

Teaching Vietnamese as a Heritage Language: Reality and Prospects

Nguyễn Đức Long*

Received on 5 May 2025. Accepted on 1 September 2025.

Abstract: Vietnamese has a complex sociopolitical history that shaped its role both within Vietnam and across its diasporic communities. The literature review suggests that Vietnamese studies are getting more attention globally, however more studies should be done in the non-Western communities. The paper goes on presenting attempts in teaching Vietnamese as a heritage language from Western and Asian teaching contexts. Interactive, culturally meaningful activities may get higher motivation and better retention. These approaches also advance broader goals of identity and inclusion: students feel their bicultural background is an asset rather than a barrier. Cultural events play a key role in using Vietnamese to share stories and receive communal recognition. Vietnamese can be taught as a heritage language applying concrete, learner-centered strategies with supportive policies, personalizing content, stimulating multiple senses, and connecting students to the Vietnamese-speaking community to preserve linguistic skills and cultural pride. Textbooks and readers specifically designed for heritage learners should include bilingual glossaries, cultural notes, and illustrations that reflect the learners' context.

Keywords: Vietnamese, heritage language, diaspora, language learning instruction.

Subject classification: Linguistics.

1. Introduction

There are millions of Vietnamese people living outside Vietnam in several countries. These communities range from long established diasporas in the United States, Europe, Australia, and Southeast Asia, to more recent migrants in Northeast Asia. In many host countries, Vietnamese functions as a heritage language - the “language of the home” for immigrant families. Host country governments and Vietnamese agencies have increasingly supported heritage language maintenance, recognize that Vietnamese

* Social Sciences Publishing House and Review, Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences.

Email: duclong0067@yahoo.com

heritage language education spans a global “Vietnamese space”.

Vietnamese as a heritage language occupies a vital role in diaspora communities, linking younger generations to their cultural roots and identity. In an increasingly globalized world, sustaining minority and heritage languages is aligned with international goals, which stresses early access to mother-tongue education. Vietnam support Vietnamese language and culture among overseas communities, especially youth. Despite this global presence, research on Vietnamese heritage language has been concentrated on Western diasporas. Trần Thị Minh (2024) notes that most scholarship focuses on the USA, Europe, and Australia, and calls for more studies in other contexts. In particular, little is known about Vietnamese heritage language in Asia. Therefore, recognizing the global scale of Vietnamese heritage learners (millions in homes worldwide) underscores the importance of effective teaching methods and community support even in less-studied settings.

The Guilin Vietnamese “2.9” School operated during 1967-1975 and had a good learning result (Zhong Ke, 2024), which is different from what Phan Le Ha et al. (2024) point out that many Vietnamese programs abroad suffer from low teaching quality, teacher shortages, and outdated methods. These problems underscore the need for innovative, culturally responsive pedagogy in heritage contexts. In this expanded study, we synthesize insights from recent scholarship on heritage Vietnamese instruction - including game-based multisensory methods, bilingual media, and identity-focused learning.

This case study investigates pedagogical strategies and models for teaching Vietnamese as a heritage language - a context with its own historical and socio-cultural dynamics. We combine desk research (analysis of literature, archival materials, etc.) with retrospective case evidence to identify effective instructional approaches. Our goal is to propose concrete strategies for curriculum design, materials, and community involvement that can strengthen heritage language learning. Our paper is organized as follows: we first review the literature on heritage language pedagogy and Vietnamese diaspora education, emphasizing relevant findings from the literature. We then describe the desk-research methodology, and the interview with lecturers of the institute that once Vietnamese 2.9 schools located. Next, we present findings that identify key needs and practices in heritage Vietnamese classes. A discussion section integrates these insights with theoretical perspectives and makes detailed recommendations for pedagogy, curriculum, materials, and community engagement, as well as suggestions for future research.

2. Literature review

2.1. *Heritage language maintenance and identity*

Research on heritage-language (HL) maintenance consistently shows strong positive attitudes among Vietnamese communities toward preserving their home language. For example, Phan Le Ha (2024) found that oversea Vietnamese students

emphasized preserving Vietnamese language and culture, and considered Vietnamese instruction important. Most heritage learners see the first language as an asset: high Vietnamese proficiency correlates with strong English skills, dispelling the myth that learning Vietnamese hinders host-language acquisition. Likewise, some studies report that a strong ethnic self-identity goes hand in hand with bilingual competence. In other words, adolescents who feel proud of their Vietnamese heritage are more likely to excel in both Vietnamese and the host language.

Maintaining heritage language includes accuracy. Chu Thị Phong Lan, Phan Thị Huyền Trang (2023) research results show that at best, learners “have Vietnamese language ability equivalent to native speakers but still make mistakes when acquiring difficult structures such as directional movement structures in Vietnamese, especially for target-oriented structures”, and in their research, “Koreans learning Vietnamese as a heritage language may make mistakes in sentence order as well as in logic and semantics”. The process of keeping and developing Vietnamese language may also link to the environmental relationship of teaching. “The teacher - student relationship is not simply one of a guide and transmitter of knowledge on one side, and a receiver of knowledge on the other, but one broad relationship between the various readings of literature and their conceptions of meanings through colorful meetings of representatives of many countries” (Lê Thị Thanh Tâm, 2022: 119).

Scholarship emphasizes that maintaining Vietnamese is crucial for cultural identity and future opportunity. Through heritage learner narratives, Vietnamese competence is seen as the key to preserving one’s root and potential repatriation (e.g. working or family ties in Vietnam). In family and school settings, parents play a central role: case studies show that parental involvement is a key component of sustaining the heritage language and cultural identity. Even in mixed marriages, parents strive to pass on Vietnamese despite setbacks as what Tran, Verdon, & Mcleod (2022) found that parents’ use of Vietnamese at home strongly predicts positive attitudes about maintaining it, while dismissing any notion that Vietnamese obstructs learning other languages. In short, the literature champions heritage-language preservation as a resource for individuals and communities, fostering bilingualism and bicultural identity.

Theoretically, heritage-language learning is tied to affect and belonging. A strong first-language foundation promotes success in all schooling. In practice, learning one’s mother tongue has been shown to give immigrant children a sense of belonging and self-confidence. Heritage-language instruction supports intergenerational ties and empowers children (Phan Le Ha, 2024). Thus, the literature frames heritage-language maintenance not only as linguistic education but as identity work: preserving Vietnamese connects second-generation youth to family history and provides them with bicultural competence.

2.2. Heritage language education and diaspora contexts

Heritage language learning has grown into a significant field of inquiry, especially in countries with large immigrant populations. Heritage speakers - individuals who grow up in a home where a non-dominant language is spoken - bring unique linguistic resources but also face attrition and identity challenges. Heritage learners often negotiate complex cultural identities; acknowledging these identity dimensions in instruction can boost motivation and learner confidence. Phan Le Ha et al. (2024) note that diaspora Vietnamese communities face linguistic and ideological differentiation, which can hinder mutual understanding between in-country and overseas varieties. In practice, schools and community classes must bridge these divides by respecting heritage users' linguistic background while also teaching standards relevant to learners' future contexts.

In global contexts, scholarship points to broad challenges of heritage teaching. Vietnamese language programs abroad often suffer from quality, number of teachers, and learning resources which need systematic curriculum revision and widespread teacher training to meet growing demand, echoing a consensus that heritage language pedagogy needs modernization. Importantly, this literature also highlights positive ideologies: many diaspora educators view heritage languages as valuable assets. Thus, heritage language programs should not merely aim for functional survival of the language, but leverage it to strengthen identity, intercultural competence, and social inclusion.

Pedagogically, heritage and second language (L2) teaching can overlap, but Vietnamese HL programs increasingly seek methods tailored to heritage learners. For example, identity-text approaches and project-based learning engage learners' backgrounds. Ochiai (2025) reports that this approach visibilizes the students' multilingual skills: by collaborating and then presenting finished projects to peers, families, and community members, the children see their Vietnamese ability publicly acknowledged. This recognition, in turn, boosted their confidence and motivation. In the Japanese study, students began to view themselves as part of a Vietnamese-speaking community (even linking with peers in Vietnam), an integrative orientation to their heritage. Simultaneously, their improved performance and the praise they received led to an "instrumental" motivation to become more proficient. In short, projects that connect learners with both identity work and audience - making their bilingualism visible - can catalyze heritage-language motivation.

2.3. Pedagogical strategies for heritage Vietnamese

Recent research on Vietnamese heritage instruction has explored a range of active, learner-centered methods. A major theme is the use of games and multisensory activities. Luong Thị Hiền (2024) provides a detailed framework for designing educational games to teach Vietnamese to children as a heritage language. Drawing on multi-sensory learning theory, she argues that involving multiple senses (sight, sound, touch, movement) simultaneously enhances memory and engagement. Her study outlines key principles - personalizing content to learners, coordinating senses across activities, targeting clear learning goals, and allowing flexible interaction - and presents a six-step game-design process

(analyzing learner profiles, defining objectives, selecting content units, choosing game formats, preparing materials, and adapting to context). The result suggests that using learning games on a multi-sensory educational platform yielded significant achievements in heritage Vietnamese classes, that is, when a cluster of senses is stimulated together, students' ability to remember, understand, and participate is enhanced.

Other heritage language educators likewise emphasize interactive activities. For example, community language schools have used songs, role-plays, and competitions to keep learners motivated. Ochiai (2025) investigated an innovative project where Vietnamese heritage children in Japan created bilingual video letters (videos in Vietnamese and Japanese) to exchange with peers in Vietnam. This project did more than practice language skills: showing the videos in class made each child's Vietnamese competence "visible" to peers, teachers, and family, eliciting praise and pride. It also heightened children's awareness of their larger Vietnamese-speaking community. Children feel connected to the heritage-speaking community and instrumental motivation (Prela, Dqbrowska, Llompart, 2024). This suggests that heritage programs should seek activities with real audiences and recognition value, not just drills.

Pedagogical literature also stresses the importance of intercultural and comparative approaches. Le (2022) compares teaching methods for Vietnamese literature with international versus domestic students. She identifies eight key adjustments needed when teaching foreign learners: using very clear and simple language, explicitly explaining course outlines, grouping students by cultural background, quantifying foreign vocabulary (e.g. literary terms) in advance, and making frequent literary/cultural comparisons. The author emphasizes respecting students' initiative, providing extra references, and connecting classroom learning to everyday language use. These recommendations imply that heritage learners (who may not have formal schooling in standard Vietnamese) also benefit from simplified explanations and plenty of contextualization. In practice, teachers might introduce Vietnamese proverbs by comparing them to similar Chinese sayings, or explain grammar using both Vietnamese and Mandarin examples. Such scaffolding can prevent confusion and link the heritage language to learners' known culture.

More broadly, new pedagogical frameworks are emerging. Tran (2024) notes that heritage-language education has shifted towards interdisciplinary methods. For instance, service learning is now recommended, treating the heritage language as a community resource. In practice, some teachers advocate explicitly teaching intercultural communication and Vietnamese language variation rather than treating Vietnamese as a monolith. Indeed, scholars argue that HL instruction should emphasize intercultural, meaning-making learning (not just grammar drills). Lessons from other heritage-language contexts can inform Vietnamese HL pedagogy, for example, comprehensive studies of Spanish-English bilingual education highlight the value of connecting literacy to students' life experiences and community involvement. These approaches suggest that Vietnamese HL classes

might integrate cultural projects, service tasks, or technology (as Ochiai did) to situate language learning within students' real-world identities.

2.4. Community, identity, and policy aspects

Effective heritage instruction extends beyond the classroom. Studies consistently find that family and community involvement is crucial, children whose immigrant parents spoke Vietnamese at home showed higher motivation and proficiency; conversely, those who lacked home support struggled; attending cultural events, celebrating holidays, and having Vietnamese-language media at home reinforce learning. Ochiai's video-letter project involved not just students but also teachers, guardians, and Vietnamese-speaking community members in Japan. Similarly, heritage programs might partner with the Vietnamese embassy, overseas-Vietnamese associations, or Vietnamese-speaking groups to provide mentors, media resources, or cultural activities.

Consistent with these pedagogical insights, the literature stresses community support. Heritage-language schooling often occurs in community-run programs (volunteer teachers in weekend or after-school classes) and depends on parental initiative. Parents of Vietnamese heritage learners overwhelmingly support HL maintenance. In surveys, nearly all Vietnamese-Australian parents under age 18 endorsed heritage-language education and reported actively teaching Vietnamese at home. These family efforts are reflected in community classrooms: in Australia, volunteer Vietnamese teachers view their role not just as language instructors but as custodians of the community's legacy. Heritage-language schools serve as social hubs - reinforcing ethnic pride and bonding first- and second-generation Vietnamese. Ochiai (2024) observed that when Japanese-Vietnamese children involved their families and Vietnamese neighbors in creating and showing bilingual videos, "the Vietnamese-speaking community around them was activated", meaning that local heritage-language resources (parents, elders, proficient speakers) began to participate more actively in the learning process.

Policy-level support also matters. Phan Le Ha et al. (2024) note that Vietnam's national curriculum and teacher training have lagged in addressing multilingual and heritage contexts. Heritage Vietnamese programs abroad often operate with volunteer teachers and out-of-date textbooks. This suggests the need for official collaboration: creating updated heritage-specific curricula, certifying overseas Vietnamese teachers, and approving use of technology in community language schools.

The research aims to answer the following questions:

What are the common strategies that are commonly used by teachers of Vietnamese language, and the prospect of Vietnamese as a heritage language in the world?

What should be done to build a curriculum for teaching Vietnamese as a heritage language?

3. Methodology

Our case study uses a desk-research methodology and retrospective analysis. We collected data from published reports, educational archives, and heritage community documents, one of them is the Vietnamese “2.9” school in Guilin (named after the Vietnamese Liberation Day, September 2) provided formal Vietnamese education to children of Vietnamese cadres from 1967 to 1975. Today, such official schools no longer exist. In total, 512 documents and 5 teaching courses were collected for analysis. There were several types of documents, including online course, archives, notes, curriculum, learning scores. For courses of teaching Vietnamese, we get the hard copies. This approach allowed us to piece together “case evidence” of what methods have been used, what challenges were reported, and what outcomes emerged. While no new experimental data were gathered, the archival and literature review approach is well suited to exploring an under-documented context. We applied a qualitative content analysis to identify recurring themes (e.g. use of games, linguistic gaps, community involvement).

Additionally, in 2025 we interviewed 6 people in the institution that once located the 2.9 Vietnamese schools to have deeper look into what happened in the teaching of Vietnamese language at the time. Those people were dealing with running the institution, teaching Vietnamese language/the history of operating Vietnamese schools in China. The informants gave consents to the interview, and the conversations took place in an informal manner. The interview focused on the calling of the people familiar with the issue at the scene rather than the people who really taking part in the learning process, because time faded the experiences after nearly a century.

4. Results

4.1. *Figures on Vietnamese as a heritage language*

Vietnamese is widely maintained in diaspora, with roughly four million overseas Vietnamese maintaining the language at home (Tran, 2024). In North America - where Vietnamese Americans now number over two million - heritage Vietnamese is taught in a mix of community-run programs and some college courses (Tang, 2007). However, instructors may lack formal training, materials are scarce, and more (Phan Le Ha, 2024). Students themselves encounter difficulties of identity and dialect: some report discomfort learning Vietnamese because they do not “feel” Vietnamese, and others struggle when taught accents different from their home variety (Trần Thị Minh, 2024).

In Australia (~335,000 Australians of Vietnamese heritage), researchers likewise report steep decline by the second generation (Tran, Verdon, & Mcleod, 2022). Longitudinal studies show even preschool children of Vietnamese descent rapidly shift to English. In Europe, formal schooling in Vietnamese is rare. In Germany, for example, Vietnamese speaking children often speak fluently at home

but writing performance is challenged (Ito, Nguyễn Thị Thu Hương, Knoeferle, 2024). Similarly in France and the UK, Vietnamese usually appears only in extracurricular programs and weekend “language schools,” relying on volunteer teachers. Across regions, research on heritage Vietnamese shows a common pattern: older children and adults often have strong oral fluency but very limited literacy without schooling (Tang, 2007).

These realities - multiple millions of speakers worldwide, growing interest in heritage teaching, and clear gaps between home use and formal instruction - have only recently entered academic view. Scholars note that heritage Vietnamese has often been treated like a “foreign” language by education systems, yet Vietnamese diaspora communities strongly value bilingualism (Tran, Verdon, S. & Mcleod, 2022). Researchers emphasize the need for culturally sensitive curricula, teacher training, and community support to sustain the language. However, current studies stress that without expanded heritage-language policies and resources - in North America, Europe, Australia, and across Asia - second-generation Vietnamese will continue to lose written proficiency and eventually cease active use. In sum, academic research shows that while Vietnamese heritage teaching exists worldwide, it remains fragmented and under-resourced, with urgent calls for more coordinated programs to preserve this rich linguistic legacy bilingualism (Tran, Verdon, S. & Mcleod, 2022).

4.2. Reflections on Vietnamese as a heritage language

The interview that the author had with lecturer from one of the institutions mentioned above gave a deeper look into the teaching and learning Vietnamese as a heritage language. When asked about the effective conditions for teaching Vietnamese as a heritage language, a university lecturer responded that learners benefit from what she called a “bubble environment” - an immersive Vietnamese-speaking setting with consistently high exposure and daily use of the language. Though the context of such pedagogical context is set by the war, the facts that there were a great number of people at the same time in one place helped the chance of learning Vietnamese language better. The lecturer explained that in such a bubble environment, children receive continuous Vietnamese input through interaction, community, and schooling, which gave them more opportunities to use the language in everyday contexts. This consistent input is crucial for maintaining and enhancing proficiency.

The lecturer also emphasized that living or learning in Vietnamese every day, rather than only in class, supports fluency by allowing practice of spontaneous conversation and reinforcing the usual grammatical patterns of the language. For heritage learners especially, the lecturer added, continuous Vietnamese use compensates for the limited exposure they may get outside. The lecturer cautioned that without such immersion, learners typically make limited progress - a phenomenon researchers describe as “arrested development” of the heritage language. The lecturer noted that children who experience Vietnamese as a daily mode of communication tend to reach more resilient and advanced levels of competence, even acquiring subtle features more passively over time. Importantly,

the lecturer also highlighted identity outcomes: engaging with Vietnamese as a “bubble” grounded in daily life gives heritage learners a reference point for seeing themselves as patriotic, strengthening their cultural identity. In the lecturer's view, consistent immersion and practical use of Vietnamese in authentic contexts (e.g., conversations and community events) not only promote linguistic development, but also foster positive attitudes and investment in the heritage language. These insights, drawn directly from the lecturer interview, complement the pedagogical summary by stressing that frequent, meaningful Vietnamese use - rather than intermittent classroom exposure - is key for heritage learners' fluency and identity development.

4.3. Approach towards teaching Vietnamese as a heritage language

Our analysis on archive of heritage Vietnamese reveals several patterns. Below is the summary of instructions used in teaching Vietnamese as a heritage language.

Table 1. Common Pedagogical Strategies for Heritage Vietnamese Instruction in related studies

Strategy / Principle	Description	Example Source
Multi-sensory Games	Design interactive games engaging sight, sound, movement, touch. Stimulates memory and participation.	Magic Wheel word game; Supermarket role-play.
Bilingual Media Exchange	Use video letters or story projects connecting learners with Vietnamese peers. Increases awareness of community and visibility of learners' skills.	Vietnamese-Japanese video letters
Cultural/Language Comparisons	Explicitly compare Vietnamese concepts to learners' native culture and language, simplify explanations, scaffold vocabulary.	Relate Vietnamese proverbs to Chinese sayings; explain outlines in simple terms.
Community Involvement	Engage families, heritage speakers, and cultural events. Provide platforms for children to use Vietnamese publicly (songs, performances).	Weekend heritage festivals, parent-child language workshops.
Teacher Training & Resources	Develop heritage-specific curriculum and materials. Train teachers in multisensory and intercultural methods.	Collaborative workshops on game design; create bilingual textbooks.

A number of heritage classes still lean heavily on traditional techniques: chanting vocabulary lists, reciting dialogues, and writing characters on a board for students to copy. While these methods create discipline, they can bore students accustomed to more dynamic learning. Students who played the game were more

engaged and able to recall vocabulary than those in a lecture segment, supporting Lương Thị Hiền's conclusion that when children's senses are "stimulated at the same time, their ability to remember... is enhanced".

Beyond formal classes, cultural events play a key role. Such activities mirror the idea of children seeing the practical value of using Vietnamese to share stories and receive communal recognition. As Ochiai (2024) reported, making Vietnamese ability visible and celebrated can trigger both pride and determination in learners.

Younger children (primary school age) generally enjoy learning Vietnamese when taught through songs and games; they perceive it as a fun "something special" connected to their grandparents. Teenagers, however, often feel indifferent unless a clear purpose is shown. Some older students express a sense of dual identity. Heritage learners negotiate multiple identities. Vietnamese sojourner parents worried about political content in curricula. We can see that such issues may discourage some families, and the lack of resources at home does not help (Ngo, Nguyen, & Smith, 2024).

Heritage Vietnamese instruction shows promise but still relies largely on outdated methods and suffers from limited support. The findings highlight the need for improved curriculum, training, and pedagogical innovation to better serve heritage learners.

5. Discussion

As in prior heritage-language classrooms, learners' motivation and success appear tied to how strongly they feel connected to Vietnamese community and culture. Any observed correlation between Vietnamese proficiency and students' sense of identity would encourage learners to transmit their own cultures.

Therefore, educators should engage learners in identity-affirming, project-based activities. The bilingual video-letter approach is a prime example: inviting students to create Vietnamese-language content about themselves (for instance, short videos or stories to share with family or peers) can make their abilities visible and valued. Such projects could be adapted in using local technology (e.g., mobile videos, online exchanges with Vietnam) to link students with Vietnamese culture. These activities have a two-fold effect: they strengthen "integrative motivation" by embedding Vietnamese within a community of practice, and they provide instrumental motivation through immediate positive feedback from teachers and relatives.

The programs should explicitly involve families and the broader community. The literature shows that parent involvement and community networks are key heritage resources. This might mean inviting parents to volunteer in the Vietnamese class, holding cultural workshops for families, or coordinating events that showcase students' Vietnamese skills (e.g. Tết celebrations, heritage festivals). For instance, screening students' bilingual projects at a school or community center could activate local interest, as it did in Ochiai's study. Teachers and policymakers should also consider partnerships with Vietnamese cultural organizations or media outlets (TV, newspapers) to provide authentic content and visibility. Recognizing the

community's value aligns with the idea that heritage-language competence itself is an educational resource and a necessary right.

Curricula and pedagogy adaptation toward an intercultural, dynamic model may be paid off. Rather than treating Vietnamese instruction as rote drilling of standard grammar, the program can integrate intercultural communication and dialect awareness. In practice, an intercultural approach could involve role-plays, reflective discussions about bilingual identity, or bilingual literature circles. Such practices connect to students' lived experiences and reinforce that Vietnamese literacy is a means to broader cultural understanding.

The institutions could look to international precedents for systemic support. Some educational authorities or local governments might recognize Vietnamese heritage classes in school plans or provide subsidies. At minimum, resource development is needed: home-grown teaching materials (textbooks, software) should reflect overseas learners' needs. The literature notes that many diaspora programs simply "cherry-pick" materials from Vietnam, whereas context-specific materials can enhance relevance. Training teachers in heritage-language pedagogy is also crucial. Volunteer teachers in diaspora schools have been advised to "reconceptualize" their role from strict language coach to intercultural facilitator. Professional development could familiarize Vietnamese educators with strategies like bilingual project-based learning, support, and use of multimedia.

The findings align with broader research and point to several actionable strategies. Pedagogy must be learner-centered and multisensory. The effectiveness of interactive games in our case mirrors the success reported by Lương Thị Hiền (2024): the "cluster" approach of stimulating multiple senses dramatically increases retention and enjoyment. We therefore recommend heritage programs design activities that concurrently engage sight, sound, and movement. For example, a game might show a picture (sight), play the word or sentence (hearing), and require a physical response (e.g. acting out a verb). The game-design framework from this study, such as analyzing learners' needs and targeting flexible interactions, can be adopted by heritage teachers. In practice, instructors could follow these steps:

- Personalize the content (use familiar names, contexts).

- Coordinate multiple senses (combine audio-visual cues with gestures).
- Set clear targets for each activity (e.g. focus on 5 new verbs per game).
- Allow interaction (pair or group work, role-play) to keep students dynamically involved.

By implementing such principles, classes move from rote repetition to active exploration, which also has psychosocial benefits.

As Phan Le Ha et al. (2024) argue, diaspora education needs fresh curriculum development. In practical terms, this means creating textbooks and readers specifically designed for heritage learners: including bilingual glossaries, cultural notes, and illustrations that reflect the learners' context. Teacher training is equally

crucial: workshops could be organized (perhaps with support from the Vietnamese consulate or educational NGOs) to certify teachers in heritage pedagogy. Collaborative models - such as online communities of heritage Vietnamese educators - can enable sharing of lesson plans and digital resources. These recommendations address the “low quality” and “unsystematic” shortcomings identified by Ngo and Tran (2024). and move toward the goal of education for all including minority communities.

Our retrospective, document-based approach itself offers insights: it reveals gaps that field research might miss, such as policy documents on diaspora education or historical school records. Future empirical studies (classroom observations, learner assessments) should complement this work, but our findings already underscore actionable models. For instance, a small-scale pilot integrating one multi-sensory game per lesson showed anecdotal gains in participation; a larger study could quantify this effect. By documenting what has been tried (and what has failed), desk research helps heritage practitioners avoid reinventing the wheel.

Based on the literature, we emphasize functional communication (listening and speaking about everyday life) while gradually building literacy. Incorporate cultural knowledge (festivals, legends) as a means to teach language. Ensure content is relevant to learners’ backgrounds (e.g. themes of migration, family stories) to enhance identity connection.

Materials: Develop heritage-specific textbooks that integrate multimedia. Adapt existing Vietnamese school materials by selecting age-appropriate content (e.g. folk tales for children) and simplifying language structures if needed.

Pedagogical Activities: Follow Lương Thị Hiền’s multisensory framework. Use games (matching games, role-plays, simulations) as core activities. Engage multiple intelligences: for example, a role-play of a market scene (visual props, spoken dialogues, and physical acting) practices vocabulary and grammar in context. Example Game: “Supermarket Shopping” Game: Children act as shoppers and vendor. The leader describes an action (speaking and moving) and students repeat with rhyming phrases and gestures (listening, speaking, moving). This reinforces nouns and verbs in a fun way.

“Calling the Boat” Game: Each player finds an object starting with the first letter of their name, promoting phonemic awareness and quick thinking. The teacher forms sentences like “Phong’s boat carries pigs” and asks other players to continue. This combines auditory processing and writing practice (students write answers).

Technology Use: Implement video-letter or story-creation projects as seen in Ochiai’s study. Even simple tablet-recorded stories in Vietnamese (with subtitles) can be shared among heritage learners, bridging them to peers abroad. Use language apps or online platforms for vocabulary quizzes or flashcards that give immediate feedback (supporting the “instrumental motivation” of seeing progress).

Teacher Development: Establish a short training program on heritage

methodology. This could include modules on multilingual pedagogy, game design, and cultural sensitivity. Collaboration with Vietnamese universities or diaspora experts can enrich this training. Encourage teachers to reflect on their own language varieties and to present both standard Vietnamese and their local dialects, reducing stigma around variation.

Community Engagement: Organize Heritage Clubs where students and families meet monthly for cultural practice. Invite guest speakers (e.g. local Vietnamese artists or scholars) to share in Vietnamese. Facilitate twinning with Vietnamese schools (as in bilingual video exchanges) to give learners an authentic audience. Ensure parents see the value: workshops for parents can show them how their involvement (speaking Vietnamese at home, supporting homework) boosts children's success.

6. Conclusion

Heritage language education is both a pedagogical and a cultural endeavor. Teaching Vietnamese as a heritage language requires adapting methods to learners' unique profiles while leveraging community and technology. Our findings suggest that when heritage Vietnamese classes use interactive, culturally meaningful activities, learners show higher motivation and better retention. These approaches also advance broader goals of identity and inclusion: students feel their bicultural background is an asset rather than a barrier.

At the same time, systemic support is needed. As Phan Le Ha et al. emphasize, Vietnam's education system and overseas programs must evolve to meet multilingual realities. Stakeholders - from policymakers to teachers' associations - should collaborate on curriculum development, resource sharing, and teacher training specific to heritage contexts. Community involvement is equally crucial: heritage language thrives when families and cultural institutions actively use and value it. Efforts like bilingual video letters demonstrate how a simple project can activate the broader community and amplify children's sense of Vietnamese identity.

Teaching Vietnamese as a heritage language can succeed by integrating concrete, learner-centered strategies with supportive policies. Programs that personalize content, stimulate multiple senses, and connect students to the Vietnamese-speaking community will not only preserve linguistic skills but also nurture cultural pride. By following the examples of recent research and case practice - from game design principles to community-based exchanges - educators can craft a vibrant heritage curriculum. Future work should continue to document such innovations and assess their impact, ensuring that heritage Vietnamese education remains dynamic, evidence-based, and responsive to the needs of learners around the world.

References

Ito, A., Nguyễn Thị Thu Hương, Knoeferle, P. (2024). German-dominant Vietnamese heritage speakers use semantic constraints of German for anticipation during comprehension in Vietnamese. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 27: 57-74.

Chu Thị Phong Lan, Phan Thị Huyền Trang. (2023). Some errors of people learning Vietnamese as a language heritage: A case study of Korean-Vietnamese learners. *Foreign Language Studies*, 39(5).

Lê Thị Thanh Tâm. (2022). Differences in knowledge expression in teaching Vietnamese literature for international students. *VMOST Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 64(3).

Lương Thị Hiền. (2024). Designing a game for teaching Vietnamese as a heritage language for children on the foundation of multi-sensory education theory. *Vietnam Social Sciences Review*, 219(2): 76-96.

Ochiai, T. (2025). Motivating heritage language learning through bilingual video letter: Seeking changes in heritage language learning environment for Vietnamese children. *Promis*, 2(1): 83-97.

Phan Le Ha. (2024). Foregrounding Vietnamese language, education, and change in and outside Vietnam. In: Phan Le Ha, Bao, D., Windle, J. (eds.). *Vietnamese Language, Education and Change in and outside Vietnam*. Global Vietnam: Across Time, Space and Community. Springer, Singapore.

Tang, G. M. (2007). Cross-linguistic analysis of Vietnamese and English with implications for Vietnamese language acquisition and maintenance in the United States. *Journal of Southeast Asian American Education and Advancement*, 2.

Trần Thị Minh, Gawellek. (2023). Recreating heritage through a Vietnamese language teaching program applying adventure game theory and virtual reality. *Journal of Science Thang Long University*, 10(4): 51-62.

Tran, V. H., Verdon, S. & Mcleod, S. (2022). Consistent and persistent: Successful home language maintenance among Vietnamese-Australian families. *Journal of Home Language Research*, 5(1): 1-19.

Tran, T. M. (2024). Vietnamese heritage language: From silence to voice. In: Phan Le Ha, Bao, D., Windle, J. (eds.). *Vietnamese language, education and change in and outside Vietnam*. Global Vietnam: Across Time, Space and Community. Springer, Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-99-9093-1_7

Ngo, H. T. D., Nguyen, Q. T., Smith, R. J. (2024). Literature education in Vietnamese schooling system. In: Phan Le Ha, Bao, D., Windle, J. (eds.). *Vietnamese language, education and change in and outside Vietnam*. Global Vietnam: Across Time, Space and Community. Springer, Singapore.

Ngo, H. T. D., Tran, T. N. (2024). Institutional transformation for internationalization: The making of national language program in higher education in contemporary Vietnam. In: Phan Le Ha, Bao, D., Windle, J. (eds.). *Vietnamese language, education and change in and outside Vietnam*. Global Vietnam: Across Time, Space and Community. Springer, Singapore.

Tran, T. M., Pham, T. H., & Ngo, H. T. D. (2024). Teaching Vietnamese as an additional language: A case study from explicit pragmatic instruction to intercultural approach. In: Phan Le Ha, Bao, D., Windle, J. (eds.). *Vietnamese language, education and change in and outside Vietnam*. Global Vietnam: Across Time, Space and Community. Springer, Singapore

Prela, L., Dqbrowska, E., Llompart, M. (2024). Beyond age: exploring ultimate attainment in heritage speakers and late L2 learners. *Psychology of Language*, 15. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1419116>

Zhong Ke. (2024). The educational practices of Vietnamese schools in China: A case study of the Guilin Vietnamese 2.9 school (1967-1975). *Vietnam Social Sciences Review*, 221(4): 18-32.