

## **The Assessment and Recommendations for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) at a Public Higher Education Institution in The Mekong Delta Region, Vietnam**



**Huynh Thanh Tien<sup>1</sup>, Jihchen Lai<sup>2</sup>, Huynh Thanh Viet<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Director of Resource Center for Community Development (RCCD)

An Giang University -Vietnam National University HCM City 18 Ung Văn Khiem Street, Long Xuyen City, An Giang Province

<sup>2</sup>Visiting Lecturer of Chinese language, Faculty of Foreign Languages An Giang University -Vietnam National University HCM City 18 Ung Văn Khiem Street, Long Xuyen City, An Giang Province

<sup>3</sup>IT Lecturer and official staff of Examination and Quality Assurance Office An Giang University –Vietnam National University HCM City 18 Ung Văn Khiem Street, Long Xuyen City, An Giang Province

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**ABSTRACT:** The changing needs of the graduate employment market require universities to take a broader view of the goals of higher education (HE). Over the years, more Chinese investors have come to invest their business in Vietnam, creating a huge demand for Chinese language skills to meet its job markets. The assessment of student learning matters as an integral part of HE and it is essential to enhance student learning through effective assessment. This study employed an interpretive qualitative research approach in which three data collection tools, including document analysis, a test design and questionnaires, were utilized. The questionnaires were delivered to all students learning Chinese 2 (Tiếng Trung 2 – the highest Chinese-level course offered at An Giang University (AGU) in order to assess their learning outcomes according to the current learning curriculum and to research what needs addressing if a new curriculum is to be developed. The data collected showed that although the current course load was heavy, it did not meet HSK certification requirements in each area - listening, reading, conversation, grammar and logogram recognition. Over 80% of the students considered necessary to reconstruct the current Chinese curriculum and redevelop the courses focusing on the communicative skills rather than academic ones. The study finally suggested some recommendations for improving the Chinese learning and teaching materials and the teaching Chinese approach for the teaching staff in the faculty effectively.

**KEY WORDS:** Assessment, Curriculum, Document analysis, Interpretive qualitative research, Learning outcomes

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The changing needs of the graduate employment market require universities to take a broader view of the goals of higher education (HE). Over the past decade, there have been global shifts towards mass HE, putting considerably a greater focus on the nature and quality of university education and encouraging the academic staff to develop their teaching program designs together with delivering an effective teaching and learning curriculum. Assessment of student learning matters as an integral part of HE in the changing world and with changing expectations that the society has for its university graduates. It is essential that educators involve in supporting student learning endeavour to enhance student learning through effective assessment. The following drawing is a simplified version of Cowan & Harding's Logical Model of Curriculum Development places learning outcomes at

The centre (Stefani, 2004a, p. 55):

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**Figure 1. A simplified version of Cowan & Harding's Logical Model of Curriculum Development**

[Adopted from Stefani, L. (2004). Assessment of Student Learning: promoting a scholarly approach. Learning and Teaching in Higher Education]

Over the last 35 years, Vietnam has transformed itself to become one of the world's fastest growing and most promising economy and at the same time China has been increasing its investment in Vietnam rapidly. China's ongoing acceleration of its investment in Vietnam allowed it to rise from being the fourth largest investor in 2019 to now the third by total capital and second by the number of projects for the first nine months of 2020 (Nguyen, 2020). China is also pushing investment through Hong Kong. Among the 117 countries and territories investing in Vietnam, Hong Kong and mainland China emerged as the largest investors with US\$10.26 billion, making up 32.3 percent of the total during the first 11 months of 2019. From 1988 to November 2019, Taiwan's accumulated FDI in Vietnam was US\$32.25 billion, making Taiwan Vietnam's fifth-largest source of FDI (Central News Agency, 2020). Together they are among the top source of FDI pledges in Vietnam. The fact that there is a huge demand for Chinese language skills can make students equipped with these skills attractive hires and through the Chinese skills, students can transform themselves into invaluable employees who are critical to the success of the companies. Moreover, China has opened its booming economy up to the world, encouraging foreign investment and economic cooperation. As such, learning the Chinese language opens up a world of better job opportunities. Aside from the obvious economic and job-seeking benefits of knowing the Chinese language, learning this language also offers many benefits to Chinese language learners' personal and professional growth not least gaining a better understanding of one of the richest cultures in the world and the opportunities to connect with over 1.4 billion people on a deeper level. Therefore, it seems that a better competence of the Chinese language at this age promises dramatic results.

This study has the following objectives. It firstly aims to examine the overall performance of students' TT2(Tiếng Trung 2 – Chinese 2) to add to the understanding of how well the current Chinese language curriculum at AGU meets the demands of the students and the public. Secondly, it targets to assess the students' academic achievement against HSK certification system, a universally accepted objective assessment standards in order to see how well the students meet the goals and expectations; to evaluate how well the current teaching materials synchronizes with the HSK certification requirements. Thirdly, the authors of this study intended to understand the performance and the difficulties of students in each learning area - listening, reading, conversation, grammar and logogram<sup>1</sup> recognition in order to provide suggestions for continuous improvement in curriculum design, development and delivery.

### I. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) issued a teaching programme for Russian and Chinese as first foreign languages for students from Grade 3 at elementary schools to Grade 12 at high schools (the highest grade in Vietnam's general education system) in 2017 (Viet Nam News, 2016). To follow this new important education policy and partly to comply with the training matching society's need, up to the year 2019, there have been 35 Vietnamese universities opening a university training program for the Chinese Language or the Chinese language teaching. The number of students enrolling to study the Chinese language training program each year is about 4000 students. The MOET predicted that there would be more and more universities offering the Chinese language programs, and more students would choose the Chinese language as a foreign language to study (this data does not include the Chinese selective course or bilingual schools that implemented Chinese as the 2<sup>nd</sup> foreign

<sup>1</sup> Chinese characters are generally logograms, a written character representing a word or morpheme; while alphabets and syllabaries are distinctly different in that they use individual written characters to represent sounds directly. Unlike logograms, phonograms do not have any inherent meaning.

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language). Therefore, there would be an increase in the number of students selecting to learn the Chinese language for their better future jobs because there will be a big shortage of Chinese teachers for schools, universities, centres and labour markets in Vietnam in the future (Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training, 2019). However, in mentioning about the situation of the development and the quality of learning and teaching the Chinese language in Vietnam now, Pham Thi Hong Tham and Zhang Yen Cheng (2019) stated that the Chinese language learning and teaching has recently grown so rapidly that people compared it to a storm overflowing into Vietnam. Thus, education managers and teachers can only respond promptly by immediate emergency measures, but have not found measures for its stable development. The learning situation, therefore, also becomes chaotic and the quality does not meet social requirements (Tham & Cheng, 2019). They added that the teaching of the Chinese language in Vietnamese universities is now divided into two types: the major Chinese language program and non-major Chinese language program (Chinese considered as a 2<sup>nd</sup> FL). The first programs trained at language specialized universities and the universities having the Chinese language faculty. In order to graduate, the students of this program have to achieve at least the certificate of HSK5 competence. For the second program, students only need to obtain the certificate of HSK 2.

For the case of the Faculty of Foreign Languages (FFL) at An Giang University (AGU), it did not have the major Chinese training program. It merely has the Chinese language as 2<sup>nd</sup> FL program for English language-major students. These students just needed the HSK2 certificate for their university graduation. However, the students starting their courses from the year 2000 have to achieve the HSK 3 certificate since AGU became an institution member of Vietnam National University- Ho Chi Minh City (VNU-HCM City) on August, 13<sup>th</sup> 2019 (An Giang University, 2021). And now AGU students of 37 other training programs have begun to identify the importance of mastering the Chinese language for their future jobs, so more and more students prefer to learn the Chinese language as a FL. However, due to the lack of the Chinese language lecturers and the current Chinese language program considered to be academic and mismatching with the competent requirement of HSK 2 and HSK 3 Certificates by a native Taiwanese teacher voluntarily teaching for the Faculty for a year. An actual challenge is that all students learning Chinese as a FL in this faculty having Zero-Chinese linguistic inputs in comparison with students learning English at schools. Due to these reasons, the authors of this study intended to find out the answers for the three research questions as follows:

1. What is the students' Chinese learning outcomes after completing the courses offered at the Faculty?
  2. Does the current Chinese language teaching curriculum match with the suggested time and language content for equivalent HSK tests?
  3. What suggestions can be provided to help students to achieve their expected learning outcomes in the future?
- In order to find out the findings for answering the three research questions above, the authors set a research design with appropriate research procedures and methods. Section 3 below provides more details about the research methodology of this study.

## II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed an interpretive qualitative research approach to explore the real context of teaching and learning the Chinese language in AGU, a public higher institution in the Mekong Delta Region. The study used a series of tools, including document analysis, a test design, and questionnaires to collect data for result analysis.

### 1. Document Analysis

Some important national and institutional documents related to the teaching and learning of the Chinese language as a FL in Vietnam and in AGU. The national documents consist of the National Foreign Languages Project (NFLP) during 2017-2025 and a Teaching Programme for Russian and Chinese as first foreign languages for students from Grade 3 at elementary schools to Grade 12 at high schools issued by the MOET. The institutional documents are in fact the current Chinese teaching curriculum, teaching materials and textbooks used at the Faculty of Foreign Languages, AGU.

### 2. A Test Design

A test design in this study is a sample HSK Level I Test was delivered for 55 students from four classes of students taking the Mock Test HSK 1 (See Table 1 below). This Test is to assess the test takers' abilities in the application of everyday Chinese (Mandarin). It is the counterpart of the Level I of the Chinese Language Proficiency Scales for Speakers of Other Languages and the A1 Level of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEF). Test takers who are able to pass the HSK (Level I) can understand and use very simple Chinese phrases and meet basic needs for communication. The HSK (Level I) test is made up of listening comprehension and reading comprehension sections and contains a total of 40 items. See the sample HSK 1 Test<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup>Hsk 1 Mock H10901 (Chinese Proficiency Test) Open - ProProfs Quiz

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**Table 1. The participating students taking the Mock Test HSK1 (H10901)**

Class	DH19TA1	DH19TA2	DH19AV	DH19KH
No. of students	14	11	17	13
<b>Total No.</b>	<b>55</b>			

**a. Survey Questionnaires**

The survey questionnaire was delivered to 5 classes of students to obtain the respondents’ understandings about the Chinese language course review and their opinions on new curriculum development. The participating students from the four classes attended the course ‘Chinese 2’. Table 1 shows the student number of each class that answered the questionnaire.

**Table 2. The number of students in each class answering the questionnaire.**

Class	DH19TA1	DH19TA2	DH19AV	DH19KH	CD43AV
No. of students	14	11	19	17	17
<b>Total No.</b>	<b>78</b>				

**b. Questionnaire Description**

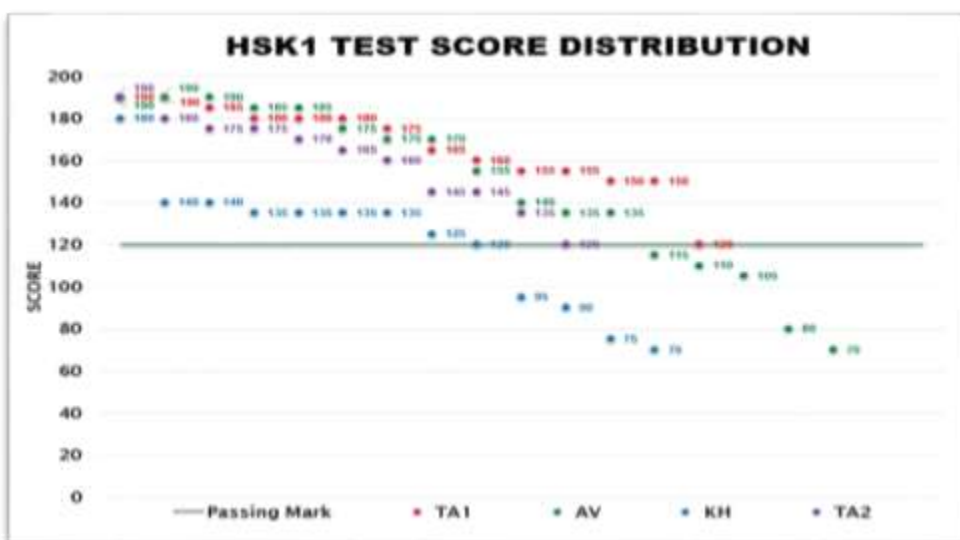
The questionnaire is divided in two parts. Part One - Current Curriculum Evaluation and Part Two - New Curriculum Development. Part One is aimed to understand the students’ opinions on the current curriculum evaluation that focused on 6 areas: *Course Content and Organisation; Learning Environment, Resources and Learning methods; Quality of Delivery; Assessment; Overall Evaluation; Contribution.* Part Two – New Curriculum Development – focuses on learning the respondents’ opinions about the following areas: *Expectations of attending higher-level Chinese Courses; Course Content and Organization; Course Delivery, Learning Environment and Teaching Methods; Assessment.*

**III. RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS**

**1. The results of HSK 1 Test and designed test (Vocab list of HSK 1&2)**

The Pareto chart was used to analyse the average scores of students from each class and all the students for each test part. The Column Chart provides the result summary of students’ score and achievement; the scatter with straight line chart represents the separate score distribution (each dot representing one student and the drilldown analysing the field tested). The Line Chart analysis shows a number of excellent or exceptional performance and noticeably few students barely manage to stay above the passing mark. This finding also reveals the weakness in the faculty’s Chinese language education being lack of communicative skills and displaying trends overtime. Let’s see Figure 2 – HSK 1 Test score distribution for all students below.

Figure 2 illustrates the plot of the distribution of students’ scores; each dot represents one student. It shows that the majority of students managed to stay above the passing mark. Figure 3 provides the summary for the student scores and its Pareto distribution.



**Figure 2. HSK1 test score distribution for all students**

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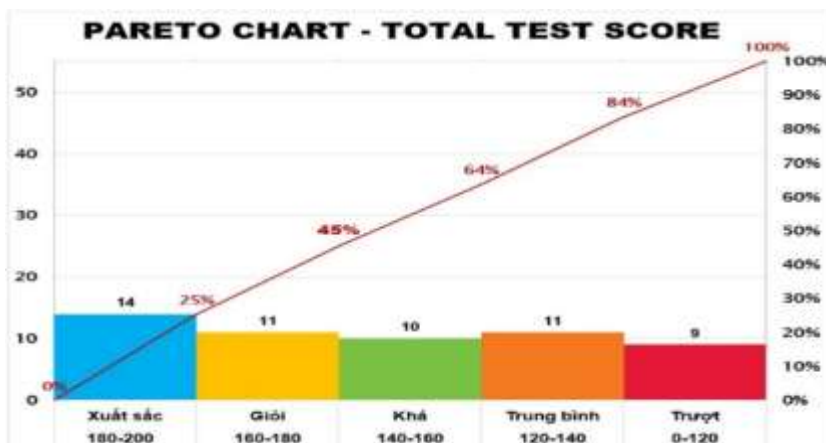


Figure 3. The student score summary and its Pareto distribution.

Figure 3 shows that 45% of the students were of excellent performance, but noticeably there were also approximately 36%+ of the students barely managed to stay above the passing mark or even failed. It is necessary to explore further to find out reasons of this point.

Utilizing a two-dimensional graph to display a multi-dimensional data structure, the Radar chart is a good fit for displaying the multivariate observations of the data collected. However, because of the wide spread of the data, the HSK scores to Vietnam’s grading system (see Table 4) were used for translating to make the Radar chart more readable. And Table 3 illustrates the summary of the student number taking the HSK 1 Test and the percentage of students with outstanding and excellent performance.

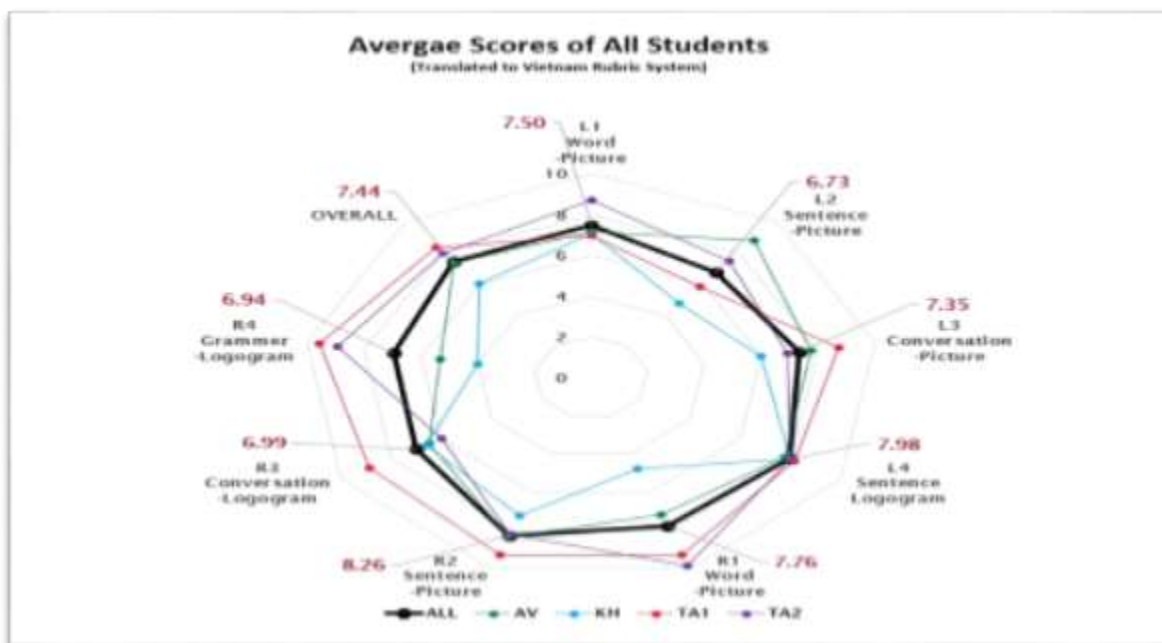


Figure 4. The Radar chart of average scores of all students from all classes

Table 4 shows the translation of the HSK scores to Vietnam’s grading system and to other school and university grading scales (EducationUSA Vietnam, U.S. Embassy Hanoi, n.d.); while Table 5 shows the average scores of each class and for each tested part from all the students after the translation. Column L1 to L4 illustrate the four different parts of listening comprehension scores, while column R1 to R4 illustrate the four different parts of reading comprehension scores. Figure 3 is the Radar chart of data presented in Table 5. For further analysis of the data about the frequency of problems or causes of students’ learning, the Pareto chart, often used in quality control, was adopted to highlight the most important factors. Pareto chart presented in Figure 4 showcases the results of such analysis.

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Table 3. Summary of students passing HSK Level 1 Test

<i>Learning Outcome</i>	<i>Number of students</i>	<i>Percentage of Students with Outstanding &amp; Excellent Performance<sup>3</sup></i>
Pass HSK Level 1 Test	55	45%

TABLE 3. TRANSLATION OF HSK SCORES TO VIETNAM’S GRADING SYSTEM (\*)

HSK Score	Vietnam Grade	Scale 2	Grade description (In Vietnamese)	Grade description (In English)	US Grade
180-200	9-10	90-100	Xuất sắc	Outstanding	A+
160-180	8-9	80-89	Giỏi	Excellent	A
140-160	7-8	70-79	Khá	Good	B+
120-140	6-7	60-69	Trung bình khá	Fairly Good	B
	5-6	50-59	Trung bình	Average	C
0-120	< 5	0-49	Không đạt	Conditional Fail	D
		0-49	Không	Fail	F

Note :(\*) adopted from EducationUSA Vietnam, U.S. Embassy Hanoi. (n.d.). Basic Information on Grading in Vietnam)

TABLE 5. AVERAGE SCORES FOR EACH CLASS AND FOR EACH TESTED PART

Class	L1	L2	L3	L4	R1	R2	R3	R4	Average Scores
AV <sup>4</sup>	7.2	8.8	7.8	7.8	7.2	8.4	6.5	5.3	7.4
KH <sup>5</sup>	7.1	4.8	6.0	8.0	4.8	7.2	6.6	4.0	6.1
TA <sup>6</sup> 1	7.0	5.9	8.7	8.1	9.3	9.3	8.9	9.6	8.3
TA2	8.7	7.5	6.9	8.0	9.8	8.2	6.0	8.9	8.0
AVERAGE	7.5	6.7	7.4	8.0	7.8	8.3	7.0	6.9	7.4

Drill-down Analysis of Assessment Results

Figure 5 shows the students’ total listening score distribution and Figure 6 indicates the students’ total reading score distribution. The two figures demonstrated that universally students were doing better in reading than listening and revealed the weakness in our Chinese language education - coming short of listening and speaking training, the most essential and crucial elements in language learning in terms of its communicative function, at work places included.

<sup>3</sup>HSK scores translated into Vietnam’s rubric system, a 10-point grading scale, where 10 is regarded as the highest and 0 is the lowest. The passing grade is 5.

<sup>4</sup> AV (Anh Văn): Class of English Language Teacher Education, “Sự phạm Tiếng Anh” in Vietnamese

<sup>5</sup> KH (Khoa Học): Class of Chemical Engineering, “Công nghệ Kỹ thuật Hóa học” in Vietnamese

<sup>6</sup> TA<sup>1</sup>, TA<sup>2</sup> (Tiếng Anh): Class 1&2 of English Linguistics and Literature – “Ngôn ngữ Anh” in Vietnamese

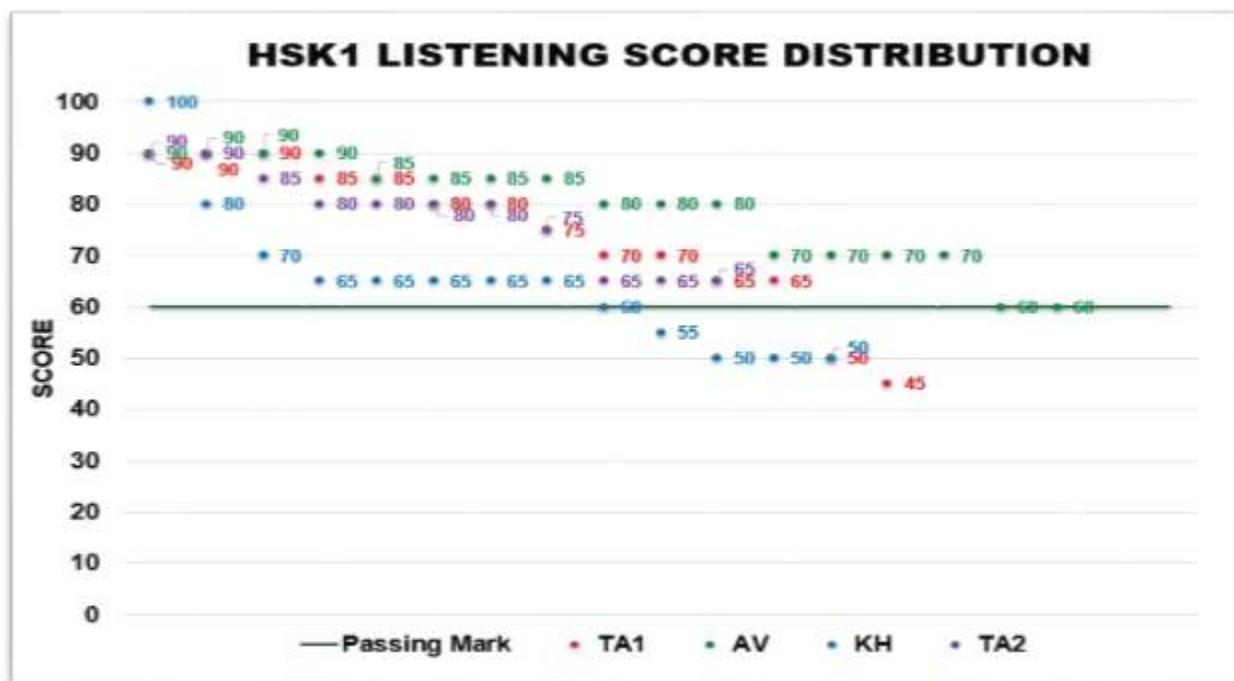


Figure 5. Listening score distribution

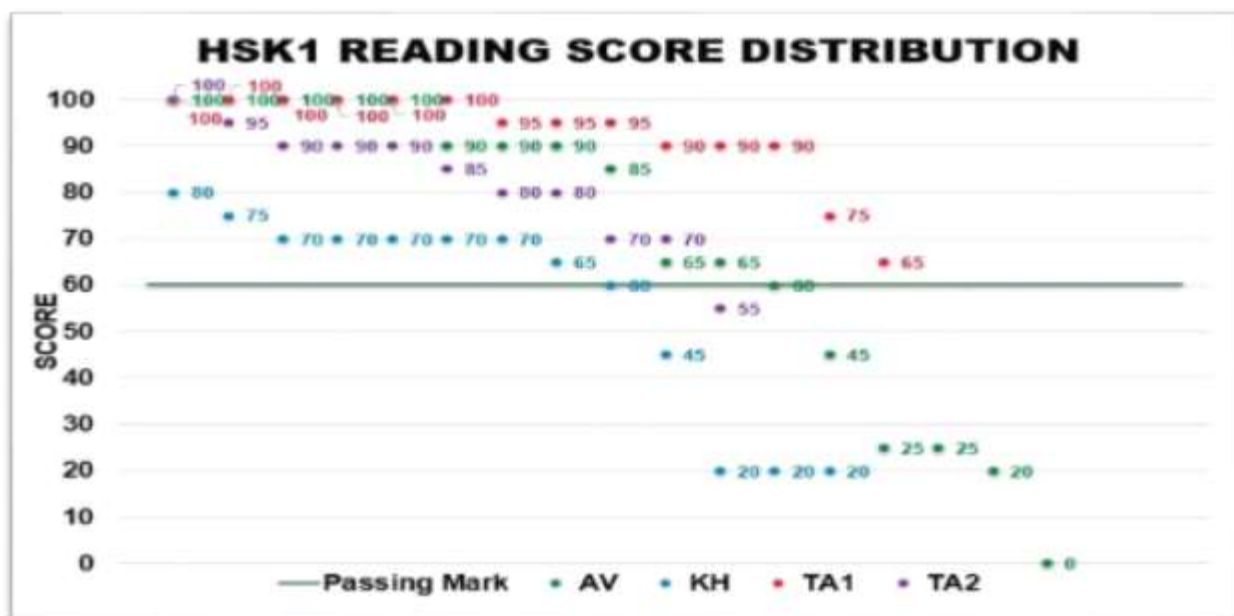


Figure 6. Students' reading score distribution

Pareto distribution analysis of students' listening scores (Figure 7) and reading scores (Figure 8) show that 45% of the students consistently displayed excellent performance in either Listening or Reading which probably means that this group of students had great interests and was devoted a great amount of efforts in learning the Chinese language. Nevertheless, there were approximately 30% of the students (35% in Listening and 29% in Reading) who barely managed to stay above the passing mark or even failed, indicating that this group of student population was having difficulties in learning Chinese.

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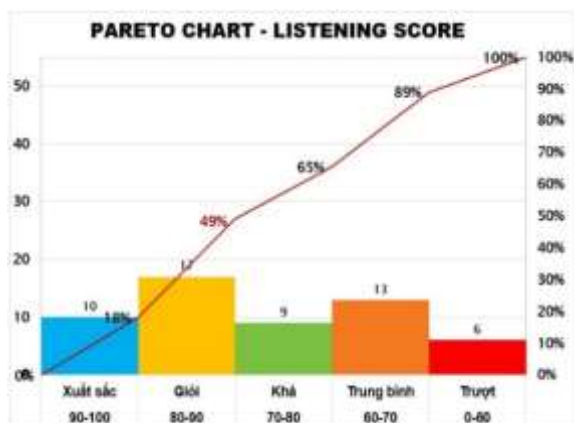


Figure 7. Pareto chart of listening scores

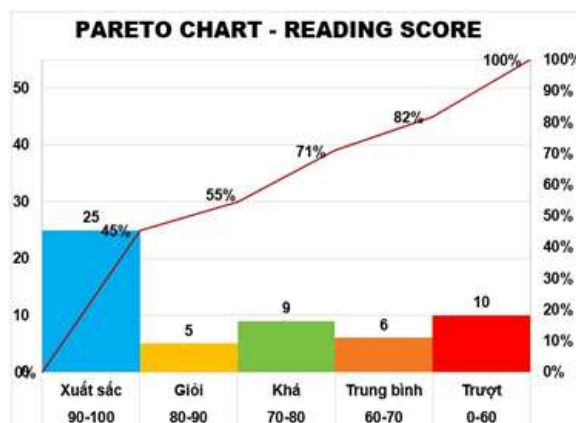


Figure 8. Pareto chart of reading scores

Further drilling down analysis needs to be performed on both the listening and reading to find out more specifically the areas that students had difficulties with.

**Listening**

Drilldown Analysis shows that approximately 1 in 3 (33,33%) of the student number faced quite evenly the same degree of difficulties in all areas of listening, with an increasing number of the students in more complex scenario as of “L2 sentence-to-picture” (47% of students) and “L3 conversation-to-picture” (49% of the student number).

**Reading**

Drilldown Analysis shows that approximately 70% of the students are doing quite well in part 1, "R1 word-to picture" and part 2, "R2 sentence-to-picture". As the amount of vocabularies increase in part 3, “R3 sentence-to-logogram" and part 4, "L4 grammar-to-logogram", this student population drops to 56%.

**Vocabulary List Check - Current Textbooks. HSK 1 & HSK2 Combined**

The current textbook<sup>7</sup> has about 30 vocabularies in each lesson and each lesson is taught in two 100-minutes classes (4 periods x 50 minutes/period) each week. There are approximately 15 weeks in one semester and so far. Students have to invest around 25 weeks, equivalent to a total of over 83 hours in Chinese learning and 750+ vocabularies being taught. It is 5 times the amount of vocabularies required by HSK1 certification (150 vocabularies) and students should be able to breeze through the test with high marks; nevertheless, the assessment results of the group of students with “outstanding and exceptional” performance are not in line with this expectation. Our teaching experiences have led us to the observation that the problems were likely to be in the mix of that the current text book and learning materials are not in sync with the HSK standard curriculum; and, too much were being taught to the students improperly under current curriculum making the goal/outcome unachievable.

In a nutshell, vocabulary is the basis of all language and the key to fluency, so firstly investigation needs to be made to determine how well the total 776 vocabularies covered by the textbook (杨寄洲, 2006, pp. 1–3) for TT1 (Chinese 1) and TT2 (Chinese 2) courses synchronize with those listed in HSK1 & HSK2 (Chinese Learning and Testing Center, n.d. & ZHDict, n.d.). Table 6 shows the result that the current textbook is only able to cover about 80% ~ 85% of the total 300 vocabularies from HSK1 & HSK2 together.

Table 6. Vocabulary Check List - HSK 1&2 Covered by Current Textbook

	No. Students	Percentage
<i>NOT COVERED</i>	45	15.0%
<i>Covered</i>	241	80.3%
<i>Partially Covered</i>	10	3.3%
<i>Covered but with local dialect</i>	4	1.3%

<sup>7</sup>Yang Ji Zhou (GV Đại học Ngôn Ngữ Bắc Kinh) biên soạn. Trương Văn Giới và Lê Khắc Kiều Lục dịch, năm 2010. *Giáo trình Hán ngữ, tập I và II (Bản cải tiến)*.



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The Pareto Principle, also known as the 80/20 Rule and The Law of the Vital Few, illustrates that 80% of effects arise from 20% of the causes – or in laymen’s terms – 20% of your actions/activities will account for 80% of your results/outcomes (Juran, 2019). This Principle serves as a general reminder that the relationship between inputs and outputs is not balanced. So, following Pareto’s Law and concentrating on grabbing efficiency with minimal work to learn the language we want to focus on the 20% of things that bring 80% of the results. The current curriculum does not seem to subscribe well to Vital Few rule.

### 2. The Questionnaire Results

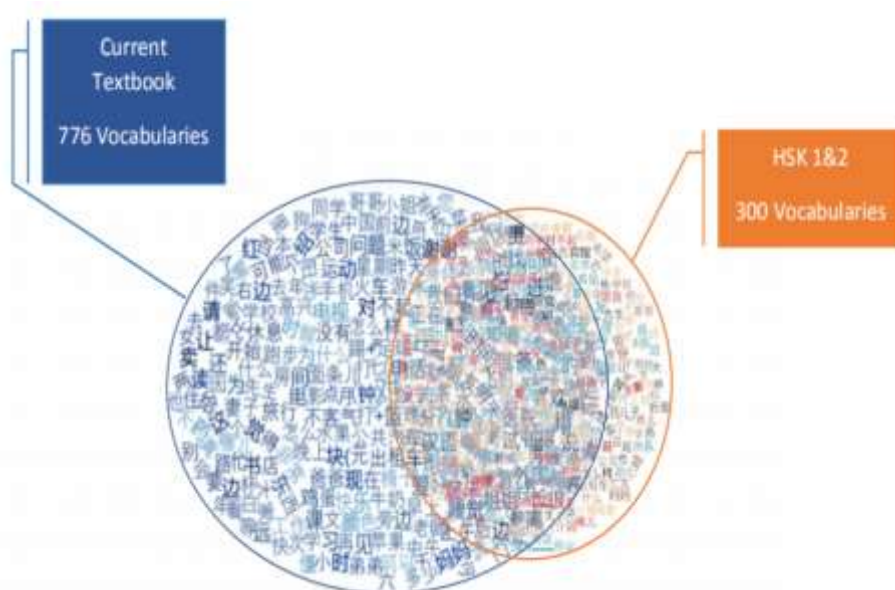


Figure 9. Illustration of the current curriculum’s failing the Pareto’s Law Student’s Questionnaire: Course Evaluation &Curriculum Development

#### Current Curriculum Evaluation

In this section we solicit the opinions of students in the following areas regarding the current curriculum:

- **Course Content and Organization:** Students were asked if course objectives were clearly; if course is important, meaningful, exciting and promoting interest in Chinese language learning; if the learning materials, workload and requirements were appropriate; if the new courses should focus more on the communicative skills and finally if redeveloping the current curriculum was necessary.
- **Learning Environment, Resources and Learning methods:** Students were asked if the learning and teaching methods, environment and atmosphere were conducive to learning and encourage their participation; and if the provision of web based learning resources was adequate and appropriate.
- **Quality of Delivery:** Students were asked to assess if lecturers stimulate their interests and thoughts on the subject area and if the pace was appropriate and ideas and concepts were presented clearly.
- **Assessment:** Students were asked if the exams and assignments are reflective of the course content; if methods and practices of grading are reasonable and fair and if their learning was accurately and fairly assessed (e.g., through quizzes, exams, projects, and other graded work).
- **Overall Evaluation:** Students were asked if the course met their expectations for quality; if the courses were useful in progress toward their goal of future career development, academic study or societal language proficiency; the specific things about the courses or the instructor that were especially helpful or can be improved to better support their learning; what parts of the courses aide their learning the most and what parts were the biggest obstacles and theirspecific recommendations for improving the curriculum.
- **Contribution:** In order to understand how they weight and their attitudes towards the Chinese Language courses, we ask Students to do self-assessment about if they are consistently and well prepared for the courses, participate actively, put a great deal of efforts into advancing learning and if they are satisfied with the progress made in the courses.

#### New Curriculum Development

In this section we solicit Students to provide input for developing the new curriculum in the following areas:

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- *General:* Students were asked about what practical needs they recognized important for Chinese language; if the University should provide the intermediate Chinese courses at HSK3 and HSK4 levels and if they would register; and, the activities they would like the new curriculum to offer.
- *Course Content and Organization:* Students were asked how and what they considered the new curriculum being vocabulary centric, proximal to HSK and communicative and immersive in nature; what linguistic activities they considered effective (e.g. articulation exercises, lockstep teaching, pair work and etc.) and if the learning materials for the new curriculum should include printed and digital technology supported media.
- *Course Delivery, Learning Environment and Teaching Methods:* Students were asked how they preferred the courses being delivered in Chinese/Vietnamese bilinguals vs. the linguistic immersion; how they supported for the natural approach to language learning, the topic/theme-based teaching, the mind mapping technique and the concept-based learning; and, what they thought about being forced out to speak in a new language and the classrooms being interactive, non-threatening and supportive.
- *Assessment:* Students are asked if they subscribed to the philosophy of “Building Quality into Process” - being graded entirely based the quizzes, activities, projects, and other work from every class session with the mid-term exam grade as the bonus.

### Summary of Student Questionnaire Results

- More than 40% of all the students in the four groups considered the current courses workload too heavy, learning outcomes unachievable, being taught in an improper way, not meeting HSK certification requirements.
- Only less than 17% of the students disagreed that it was necessary to search for new textbooks, redesign and redevelop the current curriculum, courses focusing more on the communicative skills such as speaking and listening rather than academic skills (reading, writing and grammar).
- Nearly 60% of the students considered the pace of the Course is appropriate and 91 % of the students suggested that the new curriculum should be proximal to HSK; include printed and digital technology supported media; offer the communicative and immersive language acquiring activities (namely, native speaker visits, audio and video immersion via transcription, and food safari); and, adopt the courses delivery formats of articulation exercises, lockstep teaching, conversation practice, pair work, vocabulary training and working with audio, pictures and videos.
- Over 70% of the students would like the new syllabus to devote at least 50% of time to focus on communicative skills.
- Approximately 95% of the students preferred course delivery in Chinese/Vietnamese bilinguals and by native Vietnamese speakers with the co-teaching of Chinese native speakers, rather than the “Linguistic Immersion” - courses being taught entirely in Chinese (approximately 70%).
- 92 % of the students supported the “Natural Approach to Language Learning”, “Topic/Theme-Based Teaching”, “Mind Mapping” and “Concept-Based Curriculum”
- Over 90% of the students considered classrooms that were interactive, non-threatening and supportive can have direct positive effect on their ability to learn whereas only 2% of the students did not subscribe to the philosophy of “Building Quality into Process”.
- A majority of the students would like the university to provide intermediate Chinese language courses (4-credit each): 79% for Chinese 3 & 4 for HSK3 certification (only 4% disagree) and 66% for Chinese 5 & 6 for HSK4 certification (only 9% disagree). Among them, over 74% would register.
- Nearly 80% of the students (65% for CD43AV) supported the proposition of RCCD<sup>8</sup> offering advanced Chinese courses.
- Over 90% of the students opt for the revival of Mandarin Chinese Club (MCC) to offer the following- singing band and cultural activities (100%), study abroad and scholarship consultation (98%), field trips to China, Taiwan, local Chinese communities, ... (98%), internship (94%), placement assistance& job fair attendance (94%) and social business and charity activities participation (87%).

## IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. Conclusions

When it comes to learning a foreign language such as Chinese, many students spend hours working through textbooks and doing grammar. However, many people don't realise that working on vocabulary is just as important, if not more important when it comes to success in learning a foreign language. Learning a language means learning its sound, meaning and its rules; but how to

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<sup>8</sup>Resource Center for Community Development of AGU, VNU-HCM City

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study effectively a language, the linguists emphasize on the communicative skills - listening and speaking; the academic learning skills - reading, writing and grammar come at the later time of the curriculum. To design an objective learning, instructor should design to give beginners or intermediate learner communicative skills.

Chinese characters are logograms. At the early stage the students need only to recognize a picture of tiger a tiger; learning to draw the tigers is not the immediate matter of essence. With the correct or even the approximate Pinyin the computer software nowadays is smart enough to offer a pool of targeted logograms for selection. Students only need to be able to recognize and pick the right characters.

The world changes every day, as a result, an institution has to acknowledge these shifts and then be able to implement them into the curriculum planning. Innovative instructional strategies, teaching techniques and organizational methods that are focused on achieving optimal student development and student learning outcomes must be constantly being devised in order to improve the student learning outcome.

### ***Text Book***

Language is always changing, across space and social groups, and varies across time. The current text book and test database were put in place more than 10 years ago. By examining its contents, mistakes in vocabularies and grammars are found; in addition, it contains much of the northern China dialect. Moreover, the text book pays most of its attention on the academic skills: reading, writing and grammatical rules rather than the essence of any language: the communicative skills, listening and speaking. As a matter of fact, this is the inherited shortcoming of the printed media as compared to the digital media. Many students reflected that they felt dissatisfied about the current learning materials of the faulty. To go along with the advent of new technologies and with the very positive benefits and significant opportunities of the growing prevalence of smart phones, tablets, laptops and internet, a very different approach to the language teaching and learning must be taken. It is advisable that the search for new textbooks, redesign and redevelopment of a new effective set of learning and assessment materials should be implemented.

### ***Curriculum***

As the result showed that many students considered the current courses workload too heavy, learning outcomes unachievable, being taught in an improper way, not meeting HSK certification requirements and they suggested that the courses should focus more on the communicative rather than academic skills and developing a new curriculum is imperative. Actual classroom teaching experience also finds that more than often the lecturer needs to race through the course materials in order to deliver a lesson in time. As a result, majority of the students were not likely to follow the teacher's lecture in the classroom or manage to invest time and efforts to learn outside classroom. Finally, passing the exams for the credits miserably becomes the remain goal. This way of learning seemed to be an impractical and unachievable outcome and the students themselves were not equipped with the competency level for the job market, postgraduate study and other real-world application of the Chinese language skills.

### ***HSK Synchronization***

HSK certification, a universally accepted objective assessment standards should be placed at the centre of the learning outcomes with expanded subject and concept-oriented contents as its support. Since more than 50% of the students do not consider the current course workload of 700+ vocabulary too heavy, it is possible to devise HSK1, HSK2 and HSK3 courses (total 600 vocabularies) into the new curriculum.

## **2. Recommendations**

From the conclusions above, the authors of this study have suggested recommendations for other lecturers teaching Chinese and the leading management Board of the Faculty of Foreign Languages of this public higher education institution to take into consideration as follows:

*Firstly*, devise a reinvented curriculum of vocabulary centric, HSK oriented and digital technology supported language acquisition with “natural”, “immersive” and “thematic” teaching crafted to blend with the current structural “bilingualism” approach, the grammar method that deconstructs a language into its component pieces, and the listen and repeat drills to language acquisition.

*Secondly*, enact continuous improvement efforts. By the time students finish the course TT2 (Chinese 2), they will have already invested 100 hours and about 4 million VND (nearly 200 USD) in studying the Chinese language. Over a half of the students participating in this assessment with consistent performance of excellence in either listening or reading skills could be interpreted as having great interests and devoting great amount of efforts in learning the Chinese language. In order to develop and optimize their learning outcomes, we would suggest that opportunities be offered to retain what they have already invested and meanwhile continue to better their Chinese language skills rather than to go to study at the language centers.

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Thirdly, the proposed revision of the currently established academic program and the development of the new courses can be seen at Appendix 2. The new courses can be offered as electives with credits for the students' best benefits; or, alternatively be offered at the Resource Center for Community Development (RCCD) for no credits and at no charge or with a minimal fee to cover the expenses of the Center. The bottom line will be offering these classes to the Students through resurrecting the Mandarin Chinese language club.

Finally, because it is quite hard to recruit lecturers of Chinese from big cities to work for the FFL-AGU presently, it is advisable that this university should take the advantage of the Southward Policy of the Taiwanese Government to send the volunteer Taiwanese teachers teaching Chinese Mandarin in Vietnam and this university should have favourable conditions to invite the lecturers from its Taiwanese collaborative universities to co-teach for students so that the students can learn this language more effectively.

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Appendix 1: Proposed revision of current academic programs

AGU	Venue	Learning outcomes	Semester	Vocab count	Hours	Credits
TT 1	FLF <sup>9</sup>	HSK Level 1 &	2 <sup>ND</sup>	200	60   4 hours*15 wk.	4
TT 2	FLF	HSK Level 2 &	3 <sup>RD</sup>	400	60   4 hours*15 wk.	4
TT 3	FLF/RCCD	HSK Level 4	4 <sup>TH</sup>	600	60   4 hours*15 wk.	4/0
TT 4	FLF/RCCD	HSK Level 5	5 <sup>TH</sup>	600	60   4 hours*15 wk.	4/0
TT 5	FLF/RCCD	HSK Level 5	6 <sup>TH</sup>	700	60   4 hours*15 wk.	4/0
TT 6	FLF/RCCD	HSK Level 6	7 <sup>TH</sup>	700	60   4 hours*15 wk.	4/0
TT 7	FLF/RCCD/MCC <sup>10</sup>	HSK Level 6	8 <sup>TH</sup>	700	60   4 hours*15 wk.	4/0/0
TT 8	RCCD/MCC	HSK Level 6	-	700	90   6 hours*15 wk.	0/0
TT 9	RCCD/MCC	HSK Level 6	-	700	90   6 hours*15 wk.	0/0

<sup>9</sup>FLF: Foreign Language Faculty

<sup>10</sup>MCC: Mandarin Chinese Club