

An empirical Study of Factors Influencing the Language Proficiency of Vietnamese Students

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate language proficiency and its determinants of Vietnamese students. Based on holistic literature, the authors examine and test the impact of five intrinsic factors related to the students' characteristics (which are learning purpose, learning ability, learning method, hard-working, and self-awareness) and three extrinsic factors that are related to demographic factors, parental indicators, and schooling-environment on the language proficiency. Data was collected from online questionnaires sent to more than 2500 students from eight famous universities in Vietnam and converted into an excel version before translated into SPSS and EVIEW. Research results show that intrinsic factors, especially learning methods, play a vital role in shaping Vietnamese students' capability to learn a second language. From educators' perspectives, the higher level of English exposure the students are equipped at school, the higher their language proficiency. Finally, we compare the difference in learning language ability among genders and ages. The findings suggest that girls and minorities are less proficient in language than others.

Keywords: Language proficiency, student demographics, Vietnamese students.

1. INTRODUCTION

Today, enhancing the human capital quality is vital and essential for all organizations for creating future organizational success [1]. It can be seen as an intangible asset, which can be converted into measurable outcomes, thus representing a sustainable competitive advantage and determining the human resource capability [2]. A high-skilled labor force plays a pivotal role in transforming the national economic structure [3]. The national economic strength depends on the quality rather than the number of human resources. "*Their potential capacity and capability are at once, our richest and most precious possession. Every field of endeavor will benefit as we provide greater opportunities for the training of skills and the development of talent and leadership*" [4]. On the supplying side, education is irreplaceable in equipping the labour workforce with essential knowledge as well as crucial skills, therefore, it plays an important

role in shaping organizational strength, and accelerating the national economy [3].

Evidence shows that 60% of Vietnamese students got good or distinction when they graduated. However, Vietnamese human productivity reached 11.142 USD, equal to 7.3%, 37%, 44.8%, and 55.9% of Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines [5]. Moreover, the number of unemployed Vietnamese people at working age in the second quarter of 2020 is approximately 1.300.000 people, about 172,000 of whom are above university levels, accounting for nearly 14%. These comparisons suggest a paradox in Vietnamese human capital quality. They also point out the importance of equipping students with interpersonal skills during their college time because the more skilled students are trained, the higher productivity they could propose.

Language proficiency is one of the most significant features determining students' interpersonal skills since

their capabilities are enhanced when learning a new language. Being able to use at least one foreign language proficiently helps students feel more confident in their communication process, thereby being able to integrate into the working environment more easily, especially with the international working spaces. For example, English is an international language of the world; it is the lingua franca of business. Thus, organizations require their employees to use English proficiently to understand and communicate well with their stakeholders (including shareholders, suppliers, customers, employers, and other employees) across borders. Language proficiency is also a determinant of any organization's future success, human capital quality particularly. To survive and compete in a fiercely competitive market, all organizations are forced and required to utilize and enhance their high-quality human resources before building and strengthening the relationships with their stakeholders through an effective communication method. And language proficiency controls the success of any communication approach.

In this study, the authors will shed light on how students study a second language and how their language proficiency can be improved. This is because students are the backbone of a country's future, directly shaping the future Vietnamese workforce. Once pinpointing the contributory factors in this issue, our research group hopes to help people seek suitable solutions corresponding with each influencing factor to address the question of augmenting the Vietnamese workforce's English proficiency. In other words, this study will investigate the role of language proficiency and its determinants, which include both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. The intrinsic factors are individual ability, awareness, hard-working, and motivation, while extrinsic factors comprise student demographic, home environment, and school environment.

From the research results, it can be said that intrinsic factors play a vital role in shaping Vietnamese students' language proficiency. Students learning a foreign language must have the ability, method of study, hard work. However, learning a foreign language is completely different from learning other logic subjects. This means that intelligence does not pose a strong position in determining the student's proficiency in a second language. In particular, learning English is the most important factor, directly determining language proficiency. Furthermore, we found that demographics factors also influence language proficiency significantly. Indeed, females and minorizers seem to have a lower level of language proficiency than others. Finally, from the educator's perspective, exposing students to more English practice via teaching structure can enhance students' language proficiency. Those in the advanced or international study with a higher level of language

exposure seem to be more proficient in language than others.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Researchers have paid much attention to defining and measuring language proficiency since the 18th century because of its irreplaceable role in shaping the national economy and enhancing global organizations' competitive advantages [6-7.8]. However, there is no consistency among the academics' perception of the proficiency definition and measurement. In a particular context, the efficiency in using language is demonstrated through the flexible application of this language to effectively describe the content that the learner desires to express [9]. This demonstration is dependent on how the learner can be exposed to the second language. In a broader context, the evaluation of language proficiency is not limited to a particular context, such as the adoption of the language during teaching and learning processes, because that evaluation depends more on effective language usage outside the classroom. Some authors argue that how proficient in foreign usage a learner can be should be determined by his or her ability to use language with accuracy that transfers meaning in production and comprehension.

Motivation is one of the main factors determining people's proficiency level in learning a foreign language [10-11]. They suggest the importance of motivation in influencing the learning process in which students use their learning strategies to interact with native speakers, then complete language tests before keeping the language efficiency level after learning [12-13.14]. Motivation is influenced by intrinsic and extrinsic indicators: the learners themselves and teachers or parents – who encourage and inspire students to study a foreign language. While intrinsic motivation emphasizes the learning process, extrinsic motivational goals describe how outsider indicators influence students' learning process [10-15.16]. Aptitude – an intrinsic factor, has a strong association with learners' ability to learn a second language [17]. Research findings show that learners who have a positive attitude and a good sense of purpose in learning a new language actively participate in more in-class activities and oral practices than others, thus gaining more language proficiency themselves [18].

This study will examine the impact of five intrinsic factors comprising learning purpose, learning ability, learning method, hard-working, self-awareness, and three extrinsic factors related to student demographic factors, parental factors, and schooling environmental factors. The hypotheses are as follow:

Hypothesis 1: Intrinsic factors have a positive correlation with the proficiency of learning a new language.

Many scientists and researchers have pointed out that intrinsic motivation (hard-working attitudes, positive learning purposes, proper self-awareness, and learning methods, and so on [19] can help to promote language learners' passion and make them follow their interests and goals [20]. Sharing the same viewpoint, [21] states that attitude also impacts students' efficiency. Therefore, there is a positive correlation between intrinsic motivation and proficiency in learning a new language.

Hypothesis 2: The home environmental factors impact the language proficiency

In the 1960s, several scholars were reluctant to agree that genetics, home environment, and other explanations were the main responsibility for school failure [22]. Many scholars have pointed out that parental care and orientation are part of their children's driving force to perfect their children's interpersonal skills, which include communication skills and language proficiency [23]. In addition, students' language proficiency is also shaped and influenced by the opportunities that students participate in language training courses – which is determined by the investment in time, effort, and money of their parents. Finally, parents' educational background and status are thought to also influence their children's language development [20].

Hypothesis 3. School environment directly impacts language proficiency

The learning environment at school is an important factor in determining a student's language development [24]. It is mostly observed that students can have more opportunities to learn and practice with the school's proper and necessary facilities. The school plays a vital role in delivering education and the learning environment needed for learners' language achievements. The level of exposure to a foreign language is correlated with the level of that language proficiency [25].

Hypothesis 4: Student demographic is associated with language proficiency

For a long period, many scholars and practitioners have paid huge attention to the influence of gender on learning language outcomes [26-27.28.29.30]. Among various variables related to students' demographic, age, and gender run parallel with other factors and strongly influence the language learning process [31]. Differences in levels of confidence when performing attests. For instance, boys often show a higher level of confidence. However, characteristics shown in class girls are more active and attentive than their counterparts are among two examples of how gender can affect how students learn English [32]. Therefore, the student demographic is associated with language proficiency.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Empirical model

Model 1: $LAN = \alpha + \beta_1 \times INS + \beta_2 \times HEM + \beta_3 \times STD + \beta_4 \times STE + \varepsilon$ Where: $\alpha, \beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3$ and β_4 are coefficients; ε is error, STE is a dummy variable.

If $STE = "1,"$ it refers to basic program and "0" otherwise.

STD comprises a set of control variables (while ages and working experience are discrete variables, gender, religion, and ethnicity are dummy variables)

The meaning and role of different variables are presented in Table 1

3.2. Data collection and analysis

Because in-deep research of Vietnamese students, we completely choose the high-rank multidisciplinary university in Vietnam, based on data of Webometrics Ranking of World Universities (2020), with a wide range of majors such as economics (#13 National Economics University, #47 Banking Academy, #48 Foreign Trade University, #68 Academy of Finance and Accounting, #103 Thuong Mai University), biology, science and technology (#2 Hanoi University of Science and Technology), law (#77 Hanoi University of Law), education (#1 Vietnam National University Hanoi). The sample size is presented in Table 2

The authors look at the quantitative method as a research approach to conduct this study. We firstly sent 500 online questionnaires to 500 chosen students who are from different majors, different college years, in different universities to ensure the validity of the data. Then, instruction was given to those students, helping them fill out the form. Data was collected and recorded in Excel file before being translated into SPSS and EVIEW versions. After eliminating some invalid answers, we obtained a sample of 2542 respondents from the chosen universities.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Descriptive analysis

Figure 1 compares the IELTS scores of students in eight different Vietnamese Universities: Academy of Finance, Banking Academy, Thuong Mai University, Vietnamese National University, Foreign Trade University, Hanoi University of Law, and National Economics University and Hanoi University of Science and Technology. Overall, most students taking our survey got under 5 IELTS band while those obtaining IELTS bands above

7.0 were under 10%, indicating the low level of language proficiency within Vietnamese students.

To begin with, the percentage of students obtaining IELTS under 5 in Vietnam National University constituted just over 20%, which was higher than that of Hanoi University of Science and Technology, National Economics University, Hanoi University of Law, Foreign Trade University, Thuong Mai University, Banking Academy, Academy of Finance with 14.2%, 17.6%, 4.1%, 9%, 9.4%, 11.9%, and 13.4% respectively.

On the other hand, the proportion of students with IELTS band 5-6 in Thuong Mai University made up 21.1%, followed by 2.8%, 20.3%, 19.3%, 6.8%, 13.4%, and 9.5% that of students from Hanoi University of Science and Technology, National Economics University, Hanoi University of Law, Foreign Trade University, Banking Academy, Academy of Finance University in that order given. Furthermore, the figures for students IELTS band 5-6 of University Banking Academy and Foreign Trade University, which were the same, were 4% higher than that of Hanoi University of Science and Technology.

By contrast, students' IELTS band 6-7 in Foreign trade university accounted for 16%. Vietnamese national university and Hanoi University of Science and Technology were roughly the same students with 6-7 band with 15.8%. In contrast, the Banking Academy figures were five times as small as that of Foreign Trade University. It is noticeable that in Hanoi University of Law, far more students achieving band 7-8 accounted for 52 students while none of the students at the Academy of Finance reached that band. However, although students' 7-8 IELTS score in Foreign Trade University was lower than other universities, Foreign trade university became the top university where the most students gained 8-9 IELTS score, doubled that of the Academy of Finance and Hanoi University of Science and Technology, was three times that of Banking Academy, and seven times that of Thuong Mai University.

Table 2 shows five heterogeneous intrinsic indicators ranging from hard-working, learning purpose, acquiring knowledgeability, learning method, and self-awareness in terms of gender. Fewer girls acquire knowledgeability and learning methods than boys', whereas men's hard-working, self-awareness, and learning purpose are not as high as women's.

Male student's language acquisition was supposed to be higher than female students. By contrast, the figures for girls' colleges' hard work, learning purpose, and self-awareness were 0.1, 0.04, and 0.12 higher than those of boy's colleges.

Male students' self-awareness and learning purpose show slightly different figures at 3.13 and 3.17 in that order. Contrastingly, female students show a completely

different picture: their level of hard work, learning purpose, and self-awareness occupied with 3.40, 3.16, 3.25, respectively.

4.2. Regression analysis

Table 3 shows regression results for factors influencing language proficiency. Generally, independent variables and demographic factors have a statistical significance, except for part-time, learning purpose, ability, and awareness. R-squared = 26.65. This means students' language proficiency is explained by over 26.65 % of the changes in student intrinsic (INT), School Environment (STE), Home environment (HEM), and student demographic (STD). These results confirm the significant impact of intrinsic, extrinsic, and demographic drivers on students' language proficiency.

The two variables positively impact LAN in that the coefficient of method learning and hard work equal to 0.30 and 0.26 in the order given. Although LAN is not affected by students' intelligence, learning purpose, and awareness, it is determined by 0.30 and 0.26 of the variation of the three independent variables and demographic model. Several independent factors, which are part-time, ability, learning purpose, and awareness, do not influence students' language proficiency. Similarly, FA education has no statistically significant association with LAN

When it comes to prob findings, Prob (F-statistic)= $0 < 0.05$, it is supposed the statistical significance = 95%, INT, STE, HEM, and ISTD have a significant positive correlation with LAN, the several remaining variables including part-time, FA education, parent support, learning purpose, ability, and awareness are negatively associated with LAN. In other words, the higher the language level the students learn, the higher language their capabilities are. Besides, male students' acquiring knowledge of language ability is much higher than female students. Interestingly, those who either follow religions or are not minority ethnic groups perhaps become proficient in language better than those who do not follow any creed. Moreover, by partaking in courses associated with international programs and advanced programs, students can master their language proficiency quicker than picking up the primary language programs. Surprisingly, father education does not influence children's language ability that is affected by MA-education. Likewise, family income positively impacts learners' linguistic proficiency. In other words, students coming from affluent families could milk an opportunity to get access to gain language from a very young age, whereas a reverse pattern can be seen in factors ranging from part-time, learning purpose, FA-education, awareness. Notably, the positive co-efficient found in the learning method and hard work reveals that students'

intelligence is not a significant factor in acquiring language, but because hard work and method learning play a crucial role in achieving the learners' language proficiency.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this research demonstrates the influence of intrinsic and extrinsic factors on Vietnamese students' language proficiency. The research results show that most Vietnamese students have low English proficiency levels since most research participants from the eight famous universities in Vietnam got under 5.0 on the IELTS test. This finding means that capability of using a second language is deficient and poor among undergraduates' students. From these findings, we suggest some recommendations as following to remedy the inadequacy of language proficiency:

From the students' perspective, it is necessary to consider the importance of the intrinsic factors in shaping and enhancing the ability to learn a second language. The research results emphasize the importance of endogenous factors, which are directly derived from students' motivation, hard work, learning spirit, and determination to learn a foreign language. These indicators are vital in determining the success of your language learning. More specifically, to learn a foreign language effectively, students are required to have the ability, study method, hard work, and correct perception of the language. Learning a second language is completely different from learning other thought-oriented subjects in that it does not require students to be too smart. This is because we found that students' intelligence or ability to learn only has very little effect on the student's learning efficiency. Instead, the study method and diligence are the keys to students' success while learning a second language. Especially for the learning method, this is an extremely important factor that directly determines language proficiency. For example, the Jewish learning method is one of the most popular methods recognized by world science as the fastest and most effective method of acquiring language knowledge. This learning method requires learners to use

self-study cards, learn by phrases, and put sentences in context.

From the parents' perspective, the study shows that parents' education, especially mothers', greatly impacts the formation of thinking and language preference of their children. Specifically, the higher the mother's educational attainment, the better the child will learn a mother's foreign language. We high-income families are more likely to have children with better language skills than low-income families. The reason is that a parent's investment in education depends largely on their income. Since then, parents' care and investment in education are key to helping their children improve their foreign language skills, thereby developing their children's capabilities. However, parents should not over-expect and put pressure on their children to study because family pressure is one factor that negatively affects the child's comprehensive development. Therefore, parents need to understand their children thoroughly and listen to their children to have appropriate supportive ways to encourage their children to enhance the foreign language skills.

From the educators' perspective, the creation of learning programs in which students have more opportunities to interact with native teachers is a good opportunity for students to develop their language skills. The study results have shown that students in programs that use English as the main language in learning and teaching often have better foreign language proficiency than those in traditional training systems. In other words, combining language training during college time for students in the learning process is necessary to hone and nurture their abilities. The study results also indicate the differences in students' language acquisition in different genders and in different regions and religions. The school should pay more attention to female students and ethnic minority students, who have a weaker ability to use language than others.

6. TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1: List of dependents, independent and control variables of the regression models

Variables	Meaning	Determined by	Role
LAN	Language proficiency	Listening	Dependent variable
		Speaking	
		Writing	
		Reading	

INT	Intrinsic factors	Learning purpose	Independent variable
		Acquiring knowledgeability	Independent variable
		Learning method	Independent variable
		Hard-working	Independent variable
		Self-awareness	Independent variable
STD	Student Demographic	School-year	Independent variable
		Gender	Independent variable
		Work experience	Independent variable
		Religion	Independent variable
		Ethnicity	Independent variable
HEM	Home Environment	Father education	Independent variable
		Mother education	Independent variable
		Parental support	Independent variable
		Educational level	Independent variable
		Family income	Independent variable
STE	School Environment	Basic Program	Control variable
		International Program	Control variable
		Advance Program	Control variable

Table 2: Research samples

University	Type	No. of student	Total	Percent
National Economics University (NEU)	Graduated	22	504	4%
	Freshman	234		46%
	Junior	129		26%
	Sophomore	83		16%
	Senior	36		8%
Foreign Trade University (FTU)	Graduated	34	240	14%

	Freshman	74		31%
	Junior	28		12%
	Sophomore	42		18%
	Senior	62		25%
Thuong Mai University (TMU)	Graduated	63	336	19%
	Freshman	21		6%
	Junior	51		15%
	Sophomore	89		26%
	Senior	112		34%
Banking Academy (BA)	Graduated	13	207	6%
	Freshman	61		29%
	Junior	90		43%
	Sophomore	34		16%
	Senior	9		6%
Academy of Finance (BA)	Graduated	47	275	17%
	Freshman	84		31%
	Junior	99		36%
	Sophomore	6		2%
	Senior	39		14%
Law University (HLU)	Graduated	26	260	10%
	Freshman	78		30%
	Junior	52		20%
	Sophomore	52		20%
	Senior	52		20%
University of science and technology (HUST)	Graduated	16	301	5%
	Freshman	111		37%
	Junior	109		36%

	Sophomore	44		15%
	Senior	21		7%
National University (VNU)	Graduated	130	419	31%
	Freshman	70		17%
	Junior	45		11%
	Sophomore	65		16%
	Senior	109		25%
Total		2542	2542	100%

Table 3: Regression analysis

Dependent Variable: LAN

Method: Least Squares

Date: 12/06/20 Time: 21:21

Sample(adjusted): 1 2542

Included observations: 2542 after adjusting endpoints

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
C	0.349630	0.126803	2.757259	0.0059
YEAR	0.024427	0.011830	2.064758	0.0390
GEN	0.160044	0.040484	3.953276	0.0001
PARTIME	-0.000712	0.015033	-0.047374	0.9622
RELIGION	0.289954	0.045806	6.330081	0.0000
MINORITY	0.148053	0.072449	2.043543	0.0411
PROGRAM	0.472647	0.041125	11.49282	0.0000
FA-EDUCATION	0.024790	0.022337	1.109802	0.2672
MA-EDUCATION	0.140098	0.023227	6.031760	0.0000
PARENT SUPPORT	-0.155793	0.024224	-6.431222	0.0000
FAMILY INCOME	0.134643	0.023637	5.696390	0.0000
LEARNING PURPOSE	-0.006879	0.025277	-0.272146	0.7855
ABILITY	-0.069079	0.027534	-2.508901	0.0122
LEARNING METHOD	0.307680	0.026611	11.56217	0.0000
HARDWORKING	0.262165	0.023683	11.06993	0.0000
AWARENESS	-0.169217	0.025478	-6.641647	0.0000

R-squared	0.266555	Mean dependent var	1.857986
Adjusted R-squared	0.262200	S.D. dependent var	0.948856
SE of regression	0.815023	Akaike info criterion	2.435073
Sum squared resid	1677.926	Schwarz criterion	2.471836
Log likelihood	-3078.978	F-statistic	61.20142
Durbin-Watson stat	2.067393	Prob(F-statistic)	0.000000

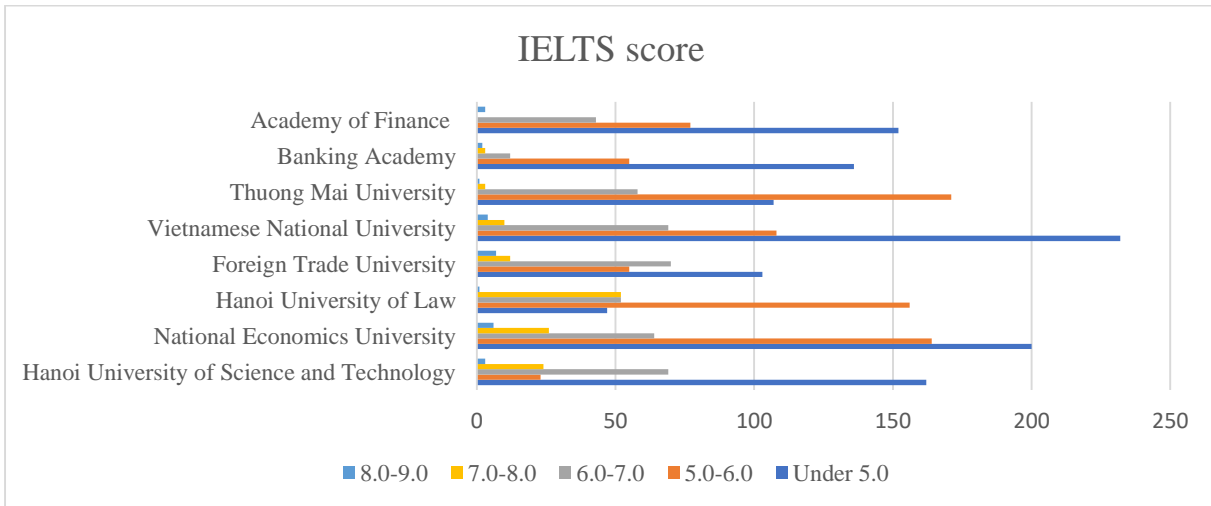


Figure 1: Students' IELTS score

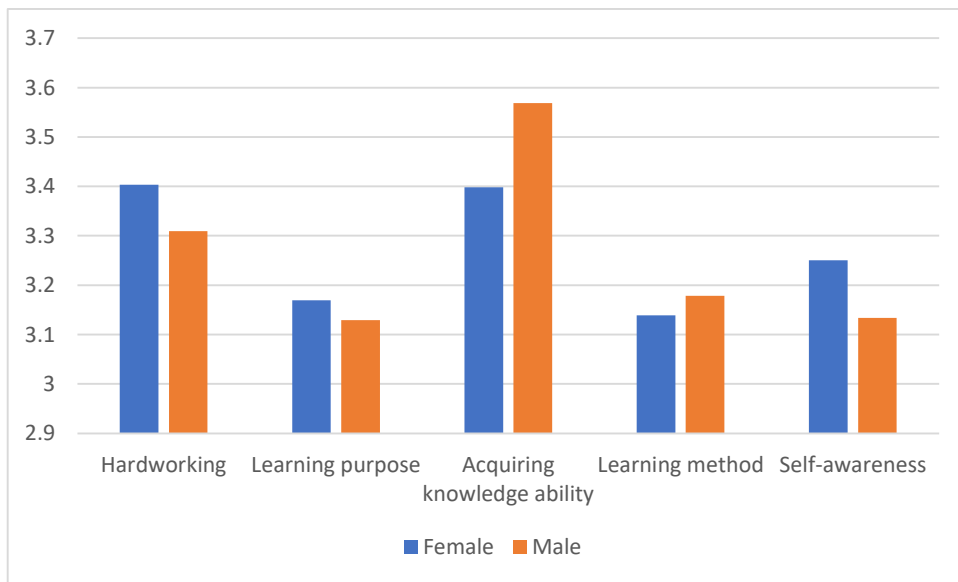


Figure 2: The intrinsic factors affecting language proficiency

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