocabulary, language and communication skills and social manners have improved markedly. They become more active, open and sociable in activities; become bolder, more confident and willing to practise their language skills during the experience. During and after each field trip, in addition to writing personal reflections, the students also have interesting seminars. These are talks and discussions about the different cultures that they know or have experienced, the similarities and differences of cultures among the foreign students (e.g., Mongolian culture and Laotian culture) and the Vietnamese culture. This has increased learners' understanding, thinking ability about language, and language proficiency.

3.4 *Participating in festivals and cultural activities with native people*

When teaching Vietnamese, we often organise for students to participate in cultural and artistic activities of the university during festivals and celebrations. On occasions such as Bunpimay New Year, Christmas Celebration, New Year's Eve Party, Teachers' Day Celebration, New School Year, among others, foreign students are welcome to participate and express the cultural features of their nations. For example, they demonstrate the vibrant dances by Mongolian students; the rhythm and softness of Lao dancers; the subtle and passionate performances of Nigerian and Mozambican boys and girls, in folk songs or dances of their nations. All have created vibrant colors imbued with the culture of the learners. This cultural playground not only helps them get along, learn more language skills and ability to communicate with native people, but at the same time show their confidence and pride in their own culture. In the *Vietnamese Speech Contest for Lao students in 2019*, a Lao student from Thai Nguyen University of Education won the Special Prize. His contest not only demonstrated good pronunciation, a wide range of vocabulary, and correct grammar, but also demonstrated his understanding of the culture and people of Vietnam and Laos. The rich cultural and historical imprint of the Vietnam-Laos friendship created the persuasiveness of his entry to win this special prize.

In order to help learners engage in experiences about Vietnamese culture and enhance their practical communication skills, the teachers have welcomed overseas students to celebrate Tet with Vietnamese families. For the international students from Laos, Mozambique, Nigeria, and Mongolia, these were very enjoyable experiences. They directly participated in and learned more about the local Eastern culture of the Vietnamese people. Through customs and cultural activities on New Year's Day such as giving lucky money, visiting and wishing everybody a happy new year, worshipping ancestors, and celebrating New Year's Eve, overseas students have a better understanding about the traditional psychology and customs of the Vietnamese people. In particular, the students experienced with great enjoyment the preparation of traditional dishes on the Tet holiday of the Vietnamese people, such as *banh chung*, fried spring rolls, and frozen meat. Many Mongolian and Laotian students were very excited when they were able to participate in making traditional Vietnamese dishes for the first time such as fried spring rolls, *banh chung* on New Year's Day, or *banh troi* and *banh chay* on Cold Foods Day.

3.5 Theatricalising songs and literary works during lessons

International students will acquire Vietnamese effectively when they understand the role and nature of the language and the culture. Lecturers of the university not only focus on linguistic knowledge of the language, but also pay attention to the cultural nature of the language. For example, they introduce games about rhyme, spelling, words and other forms of word puns to help learners understand the cultural meaning of the language. Moreover, the use of intriguing questions to guide learners to recall their personal experiences in the native language and adapt the usage of the language flexibly is also of interest to the lecturers. They convey the cultural experiences for the learners to recall, and the learners can acquire cultural features through their understanding of the local culture individually.

Performing songs: This activity aims to develop communication ability, especially the pronunciation ability of Vietnamese learners. Language in music helps learners improve their ability to receive information, remember and accumulate vocabulary to use. Performing the song stimulates creative and logic thinking, and the imagination of learners. This activity helps to increase the understanding of Vietnamese music, especially traditional Vietnamese music. As a result, more love and attachment to the language and culture of Vietnam can be established. The lecturers select and introduce some popular folk songs, with vibrant and lyrical melodies such as *Trong com*, *Ly ngua o*, or *Ly cay bong* on video. Learners sing along with the available videos, paying attention to the pronunciation, the rhythm, and imitating how to sing with correct intonation. They practise and perform folk songs. Also, they can choose performing costumes suitable to the cultural characteristics of the region to embody and experience the cultural meanings when performing songs in class.

Theatricalising literary works: This is an activity involving approaching literary texts according to the characteristics of theatrical art through scenes and performances of some parts from literary works. Performance of literary works is one of the forms of teaching Literature in high schools. This form aims to diversify the teaching of literary works, motivating students to love literature. Here, students can directly participate in many tasks such as: selecting works that can be staged; making the adaptation of that literary work into a script; practising role-playing, acting, performing on stage, etc. These activities aim to develop skills in using Vietnamese, especially Listening - Speaking skills. They help stimulate learners' imagination, promoting creativity in the process of language perception and practice. In addition, dramatisation helps to enhance understanding of literature and art, promoting learners' empathy for and immersion in Vietnamese language and culture.

The lecturers choose a number of fables that are suitable for the topics in the teaching content for learners to perform. For example, when learning about the topic of *Education*, students can role play the characters from the story *The Fortune Tellers observing elephants (Thay boi xem voi)* and perform the fable in the classroom. When studying the topic of *Culture*, students can perform a part from the legend of *Banh Chung and Banh Giay* to understand the customs and historical significance

of the Vietnamese people's custom of offering *banh chung* on New Year's Day.

In addition, in order to enhance cultural knowledge and common communication, a number of Vietnamese 2nd and 3rd year volunteer students were sent to support international students. They are enthusiastic students with good cultural knowledge of Vietnamese. They often check lessons and practise reading and pronunciation with foreign students, helping them to overcome difficulties in communication, homework and other activities. This creates a feeling of intimacy and closeness with foreign students, helping them to be proactive and confident in living and studying when living far away from home.

International students will learn Vietnamese effectively when they are introduced, exposed to social and cultural events and experience the cultural values expressed in Vietnamese. Lecturers should organise and encourage students to participate in community activities of native peoples. This is an effective language acquisition channel because it is better to have access to the culture nurtured and developed through personal living experience and recognition and knowledge of that culture. Students should have the opportunity to talk to people living in the community, use the language they are learning, and watch movies, videos and images related to the contemporary culture of that community. Cultural receptions about family life, some cultural traditions of the community, socio-political situations and current issues of the community also feature in the teaching orientation of Thai Nguyen University of Education.

4. Methods

The task we set out to accomplish for our investigation was to find out the current situation regarding a useful cultural integration model in Vietnamese language teaching at Thai Nguyen University of Education and thereby build an effective integrated model in Vietnamese language teaching for foreigners to improve the quality of Vietnamese language training. To achieve this, we studied the theory of the culturally integrated teaching model, built some Vietnamese teaching situations by combining the above theoretical research results and proposing some examples (teaching scenarios) suitable for practicing Vietnamese language and engaging with its culture in teaching Vietnamese to foreign students.

Specifically, we proposed culturally integrated teaching models that are reflected in the documents, curriculum and methods of teaching Vietnamese language.

In the model of cultural integration in the document, we used documents that were compiled with cultural elements in the content of teaching topics when teaching *Elementary Vietnamese* (levels A1 and A2) and *Intermediate Vietnamese* (levels B1 and B2). This model is aimed at learners meeting the requirements of level B2 of Vietnamese. Also, achieving the B2 level is a mandatory requirement for foreign students who want to study at universities in Vietnam.

In the model of cultural integration in teaching methods, we developed some situations as aimed at: *Experiencing cultural places; Participating in festivals and cultural activities with local people; Theatricalisation of songs and literary works in lessons*. This helps learners improve their efficiency and skills in using Vietnamese to meet the B2 standard of Vietnamese language ability.

We tested these models by using them in lessons for 90 foreign students from Laos and Mongolia studying at Thai Nguyen University of Education. Then, we took a poll on the level of satisfaction with those models. After participating in Vietnamese lessons using culturally integrated teaching models, international students answered a questionnaire to evaluate the effectiveness of the lesson and the positive perception of learners. Finally, we calculated statistics and made comments on the attitudes and evaluations of the learners. The results of the survey would be the basis for discussion and suggestions on some cultural integration measures in teaching Vietnamese in order to enhance the standards of Vietnamese language teaching for foreigners.

The results of the Vietnamese language proficiency test of these international students (in 2021) were also data for us to compare with the results of the previous year (2020) when the cultural integration model was not used in teaching Vietnamese. On that basis, we initially assessed the

impacts and effectiveness or obstacles (if any) in using the cultural integration model in teaching Vietnamese to foreigners in Vietnam.

From the results of implementing the cultural integration model in teaching Vietnamese to foreigners, we make appropriate recommendations for teaching Vietnamese as a foreign language in order to improve the quality of Vietnamese language training for foreigners in the current context of integration and internationalisation.

5. Results

When teaching Vietnamese to foreign students, we used documents and textbooks developed for the purpose of cultural integration and applying cultural integration methods to teach Vietnamese to foreign students; the results were as follows.

Using culturally integrated textbooks and materials, learners became more receptive to Vietnamese culture through the integration of topics. The satisfaction level of learners about the topics was high. Although it was argued that some topics did not follow the actual requirements, in general, the topics were integrated with cultural elements to help learners understand deeply about Vietnamese culture. Lexical and cultural resources were expanded. Learners had a deeper understanding of the topics and practised the skills of Listening - Speaking - Reading and Writing more effectively. However, the number of readings in the document was still large, and learners did not fully understand the content. Some topics had difficult content, which is not easy for learners to approach.

Table 1: Receptive levels of topics in Vietnamese teaching materials

| No. | Topic | Receptive level | | | |
|----------|--------------------------------------|--------------------|------------|-------------------------|------------|
| | | Easy to understand | | Difficult to understand | |
| | | Number | Percentage | Number | Percentage |
| A1 level | | | | | |
| 1 | Introducing and making acquaintances | 75 | 83.3% | 15 | 16.7% |
| 2 | Family | 73 | 81.1% | 17 | 18.9% |
| 3 | Occupation | 70 | 77.8% | 20 | 22.2% |
| 4 | Housing and objects | 72 | 80.0% | 18 | 20.0% |
| 5 | Traffic | 67 | 74.4% | 23 | 25.6% |
| 6 | Shopping | 73 | 81.1% | 17 | 18.9% |
| 7 | Eating and drinking | 68 | 75.6% | 22 | 24.4% |
| A2 level | | | | | |
| 8 | Animals and plants | 65 | 72.2% | 25 | 27.8% |
| 9 | Time | 72 | 80.0% | 18 | 20.0% |
| 10 | Weather | 63 | 70.0% | 27 | 30.0% |
| 11 | Costumes | 70 | 77.8% | 20 | 22.2% |
| 12 | Hobbies and habits | 68 | 75.6% | 22 | 24.4% |
| 13 | Health | 52 | 57.8% | 38 | 42.2% |
| 14 | Sports | 64 | 71.1% | 26 | 28.9% |
| B1 level | | | | | |
| 15 | Beauty spots | 60 | 66.7% | 30 | 33.3% |
| 16 | Tourism | 58 | 64.5% | 32 | 35.5% |
| 17 | Service | 38 | 42.2% | 52 | 57.8% |
| 18 | Environment | 43 | 47.8% | 47 | 52.2% |
| 19 | Education | 52 | 57.8% | 38 | 42.2% |
| 20 | Jobs | 50 | 55.6% | 40 | 44.4% |
| B2 level | | | | | |
| 21 | Economy | 40 | 44.4% | 50 | 55.6% |
| 22 | Culture | 42 | 46.7% | 48 | 53.3% |
| 23 | Arts | 45 | 50.0% | 45 | 50.0% |
| 24 | Laws | 28 | 31.1% | 62 | 68.9% |
| 25 | Mass media | 38 | 42.2% | 52 | 57.8% |
| 26 | Science | 30 | 33.3% | 60 | 66.7% |

Regarding the 26 topics, the percentage of learners assessing the materials as easy to understand is quite high mainly for topics of levels A1 and A2 (topics 1 to 14). In topics of levels B1 and B2 (topics 15 to 26), the rate is lower, mainly from 40-50%, and there are topics that only about 30% of learners consider easy to understand (topic 24: Law, topic 26: Science). Topics such as science, law, economy, services, Mass media, and environment are considered difficult to understand. These are also topics that require learners to have a good Vietnamese vocabulary and understand Vietnamese culture. Thus, the statistical results show that the compiled materials have integrated cultural elements in the topics to help learners consolidate and practice and expand their vocabulary and how to use Vietnamese. Some topics are well absorbed and easy to understand, while some are difficult to understand due to the large and varied vocabulary, and incomplete understanding of the local cultural factors. Therefore, in the process of compiling documents, teachers need to pay attention to adjust some topics at levels B1, B2 to be more suitable for learners.

Regarding the implementation of the culturally integrated methods, most of the international students were interested in these methods. However, the level of interest and conditions for implementing these methods were not the same in learners.

Table 2: Level of interest in Vietnamese teaching methods

| No. | Method | Level of interest | | | |
|-----|--|-------------------|------------|---------|------------|
| | | Like | | Dislike | |
| | | Number | Percentage | Number | Percentage |
| 1 | Experiencing cultural places; | 85 | 94.4% | 5 | 5.6% |
| 2 | Participating in festivals and cultural activities with local people | 76 | 84.4% | 14 | 15.6% |
| 3 | Theatricalisation of songs and literary works in lessons | 68 | 75.6% | 22 | 24.4% |

The survey results show that all three methods were very interesting to learners. However, cultural experience activities were the most favorite among learners (accounting for 94.4%). This is an activity that helps learners to gain practical experience, visit places and enhance their ability to communicate in reality, so they were really interested in it. A small number of people did not like it (with 5/90 people, accounting for 5.6%) due to concerns about financial difficulties when participating in experiential activities. Participation in festivals and cultural activities with local people also attracted a high number of learners' interest, with 76/90 people liking it (accounting for 84.4%). In this activity, learners can directly participate in cultural activities with Vietnamese people such as festivals, contests, and cultural exchanges. Moreover, learners can participate in the Lunar New Year celebration, staying with Vietnamese families during Tet, and making traditional cakes. This method helps them to practise speaking skills and expand Vietnamese vocabulary. However, this activity is not popular and often periodic, so 14 international students, accounting for 15.6%, were not able to participate and were not interested in it. A fairly common method that teachers often use in direct classroom lessons is the theatricalisation of songs and literary works, such as organising students to perform songs or acting out plays. This activity made many learners very excited; they were organized into groups and performed quite actively. With this method, students can interact and exchange a lot, practise speaking skills and use words, and understand Vietnamese traditional literature. The percentage of learners who love this activity is 75.6% (68/90 people). Some learners did not like it because this activity cannot be done by all learners, only performed by some groups in the class. Moreover, this method requires learners to have a talent for singing or acting, so some students are not confident or ready to participate.

In 2021, with the model of cultural integration in teaching Vietnamese to foreigners, the quality of Vietnamese language training at Thai Nguyen University of Education was improved (compared to that of 2020), meeting the curriculum framework set by the Ministry of Education and Training. Specifically, through the exam results of the 2 years 2020 and 2021, with the old model taught in the former year, the cultural integration model taught in the latter one, many more students were able to

attain B2, C1, C2 levels in 2021. The percentage of students who do not meet the standards decreased by more than 50%. Please see the chart below:

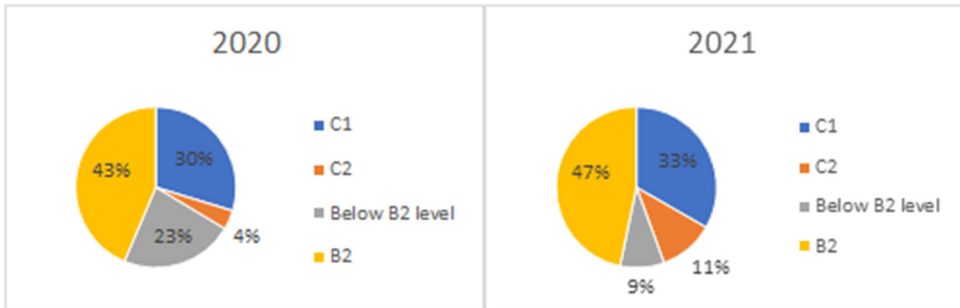


Figure 1: Results of the test assessing Vietnamese language ability of international students studying Vietnamese at Thai Nguyen University of Education

In the Vietnamese language proficiency test according to the Vietnamese Language Competency Framework for foreigners (on August 18-19 at Thai Nguyen University of Education), the percentage of overseas students achieving B2 level or higher accounted for up to 91.1% (in which: C1 is 33.3%, C2 is 11.1% and B2 is 46.7%). This rate is higher than that of 2020. The percentage of students who did not achieve B2 level in 2021 was only 8.9%, much lower than that in 2020 (22.8%). This shows that the quality of Vietnamese language training in 2021 had improved. Clearly, cultural integration in teaching Vietnamese as a foreign language for foreign students through documents and methods helped improve the quality of learners' performance.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

Through the research results, it can be seen that, first of all, documents and textbooks need to be compiled more thoroughly. Although they have been formulated to contribute to cultural integration and focused on developing Reading - Writing - Speaking - Listening skills, they have not met the needs of learners. In particular, the problem of learning materials for online learning has not been solved. This means that those who compile documents and textbooks should pay attention to expanding the learning method to suit various students and learning forms, and especially to meet the online learning requirements of learners in many parts of the world. The use of software materials, pictures, graphics, and videos is limited and needs to be configured with more diverse, socio-culturally representative, interactive and engaging activities. This finding is consistent with that of Baleghizadeh and Amiri Shayesteh (2020) who analysed the cultural representations of three English second language grammar textbooks and found out that there was a lack of balance of literature, classical music, history and society's norms.

In terms of teaching methods, these also need to be adjusted as the prevalent teaching method is still more about activities to be carried out individually. Three methods are used in the proposed model, namely, experiencing cultural sites and participating in festivals, cultural activities with local people, and theatricalisation of songs and literary works (including song performances, plays), yet they are still not commonly used. These activities are mainly held only a few times in a course and are not fixed and annual. Therefore, increasing use of communication and language skills is still not common. Teachers use more presentations than interactive activities. Clearly, these findings are rather disappointing. A study by Maijala (2020) shows that teachers must be aware of the importance of cultural experience in teaching a foreign language. They need to promote interaction and cultural activities in their classrooms. It is necessary to strengthen group activities, especially the

implementation of group productions. This will help learners have more opportunities to experience when participating in a group.

The focus on the local culture of Vietnam in teaching foreign languages is not only an advantage but also a disadvantage for learners when they do not understand much about Vietnamese culture. Therefore, teachers should be more flexible in teaching methods, paying greater attention to the connection between the target culture (Vietnamese culture) and the source culture (the student's culture) in order to promote cultural knowledge and learner interaction.

Language always happens in a real context. Many words and phrases must be placed in the actual cultural context to be fully understood. If a real context is given, the language will be grasped naturally. Therefore, we should provide international students with a real context for the Vietnamese language. That is a key strategy in the cultural integration in teaching Vietnamese to foreigners. Through the findings from the survey at Thai Nguyen University of Education, we would like to draw some conclusions as follows.

Firstly, learning materials and curricula need to be compiled in accordance with the training of skills, which means that they should be suitable for the receptive psychology of modern learners. Materials for foreign language education in the twenty-first century must be appropriate. It is feasible to create materials that can be used in combined online and face-to-face learning to meet the demands of a wide range of students. In addition, the language department can assist lecturers teaching similar language courses in developing a database that comprises numerous cultural goods and authentic resources, to which lecturers can contribute and on which they can draw. Using such a database, educators may exchange instructional resources and save time. It is also essential to develop documents and curriculum in the direction of cultural integration in all four language skills: Listening - Speaking - Reading - Writing. This system of resources must include both written documents and videos, pictures, photos about the culture, lifestyle and activities of the Vietnamese people.

Secondly, teaching methods need to be changed favouring practical experiences and diversifying forms of learning. When having practical experiences, learners' lexical resources will be expanded. Learners will easily grasp words, phrases and word usage in context. We can organise cultural experiential learning or song performance during class. In addition to the applications of technology, technology-enabled videos also need to be used to access more authentic and diverse teaching/learning resources. For examples, lecturers can use short videos for students to watch and discuss, have students comment on the language, incentivising them to make cultural observations, and compare the content of the video with reality in their home country. We can divide students into groups to discuss and compare the cultural differences between Vietnamese culture and their cultures (e.g., the cultures of Laos, Mongolia). In the same situation, how would they handle it? From there, learners can be helped to understand the vocabulary in the context and expand related words and phrases, thereby improving their use of words.

Thirdly, in integrated teaching, teachers need to pay attention to the way of connecting cultural products and patterns with cultural perspectives, thereby suggesting more practical ways of cultural integration and helping improve the quality of teaching Vietnamese as a foreign language not only in Vietnam but also in nations where Vietnamese is introduced as a second language. This can help to add some theoretical and practical issues in foreign language teaching in general and Vietnamese in particular in the direction of effective cultural integration.

Finally, in teaching Vietnamese to foreigners, it is also necessary to strengthen academic exchanges and Vietnamese teaching methods among countries where Vietnamese is taught as a second language, thereby creating chances for lecturers to talk about and exchange experiences. Thus, as they share their experiences, Vietnamese language teachers can benefit from professionals, colleagues and peers to improve their teaching ability and better support their learners.

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Appendix A: Content of cultural integration in Elementary Vietnamese (A1 and A2)

| Level | Skills | Topic | Cultural integration content |
|-------|--|--------------------------------------|--|
| A1 | Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing skills of A1 level | Introducing and making acquaintances | Providing learners with a system of words and templates for greeting, self-introducing about themselves and their families and getting acquaintances with simple and commonly used sentences For example, in Vietnamese, there are many different ways of addressing the second person pronouns: <i>anh, bạn</i> ... depending on the speaker's age, relationship and attitude towards the listener, such as: + <i>ông, bà</i> → used to call the elderly or respectful when socializing; + <i>cô, chú</i> → used to call people of middle age; + <i>anh, chị</i> → used to call young people who are older than the speaker. In the teaching materials, dialogues with many different roles are introduced in different contexts so that learners can understand the usage and attitudes of the participants in the communication. |
| | | Family | Providing learners with a vocabulary system about family and relationships in Vietnamese families, and how to use common questions and answers about family and relatives in Vietnam. Example: Dialogues about relationships in the Vietnamese family: a typically traditional family is a three-generation family consisting of grandparents, parents and children. Today's family is a family of two generations, husband and wife and two children. Using fairy tales to talk about family love such as: <i>Tích Chu</i> |
| | | Occupation | Introducing some popular occupations in Vietnamese society and around the world. Vocabulary system about occupation and some common sentence patterns to introduce and ask questions about occupation. Example: the common occupations in Vietnam are: teacher, doctor, engineer, etc. Respect for different occupation and sense of learning to have a good career. |
| | | Housing and objects | Introducing the vocabulary system about houses and common objects in daily life. Some sample questions about housing, common objects in practice. Example: Using materials and images about popular houses in Vietnam. Housing in Vietnam is mainly in the countryside, in harmony with nature. Houses often have yards and gardens. Vietnamese people like spacious houses, fresh air and in harmony with nature. |
| | | Traffic | Introducing some popular means of transport in life and some sample questions about direction, vehicles, basic regulations when participating in traffic. The curriculum uses introductory materials on traffic realities in Vietnam; a number of regulations on Vietnam's traffic law; Common questions for directions in practice. Example: <i>Could you please tell me the way to Thai Nguyen University of Education?</i> |
| | | Shopping | Introduction to the vocabulary system and questions about purchasing items related to living, eating, wearing, etc. Example: <i>Where do you usually go to when shopping in Vietnam? Supermarket, big market or small market (students' market)? What items are usually sold? Where are they sold?</i> |
| | | Eating and drinking | Introducing popular dishes and specialties in Vietnam; Vietnamese eating habits. For example, Vietnamese people often use chopsticks to eat. The main meals of Vietnamese people are lunch and dinner and the main dishes are rice, meat and vegetables or soup. Vietnamese people focus on nutrition for the body, often eating a lot of vegetables and fruits. |

| Level | Skills | Topic | Cultural integration content |
|-------|--|--------------------|---|
| A2 | Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing skills of A2 level | Animals and plants | Introducing to the world of animals and plants with vocabulary and grammatical structures, and real conversation situations related to animals and plants. For example, the textbook uses texts describing common domestic animals of the Vietnamese people such as buffalo, cow, chicken, pig, dog, cat, etc.; Some flowers typical for Tet are often displayed in the house during Tet holidays such as peach blossom, apricot blossom, which represent luck and family reunion. |
| | | Time | Introducing vocabulary to describe time, sample questions about time, questions and answers about time: how to measure time, words about time: yesterday, tomorrow, this month, which year, etc. Introducing how to measure time in lunar months. Vietnamese people use two types of calendars, lunar and solar. The lunar calendar is according to the moon, the solar calendar is according to the calendar of Western countries. |
| | | Weather | Vocabulary system describing the weather, sample questions about weather, seasons of the year and situations using words, sample sentences related to asking and answering about weather information in reality. For example: In Vietnam, the weather is divided into four seasons: spring, summer, autumn and winter. Each season has a typical weather pattern with different climates and activities. Foreigners need to know these to adapt when coming to Vietnam. |
| | | Costumes | Vocabulary system about costumes, samples of questions and answers about costumes and real conversation situations related to questions and answers about costumes in reality. Example: Introducing students to the <i>áo dài</i> , which is the traditional costume of the Vietnamese people. Costume styles and wearing habits of Vietnamese people: dress modestly and politely when going out, going to work or school, etc. |
| | | Hobbies and habits | Vocabulary system about habits and hobbies such as love, hate, happy, and sad. Learners should be able to carry out conversations, communicate, read, understand and write some simple sentences describing habits and interests of themselves and those around them. For example, they are provided with data about Vietnamese people's daily habits of eating, living, and communicating in the family and in society. |
| | | Health | Vocabulary system about health, related diseases, how to take care of the body, nutrition for good health; Samples of simple and complex sentences describing health. For example, learners are provided with dialogues and materials about Vietnamese people's healthy habits. Some taboos or procedures when visiting sick people or newborn babies. |
| | | Sports | Introducing familiar and popular sports and how to ask questions. For example, the textbook provides images of Vietnamese people's mass sports activities in schools, villages, and neighbourhoods. Vietnamese people often have the habit of jogging and getting up early to exercise. |

Appendix B: Contents of materials in *Intermediate Vietnamese* (B1 and B2)

| Level | Skills | Topics | Cultural integration content |
|-------|--|--------------|--|
| B1 | Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing skills of B1 level | Beauty spots | Introducing some typical landscapes of Vietnam in different regions throughout the country. Learners should be able to use some simple and complex sentences to describe personal feelings about famous landscapes of Vietnam. For example, they are provided with data about Ha Long Bay - a famous scenic spot of Vietnam that has been recognized by UNESCO as a world heritage site. Thereby, learners understand more deeply about how rich and beautiful lands and seas of Vietnam are. |
| | | Tourism | Learners are provided with documents and information about famous tourist destinations in Vietnam and ways and means of traveling in Vietnam. For example, in Vietnam, there are many tourist attractions associated with spirituality and traditional culture of Vietnam such as ecotourism and spiritual tourism. |
| | | Service | Providing some sample sentences about business and services in Vietnam such as hotels and restaurants; Advantages and disadvantages that tourists may encounter when using some services such as banking or post office, etc. For example, learners will be supported when accessing and using some popular services through videos introducing actual services in Vietnam. |
| | | Environment | Providing materials on the environments in cities and countryside of Vietnam, thereby allowing learners to assess the causes of environmental pollution. Learners should be able to write about their feelings about the problems of environmental pollution; ways to protect the environment to avoid affecting human life. For example, in Vietnam, the air is usually fresh in rural environments; The environment in urban areas is heavily polluted from traffic and factory emissions. |
| | | Education | Introducing the education system of Vietnam and some countries around the world. Achievements of Vietnamese education. Governmental education policies. For example, providing images of activities, school levels, and educational models of Vietnam for learners to perceive, evaluate and compare with those of their own country or other countries. |
| | | Jobs | Providing pictures and documents about jobs in Vietnam and some countries around the world. Vietnam's advantage of abundant young workers. For example, providing data about the working environment in Vietnam with some advantages and disadvantages for learners to evaluate, identify and give comments. |

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|----|--|------------|--|
| B2 | Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing skills of B2 level | Economy | Providing some data on economic sectors, current reality, development and limitations of fundamental economic sectors in Vietnam and the world. Some views and essays on Vietnam's economy are given for learners to express their views, compare and evaluate with the economy of other countries. Example: Providing a number of articles on the achievements and difficulties of the Vietnamese economy for learners to discuss, compare and evaluate. |
| | | Culture | Providing a number of documents, specific situations about the culture, customs and traditions of Vietnam and some typical countries. Ways of expressing opinions, feelings, and evaluations about a country's clothing, customs, food, or language, etc. Example: Introducing Vietnamese language, Vietnamese cultural characteristics through videos and illustrations for learners to compare, comment and evaluate. |
| | | Arts | Providing a number of texts, specific situations about some popular art forms such as: music, painting, cinema, traditional culture of Vietnam and the world. Learners should be able to give opinions, assess the aesthetic value of art and criticize the offensive phenomenon. Example: Introducing Vietnam's water puppetry art through video; explaining the rice culture where water puppetry is created. |
| | | Laws | Providing a number of documents, specific situations related to laws and the implementation of legal regulations in Vietnam. Learners should be able to express views on the awareness and compliance with the law in Vietnam and some other countries. Example: Using essays and real-life situations via video to introduce law enforcement in Vietnam. |
| | | Mass media | Providing a number of documents, real-life situations on communication, press and advertising activities in social life in Vietnam. Learners should be able to express opinions and attitudes about the harmful effects and benefits of the media or the internet on people's lives in society. Example: Providing essays for learners to grasp the issue of mass media and social media in Vietnam. Habits of Internet using of Vietnamese people. |
| | | Science | Providing a number of texts, practical situations on science, achievements of science and technology and the application of science in real life in Vietnam. Learners should be able to express their views and attitudes towards the development of science and the two-way impacts of science on social life. Example: Using data reflecting the application of science and technology in farming and animal raising towards green technology in Vietnam. |