

Improvement in the Quality of Teaching English Language at the University of Vietnam in the Context of Global Integration

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Abstract: *In the integrative process of Vietnam in general, its higher education in particular, along with information technology, foreign language plays a very important role. Foreign language, especially English is considered as one of the necessary prerequisite conditions, a tool and an efficient and effective mean in process of integration and development because of English as a bridge between Vietnamese male with international friends and is the shortest way to reach all cultural achievements, scientific and technical world. Understanding English, people can understand more deeply about the world's civilizations, expand cooperation and exchanges and develop their own potential. The article refers to the role of the foreign language in the period of national integration as well as the role of universities in English language teaching for students and supposes the measures to improve the quality of English language teaching in the universities in Vietnam at present.*

Keywords: teaching English, foreign language, university, quality, Vietnam

1. Introduction

In any era or in any other country, the quality of education in general and higher education quality in particular is always the top concern of the whole society because of its importance for the sustainable development of the country. More than ever, the quality of higher education is becoming a matter of survival; decide the success or failure of an entire country especially in terms of integration with the world economy. A main determinant of quality of higher education is the curriculum. However, in recent years, besides the achievements, education and training in Vietnam still exists in which "... the program content, teaching and learning methods, construction work, tests and evaluation are not renovated. The program content is heavier on theory, outdated teaching methods, incompatible with the different characteristics of different training types of educational institutions, regions and objects learners;..." [1]. Therefore, curriculum of educational facilities - training should be adjusted and improved in line with the trend of economic development - economic development of the country, the region and the world.

2. Vietnam Higher Education in the Period of Regional and International Integration

Long time ago, education has been the lever for the economic development of all countries in the worlds, and as well give the hope of a better future to millions of people around the world. In this process, higher education has always played an important role in training and producing high-quality human resources that have good moral qualities, good working skills, and are able to catch up the pace of integration and development of the world. The role of higher education becomes extremely important in this era, the era of knowledge economy, which the knowledge is considered as a direct force of production, and becomes a special commodity.

Entering the 21st century, a new generation of world higher education is clearly expressed in the document "Learning - a hidden treasure" (Learning: The Treasure Within) and "International Conference on Education university in the 21st century: Vision and action" (higher Education in the Twenty first century: Vision and action), which clearly states the major trend in these times characterized for the first decades of the 21st century which is globalization, high technology, information technology, knowledge economy, information society, social learning. These new trends pose new challenges for higher education. More than ever, the quality of education in general, that of higher education in particular always have the most attention of people in the society. Moreover, in the current trend of integration, when the educational system of the world as well as that of nations gradually come to recognize the qualifications and training programs of each other, the issue of quality of higher education has become very important significance.

In the context of higher education in the world, Vietnam higher education is facing new opportunities but also challenges, which require the higher education to be much stronger and more development in this innovative period. Like other sectors, Vietnam higher education is gradually integrating with the university education of the continent and the world with the goal of "Vietnam universities have reached agreements on the qualification recognitions with other countries which have equivalent training programs, creating basis for joining the credits system of ASEAN and other countries" [1].

During the integration process of Vietnam in general and its higher education in particular, English language plays a key role in the context of "the international higher education has developed quickly with main trends which are mass merchandise, diversification and internationalization" [2].

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3. The role of the foreign language in the period of national integration

Foreign languages play a role and an important position in the education system and the development of the country. On September 1945, when the country gained independence and freedom, the foreign language has become an urgent demand of the nation building and reunification. Thanks to the foreign language, Vietnamese people understand and know more about the world around us, and also make the world understand and want to make friends with us. The contribution of the foreign language as well as English language teaching has become an important part in the progress of social life.

Vietnam is a developing country, so foreign language and English language in particular is an effective tool to help us to accelerate the process of integration and cooperation. Especially when Vietnam becomes an official member of the World Trade Organization (WTO), the role of English language becomes extremely necessary because it is considered as an important bridge linking Vietnam with international friends. On the other hand, in the process of our industrialization and modernization in Vietnam today, acquiring proficiency in English language is the shortest way to reach the world's knowledge. This is a useful means to serve the communication as well as economic and cultural exchange, and access to human knowledge.

It is now almost impossible for us to live in the world today without knowing a common world language. Thanks to foreign language, we can approach any cultural achievements, scientific and techniques advances of the world, which is the path of social and economic integration. Fluency in a foreign language can help us learn from experience of the advanced countries, which leads to shorten the distance to failure and avoid repeating unnecessary steps in the process of industrialization and modernization of the country. On the other hand, proficiency in a foreign language creates more job opportunity in both national and regional areas, and it also helps people develop the human values, especially with many opportunities of studying, researching, expanding their knowledge to facilitate their future development. A foreign language is not only a useful tool workers use to explore scientific and technical achievements and learn professional skills from other countries, but also a useful means to improve the quality of a material and spiritual life.

The experience of developed countries and newly industrialized countries in the world as well as in the Asia - Pacific region have shown that foreign language is the necessary conditions and also an efficient and effective means in the process of integration and development in today's era.

Recognizing the importance of foreign language in the process of integration, from the late 60s and early 70s to now, the Party and State were very interested in foreign language teaching and learning at universities. Over the past twenty years before and after our renovation, the Party and

State have more concerned and emphasized on foreign language teaching in the national education system. So far, most of the students of secondary universities, professional and vocational schools, students of universities and colleges have been learning foreign languages, especially English language. Most students throughout the country have learned English language as a second language. Currently, there are many and many English language center and foreign language training institutions, together with the university system in all the province of Vietnam that have proven language learning demands of all people. Most universities in Vietnam today have the faculty of Foreign Languages that are responsible for teaching and researching on foreign language fields.

In 2008, the Government has issued the scheme "Teaching and learning foreign languages in the national education system in the period 2008 - 2020" that stated "Innovation of foreign language teaching and learning in the national education system, implementation of the new program of foreign language teaching and learning at the new level,..." [2].

The enactment of the scheme has expressed the concern and determination of the Government in improving the foreign language for young people in Vietnam. It also requires that "by 2020 most Vietnam students graduating from secondary, college and university are fully capable of use foreign language as a second language, which are confident in communication, learning, working in environment integration, multi-lingual, multi-cultural;..." [2]. These requirements help to contribute to speeding up the national integration process and the national industrialization and modernization.

4. The role of universities in English language teaching for students

In most Vietnam universities, students are currently taught common foreign languages, including English, Russian, French, Chinese, and English language is the most common language students choose to learn. The universities in Vietnam are now prescribed requirements for English proficiency in the universities' learning outcomes. The universities become aware that the quality of English language teaching and learning English for students is considered a key task to promote the university position and its fame in the nation. In the trend of the integration and development, proficiency in English helps students to be self-confidence in communication, working with international colleagues and students.

To make those tasks come true, the universities have to be aware of the importance of English language and to improve the quality of English language teaching and learning. By doing that, universities should have the innovation in curriculum and methods of teaching and learning English language. Besides, universities constantly raise the level of teaching staff and supply the better facilities in teaching foreign language as well as promote international

cooperation in the field of English language teaching and learning.

5. Measures to improve the quality of English language teaching in the universities in Vietnam at present

5.1 Innovating content and curriculum of English language teaching and learning

- Training human resources are capable of adapting to the scientific and technical development, it is required that English language teaching program have to be closely linked with real world. Therefore, universities need to renew the curriculum content of the English language program in accordance with the requirements of economic and social development.
- Conducting a survey on the needs of the learners, the needs of local areas to build the content of English language teaching programs which can apply into the real work and life situations and meet the needs of businesses.
- Performing the review and accreditation of the English language teaching program that create a basis for assessing the quality of the program and simultaneously announcing the results to the parties involved.
- Investing the abundant source of English language references creates favorable conditions for students to access learning activities.

5.2. Assuring the quality of English language teachers

- Lecturers are decisive factors in promoting the quality of university education. Therefore, in order to improve English language teaching quality, universities have to commit increasing both the quality and quantity of English language teaching staff to meet the prescribed standards.
- Developing English language teaching staff is very necessary for this process of quality assurance. English language teachers who directly carry out the training objectives of the university, so universities need to build a great and standard team of English teachers to ensure the scale and quality of English language teaching.
- To develop the English language teachers to meet the goals of English language teaching and learning from now to the period of 2020, the universities have to build English language teachers who have good and competent qualifications to meet the development requirements of education and training, and to enhance the status and the prestige of teachers within the society. Teacher development is a vital component in teacher education. Therefore, the universities must pay attention to develop short - and long -term teacher training programs for their English language teaching staff.

5.3. Strengthening management of teaching process of the English language teachers

The teaching process is a key activity in universities. To improve the quality of English language teaching, the universities should enhance the management of the teaching process which arranges from preparing course outlines,

lesson plans to following up steps planed in lesson plans as well as the assessment of the student learning outcomes. At the same time, it is acknowledged that the inspection and evaluation of English language teachers need to be addressed strictly by universities to promote the quality of English language teaching.

- Speeding up the inspection and examination activities in order to inspect and supervise universities to see that English language teachers carry out the implementation of teaching schedule, syllabus, lesson plans, ect... It is vital to have suitable measures to tackle the incorrect activities to enhance the teaching process of the English language teachers.
- Strengthening and promoting the activities of the scientific committee department in approving the curriculum of English language teaching as well as proposing faculty orientation workshop covering the research and teaching of English teachers.
- Organizing the inspection, assessment and classification of English teachers periodically by using self-assessment forms, student surveys, and peer review.

5.4. Implementing innovative methods of teaching English language

Every English language teacher have to aware that innovative teaching methods which are not the best ones and deny all the old teaching methods, but are different pedagogical methods that are useful for a wide variety of teaching contexts. These teaching methods have to make students to become independent critical thinkers and learners and able to work in groups of students. Additionally, English teachers have to know how to use the teaching methods in a natural way to make the class more interesting and exciting. These methods create a learner - centered environment, which leads to promote the interaction between teachers and students. Therefore, methods of Communicative Language Teaching key must be applied thoroughly to promote the initiative, creativity and capacities of learners.

- Universities should organize training courses, retraining of professional competence, pedagogical and fostering the active teaching methods, organizing workshops to exchange new teaching methods.
- Universities regularly inspect and evaluate the innovative methods of teaching English language by classroom observation, writing reports. In professional meetings, it is imperative to discuss and share the innovative ideas in improving teaching methods and teacher performance evaluation.
- Organizing seminars, conferences discussing about innovative teaching methods from traditional teaching methods to methods of learner - centered teaching. This method is the appropriate one in teaching and learning according to credit system, which creates the favorable conditions for students to combine classroom activities with self-learning.
- Promoting the movement of scientific research among English language teachers, combining research activities for innovative teaching methods.

5.5. Innovating assessments of student's learning outcomes

- Assessment student learning is a very important stage in the process of teaching and learning. Therefore, innovative methods of teaching English language for students cannot lack of innovative methods of evaluation, which aims at evaluating student learning at the end of a module/semester and adjust the teaching and learning methods in each stage of the teaching process. Therefore, innovative student learning outcomes assessments has extremely significant implications.
- Organizing training courses is needed to guide teachers to use fluently assessment tools and the test format following common European framework of reference for foreign languages, which helps to promote the appropriate assessment to meet student learning outcomes.
- English language teachers should employ common European framework of reference in curriculum, syllabus and test design, which makes students to be familiar with these format and to have the learning orientation to meet the requirements of the course learning outcomes.
- English language teachers should pursue using a variety of assessment methods that is in line with the practice of language skills.

5.6 Ensuring the infrastructure and equipment for teaching English language

- Teaching facilities are the issues that teachers are more concerned in the process of teaching English language, as they are the critical factors that support research, teaching and learning activities. In this era of information technology, it is imperative to use modern teaching and learning facilities to advance your education, especially in the process of teaching and learning English language that helps students more participating in learning activities.
- It is important to have an investment in English language teaching infrastructure and equipment to support educational performance. The universities need to develop an investment plan, which upgrades facilities, adds more teaching equipment to meet the requirements of innovative teaching.
- It is necessary to organize training courses encouraging teachers to demonstrate proficiency in the operation and maintenance of physical facilities.
- In the process of teaching, to create the efficient and effective teaching activities, teachers should be supplied with the more different teaching materials in their classes, such as materials related to skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, translation into Vietnamese and vice versa, ect.
- Promoting English language teachers to prepare lesson plans using PowerPoint and English language teaching software.

6. Conclusion

Along with other sectors, Vietnam higher education is in the process of regional and international integration. In that process, foreign languages and English language in particular

plays an important role, which helps to enrich your intellectual knowledge by learning from the great achievements of other developed countries. It is said that foreign language is not only the means of communication but the best tools in used for successful integration. In this current situation, the role of universities are becoming more important in human resources training who are proficient in English language in order to serve the construction of a prosperous and wealthy country, and to enhance student learning and working ability in an international environment.

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