

Assessing Vietnamese Language Proficiency Based on Vietnamese Language Competency Framework for Foreigners at Thai Nguyen University of Education

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Abstract Vietnamese Language Competency Framework for Foreigners was approved and released by Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training on 1st September 2015. The framework identifies basic elements for assessing Vietnamese language proficiency and developing a curriculum of Vietnamese language for foreigners. This paper reports a process of developing Vietnamese language tests based on the Vietnamese Language Competency Framework (VLCF) for foreigners at Thai Nguyen University of Education. It also suggests some recommendations on enhancing the quality of Vietnamese language assessment as well as the quality of training programs and training activities for teaching Vietnamese language for foreigners.

Keywords: vietnamese language teaching, vietnamese language competency framework, language assessment

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1. Introduction

A large number of foreign students come to Vietnam and study Vietnamese as a foreign language and the number increases every year. On September 1st, 2015, the Ministry of Education and Training issued Circular 17/2015/TT-BGDĐT attached with the Vietnamese Language Competency Framework for Foreigners [1]. The framework is firstly an important basis for the learners to understand the language content and requirements for each Vietnamese language proficiency level and be able to undertake self-assessment activities. It is also an important resource to help teachers develop the Vietnamese language curriculum, organize testing activities and assess the suitability of each level of competency.

Thai Nguyen University of Education (TNUE) is one of the key institutions of higher education in Vietnam. The mission of the University is to train teachers and educational managers for provinces in the North of Vietnam. The University has conducted Vietnamese language training courses for foreigners from various countries such as Laos, Mozambique, Mongolia, China, Taiwan, Thailand, Japan and Korea since 2001. In the past five years, the number of foreign students attending pre-university and post-graduate Vietnamese courses has been increasing and recent data on the number of foreign learners studying Vietnamese language and culture at TNUE has reached 954 students.

Since the Vietnamese Language Competence Framework for Foreigners has been established, TNUE has focused much on the development of training curricula, teaching materials and organizing assessment and evaluation activities categorized in 6 competency levels for foreign learners who will enrol in undergraduate or postgraduate programs in Vietnam. In the academic year of 2017-2018, TNUE trained Vietnamese language for 140 students from Laos, China, Mozambique and Mongolia. The Vietnamese language curriculum for those learners includes 1000 periods with 2 compulsory and optional elective modules¹.

This paper aims to describe an overview of the implementation of assessment and evaluation based on VLCF to assess Vietnamese language proficiency of foreign learners studying at TNUE. It then reports a process of developing Vietnamese language tests based on the framework. It also provides recommendations in order to improve the quality of training programs, training practice and assessment and evaluation practice in the

¹ Compulsory modules (910 periods), including Vietnamese Basic 1, Vietnamese Basic 2, Vietnamese Basic 3, Vietnamese Basic 4, Advanced Vietnamese - Listening Skill, Advanced Vietnamese - Speaking Skill, Vietnamese Advanced - Reading Skill, Advanced Vietnamese - Writing Skill, International Cultural Festival Project, Art Project, Journal Project, Vietnamese Practical Experience Trip, Culture, Vietnam and its People. Minimum requirement for elective modules (90 periods) in which students choose to study 3 of the 7 elective subjects (in Group A, Group B or Social), including: Vietnamese for Maths, Vietnamese for Physics, Vietnamese for Chemistry, Vietnamese for Biology, Vietnamese for Literature, Vietnamese for History, Vietnamese for Geography.

subjects training Vietnamese for foreigners at the University.

2. An Overview on Assessment and Evaluation of Vietnamese Language Proficiency Based on Vietnamese Language Competency Framework (VLCF) for Foreign Learners in Vietnam

2.1. Definition of Assessment and Evaluation and the Relationship between Teaching Vietnamese Language and Assessment and Evaluation of Vietnamese Proficiency

Assessment and evaluation are identified as important stages in the process of organizing and managing training activities. As a means of assessment and evaluation, test is "to examine a person's knowledge or ability in a particular field" [2], and in overall tests, assessment and evaluation "take into account actual facts to the process of assessing and evaluating learning activities" [3]. Nguyen Chi Hoa (2012) claims that "*testing acts as a means of measuring ability, skills and knowledge in a certain field*" [4] and tests can be considered as a technical tool that requires the learners to demonstrate partly skills and knowledge acquired from a training program. Nguyen also argues that tests and/or exams are administrative activities in which students have to be present during the activities and happen over a specified period of time in a specified place. Students must demonstrate their highest ability and their answers to the test questions will be assessed by one or a group of teachers.

Assessment and evaluation is a continuous process that occurs in a wide range. "Assessment and evaluation can be defined as a form of research involving the collection of data using valuable and reliable instruments, analysis of collected data and use analysed findings for specific purposes" [5]. There are many types of assessment and evaluation named as accredited, investigative, interpretative and critical types in which each type identifies specific research questions, data collection methods and data analytical processes. According to Nguyen Chi Hoa and Vu Duc Nghieu (2015), the process also includes a range of activities undertaken to collect and analyze information about a person's knowledge, attitudes, and skills. In the field of teaching Vietnamese as a foreign language, a teacher can consciously evaluate the language proficiency when students answer a question, make a comment, use some new words or apply a new sentence structures. This kind of assessment data can be seen as an informal assessment which may happen quite frequently. Tests/exams are one in many ways of assessment and evaluation that teachers themselves can create and implement in their teaching practice.

Testing in particular and assessment and evaluation in general is an important stage in teaching Vietnamese language. The main function of conducting this activity is to measure the effectiveness of the teaching practice against the subject objectives. Its results are then

employed to evaluate the effectiveness of the training program and recommend possible adjustment to the subject objectives to suit actual requirements. Assessment techniques need to be consistent with teaching and learning techniques; therefore modifications and adjustment in assessment will result in changes in teaching and learning activities. There is evidence that assessment practice to assess Vietnamese language proficiency in Vietnam in general and in some training institutions in particular has been poorly implemented and cannot provide sufficient information for adjusting teaching and learning practice as well as successfully assess learners' acquired knowledge and skills.

Assessment of Vietnamese language competency is an integral part in the process of teaching Vietnamese as a foreign language. Data collected during assessment will provide useful information for development subject curriculum, training content and training implementation. It also provides students with feedback that may have both positive and negative impacts. If a test – a standardized set of tools to measure learners' competency is carefully constructed with good content, it will have good impact for both teaching and learning activities. On the other hand, if the testing content is not consistent with the subject objectives, it will have negative impacts on students' learning outcomes, learning engagement and other psychological factors.

In summary, assessment of acquired knowledge and skills in Vietnamese language is an inseparable part of the Vietnamese language teaching process. This activity has a strong impact on both the teaching process of the teacher and the learning process of the students. It helps to collect information, data and evidence for students' learning achievements to evaluate their levels of knowledge development and Vietnamese language competency. At the same time, this activity also provides feedback to evaluate training quality, teaching practice and other administrative management to identify limitations and problems for timely adjustment of training and assessment activities to suit the targeted subject objectives and actual requirements.

2.2. General Requirements for Assessment and Evaluation in Vietnamese Language Teaching

The training of Vietnamese as a foreign language often has a common feature that learners come from different countries, at different ages with different psychological characteristics and have unique experience with their own languages and cultures. It is therefore requires the assessment and evaluation of their learning to be flexible, dynamic, and suitable for different learning contents and for different learning subjects.

The general requirements for assessment and evaluation in teaching Vietnamese has been identified by Nguyen Chi Hoa (2012) and includes 3 main factors which are test validity, test reliability and test interpretative effectiveness in assessment and teaching practices.

a. Test validity

A good test can accurately evaluate knowledge and skills of students' expected learning outcomes and in that case the test is valid or has high validity. Nguyen Chi Hoa

proposes two manifestations of test validity and they include content validity, standard validity and scoring validity. Content validity is understood as test features including sufficient structures and patterns representing language practical skills that are consistent with the training program and ensuring the ability to assess students' learning outcomes. The higher the test validity is, the more accurate the assessment of what need to be assessed is. However, standard validity requires the tests to integrate objectives of the training program and possess a high correlation between the test results and other results from other independent assessment and measurements. Finally, scoring validity is defined as the accuracy in scoring students' work and accurately score knowledge and skills need to be assessed.

In order to increase the test validity, Nguyen Chi Hoa [4] suggests performing actions including determining specific contents of the test (taking into account all the known knowledge linked to the assessed knowledge), selecting sufficient representative domains of the assessed knowledge, implementing direct testing techniques, ensuring the marking process be accurate, objective and fair, and other actions to make the test valid.

b. Test reliability

The test reliability is determined by the reliability coefficient and the marking reliability. Reliability coefficient allows comparing the reliability of different tests and the ideal coefficient is 1. A test has reliability coefficient of 1 has the same test result regardless of whether the test is held at different time periods. Marking activities have strong impacts on tests' reliability. It is acceptable for a multiple choice test to have the coefficient of 1; however, marking is more objective and consistent when the test is marked by a computer and it may become more subjective when performed by a human especially in speaking tests.

Nguyen Chi Hoa [4] proposes some suggestions to make the tests more reliable by including a full range of knowledge domains, eliminating questions that do not distinguish different students' levels of language proficiency, not providing too much freedom to students, constructing clear questions and requiring students to provide clear answers, making test layouts easily to read, supporting students to familiarize themselves with the test rules and test techniques, setting uniform standards for tests, taking into account different ways of answering questions when starting the marking process, identifying students by students' numbers and not by names and performing the test marking with many independent examiners.

2.3. Designing Tests in Accordance with VLCF to Assess Foreign Learners' Vietnamese Language Proficiency in Vietnam

The Ministry of Education and Training approved and released Circular 17/2015/TT - BGDDT dated 1st September, 2015 on Vietnamese Language Competency Framework for Foreigners. The framework came into effects on 16th October, 2015 and is developed on the reference to the Common European Framework of

Reference for Languages (CEFR). The competency framework is divided into a three-broad level scale (Beginner, Intermediate and Advanced) and a six-level scale (from Level 1 to Level 6 corresponding from Level A1 to Level C2 CEFR). The framework is used as a unified standard to assess Vietnamese language competency of foreign learners as well as basic background to develop the subject curriculum, plan the training activities, compile or select learning materials, and develop assessment criteria at each training level and competency level. The framework is also a guideline for teachers to select and implement teaching activities, teaching techniques, assessment and evaluation techniques in order to assist students with achieving the targeted learning outcomes, understanding and meeting requirements of each language competency level and the training program and being able to conduct self-assessment of their abilities.

After the VLCF being released, the Ministry of Education and Training continued to sign the Decision No. 2097 / QD - BGDDT on 21st July, 2016 to specify the Test Format to Assess Vietnamese Language Competency for Foreigners [6]. The official format for the test consists of four skills: Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. The listening, reading and writing tests are 60 minutes long, and the speaking test is 15 minutes long.

The listening test includes 4 parts, 55 multiple choice questions and listening contents vary from short, simple text; instructions and notices; conversations; speeches to simple to complex lectures about common issues or academic issues. Test candidates choose the only correct answer in the given options of each question.

The reading test consists of 2 parts and 40 multiple choice questions. Part 1 of the reading test is about typical and popular issues in daily life. Part 2 of the reading test is about science, literature and journalism topics. Each section may contain 1, 2, or 3 reading excerpts. After each passage there will be questions. Candidates must choose the only correct answer in the given options of each question.

The writing test consists of 3 parts. Part 1 of the writing test is a spelling test and this text is about 120 words long. Part 2 of the writing test requires the candidates to write a regular letter or an email of about 120 words. Part 3 ask candidate to write an essay of about 200 words on a general or academic topic.

The speaking test consists of 3 parts. Part 1 focuses on social interactions and candidates answer 3-6 questions on two different topics. Part 2 is a discussion of solutions to a problem; the candidate is provided a problem and two or more solutions and is asked to give his/her opinions on the best solution among the provided solutions and compare and explain why the selected solution is the best. Part 3 is a speaking test about developing verbal discussion on a specific topic. The candidates talk about a general or academic topic in which they can use provided ideas or develop their own ideas.

Based on the Vietnamese Language Proficiency Framework for Foreigners and on the Standards for Vietnamese Language Proficiency Assessment for International Learners proposed by Vu Duc Nghieu and his colleagues in 2014, a group of researchers at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, National University of Hanoi

has developed Vietest software which provides trial Vietnamese language tests including 24 sets and 3600 different test questions. The test questions cover all knowledge domains from Level A1 to Level C2. The unique characteristics of the test will help candidates not need to be at the testing centers and can take the test anywhere in the world at the same time. Another advantage of the test is that it provides a more flexible basis for designing and analyzing test. However, according to Vu Duc Nghieu [7], it requires a huge workload to be undertaken to change the software from trial version into full version such as developing question database with different sets of questions satisfied complex requirements about quantity, quality, content format, test layout format, systematic characteristics, conformity and uniformity.

The Vietnamese Language Competency Framework and the Test Format to Assess Vietnamese Language Competency for Foreigners have also been official and fundamental basis for many Vietnamese language training institutions named as The Faculty of Vietnamese Studies and Vietnamese Language, Department of Linguistics-Center for Applied Linguistics and Vietnamese Language - University of Social Sciences and Humanities - National University of Hanoi; Faculty of Vietnamese Studies - University of Social Sciences and Humanities - National University of Ho Chi Minh City; Hanoi University; Hanoi University of Culture and Thai Nguyen University of Education to organize competency assessment in Vietnamese language. However, these training institution just inform the test candidates little information about the test format and very general information about assessed language knowledge and skills

In January 2017, the Faculty of Vietnamese Studies - University of Social Sciences and Humanities - National University of Ho Chi Minh City introduced a test sample in accordance with the guidelines of the Ministry of Education and Training. The test consists of test components of 4 language skills: Listening, Reading, Speaking and Writing. In addition to the application of the test format required by the Ministry of Education and Training, this test sample proposes more specific contents in different test sections. For example, the official Listening test includes Part 1 with 15 questions, Part 2 with 14 questions, Part 3 with 14 questions and Part 4 with 12 questions. All listening contents are only heard once and the 60 minute test consists of 05 minutes of preparation and transferring the answers to the answer sheet. The Reading test consists of two parts in which the first one consists of two passages (or excerpts) and the other one with three passages (or excerpts). The total of 40 questions in the Reading test are divided as follows: Passage 1: 10, Passage 2: 6, Passage 3: 8, Passage 4: 8 and Passage 5: 8. The 60-minute test consists of time for reading excerpts, reading questions, finding answers and marking the answers on the answer sheet. The Speaking test consists of 3 parts. Candidates answer questions directly to the examiners. Speaking Part 1 and 3 may contain pictures. Candidates have 60 seconds to see them and then answer the questions. The Writing test consists of 3 parts. In Part 1, the candidates listen and fill in the blanks with the provided words in 10 minutes. In Part 2,

candidates write a letter for a given situation in 20 minutes. In Part 3, candidates write an essay about a given topic in 30 minutes.

In short, after the introduction of the Vietnamese Language Competency Framework and the Test Format to Assess Vietnamese Language Competency for Foreigners of the Ministry of Education and Training, most of Vietnamese language training institutions and testing centres has implemented the framework and specified some test format into their training and testing programs. However, the implementation of the framework is still incoherent and there is no consensus agreement for all training institutions and testing centres throughout the country. In addition, the Ministry of Education and Training has not promulgated regulations and sample tests to assess Vietnamese language competency in 3-broad-level scale and 6-level scale for foreigners. This fact results in the failure of organizing Vietnamese language competency tests at national level and issuing certificates that are valid at all Vietnamese language training institutions in Vietnam, in the region and in the world.

3. The Implementation of Designing Vietnamese Language Competency Tests in Accordance with the VLCF at Thai Nguyen University of Education (TNUE)

3.1. Implementing Steps in Designing Tests

Being aware of the critical importance of assessment and evaluation in the training Vietnamese language to foreign students, Thai Nguyen University of Education focuses much on implementing competency assessment of Vietnamese language for this special type of learners. With nearly 20 years of experience in training, organizing tests and issuing certificates of Vietnamese language for students to be ready for undergraduate and postgraduate courses as well as other Vietnamese language and culture courses, the University use the assessment and evaluation data as a vital source to evaluate the training programs and to adjust training objectives and teaching techniques. The assessment data reveals language competency of the learners and has strong impacts on learners' learning motivation to acquire knowledge and skills to use the targeted language. However, it should be noted that the testing content does not cover all the learning knowledge and skills in the training programs, especially the listening and speaking skills.

Responding to the national educational innovation in changing teaching techniques and assessment and evaluation techniques and applying the VLCF and the Test Format to Assess Vietnamese Language Competency for Foreigners, TNUE has re-developed the Vietnamese language curriculum for pre-university and postgraduate programs, published internal textbooks in accordance with the framework and especially comprehensibly changed the assessment and evaluation activities to assess Vietnamese language competency.

The developed curriculum is for students who study Vietnamese language for pre-university or post-graduate programs and is conducted in 10 months with 1000 teaching periods categorized into 2 learning sections of optional and compulsory subjects. In addition to 4 modules of fundamental Vietnamese (Level A1 and A2), learners are able to learn advanced Vietnamese listening, speaking, reading and writing skills (Level B1) and other specialized Vietnamese language courses (in the fields of Science, Humanities, or Education). The training program has also developed some modules in the form of learning projects and experiential trips so that students have opportunities to interact and communicate with native Vietnamese speakers.

The change of the training curriculum compatible with the 3-broad-level and the 6-level competency framework has resulted in the implementation of assessment and evaluation on a regular and systematic basis which helps to enhance students' learning motivation in improving their Vietnamese language skills.

Among different stages of assessment process, the University identifies designing tests - a standardized set of tools to measure learners' competency - playing an important role. The designing task was assigned to a group of experts with many years of teaching Vietnamese for foreigners at the Centre for International Cooperation and Vietnamese Language Training. The designing process includes the following steps:

- Step 1: *Determining testing contents – Testing topics.* In general, learning assessment is carried out twice during a learning course (mid-term assessment and final assessment). Each assessment corresponds to training contents at a specific Vietnamese language competency level. Therefore, in order to design a Vietnamese competency test suitable for the training program, the expert group needs to clearly define the subject contents and competency to be assessed. Based on that basis, the group further identifies detailed contents (including vocabulary, grammar structure ...) for the test and levels of language proficiency required the learners to achieve.

- Step 2: *Determining other test details.* The expert group discuss and determine other test details including the following information: the test content, the test structure (that followed the official test format), the test timing, the test instruments, the techniques used to evaluate the test and the test rubric. The test content is determined in details specialized the tasks to be performed by the candidates; the type of text used, the length of the text; text topics; dialects (if any), accent, text style, and speed of speakers (for listening test). It is also important to build a test rubric. In this step, the experts will also measure the test reliability and determine the grading scale and specific points for each part of the test.

- Step 3: *Reviewing and finalizing the test.* The designed test will be reviewed, edited, and finalized by two independent experts if necessary. The main task of the two experts is to review and check the validity and reliability of the test questions to find out the question need to be adjusted or decide which question cannot be adjusted but be eliminated. The final test content will be compiled into 02 test versions (even and odd codes) for later use in the exam.

- Step 4: *Trial testing for the designed test.* After being finalized in the adjustment process, the trial testing will be conducted with two groups of candidates who are Vietnamese students and foreign students and not the candidates who register to take the official test. The trial testing results will be analysed to determine the test validity and the test reliability coefficient.

3.2. The Structure and Format of the Test

3.2.1. Listening Test

Listening skill is one of the skills that learners of foreign languages in general and learners of Vietnamese language as a foreign language in particular find very difficult. There are many types of practices to improve the learners' listening skills such as listening - filling the tones, listening - spelling, listening - filling missing words, listening - arranging a conversation, listening - true/false answer, listening - selecting the correct answer and listening - answering the question. However, according to the official test format followed the guideline in VLCF, the test has only one type of questions that requires candidates to choose the correct answer from a set of provided answers. Therefore in the process of designing the test, the expert group at TNUE follows the regulations of the VLCF and the official test format and has flexible applications in the types of questions and formats of questions (with or without pictures/images, with or without text of the questions and with or without text of the answers) to measure the candidates' listening skill in a wider range.

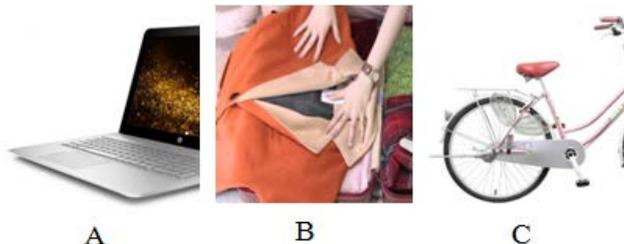
The listening test is conducted in 60 minutes (including the time to transfer answers to the answer sheet). The structure of the test consists of 4 parts, 55 questions.

* **Part 1 (3.0 points).** Part 1 has 3 questions.

- **Question 1 (1.0 point).** Listen and choose the correct answer. Question 1 has 10 sub-sections. Candidates listen to 10 short conversations. At each conversation there are 3 pictures / images for candidates to choose the answer appropriate to the content of the dialogue. Candidates have 1 minute to read the questions and can listen twice. After the listening session ends, candidates have 2 minutes to answer and transfer the answers to the answer sheet.

Sample question:

1. On the first arrival to school, what does Ly not need to bring along?



- **Question 2 (1.0 point).** Listen and choose the correct answer. Question 2 has 5 sub-sections. Candidates listen to the questions (questions are not printed in the test) and need to choose the most correct answers. Candidates have 1 minute to read the questions and can listen twice. After the listening session ends, candidates have 2 minutes to answer and transfer the answers to the answer sheet.

Sample question:

- 11. A. Yesterday I had to walk a lot and my legs hurt.
- B. I stayed home all day yesterday.
- C. Yesterday was May 7th.

- **Question 3 (1.0 point)**. Listen and choose the correct answer. Question 3 has 5 sub-sections. Candidates read the question, answer the answer (the answer is not printed in the test) and tick the most correct answers. Candidates have 1 minute to read the questions and can listen twice. After the listening session ends, candidates have 2 minutes to answer and transfer the answers to the answer sheet.

Sample question:

16. My parents, brothers and sisters sing well

- A
- B
- C

* **Part 2 (3.0 points)**. Part 2 has 2 questions.

- **Question 4 (2.0 points)**. Listen and choose the correct answer. Question 4 has 10 sub-sections. Question 4 asks candidates to choose the best answer to answer the question. Candidates listen to a 2-minute conversation at normal speech speed. Candidates have 1 minute to read the questions and can listen twice. After the listening session ends, candidates have 2 minutes to answer and transfer the answers to the answer sheet.

Sample question:

21. In the last five years, what have the international visitors to Vietnam been spending on?

- A. renting room and eating
- B. shopping, sightseeing
- C. entertaining activities

- **Question 5 (1.0 point)**. Listen and rearrange the information. Question 5 has 5 sub-sections. Question 5 asks candidates to listen and rearrange the information mentioned in the correct order (1-2-3-4-5). Candidates listen to a 2-minute dialogue at normal speech speed. Candidates have 1 minute to read the questions and can listen twice. After the listening session ends, candidates have 2 minutes to answer and transfer the answers to the answer sheet.

Table 1. Sample question

31. Link and design themed tours	
...	
35. Develop practical tour models or home stay for visitors to experience local travelling and introduce them local special products	

* **Part 3 (2.0 points)**. Part 3 has 1 question.

- **Question 6 (2.0 points)**. Listen and choose the correct answer. Question 6 has 10 sub-sections. Question 6 requires the candidates to circle the selected answer of True (T) or False (F). Candidates listen to a 2-minute dialogue at normal speech speed. Candidates have 1 minute to read the questions and can listen twice. After the listening session ends, candidates have 2 minutes to answer and transfer the answers to the answer sheet.

Table 2. Sample question

36. Two green buildings of Vietnam have won the prize in a leading design contest.	T	F
...	T	F
45. A'Design Award & Competition is an award to honor design enthusiasts in more than 80 countries.	T	F

* **Part 4 (2.0 points)**. Part 4 has 1 question.

- **Question 7 (2.0 points)**. Listen and fill in the summary. Question 7 has 10 sub-sections. Question 7 asks the candidates to listen and fill in the most correct words/numbers into the blanks. Candidates listen to a 2-minute dialogue at normal speech speed. Candidates have 1 minute to read the questions and can listen twice. After the listening session ends, candidates have 2 minutes to answer and transfer the answers to the answer sheet.

Table 3. Sample question

FACTS:
- The alcohol use in Vietnam is increasing and at an alarming rate (according to the National Traffic Safety Committee).
- On average, there are (46) people dying of traffic accidents on the road.
...
- There should be regulations, sanctions and (55) the sanctioning effects of purchasing and consuming alcohol.

3.2.2. Speaking Test

During the learning process, students practice a variety of speaking patterns depending on the language competency levels such as repeating spoken language (speaking - repeating a word, speaking - repeating a sentence), deep focus speaking (speaking - direct answering, speaking - describing pictures, speaking - verbal presentation of information from suggested pictures), interactive speaking (speaking - retelling, speaking - developing a theme, speaking - discussing solutions). The speaking test to assess Vietnamese language competency is mainly to assess candidates' ability to produce verbal language. According to the test official format, candidates take the speaking test within 15 minutes, regardless of the preparation time. The structure of the test consists of 3 parts. Part 1: Social Interactions. Part 2: Discussing the solutions. Part 3: Topic development. The structure of the test is generally recognized as suitable and applicable.

A more detailed structure of the test has been identifies by the expert group at TNUE is as follows: The listening test consists of 3 parts. Part 1: Social Interactions (2.0 points). Candidates answer 6 questions on 2 different topics. Part 2: Discussing the solutions (3.0 points). Candidates are provided with one problem and two solutions. Candidates must give their opinions on the best solution and comments on the remaining solutions. Part 3: Topic development (5.0 points). Candidates talk about a given general or academic topic and they can use the provided ideas or develop their own ideas. Candidates have 5 minutes to prepare and 15 minutes to answer.

Sample question:

Part 1: Social Interactions (2.0 points)

1. When you want to reduce stress, what do you do to relax?
2. Name some healthy and unhealthy types of entertainment?
3. Do you enjoy weekend entertainment at home or hanging out?
4. How to have a healthy body?
5. Do you have bad habits that affect your health?
6. Does work and learning pressure affect our health?

Part 2: Discussing the solutions (3.0 points)

Nowadays many young people like to go to the bar for entertainment. What do you think?

1. Agree because it is a way to entertain.
2. Disagree because this is a complicated place and many problems may happen.

Part 3: Topic development (5.0 points)

Vietnam in the view of international friends.

1. What is Vietnam famous for? Why international tourists love to come to Vietnam?
2. How is the country and people of Vietnam? What do foreigners think about Vietnam?

3.2.3. Reading Test

Along with listening skill, reading is also a language acquisition skill. As other skills, reading test also has many problems for the test designer to consider such as language of questions; types of questions; relevant grammar and vocabulary in the reading test; expression of the text in answering the questions; length of the text and topics of the text. In addition, the reading content must ensure the orthodoxy, cultural and political appropriateness and being suitable with the competency level of assessment. According to the official test format, candidates must take the test in 60 minutes. The test consists of two parts. Part 1 is about general topics in daily life. Part 2 is about science, literature and journalism. Each part may contain 1, 2, or 3 text passages or excerpts. After each passage there will be questions. Candidates choose the only correct answer from the given options of each question.

Structure of the test designed by the expert group at TNUE is as follows: The Reading test is conducted in 60 minutes (including the time to transfer the answers to the answer sheet). The structure of the test consists of 2 parts, 40 questions.

* **Part 1 (5.0 points).** Part 1 has 4 questions, each question has 5 sub-sections.

- **Question 1 (1.0 point).** Read the passage and circle the correct answer. Candidates read a given text (about 250-300 words) on a general topic and choose the best answer among the four alternatives.

Table 4. Sample question

The given text (250-300 words)

1. What is the main point of the passage?
 - A. Harmful effects of eating too much
 - B. Harmful effects of unhealthy eating habits
 - C. Harmful effects of not eating breakfast
 - D. Harmful effects of eating too much in the evening

- **Question 2 (1.0 point).** Read the dialogue and fill in the True (T) or False (F) in the box next to it. Candidates read a given dialogue (8 - 10 conversation turns) about a general topic and choose the True/False answer according to the given information.

Table 5. Sample question

The given dialogue (8 - 10 conversation turns)	
6. The jacket that Lan has tried is a bomber jacket.	T/F
...	T/F
10. The store is on sale 50% off of all products	T/F

Question 3 (1.5 points). Read the passage and circle the correct answer. Candidates read a given text (about 350-400 words) about a general topic and choose the best answer among the four alternatives.

Table 6. Sample question

The given text (350-400 words)

11. What is *minimalism*?
 - A. Extremely economical
 - B. Extremely simple
 - C. Extremely important
 - D. The simplest form that may not be more simplified

- **Question 4 (1.5 points).** Read the passage and circle the correct answer. Candidates read a given text (about 450-500 words) in a general topic and choose the best answer among the four alternatives.

Table 7. Sample question

The given text (450-500 words)

16. In the US, what problems has Quan faced?
 - A. Because of the weather
 - B. Because of being away from home
 - C. Because of using the wheelchair
 - D. Because of being discriminated

Part 2 (5.0 points). Part 2 has 4 questions, each question has 5 sub-sections.

- **Question 5 (1.0 point).** Read the paragraph and circle the correct answer. Candidates read a given text (about 350-400 words) on the topic of science and choose the best answer among the four alternatives.

Table 8. Sample question

The given text (350-400 words)

21. What is the key information that the author want to express?
 - A. Impacts of climate change
 - B. Negative impacts of climate change
 - C. Example of extreme weather condition in Vietnam
 - D. Fast changing characteristics of the weather

- **Question 6 (1.0 point).** Read the paragraph and circle the correct answer. Candidates read a given text (about 350-400 words) on the topic of literature and choose the best answer among the four options available.

Table 9. Sample question

The given text (350-400 words)

26. What does the parrot say to Mai?
 - A. Praise Mai
 - B. Call Mai
 - C. Criticize Mai
 - D. Challenge Mai

- **Question 7 (1.5 points).** Read the paragraph and circle the correct answer. Candidates read a given text (about 350-400 words) on the topic of literature and life and choose the best answer among the three options available.

Table 10. Sample question

The given text (350-400 words)
.....

31. What is the other name of summer?
 A. Leave changing season
 B. Cold season
 C. Phoenix season

- **Question 8 (1.5 points).** Read the paragraph and circle the correct answer. Candidates read a given text (about 350-400 words) on the topic of science and life and choose the best answer among the three options available.

Table 11. Sample question

The given text (350-400 words)
.....

36. What is the game called?
 A. Chinese chess
 B. People chess
 C. Traditional people chess

3.2.4. Writing Test

Writing skill is considered as the most difficult-to-learn skill and it takes time to improve and practice. It is widely accepted that the best way to assess the writing skill of learners of Vietnamese as a foreign language or as a second language is to ask them write. Based on their writings, we will evaluate the writing competency of the students. When proposing content of the test, it is necessary for the test designers to identify appropriate writing requirements, which can represent appropriate content and skills that candidates can perform. According to the official test format followed the competency framework, the writing test consists of three parts. Part 1: Spelling. The spelling text is about 120 words. Part 2: Write a regular letter or an email of about 120 words. Part 3: Write a 200-word essay on a general or academic topic.

The structure of the writing test is relatively suitable and applicable. However, the test has not had content to assess some grammatical structures and skills to write short sentences. Moreover, writing a letter is not a part in the fundamental Vietnamese course. Therefore, the expert group of TNUE has adjusted the structure and format of the writing test to suit the teaching practice. The writing test consists of 4 parts. Part 1: Spelling (2.0 points). This part takes 15 minutes to complete. Candidates listen directly to the examiner who reads spelling text (about 120 words) (the text is read in phrases and repeated twice) and rewrite the text on the answer sheet. Part 2: Rearranging words into correct order (2.0 points). This section has 5 sub-sections. Each section is a sentence that has been broken into words or phrases. Candidates have to rearrange the words to a correct order to make the sentence. Part 3: Describing pictures (2.0 points). Candidates are given 2 pictures/images and are asked to write 2 to 3 sentences to describe each picture. Part 4: Write a short paragraph (about 200 words long) about a given topic. Candidates have 45 minutes to answer all Part 2, 3 and 4.

Sample question:

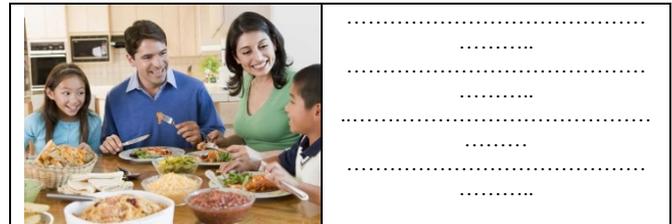
Part 1 (2.0 points): Spelling

.....

Part 2 (2.0 points): Rearranging words into correct order to make a sentence.

1. năm/ những/nền giáo dục/ Việt Nam/ gần đây/của/ đang/ quan tâm/ được/ rất/.

.....
Part 3 (2.0 points): Write 2 to 3 sentences to describe each of the following pictures.



Part 4 (4.0 points): Write a paragraph (about 200 words long) about a dish that you love.

3.3. Assessment Criteria and Marking

In order to objectively and fairly assess Vietnamese language competency of the candidates, the expert group was assigned to prepare rubrics with answer keys and a group of instructors was assigned to mark the candidates' work. The marking process must comply with the following criteria:

- Producing answer keys in details, assigning scores for every single section and proposing possible accepted answers. The scoring principle is as detailed as possible.
- Before marking the candidates' work, the instructors should understand and discuss carefully the answer keys and accepted answer options.
- Removing the candidates' information on the answer sheets to ensure that candidates are identified by numbers, not by names.
- Using many instructor markers and independent marking.
- Ensuring validity in marking. Instructors assigned to mark the test must carefully read the candidates' answers and marking the answers as being instructed in the answer keys.
- Ensuring the objectivity and equity in the assessment.

The Vietnamese language proficiency tests for Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing skills at TNUE are designed with very detail rubrics and the lowest marking unit is 0.1 points. This helps limit the variation of marks in the process of marking candidates' test papers.

4. Conclusion

Designing competency tests complying with the Vietnamese Language Competency Framework for foreign learners is a very important step in the spiral cycle of training Vietnamese language for foreigners in general and for international students at TNUE in particular. The assessments results allow determining the level of students' attainment of knowledge, skills and attitudes and identifying the level of students' cognitive development.

The assessment also provides feedback to evaluate the training quality, training management, training techniques of teachers in particular and the University in general. The assessment and evaluation of Vietnamese language competency of foreign learners at TNUE has been carried out regularly in each semester (mid-term assessment and final-term assessment). Data collected from the assessment is analyzed in different categories of test objectives to compare the level of students' attainment and achievement to the targeted objectives of knowledge, skills and attitudes. The assessment then leads to an overall evaluation of training quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning practice at the university. This assessment and evaluation helps to timely detect shortcomings in the training process to undertake necessary adjustment to achieve targeted objectives. On the other hand, teaching staffs directly involved in the teaching of the University have information to identify the strengths and weaknesses of students to timely adjust or change the curriculum, teaching techniques and regular assessment practice.

The task of designing competency tests complying with VLFCF at TNUE has been carried out as a suitable, applicable, and systematic process ensuring a full cover of knowledge specified in the framework and undertaking necessary adjustments to suit language competency levels of candidates who participates in Vietnamese language training courses. The test also includes some additional question formats that support the advanced use of Vietnamese language. The test results are used to assess both students' learning and instructors' teaching. All questions in the test are full in range of knowledge domains, suitable, diversified and non-duplicated, and able to assess candidates' basic language proficiency as well as ability to practice advanced language usage and candidates' differentiation.

In order to perform better implementation of assessment and evaluation of Vietnamese language competency at TNUE, it is necessary to develop an online question bank

to create a more convenient testing platform for candidates to easily participate in the test. Moreover, to improve the training quality and language skills for foreign learners, the University also needs to develop a system of practice questions complying with VLFCF to help the learners be familiar with formats of testing questions.

Acknowledgements

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