

Foreign Language Ability Of Vietnamese Students

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Abstract

The labor market in the trend of international integration places requirements on the human resources of each organization, they need to be good at both expertise and use foreign languages fluently. This is also a factor that affects the training activities of each university in each country, especially in a developing country like Vietnam. This study analyzes the content related to the training activities of the university, which is determined by the author, which is the foreign language ability of students, including Input foreign language ability of students; and foreign language learning ability of students. These are the two contents that influence the output standards of university students, as mentioned by many studies. The author builds a research theoretical framework with the above contents and surveys 400 final students (course 2018-2022) of the university representing the block of social sciences of Vietnam - University of Social Sciences and Humanities, to assess the practice of students' foreign language ability according to the prescribed output standards; evaluate the impact of the factor "student's input foreign language ability" and the factor "student's foreign language learning ability" on "output standards of student's foreign language ability". The survey results show that students' "student's input foreign language ability" is assessed at a lower level, which is a factor that has a great impact on the quality of training and affects the foreign language ability of students according to the output standards (output standards of student's foreign language ability). From the results of this survey, the author makes research

conclusions and discusses relevant issues to develop foreign language competence for students at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities and many universities in the region of Vietnamese social sciences.

Keywords: Student's input foreign language ability; Student's foreign language learning ability; Output standards of student's foreign language ability; Vietnam.

1. Introduction

Vietnam is geographically located in Southeast Asia. The Vietnamese higher education system consists of 224 universities, of which the social sciences universities account for over 20% (MOET, 2022). Among universities in the social sciences sector, University of Social Sciences and Humanities ranks in the group of schools with a large scale in terms of students enrolled, providing a large proportion of human resources who have undergone training for national development: Total over 7.000 students (USSH, 2022).

Vietnam is a developing country with a high level of education and average income compared to other countries in the region: 22.6% of workers have professional and technical qualifications; only 10% of Vietnamese workers can meet the requirements of enterprises in the context of international integration (Hong, N., 2022). Vietnam's trained workers are assessed to have not met much for the labor market in the context of international integration, not only because of training programs and professional practice skills but also language restrictions. The reality of the international integration process of countries shows that foreign languages bring opportunities for cultural exchange and promotion, creating opportunities for the country's economic development. However, foreign language learning and the foreign language ability of students are affected by many factors, It is necessary to classify research to match the characteristics of the school or the type of training... Therefore, the study of students' foreign language ability is necessary in the context of higher education development in each country.

In this study, based on building a theoretical framework for studying the foreign language ability of students, the author conducted a survey of final students of the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, specifically: The survey subjects include 400 non-language

major students; The survey content on foreign language ability is English used in training activities of the school. With the research results achieved, the author hopes to provide empirical information to help leaders of the University and many universities in Vietnam have a more scientific basis for training policy-making in the future.

2. Literature review

2.1. Student's foreign language ability

The term "ability" is mentioned by many researchers with the meaning of the individual's quality and ability to work for the organization and society. According to Trung, N.S. et al. (2022), it is the ability to perform the work that the individual has, expressed mainly through the results of performing that work. This content is also emphasized in several other studies, that competence is the ability to perform work, including the ability to work independently and the ability to work collaboratively to achieve that work result (Thu, TT et al., 2013). Many linguists also have a similar approach to the term "competence", which is the ability to form and develop that allows people to achieve success in a physical, intellectual, or occupational activity; Capability is expressed in the ability to perform an activity, perform a task" (EPH, 2000).

The above research points have emphasized the ability to perform work based on the appropriate knowledge, skills, and attitudes of the individual when discussing the subject's capacity. The author inherits the research view and definition of "competence", which is the knowledge and skills reflected in the actions of each individual to effectively perform a certain job. In foreign language learning of university students, it is the ability to use a foreign language for communication and research, expressed in foreign language knowledge (vocabulary, phonetics, grammar), skills use foreign languages (listening, speaking, reading, writing). In terms of theory and educational management, students' foreign language ability is shown in many aspects, which can be classified to determine content according to many related criteria.

In this study, the author bases on the provisions of Vietnamese law related to higher education programs to determine the content of foreign language competence of university students, that is: Input foreign language competence of students; and foreign language learning

ability of students. These are also two contents mentioned in many studies (Loi, NV; Hang, CTT, 2014) and the author continues to inherit when conducting this study.

a) Student's input foreign language ability (IF)

From a theoretical point of view, the input foreign language ability is the knowledge and foreign language skills of students before they are admitted to university. These knowledge and skills are acquired by students through the process of learning foreign languages in high school.

Based on the characteristics of training majors, Vietnamese universities set the entry foreign language standards in a way that is consistent with the foreign language competency framework prescribed by law (MOET, 2014). This competency framework consists of 6 levels: A1 (level 1), A2 (level 2), B1 (level 3), B2 (level 4), C1 (level 5), C2 (level 6). On that basis, most universities determine students' input foreign language ability at B1 (level 3) standard, with the characteristics of knowledge and skills, that is: Basic vocabulary knowledge to meet requirements express and communicate simply according to the learning program at the high school level (IF1); Basic grammar knowledge meet the requirements of simple expression and communication according to the learning program at the high school level (IF2); Basic listening, speaking, reading and writing skills to meet the requirements of simple expression and communication according to the learning program at the high school level (IF3).

Although the input foreign language competency standard is regulated at a low level, this ability is affected by many factors, such as cultural, educational, economic, and social characteristics of the region (island, region mountains, rural areas, and urban areas), leading to the uneven level of input foreign language ability of students in a university. This is a factor that has a significant influence on the learning process and the output standards of students' foreign language ability upon graduation.

Hypothesis 1 (H1): The input foreign language ability of university students has an impact on the output standard of foreign language competence.

b) Student' foreign language learning ability (LA)

Student' foreign language learning ability is the ability to study, acquire knowledge, and use foreign language skills according to the training program of the university that the

student attends. In Vietnam, based on the prescribed 6-level foreign language competency framework (MOET, 2014), universities develop foreign language teaching content by the characteristics of training majors. That also creates flexibility, certain differences in the content of foreign language programs of university students by university block (universities in engineering; universities in social sciences. festival...).

With the above program, university students are formed and develop new knowledge and skills in foreign languages compared to their input foreign language knowledge. That also puts requirements on foreign language learning capacity for students to form and develop foreign language knowledge and skills for professional work in the future. Universities organize the assessment of students' foreign language ability after finishing each module in the study program to identify students' foreign language learning ability. The results of this assessment are reflected in several criteria: Vocabulary knowledge is supplemented and promoted in communication and research activities in the field of specialized study (LA1); Grammar knowledge is supplemented and promoted in communication and research activities in the field of specialized study (LA2); Listening, speaking, reading and writing skills meet the requirements of expression in communication and research activities in the field of specialized study (LA3).

The foreign language ability is an important prerequisite for students to complete the study program at the university level, becoming a factor that has a great influence on the learning process and output standards of foreign language competence of students upon graduation.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Foreign language learning capacity has an impact on the output standards of students' foreign language ability upon graduation.

2.2. Output standards of student' foreign language ability (OF)

The Output standards of student' foreign language ability is understood as a foreign language competency framework with standards of knowledge and foreign language skills that students need to acquire during their study at the university level. In Vietnam, the foreign language competency

framework of university students is developed based on reference, applying the Common European Framework of Reference [06 levels: A1 (level 1), A2 (level 2), and B1 (level 1). level 3), B2 (level 4), C1 (level 5), and C2 (level 6)], combined with the actual situation and conditions of teaching, learning, and using foreign languages in Vietnam (MOET, 2014).

The above foreign language competency framework is being applied to foreign language training programs at educational institutions in the national system. Higher education institutions base themselves on the content specified in this foreign language competency framework to compile curricula, curricula, develop criteria in testing, and assess learners' competence appropriately, with the characteristics of the training specialties of the school. On the other hand, this foreign language competency framework is also the basis for higher education institutions to cooperate internationally in education and training, to recognize diplomas and certificates with countries that apply the European reference framework. In both theoretical and practical aspects, the foreign language competency framework is a general scale that orients higher education institutions to implement training quality policies (Tuyet, HT, 2013). On the other hand, this foreign language competency framework is also the output standard of foreign language ability of university students in Vietnam.

In most universities in the social sciences sector of Vietnam, including the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, the output standards of students' foreign language ability are determined according to the European reference framework. Europe with level B2 (level 4). The knowledge objectives of the level B2 (level 4) are defined, as which: Students can understand the main ideas of a complex text on concrete and abstract topics, including technical exchanges in their area of expertise own; can communicate at a fluent, natural level with native speakers; can write clear, detailed texts on a variety of topics and can explain his or her point of view on an issue, stating the advantages and disadvantages of different options. The specific content of the output standard of students' foreign language ability according to the European reference frame with level B2 (level 4) is described below:

- OF1. Students can listen and understand live or recorded talks on familiar and unfamiliar topics in their

personal, social, academic, or professional lives when presented clearly and in a standard voice.

- OF2. Students can understand the main ideas of complex speeches, both content and linguistic, delivered in standard language on concrete or abstract issues (including technical discussions) in his area of expertise.

- OF3. Students can follow long speeches as well as complex arguments on familiar topics when the talk has a clear structure (MOET, 2014).

From the above research content, the author builds a theoretical framework for student’s foreign language ability. The research model consists of 3 scales: The scale "Student’s input foreign language ability", the scale "Student's foreign language learning ability" (two independent variables), and the scale "Output standards of student's foreign language ability" (01 dependent variable). The above scales include 9 observed variables, designed by the author into 9 questions in the survey questionnaire and measured by the Likert measure with 5 levels: 1 - Strongly disagree; 2 - Disagree; 3 - No comments; 4 - Agree; 5 - Strongly agree (Table 1, Figure 1).

Table 1. Research theoretical framework

No	Scales	Encode	Rating levels				
			1	2	3	4	5
I	Student’s input foreign language ability	IF					
1	Basic vocabulary knowledge to meet requirements express and communicate simply according to the learning program at the high school level.	IF1					
2	Basic grammar knowledge meet the requirements of simple expression and communication according to the learning program at the high school level.	IF2					
3	Basic listening, speaking, reading and writing skills to meet the requirements of simple expression and communication according to the learning program at the high school level.	IF3					
II	Student's foreign language learning ability	LA					
1	Vocabulary knowledge is supplemented and promoted in communication and research activities in the field of specialized study.	LA1					

2	Grammar knowledge is supplemented and promoted in communication and research activities in the field of specialized study.	LA2					
3	Listening, speaking, reading and writing skills meet the requirements of expression in communication and research activities in the field of specialized study.	LA3					
III	Output standards of student's foreign language ability	OF					
1	Students can listen and understand live or recorded talks on familiar and unfamiliar topics in their personal, social, academic, or professional lives when presented clearly and in a standard voice.	OF1					
2	Students can understand the main ideas of complex speeches, both content and linguistic, delivered in standard language on concrete or abstract issues (including technical discussions) in his area of expertise.	OF2					
3	Students can follow long speeches as well as complex arguments on familiar topics when the talk has a clear structure.	OF3					

Source: Compiled by the author through the review

Research model

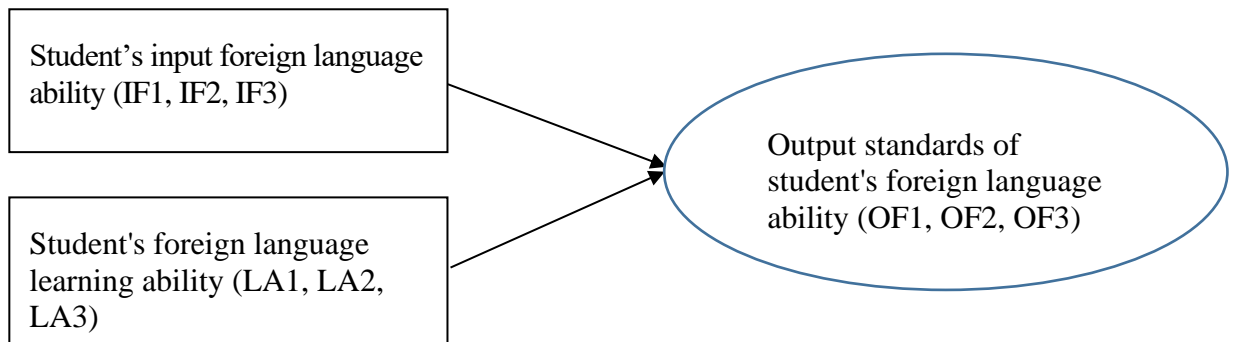


Figure 1. Research model

3. Research methods

a) Qualitative method

Qualitative methods are mainly used in the research review. The author collects and analyzes secondary data and makes initial comments on the content of theoretical research on the foreign language competence of university students. Next, the author conducts in-depth interviews and organizes to collect opinions on the initial assessment of the research

content to complete the research theoretical framework and research model, including the following scales: Student’s input foreign language ability (IF); Student’s foreign language learning ability (LA); Output standards of student’s foreign language ability (OF) [Table 1, Figure 1].

b) Quantitative method

Quantitative methods are mainly used in practical research. The author collects and analyzes primary data in the form of a direct survey of 400 final students (course 2018-2022) of the University of Social Sciences and Humanities with the content according to the theoretical framework built. With the survey results obtained, the author conducts regression analysis to test the relationship between the scales and the proposed research hypothesis.

According to Hai, DH et al. (2018), the minimum sample size to perform a regression analysis for the 3-scale and 9-observed model of this study is $N = 9 \times 5 = 45$. The author carried out the survey opinions of students of University of Social Sciences and Humanities with sample size $N = 400 > 45$ to ensure the reliability of data collection. The survey results are: 400/400 students agree to answer and 400/400 valid answer sheets, achieving a 100% valid response rate.

4. Research results

With the research theoretical framework built, the author surveyed the opinions of 400 final students (course 2018-2022) of the University of Social Sciences and Humanities. From the data collected from survey activities, the author conducts Cronbach's Alpha test to identify the reliability of the scales and observed variables in the research model. The conditions for the scales to achieve reliability are: Cronbach'alpha > 0.6; The condition for the observed variables to be reliable is: Corrected Item-Total Correlation > 0.3. The test results show that all 3 scales and 9 observed variables are reliable (Table 2) [Hai, D.H. et al., 2018].

Table 2. Statistical and scale testing results

Scales	Observed variables	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Cronbach ' Alpha	Corrected Item-Total Correlation
1. Student’s input foreign language ability (IF)	IF1	400	1	5	3.66	.578	.631	IF1 = .438
	IF2	400	1	5	3.58	.604		IF2 = .491
	IF3	400	1	5	3.45	.647		IF3 = .474

2. Student's foreign language learning ability (LA)	LA1	400	2	5	4.07	.548	.664	LA1 = .584
	LA2	400	2	5	3.80	.489		LA2 = .534
	LA3	400	1	5	3.92	.738		LA3 = .516
3. Output standards of student's foreign language ability (OF)	OF1	400	2	5	4.06	.606	.695	OF1 = .561
	OF2	400	2	5	4.16	.497		OF2 = .559
	OF3	400	1	5	4.03	.647		OF3 = .560
Valid N (listwise)		400						

Source: Author’s survey results

The data in Table 2 shows:

+ Observations on the scale of "Student's input foreign language ability" (IF), "Student's foreign language learning ability" (LA), and "Output standards of student's foreign language ability" (OF) were assessed at mean Mean > 3.4, statistically significant according to the Likert measure (1-5) identified. However, the observed variables of the scale "Student's input foreign language ability" (IF) are evaluated at the lowest level with Mean (IF1) = 3.66, Mean (IF2) = 3.58, and Mean (IF3). = 3.45, showing that the student's knowledge and foreign language skills before admission are at a low level. This is a factor that affects the learning process and English language learning results of students at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities today.

+ All 3 scales and 9 observed variables in the model have standardized test values: Cronbach'alpha > 0.6; Corrected Item-Total Correlation > 0.3. These scales continue to be used to perform regression analysis to consider the relationship of the independent variables "Student's input foreign language ability" (IF), "Student's foreign language learning ability" (LA) with the dependent variable "Output standards of student's foreign language ability" (OF) [Bảng 3].

Table 3. The outcomes of multivariable regression

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	VIF
		B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	.563	.210		2.675	.000	

Student's input foreign language ability (IF)	.329	.080	.277	4.477	.000	1.741
Student's foreign language learning ability (LA)	.544	.073	.491	7.974	.000	1.741
a. Dependent Variable: output standards of student's foreign language ability (OF)						
R Square = .607; Durbin-Watson = 2.001						

Source: Author's survey results

The regression analysis data in Table 3 indicate that:

+ R Square = .607, confirming that the scales "Student's input foreign language ability" (IF), "Student's foreign language learning ability" (LA) explain 60.7% of the variation of the scale "Output standards of student's foreign language ability" (OF).

+ VIF = 1.741 ($1 < VIF < 2$), demonstrating that the model does not have multicollinearity, confirms the independence of the scales "Student's input foreign language ability" (IF), "Student's foreign language learning ability" (LA) as well as their influence on the scale "Output standards of student's foreign language ability" (OF).

+ Durbin-Watson = 2.001 ($1 < d < 3$), demonstrating the absence of autocorrelation in the regression model. The scales "Student's input foreign language ability" (IF), "Student's foreign language learning ability" (LA) are correlated with the scale "Output standards of student's foreign language ability" (OF), as evidenced by the regression coefficients of two independent variables "Student's input foreign language ability" (IF), "Student's foreign language learning ability" (LA), which are both statistically significant (Sig. = 0.000 (Sig. < 0.05)).

+ The unstandardized regression coefficients have positive values: B (IF) = 0.329, B (LA) = 0.544, indicating that the independent variables "Student's input foreign language ability" (IF), "Student's foreign language learning ability" (LA) and the dependent variable "Output standards of student's foreign language ability" (OF) have a positive relationship; hypotheses H1, H2 are accepted.

Using the generic regression model proposed by Hai, D.H. et al. (2018): $Y = B_0 + B_1 \cdot X_1 + B_2 \cdot X_2 + \dots + B_i \cdot X_i$, we arrived at the following multivariable regression model:

$$OF = 0.563 + 0.329 \cdot IF + 0.544 \cdot LA$$

The unstandardized regression coefficients of independent variables: $B(IF) = 0.329$, $B(LA) = 0.544$, support the correlation between the independent and dependent variables in ascending order: “Student’s input foreign language ability” (IF), “Student’s foreign language learning ability” (LA).

5. Conclusion

With the above analysis and testing results, the research conclusion is confirmed, that: Students of the University of Social Sciences and Humanities self-assessed, confirming their input foreign language ability is low. That affects the learning process and affects the output standards of students' foreign language ability, which is also a factor affecting the training quality of the school. The managers of the University of Social Sciences and Humanities and many other universities should also pay attention to this issue to develop the curriculum content appropriately.

From the above research and survey results, the author discusses related issues, which are: The University of Social Sciences and Humanities as well as many universities in the social sciences sector need to study, evaluate, and classify students' input English knowledge to have an appropriate training policy. That is because:

- First, English is a popular foreign language that is included in the study program for high school students and continues to be trained in universities in Vietnam. However, students in different regions (mountains, islands, rural areas, urban areas) have different conditions for learning English, leading to students' English proficiency when they first enter university much difference. This disparity is a difficulty for both students and lecturers, so it is necessary to classify the level of knowledge right from the beginning to build an appropriate training program.

- Second, the classification of students' input English knowledge will help universities take the initiative in developing training programs and plans. At the same time, this will create excitement for lecturers and students in the process of teaching and learning, thereby improving the quality of training.

With the above research results, this author has provided information to help the managers of the University of Social Sciences and Humanities and many universities in Vietnam better see the reality of foreign language

proficiency English input of students so that there are suitable solutions in the process of organizing training.

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