

# APPLICATION OF COMMUNICATION METHODS IN TEACHING VIETNAMESE TO FOREIGN LEARNERS

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**Abstract:** *In the context of international integration, the heightened focus on communication and global cooperation has underscored the growing importance of teaching the Vietnamese language to foreign learners. This article centers on the application of communicative methodologies in the pedagogical process of teaching Vietnamese to foreign learners. It presents several recommendations for the effective implementation of these methodologies. This article employs theoretical analysis methods, document analysis, and sociological experiments to yield research findings. Additionally, it assesses the common challenges faced by instructors teaching Vietnamese as a foreign language and proposes strategic solutions to address these challenges. By emphasizing the application of communicative methodologies, this paper strives to contribute to the enhancement of the quality of Vietnamese language instruction for foreign learners and to promote cultural and linguistic integration among nations and diverse ethnicities worldwide*

**Keywords:** *communication methods, teaching Vietnamese, foreign learners, language, cultural*

## **I. Introduction**

In the context of economic integration and development, the demand for foreign individuals to learn the Vietnamese language while residing in Vietnam has experienced significant growth. To effectively address this escalating need for teaching and learning Vietnamese, it is imperative to make proactive investments in infrastructure, physical facilities, technology, and,

most importantly, intellectual capital to be adequately prepared for this endeavor. Commencing with the objectives of learners, it becomes evident that instructing and acquiring a foreign language, such as Vietnamese, should not be undertaken arbitrarily. Consequently, foreign language instruction necessitates the application of advanced, suitable, and efficacious methodologies.

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Within the spectrum of language teaching methodologies, each approach possesses its own set of merits and demerits. However, given the current currents of globalization and internationalization, instructing Vietnamese to foreign learners through communicative methods stands out as the most scientifically substantiated and pragmatic approach, harmonizing with the learners' communication aspirations and requisites. Communication serves as the conduit through which individuals can deepen their comprehension of one another, foster closeness, nurture empathy, unity, and collaborate to fortify solidarity and peace transcending continental boundaries.

In the era of economic integration and development, the demand for learning the Vietnamese language by foreigners in Vietnam has seen a remarkable increase. To meet this ever-growing demand in teaching and learning Vietnamese, we must actively invest in infrastructure, physical facilities, technology, but most importantly, intellectual capital to be well-prepared for this task. Starting from the learners' objectives, it is essential to acknowledge that teaching and learning a foreign language, such as Vietnamese, cannot be approached arbitrarily. Therefore, foreign language instruction must employ advanced, appropriate, and effective methodologies. Among the various language teaching methods, each has its strengths and weaknesses. However, in line with the current trends of globalization and internationalization, teaching Vietnamese to foreigners through communication methods is the most scientifically grounded and

practical approach, aligning with the learners' communication goals and requirements.

## **II. Theoretical background**

### ***2.1. Teaching methods in the pedagogical science system***

According to Lê Phương Nga and her colleagues (2018), "as a science, the method of teaching Vietnamese is considered a part of Educational Science, a theoretical system for teaching Vietnamese both as a mother tongue and as a second language. Teaching Vietnamese involves instructing various target groups, including native speakers, ethnic minorities, young children, students in primary and secondary schools, as well as those in colleges and universities." Like any other scientific discipline, the teaching methods of Vietnamese have their specific objectives and responsibilities, theoretical foundations, practical applications, and unique research methods.

### ***2.2. Some teaching methods for foreign language***

#### ***2.2.1. Translation - grammar method***

The translation - grammar method is considered a classical foreign language teaching approach. Its purpose is to help foreign language learners read documents and literary works in the target language. The teacher plays an absolute guiding role in the classroom, while students passively receive information from the teacher. The teacher exclusively uses the source language for teaching and guidance. A typical lesson using this method includes presenting grammar rules, a list of new words, and translation exercises.

### 2.2.2. *Direct method*

The direct method also known as the natural method, imitates the natural way humans acquire language. This method has the following characteristics:

Only the target language is used in the classroom. Meaning is directly linked to the target language through the association of linguistic forms with activities, mimicking, gestures, and situations. Reading and writing instruction follows oral instruction. Grammar is acquired through induction.

### 2.2.3. *Listening-speaking method*

The listening-speaking method, also known as the army method, is similar to the direct method. It includes the following key points:

- Emphasis on teaching listening and speaking before reading and writing.
- Use of dialogues and practice exercises.
- Discouragement of using the native language in the classroom.
- Frequent use of analytical and comparative techniques. The listening-speaking method is influenced by structural linguistics and behaviorism.

### 2.2.4. *Silent way method*

This method, proposed by C. Gattegno, uses gestures and mutual imitation, which means that teachers use wooden sticks of varying lengths and colors to help students speak. The name “Silent Way” comes from the relative silence of teachers using these techniques. The fundamental principle of the silent way method is that “Teaching is a support for learning.”

### 2.2.5. *The comprehension approach method*

This method, introduced by Asher, represents a new approach to teaching language and is called “The comprehension approach” because of its emphasis on listening comprehension. In the response method, students listen and respond to requests in the teacher’s target language. Language units introduced are commands, requests, and instructions that require physical action from the learners.

## 2.3. *Communicative approach in language teaching*

### 2.3.1. *Communication*

According to Lê Khánh Dương and colleagues (2015), communication or communicative approach is the most common and effective method of teaching foreign languages today. Most textbooks and teaching materials for English worldwide, including in Vietnam, are developed based on the principles of this approach. Consequently, the ultimate goal of foreign language instruction is to develop communication skills and language proficiency for learners.

In the communicative approach, the teaching of language requires consideration of the social and cultural aspects of the language, the social conditions in which language is produced, and the language used in daily life. Additionally, the communicative approach focuses on the semantic aspect of language, which is the communicative intention. This concept is later referred to by linguists as “language functions.” Therefore, according to the communicative approach, language is not just a means of thinking but also a

means of communication. The ultimate goal of language learners is not only to acquire and master language knowledge (pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar) but also to attain communicative competence (proficiency in all four skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and using language for communication). Therefore, current teaching materials aim to help learners perform various language functions, such as making requests, suggestions, demands, describing objects, expressing interest, liking, or disliking, and more. Furthermore, to communicate effectively, learners need to use appropriate language forms for different communicative situations, in which participants must convey their communicative intentions through various tasks.

### 2.3.2. *Communicative methods*

The Communicative Approach emerged in England in the 1960s as a replacement for the Situational Language Teaching method, gaining worldwide popularity in the 1970s. According to Lê Quang Trục (2018), this approach is based on the perspective that language is a system of expressing meaning, rather than just a set of rules for organizing and transforming words. From this viewpoint, learning a language is enhanced through real, meaningful communication activities. In this approach, the classroom becomes an environment for learners to actively use the language they are learning for practical and specific communication purposes.

In Vietnam, the term “Communicative Approach” is defined

in Vietnamese language teaching as, according to Lê A (1999), “an instructional method that guides students to apply the theories they have learned in carrying out communication tasks, with attention to the characteristics and factors involved in communication activities.” According to Nguyễn Minh Thuyết (2014), teaching language through the Communicative Approach simulates the path of developing and enhancing a person’s communicative abilities in designing and implementing learning programs to help learners acquire this capacity quickly and sustainably.

According to Trịnh Văn Huân (2018), “When discussing teaching methods, educators aim not only to transmit linguistic knowledge but also to help learners utilize a particular language system to meet their communication needs.” Therefore, improving language communication skills through communicative teaching methods and shifting from traditional knowledge transmission to capacity development has gained extensive attention from those involved in educating and training Vietnamese language for foreigners.

It can be seen that the communicative method is regarded as a positive approach to language learning. In Vietnam, this method, as a new improvement in language teaching, has been gaining strong support in recent years.

The goal of teaching a foreign language is to develop linguistic skills, communicative competence, and communicative abilities. This method requires consideration of the social and cultural aspects of the language, the social conditions in which language is produced,

and the language used in everyday life. Additionally, the communicative approach pays attention to the meaning of language, or in other words, the intention of communication. This concept is later referred to as language functions. Therefore, according to the communicative approach, language is not only a means of expressing thoughts but also a means of communication.

### III. Research methods

To carry out this research, we employed theoretical analysis methods to assess the alignment between the curriculum and the theoretical content of teaching through references and comparisons. We utilized synthesis techniques, conducted document analysis, and referred to relevant sources pertaining to the subject, including research studies on teaching Vietnamese as a foreign language and investigations related to teaching culture in foreign language education. Additionally, we made use of instructional materials such as textbooks, publications, and reference documents from Vietnamese language courses designed for foreign learners. Furthermore, the authors employed data

collection and processing techniques, conducted a sociological experiment to analyze curriculum implementation, the Vietnamese teaching process in a classroom setting.

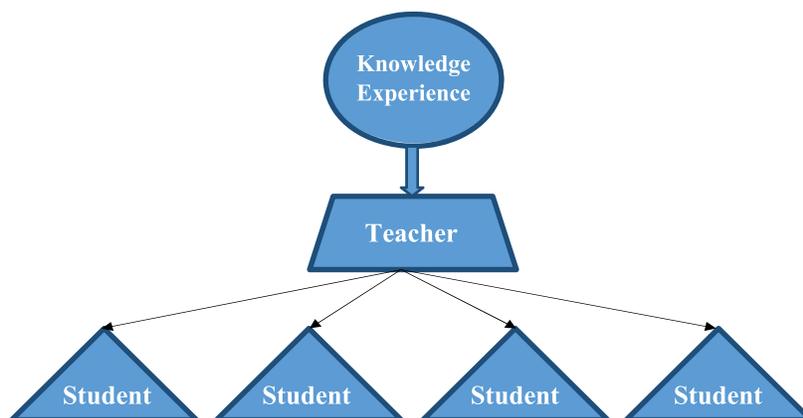
### IV. Teaching vietnamese using the communicative approach for foreign learners

Teaching Vietnamese to the international community using the communicative approach, also known as the communicative language teaching approach, is based on the transactional education perspective and views language as a means of communication.

#### 4.1. *Transmission education approach*

The transmission education approach has been applied for centuries when scientific and technical progress was slower. In this transmission-oriented perspective, the role of the teacher is central (teacher-centered). All knowledge and experience that learners acquire come through the teacher. The shortcomings of the teacher in terms of experience and knowledge undoubtedly hinder the learners' development (Figure 1)

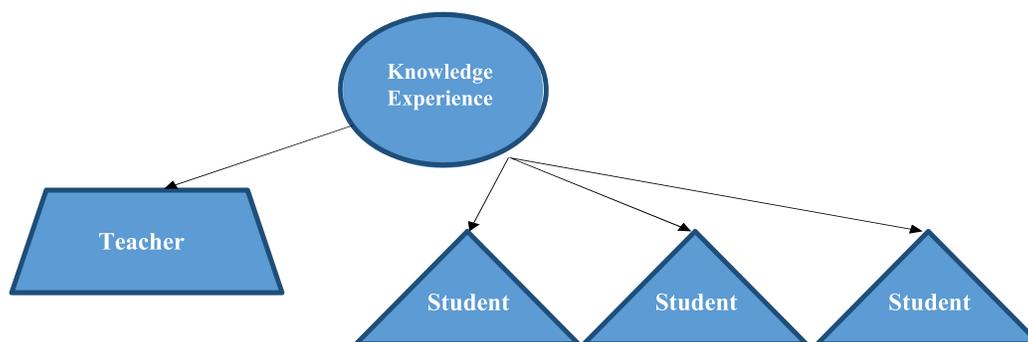
Figure 1: *Transmission education paradigm*



After numerous studies and experiments, educators and experts have concluded that education should be learner-centered. It is essential to equip learners with both theoretical knowledge from books and practical knowledge

from everyday life. This approach places the teacher in the role of a facilitator, motivator, and guide, assisting learners in learning, exploring, and discovering. This is the transactional education paradigm (Figure 2).

*Figure 2: Transmission of educational beliefs*



Communication process based on language perspective:

- Language is a system that helps humans express meaning.
- The primary function of language is to facilitate communication.
- Language structure is reflected in the function of using language for communication.
- The fundamental units of language are not only structural and grammatical features but also depend on the meaning expressed in language genres, text-types, and discourse forms.

#### ***4.2. Steps in language learning using the communicative approach***

- Create language activities with real communication contexts in daily life.
- The language used in activities must carry meaning.
- Using language with meaning is the learning process (Johnson, 1982).

Thus, applying the communicative process to language teaching (Vietnamese) is about creating language usage activities to engage learners in language activities, followed by incorporating grammar elements from the discourse form for learners to practice through exercises.

##### *4.2.1. Creating language activities*

Creating language activities involves using different genres in various communication contexts. In daily life, activities do not occur in isolation. Therefore, language activities must be formed into activity clusters.

Developing the four language skills requires meeting the following needs and objectives:

- Receptive skills: Listening and reading comprehension.
- Productive skills: Speaking and writing.
- Before creating activities, teachers need to:

- Select topics: Suitable for the learners' level, needs, and interests.

- Set objectives: Based on language learning purposes and goals for each lesson.

- Choose genres and grammar: Depending on the language level and learners' needs, genres are incorporated into activities. From these genres, teachers extract grammar points for learners to practice through exercises.

Finally, create a continuous series of activities, progressing from receptive to productive activities.

In language activities, exercises should be included to support language usage, particularly for grammar elements, phonetics (e.g., pronunciation), syllable recognition, word formation, sentence construction, and expressing time. However, exercises are not the primary focus of a lesson; the primary focus is on the language activities performed by the students.

#### *4.2.2. Types of Practical Activities in the Classroom*

The communicative approach marks a shift from traditional language learning, which focuses on mastering grammar and practicing through closely "supervised" activities, such as memorizing grammar exercises and dialogues, towards more "freedom" in activities, like group work, role-playing, and problem-solving. These practical activities encompass all four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) to develop learners' communication abilities.

#### *4.2.3. The Roles of Teachers and Learners*

The mentioned practical activities partially illustrate the roles of teachers and

learners in the communicative approach. Learners must engage in classroom activities collaboratively and individually, listen, and interact with fellow learners in groups, rather than mechanically practicing as in traditional methods. In general, this approach demands greater learner responsibility for their own learning, emphasizing their active and creative involvement.

As for teachers, their roles vary depending on the stage and type of activity, such as being a controller, organizer, prompter, or participant. In a communicative language teaching classroom, both teachers and learners must collaborate throughout the learning process. This collaboration is only achieved when both teachers and learners are well-prepared and clear about their roles from the beginning of the class.

The communicative approach, also known as the communicative language teaching approach, meets the increasing demand for cross-cultural interaction. The goals of learning a foreign language (Vietnamese) can vary, including travel, daily communication, business communication, language research, literature, history, economics, and Vietnamese culture. However, the central requirement remains: Listening and speaking for direct communication, or reading and writing for reading books, research, and enjoyment.

To initiate effective Vietnamese language teaching and learning, five guiding objectives for teaching methods and textbook compilation have been proposed. That includes:

+ Language is spoken, not written

Initially, one must practice listening and speaking a few common sentences before moving on to reading and writing. Emphasis should be placed on pronunciation and intonation. The learning material should consist of everyday, common phrases rather than high-level literary texts. Regularly practice listening and repeating these sentences.

+ Language is a collection of habits

It must be cultivated by imitating and memorizing dialogues and reading aloud model sentences until an automatic response is formed, similar to one's native language. This is relatively easy for children but requires much more effort for adults.

+ Teach the language itself, not about the language

This means that learners should practice using the foreign language through listening, speaking, reading, and writing. It is not about merely teaching knowledge about the language as traditionally done but rather focusing on practical usage. Grammar is only a means to achieve the immediate goal, which is effective communication with native speakers. Only a few learners who want to delve deeper should study literature and linguistics.

+ Language is what native speakers say, not what we think they say

Learn the modern, everyday language, not archaic language found in books. Of course, pay attention to language variations such as regional dialects, social registers (slang), or usage

in different contexts, like spoken versus written language.

#### ***4.3. The Implementation Process of the Communicative Approach***

Step 1: Describe a hypothetical communication situation (concise and clear)

Step 2: Analyze the situation described, provide accompanying dialogues or expressions based on the situation outlined in Step 1 (debates, expressions of gratitude, praise, discussions, etc.)

Step 3: Instruct learners to recognize the appropriateness of speech in the given context, emphasizing the connection between speech and the communication scenario

Step 4: Adjust and correct inappropriate speech, draw necessary conclusions for learners to remember and practice.

#### ***4.4. Advantages of the Communicative Approach***

- The communicative approach is a scientifically sound method that effectively meets the current learner demands for listening and speaking skills.

- It contributes to preserving the purity of the Vietnamese language, which is an effective tool for introducing the history, culture, and traditional way of life of Vietnam to friends all over the world.

- The communicative approach helps learners reduce the time required for learning.

- It enhances learners' active, creative, confident, daring, and dynamic qualities.

- The communicative approach involves rapid practice, relying on

learners' communication products for correction and enhancement. To achieve this, teachers must invest more time and effort in selecting and diversifying communication situations. Teachers need to provide accurate and timely feedback.

- Teaching languages today aim to provide learners with the ability to communicate in the language they are learning rather than just imparting knowledge about the language. Using the communicative approach (or the process of creating language-use activities) allows teachers to improve their students' communication skills, providing them with opportunities to communicate like native speakers, rather than using language that is academic in nature.

Different from structural and grammar-based methods, the communicative approach allows teachers and learners to transition from language theory and knowledge to practical use in real communication situations in everyday social life.

- Listening and understanding are crucial skills when communicating in a foreign language (Vietnamese). If one speaks well but has poor listening skills, the conversation may not succeed. Conversely, if one has good listening and understanding skills but struggles with speaking, there is still hope that native speakers will understand their intended message. However, regardless of the specific skill set required, all four language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—need to be addressed appropriately according to the purpose and goals of the learners' study.

#### ***4.5. Some Recommendations for Teaching Vietnamese to Foreigners Using the Communicative Approach***

Through surveys and research, we have identified the strengths and weaknesses of various methods currently employed in teaching Vietnamese to foreigners. Below, we provide some suggestions and recommendations with the hope that educators using the communicative approach can consider applying them to enhance their teaching effectiveness.

##### *4.5.1. Teacher Training*

Many teachers who instruct Vietnamese to foreigners, both at the Hong Bang International University and in Ho Chi Minh City, have not undergone pedagogical training specific to this field. They often rely on teaching experiences in English, French, or Russian, among others, to transition to teaching Vietnamese. We suggest that the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) develop specialized training programs for teaching Vietnamese to foreigners. In the short term, there should be workshops or training courses available for current teachers who require this training.

##### *4.5.2. Diverse Student Groups*

Foreign students studying Vietnamese in Ho Chi Minh City and other provinces have diverse objectives, levels, and ages. We propose that classes should be categorized according to the students' profiles, learning goals, age groups, and whether they are undertaking short-term or long-term courses. This categorization would create more favorable, engaging, enjoyable, and productive learning environments. Students should spend ample time practicing communication skills.

##### *4.5.3. Unified Textbooks*

Presently, there are various textbooks for teaching Vietnamese to

foreigners, either authored individually or collectively. The content of these textbooks often reflects the authors' preferences or is based on foreign language curricula. Additionally, teachers may choose their textbooks based on personal preferences, resulting in a lack of uniformity. We recommend that MOET commission a team of experienced professionals in education, language, culture, etc., to develop standardized Vietnamese textbooks tailored for the communicative approach. These textbooks should cover basic to advanced levels and include specialized materials for students in different fields.

#### *4.5.4. Effective Communication Skills*

After assessing the pros and cons of different methods, we conclude that there is no one-size-fits-all approach. Each method has its own strengths and weaknesses. However, the ultimate goal of most language teaching methods, including Vietnamese, is to enable learners to communicate effectively in the target language. Therefore, teaching Vietnamese using the communicative approach is a suitable direction. Nonetheless, teachers should be flexible and integrate other methods to maximize teaching effectiveness. Additionally, teachers should pay attention to reading, writing, and grammar structures, gradually incorporating them into lessons. Teachers should create a stimulating learning environment by utilizing various resources, gestures, and activities to enhance communication skills. The use of an intermediary language (e.g., English) can be a useful tool for teaching beginners

but should be gradually minimized in advanced classes.

#### *4.5.5. Pronunciation and Writing*

The pronunciation and writing of Vietnamese should be introduced gradually and in manageable amounts in the initial sections of textbooks. It is important to distribute sufficient time for pronunciation practice throughout the curriculum, connecting it to real-life scenarios through lessons. Effective teaching of pronunciation is vital, especially for beginners. Pronunciation mistakes can hinder communication, even if the speaker's grammar and vocabulary are correct. The curriculum should focus on teaching versatile words and phrases that are commonly used in everyday communication.

#### *4.5.6. Classroom Layout and Atmosphere*

Classrooms for teaching Vietnamese using the communicative approach should not adhere to traditional seating arrangements (with the teacher at the front and students sitting below). Given the nature of language activities and communication, classrooms should be arranged to provide an open, comfortable, noise-free, and positive atmosphere conducive to interaction. Seating arrangements should vary according to individual, group, or whole-class activities, as required by the lesson.

#### *4.5.7. Extracurricular Activities*

Supplementary activities outside the classroom, such as participating in cultural festivals, watching films, attending theater performances, visiting

museums, art exhibitions, traditional villages, religious sites, markets, and grocery stores, can significantly enhance students' communication skills. These extracurricular activities help students understand Vietnamese culture, customs, and daily life, making language learning more authentic.

### V. Conclusion

The number of foreigners coming to Vietnam for work, study, and living is steadily increasing. To live and work in Vietnam, foreigners need to learn Vietnamese and understand Vietnamese culture. Therefore, learning Vietnamese is an essential requirement for them. Among the various methods used to teach Vietnamese to foreigners, we believe that the communicative approach is a scientifically sound and practical method suited to the needs of learners aiming to communicate effectively. However, it is crucial for educators to maintain flexibility and consider the diverse needs of their students. By doing so, learners will have a higher chance of achieving success in their daily communication with Vietnamese people.

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