Original Paper

Students of Chinese Language Major and Their Attitude Towards the Current Learning Study in Vietnam

Thi Hong Tham Pham[1*], Yan Cheng Zhang[1] & Jing Shang[1]

[1] College of Literature, Wuhan University, China

[*] Thi Hong Tham Pham, College of Literature, Wuhan University, China

Abstract

Chinese language has recently grown so rapidly that people compared it to a storm overflowing into Vietnam. Thus, education managers and teachers can only respond promptly by immediate emergency measures, but have not found measures for stable development. The learning situation therefore also becomes chaotic and the quality does not meet social requirements.

This article aims to analyze the current situation of Vietnamese students studying Chinese language by applying methods of current situation survey by questionnaires, observations in actuality and document research. Through this, the author figure out the true situation of learning attitude and student's assessment of their schools' quality of teaching. Results of the research will help teachers to better adjust their teaching methods, and help educational managers have more effective education policies.

Keywords

Vietnamese students, scientific research, Chinese language, Foregin languages, learning attitude, career trends

1. Introduction

1.1 Objectives of the Research

- An overall investigation of the current situation of studying Chinese language of Vietnamese students

- An investigation of the awareness and learning attitudes of students towards Chinese language

- An analysis of those factors that affect their academic performances

In this practical research, the authors hope to help educators and teachers have a more comprehensive view of the current learning situation of students so as to better adjust management methods, bringing the teaching quality to a higher level.

1.2 Subjects of the Research

Subjects of the Research are students of Chinese language major all over the Country from year 1 to year 4. We conducted a nationwide survey with 8 universities across 3 regions of the Northern, Central and Southern Vietnam. The number of students undertaking the survey was 896 students.

1.3 Research Methods

In order to obtain the best research results, the authors use many research methods simultaneously. In educational research, empirical research and qualitative research methods are used most commonly by their practicability. The methods used are as the following details:

Questionnaire: The questionnaire designed by us includes 30 questions. It consists of 4 parts: 1/personal information; 2/information about student's class learning process; 3/information about their self-study process; 4/information about participating in scientific research and self-assessment. We gave out 1,100 questionnaires in total that were equally divided among 8 universities across the country, but only 896 of the taken back questionnaires were valid. Therefore, in this report we only used the survey results of 896 valid votes.

Multiple choice: With an aim to have a more equal assessment of the Chinese language proficiency of Vietnamese students, we designed a multiple-choice test comprising 60 sentences on a 10-point grading scale. The content consists of three levels: Beginner, intermediate and advanced. Students with under-6 point were classified as beginner level, from 6 to 7—intermediate level and from 8 and above—advanced level. The test was passed by Chinese professors, doctors, and experts of Wuhan University, Hubei, China.

Questionnaires and multiple choice were designed entirely in Chinese language to ensure that only students of Chinese language major could fill out the questionnaire, ensuring the right subjects of the Research.

Interview and direct observation: In parallel with the time to conduct surveys by questionnaires, we attended classes and conducted class observations, mainly observing students' learning attitudes at class. We then conducted random interviews with students to understand their learning situation, as additional materials for our research.

Refer to related documents and use data from the official website of Vietnam's Ministry of Education's: The authors combined the results from previous researches and used actual data published by the Ministry of Education of Vietnam.

We conducted the survey from October to December 2018. The paperwork method, 02 copies for each student (questionnaire and multiple choice question) for them to fill out, then we collected them, gather, import and process data via SPSS software.

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1.4 Overview of Research Issues

We would like to confirm that the study of the current studying situation of students of Chinese language major has not been given enough attention. In the process of searching documents at national libraries, Hanoi library, libraries of different universities, foreign language research magazines, foreign language sciences, educational researches, educational sciences or even the reports in the conference about foreign languages in general and Chinese language in particular, we only found very few short articles.

The research areas which were more frequently mentioned by researchers were learning motivation, learning environment, learning results, assessment... The study in a comprehensive way to assess properly the current situation of students of Chinese language major is almost nonexistent. The author think, in this regard, we really need a lot more investment.

In the coming time, hope we have more comprehensive and in-depth studies on the learning situation of Chinese learning of Vietnamese students.

2. Research Content

2.1 Current Types of Training Chinese Language

On present-day, teaching Chinese language in Vietnam is divided into 2 types: Specialised (Chinese language as a major) and non-specialised.

Specialised Chinese (or Chinese language as a major) is trained at language specialized universities and those institutions opening Faculty of Chinese language. Prior to graduation, students of these universities often have to meet the HSK5 requirements or higher. In addition, they also have to complete other programs required by particular school.

Non-specialized Chinese is considered as a second foreign language. Studying this type of Chinese language training, students only need to reach HSK4 depending on the requirements of particular university (Ministry of Education of Vietnam, 2019).

2.2 Admissions/Entry Requirement, Outcome Requirement and Learning Process

According to the regulations of the Ministry of Education of Vietnam, students who would like to study the major in Chinese language can use either English or Chinese to undertake university entrance examination. This means that at the time of enrollment many of them have known Chinese language already and vice versa. This fact leads to the situation that students of Chinese language major have a difference in language skills' levels in the classroom right from the start.

During the study program, students of Chinese language major must make great efforts. As the above mentioned, students must obtain HSK5 before graduation from their four-year program, so, supposing their entry level is 0, they must reach more than one HSK level each year. This is really a very big difficulty for each student to overcome due to our non-communicative environment of Vietnam.

2.3 Study Environment

The study environment in Vietnam does not satisfy the requirements of students. The survey results showed that only 2.9% of students thought the study environment in their universities was very good. The number of students giving assessments as "poor" accounted for the highest rate of 46.1%. The number of students saying that the learning environment in their school normal and very poor also accounted for a relatively high percentage. The "good" assessment was 6.5% only.

Table 1. Assessment Results about the Study Environment

Assessment about the study environment	Amount	Percentage	Effective percentage	Cumulative percentage
Very good	26	2.9	2.9	2.9
Good	58	6.5	6.5	9.4
Normal	290	32.4	32.4	41.7
Poor	413	46.1	46.1	87.8
Very poor	109	12.2	12.2	100.0
Total	896	100.0	100.0	

Source: This study.

During the survey, the authors found that many universities did not have air conditioners. Obviously, in the hot and humid tropical climate of Vietnam, the lack of cooling equipment was also one of the reasons resulting in student's dissatisfaction. Besides, the classroom equipment was very outdated, many devices were even broken.

Students have almost no environment to practice foreign language. Only in large universities that have partnerships with educational institutions in Chinese-speaking countries, do students at these universities occasionally have opportunities to interact directly with native speakers. In smaller universities or those that have not had the opportunity to work with the educational institutions of these countries, students must create a communication environment by learning in groups or finding by themselves native Chinese speakers to learn. Consequently, Vietnamese students are limited in their ability to response in communication and have non-standard pronunciation... Many researches have shown that after graduation, Vietnamese students can only speak for Vietnamese people to understand (Vu A. & Vu H., 2008).

Consequently, through these data, we can strongly advise the universities and the Ministry of Education of Vietnam about changing or improving the study environment for students, ensuring that they have the best study conditions to have the highest learning performance.

2.4 Self-Study Awareness

In addition to the time studying in the classroom, self-study is very important. This is the time for students to revise lessons and prepare for new lessons before coming to class for summarizing and developing more new knowledge. Self-study time is an important time to determine the quality of learning for each student.

According to the results of a survey about the time that Vietnamese students spent on studying Chinese language at home, we could see that the number of students who spent 90 minutes or more to study was 24%, from 60-90 minutes—38.4%, there were 27.2% of students spent about 30-60 minutes on self-study and the number of self-study under 30 minutes accounts for only 10.4%. No student does not spend time studying at home by himself.

Table 2. Time of Self-Study at Home

Time of self-study	Amount	Percentage	Effective percentage	Cumulative percentage
Less than 30 minutes	93	10.4	10.4	10.4
From 30-60 minutes	244	27.2	27.2	37.6
From 60-90 minutes	344	38.4	38.4	76.0
More than 90 minutes	215	24.0	24.0	100.0
Total	896	100.0	100.0	

Source: This study.

In the learning environment in Vietnam, this is an acceptable number. Usually in the classroom, beside the major subjects, students will also have to complete many other subjects, so, they will have to divide their time for each study. The time spent on self-study of Chinese language, as the above mentioned, can further demonstrate the passion for their chosen field of study.

In addition, according to the author's observation when participating in the survey, students who came to class often paid attention to lectures, enthusiastically answered questions asked by the teacher, however, they still had much difficulties when giving questions. Considering the context of the educational environment in Vietnam, this had been also a common trend of many student generations for years. Vietnamese students were less likely to give their teachers or educational managers with questions (Vu, 2012). Reasons coming from different aspects, partly because Vietnam had been applying traditional education method for a long time: Listened and recorded what given by teachers; partly because of the long-standing culture that young people being forced to listen to their seniors ... These have profound effects towards people of the younger generations. Up to now, we have been gradually reforming the above situation to educate a whole new young generation who are completely independent with critical thinking and know how to ask questions.

2.5 Scientific Research

Scientific research is a special kind of activity that helps people find and improve reality. That is the process of creating, discovering rules and applying them to the reality of social life. Therefore, universities are now paying much attention to the current scientific research works undertaken by students.

For students, scientific research is a process of experience from theory to practice, helping them to initially practice and improve their thinking, self-discovering and self-fostering knowledge while studying at universities. Learning is a lifelong job, scientific research will help students have knowledge of learning methods and self-study, forming and perfecting personalities, having positive thinking in awareness and behavior. For the school's training works, scientific research helps improve the efficiency and quality of teaching and learning, contributing to improve the quality of training in universities, turning the training process into a self-training process and helping students gradually improve their knowledge and approach scientific issues in a more convenient way.

However, scientific research activities of students are still having a lot of shortcomings.

Students' perceptions of the importance of scientific research

The quality of scientific research activities, the participation attitude of students depends greatly on the awareness of students about scientific research activities. However, the survey results showed that only 5.5 % of all students thought that scientific research was very important, and the number said it important was 28.7%. While the number of students who thought this activity was not important is 29.1%, not participating was 13.3%, and still up to 23.4% of students still had not clearly defined what was scientific research activity so they still appreciate its importance.

Table 3. Students' Perceptions of the Importance of Scientific Research

Importance of scientific research	Amount	Percentage	Effective percentage	Cumulative percentage
Not participated	119	13.3	13.3	13.3
Did not understand about scientific research	210	23.4	23.4	36.7
Un-important	261	29.1	29.1	65.8
Important	257	28.7	28.7	94.5
Very important	49	5.5	5.5	100.0
Total	896	100.0	100.0	

Source: This study.

From the above results, it was shown that students currently do not really saw the importance of scientific research activities to learning activities, so there was no investment nor active participation in this activity.

Forms of participation in scientific research of students

In order to promote students' scientific research activities, the universities had actively integrated this activity into their annual teaching plans. Diverse forms of scientific research were put into practice such as: Discussing case studies in class, making essay subjects, organizing competitions to seek for talents/student's ideas, organizing seminars at Faculty level ... to encourage students to participate in scientific research, to encourage creativity and dynamism in the first step to familiarize themselves with research. Here are some forms of scientific research that students have participated in:

Table 4. The Rate of Participation in Scientific Research of Students

The rate of participation in scientific research	Amount	Percentage	Effective percentage	Cumulative percentage
Never participated	262	29.2	29.2	29.2
Write a report at the end of the term or midterm	497	55.5	55.5	84.7
Writing thesis	122	13.6	13.6	98.3
Participate in scientific research at faculty level	15	1.7	1.7	100.0
Total	896	100.0	100.0	

Source: This study.

According to the survey results, the current scientific research activities of students were mainly in simple and mandatory forms such as carrying out essay assignments or provide specialized reports, assigned by teachers with the rate of 55.5%, and write thesis with the rate of 13.6%. Regarding voluntary activities, requiring the exploitation and research, students had not participated much, and not really interested as well, such as participation in scientific research organized by the Faculty. This number only accounted for 1.7%. Students had not consciously participated in scientific research at university level and higher levels of scientific research. Besides, there were also quite a number of students who had never participated in scientific research activities, accounting for 29.2%.

This shows that scientific research activities were not popular among Chinese language students on present-day, but it was only at the level of writing essay. Gradually this would create "inertia" making students to hesitate at reading, writing and even made them return to the old learning method "As teacher reads, so must students record". As a result, knowledge was still the knowledge of teachers, and students were passive, coping, greatly affecting the quality of training.

Regarding the cause of this situation, according to our survey, there are several causes:

- Scientific research is a difficult task for Vietnamese students: This difficulty is reflected in the lack of researching skills, lack of job handling skills in research implementation and undertaking, not really understand what scientific research is, lack of knowledge about scientific research process or methodology, lack of experience and knowledge to conduct research.

- Awareness of scientific research is still limited: The majority of Chinese students are not really interested in scientific research, not fully aware of the benefits of this work and the biggest obstacle is that students are not well equipped with research methods, most of them are confused about where to start, what to do and what they want to achieve, for whom ... this is deeply influenced by the out-of-dated teaching method of lecturers when they regularly apply traditional teaching methods. Students lack the necessary thinking requirements that make finding problems in science be limited.

- Scientific research of students is very little and they receive alsmost no support from all levels. In fact, in order to successfully undertake a scientific research project, the project implementer needs to spend a lot of expenses such as purchasing data, materials, printing, surveying, contact information... if the project is at faculty level, then often they will receive very low support. To satisfy their passion, most of them have to pay pocket money to pay these expenses or to reduce survey expenses, so the results are not objective and the reliability is not high.

- In Vietnam, the completion of lessons in the classroom is still a key task of students, scientific research has not been taken seriously, so the time division for this work has not been paid attention. Some students even said that they will spend time for scientific research only when have they no more work to do. This is the situation that educational managers and teachers need to pay more attention to. If overcoming the situation that student is self-concious to undertake scientific research, the education of the country will have an opportunity to develop and implement the awareness of lifelong learning for each person.

- However, we should not completely blame on students, what they acquire at schools is largely transferred and instructed by teachers. Teachers are both supportive and research instructors who are both motivating and inspiring students. If students do not have the guidance of teachers, they will find it difficult to find research directions, content and how to write scientific reports. In fact, many lecturers also do not care or do not have enough time to be interested in scientific research issues. Therefore, the scientific research of students has not really achieved the desired results (Pham, 2019).

2.6 Evaluation of School Management

The way of teaching, managing the quality of learning always has a profound impact on each student. To see the effects from the university's management to each student, we need to look back on how to organize teaching in universities in Vietnam today.

About the teaching Chinese language at schools

Table 5. Situation of Teaching at Schools

Situation of teaching	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Numbers of having exam/semester	896	.00	3.00	1.3750	.61997
Average exam mark	896	5.00	9.00	7.3170	1.17515
Number of students	896	20.00	50.00	45.4018	5.33308
Number of class hours/week	896	1.00	5.00	4.0513	.97662
Valid N (listwise)	896				

Source: This study.

From the above Table 5 we could see the teaching organization at schools was as follows:

+ Regarding proficiency test: Most of universities gave tests at least one times each semester, but there were also universities that gave tests three times each semester. On average, universities gave test 1.37 times out of three maximum. The score were recorded in the school academic record and used to calculate the average mark for the end of the school year.

+ About the grade point average: In general, the overall average mark of students was relatively high, reaching over 7.

+ About the duration of training: In general, the duration of Chinese language training at the universities was guaranteed to comply with the regulations of the Ministry of Education. For students of Chinese language major, the training duration was guaranteed from 16-20 study periods a week and about 225 periods a semester.

+ Class size: On average, each class had about 45 students, this was a fairly large number for the class size of a foreign language class (Note 1).

From the above information, the evaluation and assessment of the universities are in accordance with the regulations of the Ministry of Education of Vietnam. Compliance with the regulations is mandatory for every university in Vietnam. However, we also realize that the above regulations are completely administrative, the assessment and evaluation for each student are aimed at giving marks to count into the conditions for passing grades. The assessment in Vietnam has not been conducted for the purpose of classifying students.

Evaluation of students for the universities' teaching

The above objective information about teaching organization showed us the teaching situation of the universities today. They completed the mission in accordance with the regulations of the Ministry of Education of Vietnam. However, how students perceived these rules, the survey below will show us their evaluations so that we can have a fairer view of the teaching arrangements.

Table 6. Evaluation Students about the Teaching Process

Teaching process	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Self-assessment of proficiency	896	1.00	5.00	3.2455	.98819
Survey results on students' proficiency	896	1.00	5.00	2.8638	1.51469
Teachers	896	1.00	5.00	3.4252	1.30276
School facilities	896	1.00	5.00	2.1607	.86577
Curriculum	896	1.00	5.00	2.7310	1.39919
Valid N (listwise)	896				

Source: This study.

- Self-assessment results: We could clearly see that students tended to evaluate themselves higher than the results of our actual survey (the self-assessment level was 3.24, while the actual survey level was 2.86).

- Evaluation of teaching organization: We could see that students' opinions towards teachers (including ideas about teaching attitudes, professional qualifications, teaching methods ...) was not absolutely good, only achieved an average of 3.4 points out of 5. If putting this result in the context of Vietnamese culture when students do not have the habit of giving suggestions to the managers about how to organize the school's teaching or the teaching method of teachers, even if it is above the average level we still learn from it the dissatisfaction of students.

- Evaluation of teaching equipment and curriculum: The number demonstrating the dissatisfaction opinions of students at this point was relatively low, reaching only 2.1/5. In addition to the question as communication environment in Chinese, extracurricular activities to enhance Chinese ability for students, the number was even lower. This dissatisfaction was also reflected in the ideas of open questions. This again confirmed the results of student satisfaction with the school learning environment.

In addition to the aforementioned issues, there was also a remarkable information that the ratio of private tutoring of students today. There were 479 out of 896 respondents answered that they took extra classes, accounting for 53.5%. This was an alarming number because from this figure we could see that the current training program had not really met the study needs of more than half of the students nationwide, although they still had to take classes in the classrooms and sit for every test. This was also a great waste of effort for teachers and students. With such a high rate of private tutoring, whether or not anyone who can affirm with certainty that the achievements of the students today are the result of the school's training.

About foreign language certificate: Among the 896 students responding the survey, there were up to 188 students (accounting for 21%) said that they had national language certificates (Note 2), of which 123 people (accounting for 65.4%) had degrees. B, 65 people (accounting for 34.5%) have degrees C. The number of students with HSK certificates was 151 people (accounting for 16.9%), of which the number of students achieving HSK6 was up to 42 people (accounting for 27.8%), reaching HSK5-57 people (accounting for 37.7%), reaching HSK4-52 people (accounting for 34.4%). This information once again confirmed the difference in proficiency as stated above. It was worth mentioning that these students have to study with students who are at a much lower level. This gave us more ground to be able to affirm that the big difference in proficiency of students in the same class is one of the reasons causing the inefficiency to the Chinese language training at tertiary education in Vietnam today.

2.7 The Results of the Student's Proficiency Assessment Conducted by the Survey Team

According to the regulations of the Ministry of Education of Vietnam, year-1 student must achieve minimum results of HSK3 when completing their first year; at least HSK4 at the end of year 2, at least HSK5 at the end of year 3 and at least HSK5 at the end of year 4.

We designed a test of Chinese language proficiency for students based on different levels, less than 6 equivalent to the elementary level (HSK1-2), likewise, students must reach 8 and above to reach advanced level (HSK5-6).

According to the assessment results of the universities participating the survey, all students meet requirements for passing up to higher class. However, for more information about the actual situation of current Chinese language students, we refer to the survey results of the investigation team.

Table 7. The Results of the Student's Proficiency Assessment

The student's proficiency assessment	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Year 1	265	1.00	3.00	1.5509	.60165
Year 2	226	1.00	5.00	2.2655	.85393
Year 3	212	1.00	5.00	3.0425	1.20154
Year 4	193	2.00	5.00	3.4560	.78354
Valid N (listwise)	193				

Source: This study.

Thus, referring to the above mentioned, the proficiency of first year students only obtained the average level of 1.55, the second year—2.26, the third year—3.04 and the fourth year—3.45 (see Table 7). This is a very low score compared to the requirement. According to the HSK definition, first-year students can only deal with familiar situations, while the 3rd and 4th year students are only able to participate in exchanging simple information in familiar contexts, they have not been able to participate in the

exchange of opinions or expressing personal views (Note 3). In addition, if using the average growth (Note 4) based on the test results of the students in the sample, when they graduate, these students will only reach above HSK4 nearly HSK5. At this level, university graduates are only qualified to participate in simple interviews, not to mention talks, seminars, conferences ... not to mention that the survey only concluded students in grammar, vocabulary, reading comprehension, etc., without assessing the speaking skill, the skill that Vietnamese students are often very weak. Thus, if we assess all 4 skills of learners, the conversion result will be much lower.

2.8 Trends of Major Selection of Chinese Language Students

The Chinese language major is divided into 2 main groups: 1/Chinese language pedagogy (Training teachers of Chinese language); 2/Chinese language. Now, the current major selection also changes compared to it before.

Previously, the pedagogy (teacher training) branch often had higher entry scores and the enrollment rate was higher than the Chinese Language major, but in recent years, the entrance exam scores have been lower compared with the Chinese Language branch, the number of students who registered for the exam is also much smaller (Tran, 2016). This can be explained that China's investment in recent years has grown too strongly, creating many job opportunities for students after graduation, while in the pedagogy, the pedagogy/teacher training branch was limited due to strict recruitment regulations (requires high qualification from a master degree or higher for schools that open the normal Chinese language major), Doctor degree for schools offering specializing Chinese language major. In addition, if student are only at university level they can only apply for jobs at primary, secondary and high schools that teach Chinese language, (the number of these schools is not much), partly because of the government's preferential treatment for teachers was not good (Pham, 2019) and compared with the Chinese Language branch, the opportunity to improve income from the Chinese Pedagogy/teacher training branch is much lower.

Therefore, recently, some Vietnamese universities have to increase opening the Chinese Language classes, increasing the number of students, teachers and other learning conditions. Typically, the Hanoi University of Foreign Languages in recent years has especially opened an advanced Chinese language class for the Chinese language major in order to improve the quality of this branch, while the Chinese Pedagogy/Chinese language teachers training branch has not changed, while Thai Nguyen University of Teacher Training had recruited 70 students for Chinese language teacher training branch, but only 30 for the year 2019, but the Chinese language branch was deposit, which recruited 180 students for year 2017 and the number increased to 300 in Year 2019 majored in Chinese Pedagogy in 2017 recruited 70 students., in 2019 it was reduced to 30 students, and Chinese Language Industry in 2017 recruited 180, then in 2019 increased the enrollment to 300 (Ministry of Education of Vietnam, 2019).

3. Conclusion

Through this research result, we have temporarily found some reasons causing the low quality of Chinese language training in the current period. The way the universities organize ineffective management, the fact that they do not really pay attention to the actual needs of students, the failure to meet requirements of their learning environment, the relatively big difference of students' proficiency in a same class ... are the important reasons resulting in the ineffectiveness in the training quality of the universities training. At the same time, it is necessary to carry out reforms on assessment, take students as the center in education, encourage them in the learning process, especially promote their awareness of scientific research.

In addition, with the current situation of changing job trends, the Vietnamese government also needs to reconsider the policy towards the Chinese language teacher training/Pedagogy branch, to avoid wasting high-qualified human resources.

Through this research, we hope to bring valuable reference information, giving education managers, teachers and students a more comprehensivean overview so as to take appropriate reforms, helping to improve the learning quality of students and to meet the requirements of society.

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Notes

Note 1. According to world standard, the class size of a foreign language class can never exceed 20 students. Under the Vietnamese conditions, the acceptable class size for a foreign language class is 30 students, but should not more because students will not have conditions to practice using the language.

Note 2. The national foreign language certificate of Vietnam is prescribed as follows: Level A (elementary) includes levels A1 and A2 equivalent to HSK1 and HSK2; Level B (intermediate) includes B1, B2 equivalent of HSK3 and HSK4; Level C (advanced) includes C1 and C2 equivalent to HSK 5 and HSK6.

Note 3. According to the Chinese Language Testing Center, HSK level 1.2 (equivalent to A level of VN level below 1 is used in the topic), the students can only deal with simple information in familiar situations. Level 3.4 is equivalent to level B) in accordance with Vietnamese regulations, the level of 2-3 in the topic can cope with more situations, raise opinions and express limited attitude. Level 4-5 (equivalent to C in Vietnam, level 4-5 in the topic), they can be confident and use functional language, which can be expressed inaccurately but with be able to understand and be more aware of language usage rules.

Note 4. According to the research results, the topic "Evaluation of the effectiveness of English as a foreign language at universities" by the Department of Science and Technology assigned to the research team of Ho Chi Minh City University of Social Sciences and Humanitie, which is calculated as follows: 4/8 * 2 = expected growth for each semester.