

An Investigation on Learning Needs of Chinese Language Majors in Vietnam: A Case Study of Ho Chi Minh City University of Education

¹Luu Hon Vu

¹*Faculty of Foreign Languages, Ho Chi Minh University of Banking, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam,
luuhonvu@gmail.com*

Abstract

Learning needs are the needs and expectations of students in the learning process. This article takes Ho Chi Minh City University of Education as an example to investigate the learning needs of Chinese language majors in Vietnam. The results show that: (1) In terms of teaching content, students hope that teachers can provide other relevant materials in addition to the content in the textbook, hope to master all skills and knowledge related to Chinese (especially cultural knowledge and translation skills), and like to watch Chinese video supplementary classroom activities; (2) In terms of teaching methods, students hope that the content is explained in both Chinese and Vietnamese, and teachers use powerpoint and blackboard writing to present teaching content, they like to learn through pictures and games, but they do not like personal activities and after-school group work, they want teachers to ask open-ended questions to the class out of sequence, and hope that the teacher will wait for the students to finish before correcting the mistakes; (3) In terms of teaching materials, students like textbooks that are contemporary, practical, interesting and interactive, and hope that the content of the textbooks is related to cultural customs and daily life; (4) In terms of teachers, students expect teachers to be both knowledge imparters and motivators, be amiable, and not be too strict.

Keywords: learning needs; Chinese language majors; learners; Vietnam.

1. INTRODUCTION

Needs is a concept with a larger meaning, which involves learners' needs, expectations, motivations, etc. (Brindley, 1989). Needs analysis is the process of identifying and prioritizing learners' language needs (Richards et al., 2002). Needs analysis is like a doctor's diagnosis before prescribing a patient's medicine (Long, 2005). This is the basis of curriculum design for schools and teachers, as well as the basis for organizing teaching, using teaching materials, selecting teaching methods, and evaluating teaching (Li, 2017).

In the field of international Chinese education, the study of learners' learning needs did not begin to receive attention until the beginning of this century. Ni (2007) investigated the needs

of foreign students in China through a questionnaire survey in three aspects: (1) admission, (2) classroom learning, and (3) assessment. Since then, researches on learners' learning needs have been published almost every year, such as: Wu & Liu (2009), Liang (2010), Zhang (2014), Zhao (2016), etc.

At present, there are few research results on the Chinese learning needs of Vietnamese students. We only found the master thesis of Nguyen (2018) on CNKI. Nguyen (2018) analyzed the learning needs of non-Chinese majors at Tra Vinh University in Vietnam from three aspects: (1) cognitive components, (2) target needs, and (3) learning needs. However, the learning needs of Chinese majors differ from those of non-Chinese majors. However, no related research

has been found in the existing research. To fill this gap, this article aims to examine the learning needs of Chinese language majors in Vietnam.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Different scholars hold different viewpoints and different classification methods on the learning needs of foreign language learners. Hutchinson & Waters (1987) divided needs into two categories: (1) target needs, and (2) learning needs. Target needs are the knowledge that learners need to master in order to serve the learners' future target work; and learning needs are the learner's needs and expectations in the learning process. Brindley (1989) divided needs into two categories: (1) objective needs, and (2) subjective needs. Objective needs are the learner's foreign language level, learning difficulties and other objective situations, and subjective needs are the learner's cognition and emotion. Waters & Vilches (2001) divided needs into two stages, one stage is the foundation-building stage, including familiarization needs and socialization needs, and the other stage is potential-realizing stage, including application requirements and integration requirements.

Our research is primarily based on the learning needs perspective of Hutchinson & Waters (1987) and Brindley (1989). We believe that the learning needs of learners are the requirements, needs and expectations of learners in the learning process, which is subjective. Learning needs involve many aspects. In this study, we mainly examine the following four aspects: (1) teaching content, (2) teaching methods, (3) teaching materials, and (4) teachers.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

3.1. Survey objects

Table 1. *The situation of the subject of investigation*

Index		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	22	11.2
	Female	174	88.8
Ethnic	Kinh	159	81.1
	Others	37	18.9
Age	19	32	16.3
	20	146	74.5
	21	11	5.6
	22	1	0.5
	23	6	3.1
Grade	second-year	33	16.8
	third-year	163	83.2

Table 1 shows that, 196 undergraduate students from the Chinese Department of Ho Chi Minh City University of Education in Vietnam participated in this survey. In terms of gender, there are 22 males (11.2%) and 174 females (88.8%). In terms of ethnicity, there are 159 students from the Kinh ethnic group (81.1%) and 37 students from other ethnic groups (18.9%). In terms of age, the oldest is 23, the youngest is 19, and the average is 19.99. In terms of grade, there are 33 second-year undergraduate students (16.8%) and 163 undergraduate third-year students (83.2%).

3.2. Research tools

We adopted a questionnaire as the data collection tool for this study. We draw on previous studies, and the design of the questionnaire is modified and supplemented on the basis of Ni (2007), Wu & Liu (2009), Zhang (2014). The questionnaire consists of four aspects, including 18 groups of questions. A five-point Likert scale was used, in which "1-strongly disagree", "2-disagree", "3-average", "4-agree", and "5-strongly agree".

The specific structure of the questionnaire is as follows:

Table 2. *The structure of the questionnaire*

No	Items	Code
Teaching content		
1	The scope of teaching content	A1
2	Classroom supplementary activities	A2
3	Language and cultural knowledge	A3

4	Language skills	A4
Teaching methods		
5	The language taught by the teacher	B1
6	The presentation method of the teaching content	B2
7	The teaching aids	B3
8	The language practice method	B4
9	The grouping method	B5
10	The questioning method	B6
11	The error correction method	B7
12	The review and inspection method	B8
13	The question form of the homework	B9
14	The homework evaluation method	B10
Teaching materials		
15	The characteristics of the textbook	C1
16	The theme of the text	C2
Teachers		
17	Namely the role of teachers	D1
18	The quality of teachers	D2

18 The quality of teachers D2

The first aspect: teaching content. There are four groups of questions in this aspect, which are the scope of teaching content, classroom supplementary activities, language and cultural knowledge, and language skills.

The second aspect: teaching methods. There are ten groups of questions in this aspect, which are the language taught by the teacher, the presentation method of the teaching content, the teaching aids, the language practice method, the grouping method, the questioning method, the error correction method, the review and inspection method, the question form of the homework, and the homework evaluation method.

The third aspect: teaching materials. There are two groups of questions in this aspect, which are the characteristics of the textbook and the theme of the text.

The fourth aspect: teachers. There are two sets of questions in this aspect, namely the role of teachers and the quality of teachers.

3.3. Data collection and statistics

We use random sampling to conduct surveys through the Google Forms platform. A total of

196 valid questionnaires were received. We use SPSS 25.0 for statistics and processing of the data obtained from the survey.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Teaching content

The needs of teaching content include the following four aspects: (1) scope of teaching content, (2) classroom supplementary activities, (3) knowledge of language and cultural, and (4) language skills.

4.1.1. Scope of teaching content

The survey results show that the most favorite teaching content of students is “the content of teaching materials and related materials” (Mean = 4.21; SD = 0.658), followed by “the content of teaching materials” (Mean = 3.86; SD = 0.654), and the least favorite teaching content is “content selected by the teacher that has nothing to do with the textbook” (Mean = 3.75; SD = 0.856). This result is exactly the same as the Chinese learning needs of international students in China (Zhang, 2014) and the learning needs of Vietnamese students as a second foreign language (Luu, 2022). It can be seen that the content in the textbook cannot meet the needs of students. They hope to gain more knowledge from other related materials. Therefore, on the basis of the content of the textbook, teachers need to supplement relevant materials to enrich the teaching content, and also need to supplement extracurricular exercises to improve students’ Chinese proficiency. This not only helps to achieve teaching goals, but also stimulates students’ enthusiasm for learning.

4.1.2. Classroom supplementary activities

Classroom supplementary activities have a certain effect on the improvement of classroom teaching effect. The survey results show that the students’ favorite classroom activity is “watching Chinese videos” (Mean = 4.24; SD = 0.647), followed by “listening to Chinese music” (Mean = 3.97; SD = 0.880), “reading Chinese stories” (Mean = 3.89; SD = 0.763), and the least favorite is “making traditional

Chinese crafts" (Mean = 3.84; SD = 0.956). The order of learning needs of Vietnamese Chinese as a second foreign language students (Luu, 2022) is exactly the same, but the degree of need is somewhat different. It can be seen that both Chinese language majors and non-Chinese language majors prefer supplementary activities with high entertainment (such as watching videos, listening to music). However, unlike non-Chinese language majors (Luu, 2022), Chinese language majors prefer activities related to Chinese characters and manual activities. This may be due to different majors and different jobs in the future. Chinese language majors need to be in constant contact with Chinese characters, so they are not afraid of Chinese characters. Chinese traditional craftsmanship is a channel for them to understand Chinese culture.

4.1.3. Knowledge of language and culture

The survey results show that students hope to learn and master the knowledge of Chinese language and culture comprehensively. Among them, cultural knowledge is the content that students most want to learn (Mean = 4.44; SD = 0.583), followed by vocabulary knowledge (Mean = 4.32; SD = 0.611), Chinese character knowledge (Mean = 4.30; SD = 0.613), phonetic knowledge (Mean = 4.26; SD = 0.645), and finally grammar knowledge (Mean = 4.22; SD = 0.743). This order is somewhat different from that of Vietnamese students majoring in non-Chinese languages (Luu, 2022). This is not difficult to understand, because the Chinese language major of Ho Chi Minh City University of Education has a large proportion of language courses and a small proportion of cultural courses, with only one compulsory course (China Overview) and three elective courses (Chinese culture topics, Chinese literature, business culture).

4.1.4. Language skills

Survey results show that students want to improve their language skills across the board. The order of demand from high to low is: translation (Mean = 4.55; SD = 0.584) > speaking (Mean = 4.52; SD = 0.586) > listening (Mean = 4.47; SD = 0.585) > writing (Mean =

4.37; SD = 0.707) > reading (Mean = 4.31; SD = 0.702). This order is somewhat different from Nguyen (2018) and Luu (2022) on non-Chinese language majors in Vietnam, where Chinese language majors pay more attention to improving their translation skills. This is because the future employment of Chinese language majors is mostly related to Chinese-Vietnamese translation, and improving translation ability will be beneficial to their future work. However, there are not many translation courses in the curriculum of the Chinese language major of Ho Chi Minh City University of Education, only four courses of translation theory, written translation, interpretation and business translation, which cannot meet the needs of students.

4.2. Teaching methods

The needs of teaching methods involve the following ten aspects: (1) language taught by teachers, (2) presentation of teaching content, (3) teaching aids, (4) language practice methods, (5) grouping methods, (6) how to ask questions, (7) mistakes correction methods, (8) review and inspection methods, (9) homework topic format, (10) how to evaluate work.

4.2.1. Language taught by teachers

In a Vietnamese environment, which language should be used in Chinese classes, Chinese or Vietnamese? This is an issue that Vietnamese teachers are very concerned about. According to the survey results, students most like teachers who teach in both Chinese and Vietnamese (Mean = 4.41; SD = 0.669), followed by teachers who teach all in Chinese (Mean = 3.35; SD = 0.873), and the least favorite is teachers who teach all in Vietnamese (Mean = 2.77; SD = 0.806). This result is different from the needs of international students in China (Wu, 2013; Zhang, 2014; Yang, 2017). International students in China want teachers to teach in Chinese, and do not like teachers to teach in the learner's native language. This result is exactly the same as the needs of Chinese learners in Russia (Meng, 2013) and the needs of Vietnamese as a second foreign language students (Luu, 2022). It is hoped that teachers will use both Chinese and

students' native language to teach. It is not difficult to understand. International students who study in China mostly want to improve their Chinese proficiency. If teachers teach in their native language, it will be the same as when they study in their own country, which is not conducive to their language development. Therefore, they prefer teachers to use all Chinese in teaching. Most of the students who learn Chinese in a non-target language environment are not as good in Chinese as international students in China, nor do they have as many opportunities to use Chinese. If teachers teach in Chinese, it will affect their understanding of the text. However, if teachers use Chinese and Vietnamese to teach at the same time, it will help improve students' Chinese proficiency, all the same time it also helps student master difficult and complex problems.

4.2.2. Presentation of teaching content

Powerpoint and blackboard writing each have their own advantages. Powerpoint can bring students an intuitive and vivid feeling. Writing on the blackboard is convenient for teachers to supplement the content not covered in the powerpoint in a timely manner. The presentation methods of these two kinds of teaching content have their own advantages and disadvantages, which can enhance each other's strengths and avoid weaknesses, and bring good results to classroom teaching. According to the survey results, students liked "using both of powerpoint and writing on the blackboard" to present teaching content the most (Mean = 4.23; SD = 0.767), followed by "using only the powerpoint" (Mean = 3.62; SD = 0.779), and the least favorite was "using only the blackboard" (Mean = 3.20; SD = 0.764). This result is exactly the same as the needs of Vietnamese Chinese as a second foreign language students (Luu, 2022). It can be seen that the presentation of teaching content can not only rely on modern tools, but also need to be combined with traditional tools (blackboard writing), so as to bring better results.

4.2.3. Teaching aids

Teaching aids are indispensable for teachers' classroom teaching. Appropriate use of teaching aids will help improve classroom teaching. The survey results show that the students' favorite teaching aids are "picture" (Mean = 4.28; SD = 0.645) > "TV, film, video" (Mean = 4.20; SD = 0.706) > "object" (Mean = 4.04; SD = 0.796) > "tape recorder" (Mean = 4.03; SD = 0.764) > "new word card" (Mean = 3.79; SD = 0.832) > "mobile applycation" (Mean = 3.74; SD = 0.911). This order is somewhat the same as that of Zhang (2014), Chen (2015), Yang (2017), and Luu (2022). Chinese learners prefer teachers to use "pictures" and "TV, film, video" as teaching aids tool. This may be because these two tools are vivid, intuitive and easy to understand, which are conducive to stimulating students' enthusiasm for learning and improving teachers' teaching effect.

4.2.4. Language practice methods

Language practice is an important part of teaching. According to the survey results, the students' favorite language practice method is "language games" (Mean = 4.08; SD = 0.737), followed by "paired conversation" (Mean = 3.84; SD = 0.774), "role playing" (Mean = 3.67; SD = 0.931), "group discussion" (Mean = 3.64; SD = 0.892), and the least favorite is "debate" (Mean = 3.59; SD = 0.921). This result is exactly the same as that of Wu & Liu (2009), Zhang (2014), and Luu (2022). It can be seen that the more interactive exercises are very popular with students, and students are very eager for teachers to use these exercises in the classroom.

4.2.5. Grouping methods

In classroom activities, teachers should divide several people into groups. Is it more appropriate for language practice? The survey results showed that the students most liked "groups of three or more" (Mean = 3.65; SD = 0.787), followed by "groups of two" (Mean = 3.44; SD = 0.811), "group activities of the whole class" (Mean = 3.28; SD = 1.016), and the least favorite is "personal activities" (Mean = 2.88; SD = 0.820). This result is somewhat

identical to Luu (2022). It can be seen that, whether it is a Chinese language majors or a non-Chinese language majors, they do not like personal activities. They all want teachers to group two or three students because it reduces their learning anxiety.

4.2.6. How to ask questions

Questioning is a part of classroom teaching. How should teachers ask questions without stressing students? This is one of the issues that teachers are very concerned about. The survey results show that students want teachers to “ask questions for the whole class” (Mean = 3.78; SD = 0.743), and do not like teachers “ask questions to individuals” (Mean = 3.39; SD = 0.813); students want teachers to “ask questions out of sequence” (Mean = 3.27; SD = 0.849), do not too much like the teacher’s “question in sequence” (Mean = 3.11; SD = 0.864); students want “the teacher’s question is open-ended” (Mean = 3.63; SD = 0.737), less like “the teacher’s question is closed-ended” (Mean = 3.22; SD = 0.649). This result is identical to Luu (2022) on non-Chinese language majors in Vietnam. It can be seen that the characteristics of Vietnamese students are that they want teachers to ask questions to the whole class out of sequence, and the questions should be open-ended. This may be because Vietnamese students are not yet confident enough to feel pressured to be questioned by teachers.

4.2.7. Mistakes correction methods

In the classroom, students often make mistakes. At that time, should teachers correct mistakes, and how should they correct them? This is an important issue that can have negative consequences if not addressed properly. The results of the survey showed that the students most wanted was “to correct their mistakes after the students finished speaking” (Mean = 4.07; SD = 0.785), followed by “guide students to correct their own mistakes” (Mean = 3.87; SD = 0.764), “correct students after class” (Mean = 3.58; SD = 0.949), “students correct each other’s mistakes” (Mean = 3.47; SD = 0.981), students do not like the teacher’s “interrupting students to correct errors” (Mean = 2.24; SD = 1.028), nor agree with “small

mistakes do not need to be corrected” (Mean = 2.31; SD = 0.927) and “no mistake correction required” (Mean = 2.20; SD = 1.114). This result is somewhat the same as that of Wu (2013) and Luu (2022). It can be seen that the students very much hope that the teacher will correct their mistakes, even if it is a small mistakes, so that the students will know their own shortcomings and continue to improve and improve their Chinese proficiency. However, students do not like teachers to interrupt students to correct mistakes when students are speaking or reading texts, because it will affect students’ interest in learning.

4.2.8. Review and inspection methods

The results of the survey showed that the review methods that students prefer from high to low are “homework” (Mean = 3.59; SD = 0.858) > “question and answer” (Mean = 3.41; SD = 0.870) > “dictation” (Mean = 3.27; SD = 0.896) > “self-report” (Mean = 3.19; SD = 0.906). This order is the same as that of Vietnamese non-Chinese language majors (Luu, 2022). Students like “homework” most, because this form has a specific review range, and students can prepare before class, so they will not feel pressure, while other forms are easy to cause students to have learning anxiety.

4.2.9. Homework topic format

The survey results show that the form of questions that students like from high to low is “memorizing new words” (Mean = 3.68; SD = 0.759) > “exercises not done in class in the textbook” (Mean = 3.66; SD = 0.745) > “exercises outside the textbook” (Mean = 3.52; SD = 0.844) > “after school group work” (Mean = 3.19; SD = 0.987). This order is somewhat consistent with the findings of Luu (2022). It can be seen that the students do not like the group work assigned by the teacher after class. This may be because students do not have a lot of time after class and have difficulty scheduling time to discuss and complete group work.

4.2.10. How to evaluate work

According to the survey results, the students’ favorite method of homework evaluation is

“face-to-face correction and evaluation” (Mean = 3.61; SD = 0.862), followed by “ex-post correction and evaluation” (Mean = 3.45; SD = 0.968), and the least favorite is “cross-correction among classmates” (Mean = 2.79; SD = 0.988) and “no correction” (Mean = 2.23; SD = 1.079). This result is the same as that of Zhang (2014), Nguyen (2018), and Luu (2022). It can be seen that the hope of Chinese learners is for teachers to change their homework and make changes in person.

4.3. Teaching materials

Teaching materials are an important basis for Chinese teaching. The demand for teaching materials involves the following two aspects: (1) the characteristics of the teaching materials, and (2) the theme of the text.

4.3.1. The characteristics of the teaching materials

The survey results show that students want teaching materials to be “epochal” (Mean = 4.43; SD = 0.632), “practical” (Mean = 4.35; SD = 0.681), “interesting” (Mean = 4.29; SD = 0.650), and that exercises should be “interactive” (Mean = 4.21; SD = 0.746). It can be seen that Vietnamese students have higher requirements for Chinese textbooks. This is not difficult to understand, because most of the Chinese textbooks used in Vietnamese universities are textbooks written by Chinese scholars ten years ago. The language and content are somewhat out of touch with the current society, and some vocabulary and topics are outdated and lack interest and interaction.

4.3.2. The themes of the text

The results of the survey showed that the topics students liked from high to low were “cultural customs” (Mean = 4.37; SD = 0.670) > “daily life” (Mean = 4.30; SD = 0.645) > “history and geography” (Mean = 3.99; SD = 0.847) > “economy and trade” (Mean = 3.97; SD = 0.847) > “sociopolitics” (Mean = 3.67; SD = 0.942). “Cultural customs” and “everyday life” are also topics that Vietnamese non-Chinese language majors like (Nguyen, 2018; Luu, 2022). This may be because these two themes

are often encountered in life and have high practicability, and through these themes, one can learn about Chinese culture, customs and habits.

4.4. Teachers

The demand for teachers involves two aspects: (1) the role of the teacher, and (2) the quality of the teacher

4.4.1. The role of the teacher

Teachers play an important role in the learning process of students. The results of the survey show that students’ expectations for the role of Chinese language teachers from high to low are “knowledge imparters” (Mean = 4.41; SD = 0.606) > “motivators” (Mean = 4.37; SD = 0.639) > “learning facilitators” (Mean = 4.24; SD = 0.655) > “learning evaluator” (Mean = 3.79; SD = 0.914). This order is exactly the same as the study by Luu (2022). It can be seen that Vietnamese students especially hope to learn a lot from teachers, and hope that teachers can spread positive energy and stimulate learning motivation to students.

4.4.2. The quality of teachers

The survey results show that the students’ expectations for the quality of Chinese teachers from high to low are “amiable” (Mean = 4.46; SD = 0.611) > “dedicated and responsible” (Mean = 4.45; SD = 0.618) > “flexible and innovative in teaching methods” (Mean = 4.41; SD = 0.614) > “knowledgeable” (Mean = 4.39; SD = 0.666) > “care, love, respect students” (Mean = 4.38; SD = 0.665) > “language humor” (Mean = 4.35; SD = 0.667) > “enliven the classroom atmosphere” (Mean = 4.34; SD = 0.708) > “strict” (Mean = 3.29; SD = 1.034). This result is similar to the studies of Nguyen (2018) and Luu (2022). Vietnamese students are particularly fond of amiable teachers, and they do not like more strict teachers.

5. CONCLUSION

Learning needs are the needs and expectations of learners in the process of language learning. Based on the learning needs of Hutchinson &

Waters (1987) and Brindley (1989), this article conducts a questionnaire survey on 196 undergraduates majoring in Chinese language at Ho Chi Minh City University of Education from four aspects: teaching content, teaching methods, teaching materials, and teachers. The results show:

First, the teaching content. Students are not satisfied with just learning what is in the textbook, they expect teachers to provide other relevant materials as well. Students believe that language knowledge and skills are very important, and hope to master various knowledge of pronunciation-vocabulary-grammar-culture (especially cultural knowledge), and be proficient in listening-speaking-reading-writing-translation skills (especially translation skills). Students also enjoy watching Chinese video as a supplemental classroom activity.

Second, teaching methods. Students hope that teachers can use both Chinese and Vietnamese to teach at the same time, and hope that teachers can use powerpoint and blackboard writing at the same time to present teaching content. They like to learn through pictures and games and dislike individual activities. They want teachers to ask open-ended questions to the class out of sequence, and they want teachers to wait for students to finish before correcting mistakes. They do not like group work after class and want teachers to mark and evaluate their work in person.

Third, teaching materials. Students hope that the Chinese textbooks are contemporary, practical and interesting, and the exercises in the textbooks are interactive. They prefer content related to Chinese cultural customs and daily life.

Fourth, teachers. Students expect teachers not only to impart knowledge, but also to motivate them. They prefer teachers who are amiable and amiable rather than strict teachers.

The results of this study are an important basis for school curriculum adjustment, teachers' classroom teaching, and textbook selection. In addition, the results of this study have certain reference value for online teaching and future

distance education. Only by understanding students' learning needs can Chinese teaching be targeted and loved by students.

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