

**TEACHING VIETNAMESE READING SKILLS TO FOREIGNERS AT THAI NGUYEN
UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION (THAI NGUYEN UNIVERSITY, VIETNAM):
CURRENT SITUATION AND SOLUTIONS**

Dr. Ngo Thi Thanh Nga

Thai Nguyen University of Education, Vietnam

<https://doi.org/10.54922/IJEHSS.2025.1047>

Received: 15 June 2025/Published: 22 July 2025

ABSTRACT

To read Vietnamese well, especially for advanced texts, recognizing words (homophones, synonyms, Sino-Vietnamese, etc.), equivalent expressions, etc. in the reading text is an important issue. Through the method of surveying, analyzing and synthesizing the survey results with the subject of international students studying Vietnamese at Thai Nguyen University of Education, the article mentions the current situation of teaching and learning Vietnamese Reading skills for foreigners at Thai Nguyen University of Education as well as proposing some solutions to teach this skill better. The survey results show that vocabulary and understanding clearly and specifically the meaning of words, homonyms, Sino-Vietnamese words in the Vietnamese vocabulary system, etc. are always difficult challenges for international students. Therefore, with advanced texts, reading comprehension becomes even more difficult. From this reality, the article has proposed some solutions so that international students can read and understand texts well, practice well the types of exercises to effectively serve the Vietnamese proficiency test as well as study in Vietnam after completing the Vietnamese preparatory course.

Keywords: Vietnamese, method, Reading skill, foreigners, effective.

1. INTRODUCTION

Currently, teaching Vietnamese to foreigners in general is of interest to many people. Therefore, there are many research articles that mention this issue such as: Some techniques to help teach Vietnamese effectively to foreigners (2021) by Tran Thi Hai Yen, Secrets to teaching Vietnamese to foreigners effectively (2014) by Hoang Ha, ... However, the articles often do not pay attention to any specific skills but often analyze the difficulties of learning Vietnamese such as pronunciation, tones, grammar, ... and give many effective teaching and learning solutions such as learning through reading books, newspapers, watching youtube, tutoring pictures, field trips, ... Some articles mention Reading skills but they are about how to learn Reading skills effectively online (via Zoom) such as the article: Some effectiveness of Vietnamese reading comprehension skills... for foreigners from online teaching methods via Zoom application by author Ngo Thi Khai Nguyen. Thus, there are still many gaps in research on how to effectively teach Reading skills. In the process of teaching and observing the difficulties of international students when learning Vietnamese, we have found that correctly understanding words and equivalent expressions, especially in advanced texts, is one of the difficulties that international students often encounter. From this reality, the article aims to answer the following research question: How can international students learn Vietnamese and recognize words (such as homonyms, synonyms, Sino-Vietnamese

words, etc.) or equivalent expressions at different reading comprehension levels, especially in long and difficult texts? This is also the goal of the article.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

To conduct this article, the author used two basic methods: survey and synthesis analysis. We conducted a survey on 48 international students from 8 countries (Laos, Mongolia, China, Taiwan, Korea, Mozambique, Mexico and Finland) in the Vietnamese language preparatory program at Thai Nguyen University of Education on issues such as: the suitability of the content of the Reading skills program, the most difficult reading comprehension passages in the textbook, difficult questions in the correct choice exercises (basic form of the assessment test), difficulties and causes of difficulties when learning Vietnamese, teaching methods and issues that international students want teachers to improve when teaching Reading skills. These are general survey contents about Reading skills. From the survey contents received, we analyzed the data and evaluated the results. From there, propose solutions to improve the quality of teaching and learning Vietnamese Reading skills for foreigners at the University of Education - Thai Nguyen University and further, better teaching at facilities outside the school.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. *Opinions on the content of the Vietnamese Reading skills textbook for foreigners from level A1 to B2.*

Table 1. Opinions on the content of the Vietnamese Reading skills textbook for foreigners

No	Content	Opinion	Percentage
1	Very suitable	8	16,67%
2	Suitable	27	56,25%
3	Fairly suitable	12	25%
4	Not suitable	1	2,1%

Thus, regarding the suitability of the textbook content, the majority of international students have the opinion that the content of the Reading textbook is quite suitable, suitable and very suitable with a rate of 97.8%. Regarding this issue, there is only 1 international student who thinks it is not suitable (and this is an international student of Chinese nationality, belonging to class B). Thus, it can be seen that, in general, the content of the Reading textbook basically meets the level of learners.

3.2. *Opinions of international students on the most difficult type of exercise in the Vietnamese Reading Skills for Foreigners textbook from A1 to B2 (especially B1 and B2) (In this survey, international students can choose multiple options).*

Table 2. Opinions of international students on the most difficult type of exercise in the Vietnamese Reading Skills for Foreigners textbook

No	Content	Opinion	Percentage
1	Answer the question	27	56,25%
2	Fill in the appropriate word in the blank	22	45,8%
3	Match the term with the appropriate explanation	7	14,6%
4	Choose the correct option	0	0%
5	Choose the True/False sentence compared to the information in the lesson	5	10,4%

In this survey, we found that the type of exercise that fills in the blank is one of the most difficult types of exercise for learners (45.8%). Filling in the appropriate word in the blank requires the learner to understand the word correctly and the expressions surrounding the word's position (context). This is the basis for the instructor to have specific ways of teaching and training skills for the learner in this type of exercise in the most effective way.

3.3. Opinions on the most difficult type of question in the "choose the correct answer" type of exercise (the basic type of Vietnamese proficiency test) in the Vietnamese Reading skills textbook for foreigners from level A1 to B2 (especially level B1 and B2) (In this survey, international students can choose multiple options).

Table 3. Opinions on the most difficult type of question in the correct choice exercise

No	Content	Opinion	Percentage
1	Find the main content of the text	12	25%
2	Find the main idea of a paragraph in the text	6	28,8%
3	Find replacement words	15	31,25%
4	Meaning of words in the text	16	33,3%
5	Author's point of view in the text	18	37,5%
6	Put the sentence in the appropriate position (A, B, C, D)	7	14,59%

In this survey, we found that the most difficult type of question in the correct choice exercise (the basic type of Vietnamese proficiency test) in the Vietnamese Reading skills textbook for foreigners from level (especially level B1 and B2) for international students are respectively: Author's point of view in the text, find the meaning of words in the text, find replacement words, find content main idea of a text, put sentences in the right position (A, B, C, D) and find the main idea of a paragraph in the text. Thus, the type of questions related to vocabulary understanding (finding replacement words and the meaning of words in the text) are the two types of questions that international students find most difficult (accounting for 31.25% and 33.3%, respectively). From teaching practice, these difficulties need to be given due attention.

3.4. Opinions on difficulties in learning Vietnamese Reading skills

(In this survey, international students gave their opinions through personal answers).

Through synthesis, we found that international students found it most difficult to learn Vietnamese Reading skills because they had a small vocabulary and did not really understand the words (24 opinions, accounting for 50%). In addition, there were also some opinions that the learning speed was fast so they did not fully understand the lesson (5 opinions, accounting for 10.4%), the text was long (5 opinions, accounting for 10.4%) and the sentence structure at B1 level, especially B2, was difficult (9 opinions, accounting for 18.75%). In addition, some international students found it difficult to find the correct answer for some types of questions in the exercise section of choosing the correct answer such as: finding replacement words, meaning of verbs and placing sentences in the appropriate position (3 opinions, accounting for 6.25%). However, some international students said that they had no difficulty learning Reading skills (8 opinions, accounting for 16.67%) and few difficulties (2 opinions, accounting for 4.2%).

From the personal answers of international students about the difficulties they encountered when learning Reading skills, we realized that equipping vocabulary and explaining the meaning of words are some of the important issues when teaching this skill so that students can read and understand the text correctly.

3.5. Opinions on the causes of difficulties in learning Reading skills

(In this survey, international students can choose multiple options).

Table 4. Opinions on the causes of difficulties in learning Reading skills

No	Content	Opinion	Percentage
1	Not understanding the types of exercises	15	31,25%
2	Not understanding the questions	9	18,75%
3	Long and difficult reading texts	30	62,5%
4	Not understanding the Reading skills	5	10,4%
5	Low vocabulary	13	27,1%

In this survey, we found that the main reason why international students find it difficult to learn Vietnamese Reading skills is because of long and difficult texts (62.5%). In addition, the causes are not understanding the types of exercises, low vocabulary, not understanding the questions and not understanding the Reading skills. This shows that advanced texts are often long and difficult. If learners do not have an understanding of vocabulary (especially specialized terms or Sino-Vietnamese words), understanding the text and practicing reading advanced texts as well as doing exercises (especially exercises in the Vietnamese proficiency test for Reading skills as required by the Ministry of Education and Training) will encounter many difficulties. 3.6. Opinions on what teachers need to improve to teach Reading skills better (in this survey, international students give their opinions through personal answers).

Through the synthesis, we found that, in addition to the international students who felt that the teachers taught well and did not need to improve anything when teaching Vietnamese Reading skills (22 opinions, accounting for 45.8%) or did not know what the teachers needed to improve (2 opinions, accounting for 4.2%), other international students wanted the teachers who taught Reading skills to introduce and expand the vocabulary system of the lesson and explain more thoroughly (15 opinions, accounting for 31.25%), improve the ability to interact with learners (2 opinions, accounting for 4.2%), explain important grammar phenomena that appear in the reading (3 opinions, accounting for 6.25%), add exercises and practice (4 opinions, accounting for 8.3%),

use more technology (1 opinion, accounting for 2.1%), etc. Thus, among the opinions suggesting that teachers need to improve to better teach Reading skills, the opinion about vocabulary still accounts for the majority (31.25%). This requires teachers to make adjustments and have appropriate solutions to help learners read and understand texts better and develop their reading comprehension skills in the future.

4. PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

4.1. For lecturers

First: One of the goals of the Vietnamese language training program is for learners to take the competency test and obtain a certificate to continue studying in Vietnam. Therefore, doing well in exercises, including exercises on finding replacement words and understanding the meaning of words, is important. Because reading materials are non-repetitive, training and guiding reading comprehension skills through word recognition, especially in advanced texts (levels B1, B2, C1, C2), is important. For each type of exercise, after correction, teachers should conclude what the correct answer finding skill is. For example, questions about finding the main content of a text with common questions such as: What is the paragraph mainly about?... or What is the main idea of the paragraph?..., teachers need to guide learners to carefully read the title, first and last sentences of the paragraph, identify words and phrases that are repeated many times in the text to determine the content of the entire text as well as the main idea of any paragraph in the text. With questions about the author's point of view or attitude, it is necessary to pay attention to the author's positive, negative or neutral attitude through identifying expressive words and the author's way of expressing in the article. With questions about the meaning of words or replacement words, teachers need to guide learners to put the words in context, read the context carefully and look up the dictionary if necessary. (Example sentence: "Bờ biển của Việt Nam dài **đến** 3.260km" - text on the topic of Environment. Is the word "**đến**" in the above sentence a verb (indicating action) like the sentence: "Tôi **đến** trường"? These two words "**đến**" are two homonyms but have different meanings and to understand their meanings, we must put them in context. The word "**đến**" in the first sentence usually comes after an adjective that means "estimate", "guess" synonymous with the words: "khoảng", "chừng" and the second word "**đến**" is a verb that indicates human action).

Second, to read and understand a text, vocabulary is essential. To express a problem in Vietnamese, there are many different ways to express it, adding synonyms, antonyms, literal meanings, and figurative meanings creates difficulties for learners. Therefore, expanding vocabulary or guiding learners to expand their vocabulary is an important issue when teaching Reading skills. In each lesson, teachers need to explain in detail the typical terms of each topic (for example: multiculturalism, cultural identity, conservation, restoration, three generations under one roof, four generations under one roof, four immortals, etc. in the Culture topic), common Sino-Vietnamese words (for example: high-rise buildings, real estate, etc. in the Economics topic), synonyms (for example: "**phi**", "**bất**" such as: "phi thuong bất phú", "**vô**" such as: "vô học", "vô tri"). In addition, teachers should also expand the vocabulary system related to the lesson topic or explain more thoroughly some difficult words and different expressions in the text and in the exercises so that learners can apply them to reading comprehension in other texts.

Third, in the survey on difficulties in learning Reading skills, 8 opinions (16.67%) said that there were no difficulties in learning this skill. Therefore, teachers can arrange for some students with good language thinking ability to work in groups with less capable students to both support

the group of poor students and promote the thinking of the group of students with good language reception ability. In addition, to make the lesson more interesting, teachers can also lead learners to explore the lesson through warm-up stages related to the topic of the lesson with videos and real-life images such as: cuisine, travel, scenic spots, environment, etc. so that learners have initial understanding of the content of the topic, vocabulary system, Vietnamese grammar structure, etc., helping them to better interact with the text in the textbook.

In addition, with the development of technology today, teachers can apply technology as a modern teaching method by giving students exercises to learn about the meaning of words in the text, find replacement words for words in the text through software and platforms to assign exercises to increase effective interaction, creating initiative and excitement for learners such as: Kahoot!, Quizizz, Edmodo, Classkick, In the process of teaching reading texts, teachers can organize into small study groups of 2 to 3 students to read together as well as analyze the text and share with each other in terms of knowledge and skills to help them understand the lesson and expand their knowledge of vocabulary (including synonyms, antonyms, ...), grammar structures and communication in Vietnamese language.

4.2. For international students

First: To learn Reading skills effectively and with high quality, in addition to the activities that teachers need to conduct, international students need to always actively and enthusiastically participate in the entire process of the lesson. To read effectively and perform well the content of the exercises in the reading textbook, international students need to be proactive in studying the content of the lesson in advance, reviewing the vocabulary system, grammar structures learned in elementary and intermediate Vietnamese courses, preparing lessons fully, and carefully preparing lessons before each lesson. During the learning process, students need to actively participate in building lessons when required by teachers.

Second: Students need to focus on doing all the exercises completely, on time, especially the exercises on vocabulary (word meanings and word replacements in the text) that have been assigned through some software such as Kahoot!, Quizizz, Edmodo, Classkick. Students can also exchange and share with each other while doing exercises. This will create a lively, exciting and focused learning atmosphere, making learning more effective and also helping teachers have better teaching motivation.

Third: To make reading comprehension clearer and deeper, students also need to avoid passive hesitation. For problems, words, and sentence structures that they do not understand, students should also boldly ask and request the lecturer to explain again in a clearer and more specific way. When the lesson ends, students can also summarize each text they have learned and can rewrite it in about 5 to 7 sentences. This both consolidates the lesson knowledge and reinforces vocabulary and grammar. This is also an effective way to practice Vietnamese reading skills for foreign students. Fourth: Students can expand their vocabulary and understanding of Vietnamese vocabulary by reading advanced texts with the same topic system as the lessons in class through reading books, newspapers, watching TV news, etc. Students also need to take notes on this reading process and can discuss with the teacher in class.

4. CONCLUSION

Through a survey of 48 international students (from 8 countries: Laos, Mongolia, Korea, China, Taiwan, Mexico, Finland, Mozambique) studying Vietnamese at the University of Education - Thai Nguyen University, the article analyzed and synthesized the opinions of international students when studying Vietnamese Reading skills at the school. The purpose of the survey is to better understand the thoughts of international students about the program content, the difficulties as well as the wishes of international students when studying Vietnamese Reading skills. From there, the article gives suggestions and recommendations for both foreign teachers and students to help limit and overcome the difficulties of foreign students when studying Vietnamese Reading skills. At the same time, promoting the advantages of the program content as well as the strengths of the instructors teaching this skill helps the process of teaching and learning Vietnamese Reading skills for foreigners to be more effective and of better quality, meeting the expectations of learners of one of the high-quality Vietnamese training centers for foreigners nationwide.

REFERENCES

1. Anderson, R., Hiebert, E., Scott, J., & Wilkinson, I (1985), *Becoming a nation of readers: The report of the commission on reading*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Education and the Center for the Study of Reading.
2. Hoang Ha (2014), "Secrets to teaching Vietnamese to foreigners effectively" (2014), <https://monkey.edu.vn/ba-me-can-biet/giao-duc/hoc-tieng-viet/day-tieng-viet-cho-nguoi-nuoc-ngoai>.
3. Ngo Thi Khai Nguyen (2022), "Some effectiveness in Vietnamese reading comprehension skills... for foreigners from online teaching methods via the Zoom application" <https://r.search.yahoo.com/>.
4. Doan Thien Thuat (editor) (2004), *Vietnamese (for foreigners)*, Volumes I, II, The Gioi Publishing House, H.
5. Tran Thi Hai Yen (2021), "Some techniques to help teach Vietnamese effectively to foreigners" (2021), <https://ssh.htu.edu.vn/nghien-cuu>.