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CONCEPT

Some Solutions to Improve Communication and Intercultural Skills in Teaching Vietnamese to Foreigners

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Intercultural communication is an important aspect of language education in today's globalized world, where interactions between diverse cultures are inevitable. In teaching Vietnamese to foreigners, fostering learners' intercultural communication skills is essential for meaningful cultural exchange and language acquisition. **Method:** This article draws on research practices and the pedagogical process of teaching Vietnamese to foreign learners. It focuses on analyzing the challenges inherent in teaching Vietnamese by identifying the linguistic and cultural barriers that learners commonly face. Employing methods such as observation, interviews, and experimental approaches, the study examines students' acquisition of knowledge and practice in the Vietnamese language. Furthermore, it proposes targeted teaching strategies to address these challenges, emphasizing the use of multimedia techniques, role-playing activities, and cultural immersion as effective solutions. **Results:** The study highlights the effectiveness of integrating multimedia tools and cultural immersion in improving learners' intercultural communication skills. Real-life examples of typical intercultural communication situations encountered when learning Vietnamese are provided, along with strategies to address these situations from an intercultural perspective. This study will serve as a significant reference for educators involved in teaching Vietnamese to foreign learners, with a particular focus on enhancing intercultural communication skills. **Discussion:** The findings highlight the importance of developing communication skills through listening, speaking, reading and writing activities. Focusing on group communication and using multimedia platforms to create dynamic and interactive learning environments. These approaches contribute to improving both intercultural understanding and language proficiency. **Conclusion:** Addressing linguistic and cultural barriers in teaching Vietnamese to foreigners requires a strategic focus on developing communication and intercultural skills. The proposed solutions provide a roadmap to improve learners' proficiency and promote meaningful cultural exchange.

Keywords: Intercultural communication, Vietnamese language teaching, cultural integration, communication skills development, language education strategies.

1. INTRODUCTION

The rise of intercultural communication in the modern world has forced educators to focus on teaching language and culture simultaneously. In the context of Vietnamese language education for foreigners, understanding Vietnamese culture is as important as mastering grammar and vocabulary. The theme of the 5th International Conference on Culture and Education (ICCE 2024), "Intercultural Education in the Context of Integration", emphasizes the need for intercultural competence in teaching Vietnamese to foreigners. This article examines how Vietnamese educators can improve learners' intercultural communication skills and proposes practical solutions to foster an environment where culture and language learning go hand in hand.

In an increasingly globalized world, learning a foreign language often comes with the challenge of understanding and integrating into a new culture. For foreigners learning Vietnamese, this challenge is compounded by the complexity and cultural nuances inherent in the language. Communicating effectively in Vietnamese requires not only mastery of grammar and vocabulary, but also an understanding of the cultural values and social hierarchies that determine how the language is used in different contexts. This article discusses some solutions to improve communication and intercultural skills when teaching Vietnamese to foreigners. The article highlights how teachers can integrate culture into language instruction, use multimedia tools, and promote group communication to improve learners' listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills.

2. METHODS

2.1 Intercultural Communication and Education

Intercultural communication is the process by which individuals from different cultures interact and exchange ideas. In the context of teaching Vietnamese to foreigners, intercultural education plays a key role. Learners must not only acquire linguistic competence but also develop intercultural competence, which includes understanding cultural norms, values, and behaviors related to language (Hoang, 2022). The goal of intercultural education is to create a respectful, fair, and open environment where different cultures can interact without one culture dominating another.

2.2 Solutions to improve intercultural communication skills
Cultural integration

One of the most effective ways to teach intercultural communication is through cultural immersion. Immersion allows learners to experience Vietnamese culture firsthand by participating in everyday activities, such as going to the market, joining a family meal, or attending traditional festivals. These experiences provide learners with the opportunity to apply their language skills in real-life contexts where they must navigate cultural norms and communication styles. According to Nguyen and Pham (2020), immersion fosters an appreciation for cultural differences, encouraging learners to adapt their communication strategies to different cultural contexts.

The following activities serve as illustrations of students' cultural integration: participating in traditional festivals that include listening to Hue folk songs and engaging in the ceremonial release of flower lanterns on the Perfume River following a prayer ceremony:

Role-playing and simulation

Role-playing and simulation are excellent strategies for improving intercultural communication skills. These methods allow learners to practice speaking Vietnamese in culturally relevant situations. For example, a role-playing

Figure 1. Enjoying a Dragon Boat Cruise along the serene Perfume River

exercise might involve learners reenacting a conversation at a Vietnamese wedding, in which they must greet elders respectfully and use appropriate honorifics. Such exercises help learners understand the pragmatic aspects of language use in Vietnamese culture. By simulating real-life situations, learners can experiment with different communication strategies and receive feedback from the instructor on their cultural appropriateness.

An effective example of fostering language communication in the classroom involves engaging students in group or pair communication activities centered on the topic of "Traffic." In this approach, the teacher facilitates activities such as identifying modes of transportation using visual aids like pictures or model toys,

including motorbikes, bicycles, cars, and trains. Beyond vocabulary acquisition, students engage in role-playing scenarios where they practice asking for directions, expressing apologies for inconveniencing others, and navigating situations involving minor traffic mishaps. These scenarios are enriched by the use of culturally appropriate forms of address and honorifics when interacting with older individuals, thereby reinforcing both linguistic and sociocultural competence.

By cultivating a dynamic and supportive classroom environment, these communication exercises enhance student engagement, foster enjoyment, and promote retention. The lively and interactive nature of these activities ensures that the learning process is both memorable and stimulating, reducing monotony and encouraging sustained participation.

2.4 Use of Multimedia Tools

With the development of technology, multimedia tools have become indispensable in language teaching. Videos, podcasts, and interactive applications can be used to introduce learners to authentic Vietnamese communication styles. For example, watching Vietnamese TV shows or movies allows learners to observe how native speakers interact in various social contexts, such as formal meetings or casual conversations with friends. According to Tran (2019), multimedia tools not only improve language comprehension but also provide learners with a deeper understanding of cultural nuances. These tools allow learners to interact with the language in a dynamic and engaging way, improving both listening and speaking skills.

Figure 2. Prayer ceremony of Lao students at Thien Mu Pagoda in Hue City, Thua Thien Hue Province, Vietnam

Figure 3. Lao lecturers and students pose for souvenir photos at Toa Kham Wharf in Hue City, Thua Thien Hue Province, Vietnam, following the Flower Lantern Releasing Ceremony on the Perfume River.
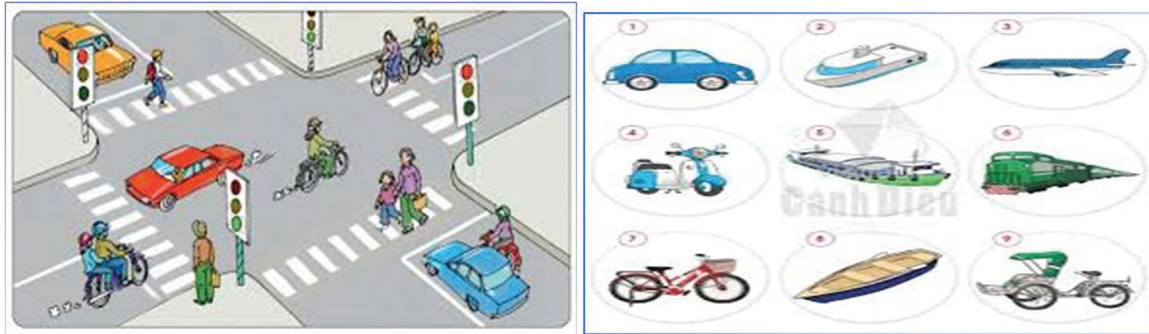
Figure 4. Exploring Various Modes of Transportation: A Visual Guide to Different Types of Vehicles

Indirect group communication, using digital tools such as online chat forums or video conferencing, is another effective method. In today's digital age, platforms such as Zoom, Skype, and Google Meet provide learners with the opportunity to communicate with native speakers or other learners in real time, regardless of location (Do, 2021).

Students, in particular, exhibit a strong interest in engaging with hypothetical and real-life scenarios in communication. For instance, they often show enthusiasm when guided to edit conversations using digital tools such as video calls or platforms like Zoom. These edited conversations can then be saved and shared with the class, fostering a collaborative learning environment.

Moreover, educators leverage technology to deliver knowledge and skills in dynamic and visually engaging ways, significantly enhancing students' ability to practice and improve their communication skills. This approach not only facilitates language acquisition but also encourages active participation and deeper engagement.

By cultivating a lively and supportive atmosphere during communication practice, and by tapping into students' excitement, educators make the learning process more memorable, effective, and enjoyable, thereby mitigating monotony and fostering sustained interest.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Typical intercultural communication situations and solutions

In the context of teaching Vietnamese to foreigners, it is essential to anticipate common intercultural communication situations and provide learners with strategies to navigate them. Here are two examples of such situations:

1. *Situation 1*: **How to address the elderly in Vietnamese culture**

In Vietnamese culture, addressing elders with the correct form of address is a sign of respect. Foreign learners often have difficulty choosing the appropriate form of address to address elders, as Vietnamese honorifics are complex and vary according to family hierarchy, age, and social status. For example, "sir" is used to address an older man, while "ba" is used to address an older woman. When learners do not use the appropriate form of address, this can lead to unintended disrespect.

Solution: Educators can teach learners to master Vietnamese honorifics through repeated practice and contextual examples. Role-playing exercises in which learners greet elders in different situations can help them internalize the correct forms of address.

2. *Situation 2*: **Making an indirect request**

Vietnamese people often use indirect speech to make requests, especially when the request might cause inconvenience to the listener. For example, instead of saying "Could you give me a ride?", a Vietnamese speaker might say "I wonder if you have time to give me a ride?" Foreign learners may find this indirect speech confusing and may not understand the need to use such politeness strategies.

Solution: Educators should emphasize the importance of politeness in Vietnamese culture and teach learners how to construct indirect requests. Practicing dialogue and simulating polite conversations can help learners become more comfortable with indirect speech.

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3.2 Solve the problem of using language to behave appropriately in Vietnamese situations, culture and customs

In teaching Vietnamese to non-native speakers, one of the main challenges is ensuring that learners not only understand vocabulary and grammar, but also learn to use the language in a way that is appropriate to Vietnamese cultural norms. Vietnamese culture places a significant emphasis on social hierarchy, respect for elders, and situational appropriateness, which can influence language use in both formal and informal contexts (Tran, 2020). For example, the way a person addresses an elder in Vietnamese is very different from the way they address a peer or younger person. Understanding and mastering these nuances is key to promoting successful intercultural communication.

As explained above, Vietnamese has distinct pronouns based on the age, status, and relationship of the speaker to the listener. Foreigners often have difficulty with this aspect of the language because they are used to using neutral pronouns, regardless of social hierarchy. Incorrect use of these pronouns can lead to misunderstandings and even insults to the person being addressed. For example, calling an elder "you" instead of "bac" or "ong" (terms used to refer to elders) would be considered disrespectful (Nguyen & Mai, 2018). Therefore, Vietnamese language educators must

incorporate cultural lessons into their curriculum to teach students the appropriate context for using these terms of address.

Furthermore, nonverbal communication plays a pivotal role in Vietnamese culture and is often as important as spoken words. Gestures, eye contact, and facial expressions can carry significant weight in communication. For example, prolonged eye contact can be seen as disrespectful or confrontational in some formal situations in Vietnam (Pham, 2021). Educators need to integrate both language and cultural instruction to ensure that students understand the deeper meanings and implications of their words and actions.

It is not just about learning grammar and vocabulary, but also about learning how to behave and communicate within the cultural framework of Vietnam. This requires cross-cultural sensitivity and a deep understanding of Vietnamese customs, rituals, and expectations. Teachers should develop situational role-play activities and case studies that allow learners to practice using the language in a variety of social contexts (Hoang, 2022). By addressing these linguistic-cultural issues, foreign students can become more proficient in navigating Vietnamese society, communicating respectfully, and participating effectively in both formal and informal cultural exchanges.

4. DISCUSSION
4.1 Develop Listening-Speaking, Reading, Writing skills through communication activities
Group communication *(Direct or indirect)*

In language teaching, the development of core skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing is essential. These skills can be enhanced through communicative activities that simulate real-life situations, allowing learners to practice in meaningful contexts. Group communicative activities are particularly effective as they provide opportunities for collaborative learning, peer feedback and interaction with the language in a more dynamic and interactive way.

Direct group communication activities can take the form of discussions, debates, or role-playing exercises, in which learners are asked to use Vietnamese in specific social contexts. These activities not only help students improve their fluency but also help them become more confident in using the language naturally. Teachers can simulate cultural situations such as market negotiations, classroom discussions, or public speaking events, in which learners must apply both their linguistic and cultural knowledge to succeed (Liu, 2020). For example, a role-playing exercise in which students must navigate a formal dinner with a Vietnamese family can teach both the language needed to converse and the nonverbal cues needed to show respect.

Indirect group communication, such as online forums, chat groups, or video-based discussions, also supports language learning by providing a platform for students to practice their writing and comprehension skills. These types of interactions are beneficial, especially in the digital age where communication often takes place through multimedia channels (Nguyen & Do, 2019). By practicing in both direct and indirect formats, learners can adapt to a variety of communication environments, further enhancing their flexibility.

Multimedia (Using the Internet, social networks, etc.)

The integration of technology into language education, especially the use of multimedia tools, has transformed the way language skills are developed. Platforms such as Skype, Zoom or Google Meet provide learners with the opportunity to practice speaking and listening in real time with native speakers or friends, regardless of where they are. Social media platforms such as Facebook or Zalo (popular in Vietnam) provide informal communication channels where learners can practice writing and reading skills by engaging in discussions on posts or messages with Vietnamese-speaking friends (Hanh, 2023). These platforms help learners immerse themselves in real-life Vietnamese conversations, keeping up to date with cultural trends, slang and current expressions.

Teachers should encourage the use of multimedia tools not only for formal learning but also for informal interactions, as they can provide learners with a more authentic experience of the language and culture. Communication through internet-based platforms, combined with traditional classroom methods, provides a comprehensive approach to learning Vietnamese (Do, 2021).

Communication through speech and body language

Body language, gestures, and other nonverbal cues are an integral part of effective communication in Vietnamese culture. Foreign learners must understand that words alone are often not enough to convey meaning. For example, a simple greeting such as "cháo" (hello) may be accompanied by a slight bow or a smile, which shows respect and friendliness. Body language varies significantly between cultures, and in Vietnam, it is often used to show politeness, respect, or subtle disagreement (Nguyen, 2017). By teaching students how to interpret and use nonverbal cues, educators can help them communicate more effectively in the context of Vietnamese culture.

4.2 Language and communication context with Vietnamese culture

When teaching Vietnamese to non-native speakers, it is essential to integrate cultural competence into language instruction. Cultural norms, values, and social etiquette must be considered to ensure that language use is appropriate to specific situations. For example, in Vietnamese culture, addressing someone by their title and showing respect to elders is important in both formal and informal contexts. Teachers must guide learners in the proper use of honorifics, ensuring that they understand the difference between formal and informal speech depending on the context (Hoang, 2022).

Misunderstanding cultural nuances can lead to communication breakdowns. Therefore, it is important for educators to incorporate cultural competence into their curriculum. This helps learners not only use the language fluently but also navigate social interactions within the framework of Vietnamese culture appropriately (Hoang, 2022).

One of the main challenges in teaching Vietnamese to foreigners is helping them navigate the complex relationship between language and cultural context. In Vietnamese culture, language is used to reflect respect for age, status, and social roles. For example, Vietnamese has a rich system of pronouns that change depending on the relationship of the speaker to the listener, including factors such as age, family hierarchy, and social status (Nguyen & Mai, 2018). Unlike English, where pronouns remain neutral, incorrect use of pronouns in Vietnamese can result in unintentional disrespect.

To address this issue, language teachers must move beyond grammar and vocabulary and focus on teaching cultural nuances. One solution is to introduce situational role-playing into the classroom, where learners practice using appropriate language in different social contexts. For example, students could be asked to role-play conversations at formal dinners, in business meetings, or in informal settings with friends. This allows them to practice using correct pronouns, greetings, and phrases in a culturally appropriate manner (Tran, 2020). Additionally, non-verbal communication, such as gestures, eye contact, and physical proximity, should be incorporated into language lessons. In Vietnamese culture, avoiding prolonged eye contact is a sign of respect, especially in formal situations (Pham, 2021). Teaching these cultural nuances can help foreign learners avoid misunderstandings and communicate more effectively.

4.3 Challenges in Teaching Vietnamese to Foreigners

One of the main challenges foreign learners face when learning Vietnamese is the tonal nature of the language. Vietnamese is a tonal language with six different tones, meaning that the same word can have different meanings depending on the tone used. For example, the word "ma" can mean "ma", "mê" or "mồ" depending on the tone used (Pham, 2021). For foreigners, especially those from non-tone language backgrounds, mastering this aspect of the language is crucial for effective communication.

In addition, foreigners often find it difficult to adjust to the cultural context of communication. For example, in Western cultures, direct communication is common, while in Vietnamese culture, indirect communication is often preferred to maintain politeness and avoid conflict (Nguyen & Do, 2019). Language teachers must provide learners with opportunities to practice these indirect forms of communication, such as using phrases that soften requests. Would you like to/Can you…? / Do you mind…? or politely decline the offer like: I 'm sorry/ Thanks for...but.../Maybe...

4.4 Develop listening, speaking, reading and writing skills through communication activities

Effective language instruction requires the development of four core language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These skills can be fostered through communicative activities that simulate real-life interactions. One effective approach is to use group communication activities, either face-to-face or face-to-face, in which learners engage in discussions, debates, or role-plays. This allows them to practice listening and speaking in meaningful contexts (Liu, 2020).

Direct group communication activities can include face-to-face interactions where learners are encouraged to use Vietnamese in both formal and informal situations. For example, teachers can organize class discussions or debates on relevant topics such as Vietnamese history or culture, allowing students to practice their speaking and listening skills while learning about the country's cultural heritage (Do, 2021). Role-playing exercises, such as negotiating prices at a market or introducing themselves at a business meeting, help learners apply their language knowledge in real-life contexts (Hoang, 2022).

Indirect group communication, using digital tools such as online chat forums or video conferencing, is another effective method. In today's digital age, language learning is no longer limited to the classroom. Platforms such as Zoom, Skype, and Google Meet allow learners to communicate with native speakers or other learners in real time, regardless of where they are (Nguyen & Do, 2019). These tools provide learners with the opportunity to practice their language skills outside of the traditional classroom setting, making learning more flexible and accessible.

4.5 Multimedia

Multimedia tools have transformed language education by providing learners with diverse and interactive ways to interact with the target language. Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Zalo, and YouTube, provide learners with informal spaces to practice reading and writing skills through comments, posts, and messages. Furthermore, watching Vietnamese videos, movies, or TV shows with subtitles can help learners improve their listening skills by exposing them to authentic Vietnamese speech in different contexts (Hanh, 2023).

By integrating multimedia into language instruction, educators can create more immersive learning experiences. For example, teachers can assign learners to watch a Vietnamese movie and then discuss it in class, encouraging them to use their listening and speaking skills while learning more about Vietnamese culture. These multimedia activities help learners engage with the language in a fun and interactive way, making it easier for them to retain new information (Do, 2021).

4.6 Communication through speech and body language

Verbal and non-verbal communication are equally important in Vietnamese. As mentioned earlier, body language, gestures, and facial expressions play an important role in conveying meaning. For example, while in some cultures it is customary to make eye contact while conversing, in Vietnamese culture it is respectful to avoid direct eye contact with elders or superiors (Nguyen, 2017). Additionally, certain gestures, such as nodding or bowing, are used to express gratitude or acknowledge someone's presence.

For foreign language learners, understanding these nonverbal cues is just as important as mastering the language itself. Teachers should emphasize the role of body language in communication and provide opportunities for learners to practice these gestures in real-life situations. For example, learners can be taught how to greet elders respectfully or how to use nonverbal cues to express agreement or disagreement in a conversation (Tran, 2020).

Limitations to the Study

Here are some limitations of the study:

1. **Limited Sample Size**: The study may have a small sample size, which could affect the

generalizability of the findings to a broader population of foreign learners of Vietnamese.

2. **Focus on Specific Contexts**: The research primarily addresses the teaching of Vietnamese in specific cultural contexts, which may not fully represent the diverse experiences of all learners in different environments.

3. **Subjectivity in Data Collection**: The reliance on qualitative methods such as interviews and observations may introduce subjectivity, as participants might provide biased responses based on their perceptions or social desirability.

4. **Lack of Longitudinal Analysis**: The study does not include longitudinal data to assess the long-term effectiveness of the proposed teaching strategies on learners' communication and intercultural skills.

5. **Insufficient Exploration of Challenges**: While the article identifies several strategies for improving communication skills, it may not adequately address potential challenges or barriers educators face when implementing these strategies in practice.

6. **Cultural Sensitivity**: The discussion may not fully account for how different cultural backgrounds influence learners' experiences with Vietnamese language and culture, limiting a comprehensive understanding of intercultural dynamics.

These limitations highlight areas for further research and consideration, which can enhance future studies on improving communication and intercultural skills in language education.

5. CONCLUSION

Teaching Vietnamese to non-native speakers requires more than language instruction. It involves fostering intercultural competence and helping learners navigate the cultural nuances of the language. Through the use of communicative activities, role-playing, multimedia tools, and integrating cultural lessons, teachers can help students develop the skills necessary to communicate effectively in Vietnamese. By understanding the cultural context in which language is used, learners will be better equipped to engage in meaningful intercultural exchanges that promote both language proficiency and cultural understanding.

This study contributes to the evaluation of the effectiveness of strategic solutions through the practical activities implemented by our students over the years. Additionally, we encourage further evaluation studies and the sharing of experiences by other scholars to advance the field of teaching Vietnamese to foreigners. Such collaborative efforts will not only enhance the development of this discipline but also provide tangible benefits to individual learners, particularly in the context of global and regional integration and broader educational advancements. Furthermore, fostering student engagement and enthusiasm ensures that the learning process remains both memorable and stimulating, mitigating monotony and enhancing educational outcomes.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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Trần Thị Vân Dung, born in 1978 in Vietnam, graduated with a BA in Linguistics from Hue University in 2006. In 2013, she received a MA in Vietnamese Literature from the University of Sciences, Hue University. In 2024, she received a PhD in Vietnamese Literature from Hanoi National University of Education, Vietnam.

Since 2020, she has been a senior lecturer at Thua Thien Hue Pedagogical College. She is also a valued editorial board member of Horizon Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research, a prestigious peer-reviewed scientific journal. In addition, she serves as Vice President of the Thua Thien Hue Writers Association, Vietnam.

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With a B2 English proficiency level according to Vietnam's six-level foreign language proficiency framework, Phan Minh Chau has extensive teaching and research experience in Vietnamese Studies, Cultural Management and Tourism. Over the past eight years, she has specialized in teaching Vietnamese as a foreign language, bringing her expertise to both domestic and international learners.

Renowned for her strong research abilities, she has published numerous high-quality articles in prestigious journals, including the Journal of *Social Sciences & Humanities*, *the Journal of Indian and Asian Studies*, and *the Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*. She is an active participant in international academic conferences, contributing consistently to the global scholarship on Oriental and Vietnamese Studies.

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