ANALYZING UNDERGRADUATES' NEEDS FOR AN IMPROVEMENT IN INTERPRETER TRAINING CURRICULUM AT BANKING UNIVERSITY HCMC, VIETNAM

Nguyen Quang Nhat*, **Nguyen Ngoc Phuong Dung**

Banking University of Ho Chi Minh City

Abstract: This paper aims to analyze students' needs for an improvement in interpretation course design, administered among 96 seniors from the Faculty of Foreign Languages at Banking University of Ho Chi Minh City (BUH), Vietnam. It used a questionnaire on learning objectives, course planning, teaching contents, teaching methods, testing and evaluation in this institution. The results indicated that the students would like to get good marks in the final exams as well as acquire necessary knowledge and skills of a real interpreter. The findings also revealed that there should be more authentic practice, group-work activities, and practical collaborative evaluations. The topic selection and teaching methods need to take learners' interests and effective formal class time into account. Finally, the results showed that the students lacked confidence in their interpreting ability; therefore, instructors should spend more time on practice and practical implications should be considered for subsequent course curriculum updates.

Key words: Curriculum, interpretation, interpreter training, needs analysis, quality improvement

1. Introduction

1.1. Research statements and problems

As English has become the lingua franca worldwide, proficient interpretation skills have been playing an essential role for workforce of non-English speaking countries which aim to participate in the global economy for social, educational, and economic development. As a result, there is an increasing demand for competent interpreters as well as effective teaching methods of this discipline. This situation necessitates a reconsideration of contemporary pedagogical practices as a way of increasing the effectiveness of interpreter training. A majority of interpretation lecturers desire to change their instructional styles from traditional lectures to more active, student-centered methods during the limited formal class time while ensuring content coverage. Those teaching methods have been constructed based on innovative pedagogical theories, requirements of national curriculum updates or practical market needs. For example, Faculty of Foreign Languages at Banking University of Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam (2015) conducted a questionnaire survey on the employer's needs for graduates to develop a curriculum for interpretation undergraduate classes to meet the requirements of CDIO standards. However, no research study has been carried out in this Faculty to investigate students' desires or expectations for interpreter training. Such needs analysis should be the starting point for any course updates because it helps equip the course designers with valuable information to align the course contents with learners' needs. Therefore, this study aims to fill

---

* Email: nhatnq@buh.edu.vn

this gap by conducting an analysis to understand students' needs for an improvement in interpretation teaching and learning.

In addition, Vietnamese interpreter training generally relies on previous course designs and intuition of instructors, as well as sticking closely to traditional methods (Pham, 2016). This tendency, as a result, pays little or no attention to learners' needs, which not only hinders students' performance but also de-motivates them. Therefore, it is also the reason that strongly convinced the researchers to conduct this study to analyse comprehensive needs from the learners' perspectives towards the whole interpretation curriculum so that future delivery of interpreter programs might be modified for better learners' engagement and better academic performance.

1.2. Research questions

With a concern for improving the quality of interpreter training, this study tries to answer two following questions:

1) What are BUH senior students' needs for the interpretation curriculum in terms of learning objectives, course planning, teaching contents, teaching methods, and testing and evaluation?

2) What can be done for an improvement in the current interpretation curriculum based on the needs analysis?

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Needs analysis and its roles in education

Needs analysis, as Nunan stated, is "a family of procedures for gathering information about learners and about communication tasks" such as learning goals, learning objectives, styles and learning preferences (Nunan, 1988, p.75). The history of needs analysis in language teaching and learning is considered to originate in the 1960s, when there was an increase in demand for specialized language programs. Since then, needs analysis has proved its position as a useful tool for planning, developing and evaluating programs. Information on those learning points can be collected through scores on students' proficiency test, questionnaires about learners' previous training, and interviews about students' abilities (Brown, 2001). Information about learners' needs may influence the teacher's choice of course content, learning materials, classroom activities, assessments and evaluations. Likewise, learners may appreciate the courses better when they feel that their needs are appreciated. Finally, needs analysis provides an insight into the real needs of not only learners but also of stakeholders. This information includes the desired outcomes of stakeholders towards a program, the efficiency of assessment, the status of students' proficiency and the practicality of current curriculum contents. Therefore, provided instructors would like to improve the quality of their teaching, needs analysis is a necessary step during the course design.

2.2. Approaches to needs analysis

It might be categorised into five main approaches to needs analysis. First, the systemic approach of Richterich and Chancerel (1977) is used to determine the needs in terms of the

learners' nature, learning context, and a wide range of perspectives. Needs are collected before and during a course with many data collection instruments; however, his method does not pay attention to learners' real-world needs and relies too much on their subjective perceptions (Kaewpet, 2009).

Munby's (1978) Target-Situation-Analysis model addresses the importance of communicative mode and activities, highlighting an abundance of needs required for communication such as communicative events, channel of communication, the relationships between the target and his interlocutors. However, this method is merely a checklist of communicative facets with too many complex and time-consuming activities, whereas learners' voices and society' needs are not taken into consideration and it did not really inform how to turn these issues into an actual syllabus.

The learning-centred approach proposed by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) investigates learners' needs in the comparison of perceived vs. felt needs, product vs. process oriented interpretations, and objective vs. subjective needs. "Perceived needs" are needs of teachers, parents or experts, while "felt needs" are gathered from learners. The "product-oriented interpretation" means the proficiency required to communicate effectively in the target situations, whereas the "process-oriented interpretation" means how learners are expected to respond satisfactorily to different learning situations. Finally, "objective needs" provide insights about learners' real-life needs, their proficiency, their current difficulties and obstacles while "subjective needs" refer to affective and cognitive factors such as students' desires and expectations (Berwick, 1989).

The critical approach of Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) aims to display a comprehensive list of viewpoints from students, teachers, stakeholders and policy makers in order to provide suggestions for improvements in course contents, instructional materials, teaching methods and assessments. In other words, this approach tries to incorporate all elements of needs analysis into a course design; therefore, it might be suitable for large and complex projects with multiple of activities and dependency relationships.

The task-based approach of Long (2005) states that tasks are the units of analysis and a course should be organized with different task types based on real-life activities that learners might have to perform in their future. Therefore, course designers should conduct needs analysis to find what tasks are necessary to reflect the real world. It can be said that the task-based approach pays much attention to language variables with the claim that learning only takes place during communication, which fails to consider learner's social needs and situations.

After reviewing the documents in the Faculty of Foreign Languages at BUH, the researchers found that the syllabi were determined mainly from the results of "BlackBox" survey of the proficiency outputs of BUH's English-majored graduates from the perspectives of employees (2015) whereas no formal research had been conducted to investigate learners' needs. Therefore, it raised a question that the current teaching approaches and curriculum development in this institution might not bring about expected beneficial learning outcomes when learners' needs were not taken into serious consideration. As a result, this study aimed to explore learners' needs for a quality improvement of interpretation course design. While

looking at the merits and defects of each aforementioned approach, the researchers decided that the learning-centred approach is the most suitable one. Hence, this study focused on felt needs, process-oriented interpretations, and subjective needs since few studies have been done on these issues. Five components in language curriculum development stated by Richards (2001) were adopted and modified, including learning objectives, course planning, teaching contents, teaching methods, and testing and evaluation.

3. Methodology

The data collection process occurred in May 2018. The participants were 96 seniors (11 male, and 85 female) in a four-year Bachelor programme at the Faculty of Foreign Languages at Banking University of Ho Chi Minh City. Most of them were at intermediate level in English (at least 6.5 in IELTS or equivalent), and they had studied two interpretation courses in their final school year. The study took place on the last day of their second course on interpretation so that the participants could express their attitudes toward interpretation courses based on their experiences.

The study adopted a 44-item questionnaire including 9 multiple-choice questions, 1 dichotomous question, and 34 rating-scale questions (see Appendix). The questionnaire was written in English, sent directly to all students and administered in class. After the data were collected, the questionnaires were analysed quantitatively by descriptive to examine the assumption of normal distributions; therefore, they could shed light on the learners' needs and requirements for an improvement in interpretation teaching and learning.

4. Findings

The results of this study are described as follows.

4.1. Learning objectives

Table 1 reveals that "to pass the exams as a requirement of the Bachelor degree" was the most important goal in an interpretation course while "to adopt appropriate ethical attitudes towards interpretation" was the least important one. "To acquire necessary knowledge and skills of an interpreter" also received a particular attention from the students as it was ranked the second with a mean of 4.92.

Table 1. Importance level of learning objectives

Objectives	Mean	SD	Rank
1. to acquire necessary knowledge and skills of an interpreter	4.92	0.27	2
2. to improve English and Vietnamese proficiency	4.81	0.4	3
3. to pass the exams as a requirement of the Bachelor degree	4.96	0.2	1
4. to find language strengths and weaknesses	4.19	0.39	4
5. to adopt appropriate ethical attitudes towards interpretation	3.95	0.39	6
6. to be able to work in international contexts	3.96	0.5	5

4.2. Course planning

96% of the participants would like their teachers to spend more time on practice with foreign speakers. 84% of them expressed a preference towards simulation practice, 72% would like to have field trips, while only 48% of the students enjoyed listening practice like the way they normally do in the physical classrooms. In addition, Table 2 reveals the skills that the

subjects wanted to have more time to practice. Three students chose the "Other" option with team-work skills, research skills and speaking skills.

Table 2. Interpretation skills or knowledge students want to have more time to practice

Interpretation skills or knowledge	Percentage	Rank
1. Interpretation techniques	94%	1
2. Cultural awareness	64%	4
3. Specialist knowledge	51%	5
4. Reformulation skills	81%	2
5. Assessment skills	24%	6
6. Public speaking skills	78%	3

4.3. Teaching contents

98% of the subjects preferred teacher-generated materials to the current textbook with the reason that the textbook was not updated and some assignments were taken from literary texts, which they did not find comprehensible or relevant to them. Besides, Table 3 indicates that among the 9 kinds of contents, "listening skills" was regarded as the most important element in the interpretation course whereas "interpretation theories" was considered the least important one. As such, five most important types of content were "listening skills," "note-taking skills," "memory training and chunking", "public speaking," and "reformulation techniques".

Table 3. Importance level of interpretation contents

Contents	Mean	SD	Rank
1. interpretation theories	3.82	0.62	9
2. listening skills	4.89	0.32	2
3. note-taking skills	4.88	0.33	1
4. memory training and chunking	4.84	0.37	3
5. speaking skills	4.70	0.46	6
6. cultural awareness	4.66	0.48	7
7. reformulation techniques	4.72	0.45	5
8. public speaking	4.74	0.44	4
9. practice of different interpretation types and modes	4.31	0.47	8

72% of the participants preferred to have 50% of the business-related topics in their materials. In addition, Table 4 indicates the preference level of additional genres that students are interested in (Question 21) when no "Other" option was chosen. These results can provide more insights into choosing topics for further practice and reference.

Table 4. The preference level of additional genres that students are interested in

Additional genres	Percentage	Rank
1. daily news	75%	1
2. legal issues and politics	41%	6
3. media and entertainment	70%	2
4. advertisements	44%	5
5. tourism	69%	3
6. education	56%	4
7. medicine and medication	29%	7
8. literature	23%	9
9. scientific speeches	28%	8

4.4. Teaching methods

In terms of grouping, 86% of the subjects expressed a preference for group work, while 58% preferred pair work, 36% whole-class work, and 18% individual work. Table 5 reveals the learning activities that the students would like to join in the classroom. According to this table, the three most preferable activities were "group in-class practice", "discussion on interpretation tasks" and "presentations". "Teacher's lectures" were the least-preferred learning activities. No "Other" option was chosen.

Table 5. The preference level of activities in class

Activities	Percentage	Rank
1. revision of previous lessons	66%	5
2. discussion on interpretation tasks	74%	2
3. individual in-class practice	68%	4
4. group in-class practice	82%	1
5. peer editing/ peer review	64%	6
6. presentations	72%	3
7. teacher's lectures	33%	7

Table 6 shows the importance level of teacher's roles. The top three types of roles were to "provide real-life/simulated practice", "provide jargons, terminology and idioms in both languages", and "inform common errors that students usually make". "Provide lessons of interpretation theories" was ranked as the least important.

Table 6. Importance level of teacher's roles

Teacher's roles	Mean	SD	Rank
1. provide real-life/simulated practice	4.9	0.3	1
2. provide jargons, terminology and idioms in both languages	4.79	0.41	2
3. provide lessons of language knowledge	4.55	0.52	8
4. provide lessons of interpretation theories	4.18	0.6	10
5. teach you how to apply theories into practice	4.64	0.48	5
6. inform common errors that students usually make	4.78	0.42	3
7. provide suggested answers	4.56	0.5	7
8. interact with students to answer problems	4.65	0.48	4
9. review previous lessons	4.61	0.49	6
10. teach you how to assess an interpreted version	4.23	0.53	9

4.5. Testing and evaluation

In terms of testing methods, 84% of the students wanted to have role-plays on the stage as simulated practice, 72% would like to have projects and assignments on real-life interpretation, and 76% of the students preferred to have quizzes, games and collaborative tests rather than paper-based tests. As far as teacher's evaluations and comments are concerned, 64% of the students chose "peer review and different suggestions from the teacher", whereas that of the students who chose "teacher's comments on the paper only" and "teacher's provision of feedback in class" was 14% and 22% respectively. No "Other" option was chosen.

Finally, Table 7 reveals the confidence level of the subjects as regards their interpretation ability. Generally speaking, the subjects did not think highly of their interpretation ability ("less confident" or "confident") with the mean scores ranging from 2.78 to 3.86. It should be noted that their confidence in "interpretation theories" is the highest at 3.86 whereas the confidence in "public speaking" is the lowest at 2.78.

Table 7. The confidence level of students' interpretation ability

Content	Mean	SD	Rank
1. interpretation theories	3.86	0.49	1
2. listening skills	3.25	0.66	8
3. note-taking skills	3.58	0.56	4
4. memory training and chunking	3.28	0.66	7
5. speaking skills	3.77	0.61	2
6. cultural awareness	3.53	0.62	5
7. reformulation techniques	3.44	0.58	6
8. public speaking	2.78	0.65	9
9. practice of different interpretation types and modes	3.67	0.54	3

5. Discussion and implications

This study has provided certain insights into how the curriculum could be built upon felt needs, process-oriented interpretations, and subjective needs based on learners' perspectives and expectations. First, the finding showed that besides getting good marks to pass the exams, the students also wanted to acquire necessary knowledge and skills of an interpreter. This means that they wanted to improve real interpretation skills in case they might work as an interpreter in their future career. Therefore, interpretation courses should be process-oriented and provide real-life practice for the students to sharpen their skills. Second, a majority of the subjects suggested that more class time be devoted to real-life practice and that the tasks be done in class in order to promote effective learning and instructions. In addition, interpretation techniques and reformulation skills are two foci that receive most attention from students and they would like to have more time to practice. Therefore, a consideration for more effective use of formal class time should be taken to ensure content coverage and foster these two skills.

Concerning teaching contents, teacher-generated materials were especially favoured by the students because these materials with real-life examples were more likely to meet their interests and make them understand the lessons better. As regards the skills, "listening skills", "note-taking skills," "memory training and chunking", "public speaking," and "reformulation techniques" are highly appreciated. Most students also expressed their needs to have 50% of business-related topics in the teaching material because this topic wins the high priority in their final exams. In addition, the results revealed that the students preferred "news", "media and entertainment", and "tourism" as additional topics for further practice. In contrast, the least preferred topics were "literature" and "scientific speeches", which means the students would like to avoid practice in those fields.

As far as the teaching methods are concerned, most students would like to work in pairs and groups to join in a wide range of classroom activities such as "group in-class practice",

"discussion on interpretation tasks" and "simulated presentations". "Teacher's lectures" were least favorable whereas the teachers were expected to play more roles in providing real-life/ simulated practice, providing jargons, terminology and idioms in both languages, and informing common errors that students usually make.

Concerning testing and evaluation, the students desired to participate in different types of role-plays, projects, quizzes and collaborative assessments rather than a mere paper-based mid-term test or end-of-term exam so that they might have more chances to monitor their progress. When completing interpretation tasks, more than half of the students would like to work with groups and discuss to evaluate the work with peers or teacher. This means that after the interpretation assignment is completed, they would like the teacher to conduct group discussions before sharing errors with the whole class so that possible solutions can be extended for attaining the final versions. This also means that interactions between teachers and students should be enhanced and more activities on how to evaluate a work should be adopted before teacher provides the answers.

Finally, research results indicated that the students lacked a confidence in their interpretation ability. Therefore, the courses need to provide more opportunities for practice and course designers need to find more ways to motivate students to improve their interpretation skills. Some suggestions include more time for in-class group work to enhance learners' participation and working efficiency, group projects with real practice so that they can indulge in the actual interpretation world, online discussion forums to foster out-of-class interactions, field trips to interpretation and translation agencies, and digital portfolios to monitor students' progress as well as for further revision.

In summary, the investigation of learners' needs in this study suggests that interpretation curriculum should cover the following contents: basic interpretation theories, listening skills, note-taking skills, memory training and chunking, speaking skills, cultural awareness, reformulation techniques, public speaking, and practice of different interpretation types and modes. Areas of interpretation types and modes might include simultaneous interpretation, liaison interpretation, and conference interpretation. Panel talk, forum, workshop and different modes of interpretation should be simulated and introduced so that learners might have more chances to internalize and sharpen their skills. The topics may vary based on the specific major and focus of different faculties. For example, the findings of this study showed that interpretation courses at BUH should cover an extensive range of topics and text genres with business and legal resources winning heavy priority. Within such a curriculum, different classroom activities and teacher's roles are implemented so that students could find the learning process meaningful and it could provide a long-term structured as well as systematic curriculum for undergraduate interpretation training.

6. Conclusion

This research on needs analysis of senior students at the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Banking University of Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam University has provided valuable and meaningful results for the assessment of the interpretation courses in this institution. It looked into learners' felt needs, process-oriented interpretations, and subjective needs and some pedagogical implications were drawn from this study to improve the course design. First, interpretation courses

should involve authentic materials and collaborative experiences so that students might have more chances for real-life practice if they would like to pursue interpretation as their future career. Second, there should be more interactions among students in group work under the guidance of teachers to develop students' practical interpretation skills. This means that more class time should be spent on interpretation activities and useful activities which raise competence in interpreting. All of these activities can help students and instructors to identify problematic areas that need consideration as well as strong points that deserve appreciation, thus assisting students to achieve academic success and enhancing their positive attitudes.

Despite some efforts in carrying out research, this study still has some drawbacks. First, due to time and budget constraints, the questionnaire was selected as the only data collection method of the study. If more tools such as interviews or qualitative research had been adopted, it would have further investigated the needs of students and helped cross-examine the results, thereby improving its reliability and validity. Second, the results cannot be generalized to other English-majored students in Vietnam due to its small sample size. Thus, our understanding of interpretation learners' needs analysis could benefit more from research with larger scale and different populations.

References

Berwick, R. (1989). Needs assessment in language programming: From theory to practice. In R.K. Johnson (Ed.), *The second language curriculum,* (pp. 48-62). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Brown, J.D. (2001). *The elements of language curriculum: A systematic approach to program development*. New York: Heinle & Heinle.

Dudley-Evans, T., & St John, M.J. (1998). *Developments in English for specific purposes: A multi-disciplinary approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1987). *English for specific purposes: A learning-centred approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kaewpet, C. (2009). A framework for investigating learner needs: Needs analysis extended to curriculum development. *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, *6*(2), 209–220.

Long, M.H. (2005). *Second language needs analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Munby, J. (1978). *Communicative syllabus design: A sociolinguistic model for defining the content of purpose-specific language programmes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nunan, D. (1988). *Syllabus design*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pham, H.P.V. (2016). Model of teaching translation. *Proceedings of teaching translation and interpretation at tertiary level* (pp. 94-109). Ho Chi Minh City: National University HCMC Press.

Richards, J.C. (2001). *Curriculum development in language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Richterich, R., & Chancerel, J. (1977). *Identifying the needs of adults learning a foreign language*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.

The 'BlackBox' survey of the proficiency output standards of BUH's English-majored graduates from the perspectives of employees (2015). Banking University of Ho Chi Minh City

PHÂN TÍCH NHU CẦU CỦA SINH VIÊN ĐỂ CẢI THIỆN CHƯƠNG TRÌNH ĐÀO TẠO PHIÊN DỊCH TẠI TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC NGÂN HÀNG TP. HCM, VIỆT NAM

Tóm tắt: Bài viết phân tích nhu cầu của 96 sinh viên năm cuối Khoa Ngoại ngữ tại Đại học Ngân hàng Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh (BUH), Việt Nam để cải tiến hiệu quả xây dựng chương trình môn học phiên dịch. Nhóm tác giả sử dụng bảng câu hỏi khảo sát về mục tiêu học tập, quy hoạch khóa học, nội dung giảng dạy, phương pháp giảng dạy, kiểm tra và đánh giá tại cơ sở giáo dục này. Kết quả cho thấy sinh viên mong đạt điểm cao trong kỳ thi cuối khóa cũng như muốn có được kiến thức và kỹ năng cần thiết của một phiên dịch viên thực thụ. Nghiên cứu cũng chỉ ra rằng rằng cần có nhiều bài tập thực hành gắn với thực tế hơn, cần nhiều hơn nữa các hoạt động học tập nhóm và đánh giá bản dịch thiết thực. Đề tài và phương pháp dạy học cần phải quan tâm đến sở thích của người học cũng như làm sao để việc sử dụng thời gian học tập trên lớp được phát huy một cách hiệu quả. Cuối cùng, kết quả cho thấy rằng sinh viên thiếu tự tin vào khả năng phiên dịch của bản thân mình; do đó, giảng viên nên dành nhiều thời gian hơn vào thực hành và những đề xuất mang tính thực tiễn cần được xem xét để cập nhật trong chương trình giảng dạy tiếp theo.

Từ khóa: Chương trình học, phiên dịch, đào tạo phiên dịch, phân tích nhu cầu, cải tiến chất lượng