

# PROBING THE IMPACT OF TIME-RELATED FACTORS ON KOREAN LEARNERS' PROFICIENCY IN ACQUIRING THE VIETNAMESE LANGUAGE

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## ABSTRACT

In recent years, the interest in learning Vietnamese among foreign learners, particularly Koreans, has surged, driven by the need for effective communication and professional growth. This study examines the factors influencing Vietnamese language acquisition among 63 Korean students, comprising 38 males and 25 females, from Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in Seoul and the Kmove Program at VNU University of Languages & International Studies in Hanoi. The research focuses on three key areas: placement in language classes, self-assessed linguistic capabilities, and a multiple-choice test on the verb *đi* 'to go' in directed motion constructions. This test highlights key differences between Korean and Vietnamese, serving as a valuable proficiency metric. Additionally, time-related variables such as extended exposure to a native-speaking environment (over 6 months), duration of language study (over 2 years), and early start age (under 12 years) are crucial in language acquisition. These findings aim to provide insights for teaching Vietnamese to Korean learners and other foreigners engaging with Vietnam's evolving cultural landscape.

Keywords: Vietnamese as a second language, Korean, time-related factor

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Recently, the demand for learning Vietnamese from foreign, particularly Korean, learners has been on the rise. The majority of these learners aim to achieve fluency in the language for work and communication purposes. This study focuses on a sample of 63 Korean students, who were enrolled at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in Seoul and The Kmove Program based at VNU University of Languages & International Studies in Hanoi. The objective of this research is to examine the time-related factors influencing Vietnamese language acquisition among Korean learners. In addition to differences in linguistic typology, three key time-related variables were identified as impacting the acquisition process. These variables include the duration and intensity of exposure to a Vietnamese-speaking environment, the overall length of time committed to Vietnamese language study, and the age at which the study of Vietnamese begins. These preliminary findings aim to offer practical insights for teaching Vietnamese to Korean learners, as well as to foreigners in general.

## **2. WHY KOREAN LEARNERS OF VIETNAMESE?**

The Korean and Vietnamese languages were chosen for this study due to their typological differences.

In particular, Vietnamese and Korean exhibit typological differences, particularly in their word order patterns. Vietnamese is classified as a head-initial language, where the head (e.g., the verb) is positioned before the modifier (e.g., the object) and the location is preceded by the preposition (Cao 2003; Duffield 2013, Phan and Duffield 2022), as seen below:

- (1) a. Tôi đọc sách  
1SG read book  
'I read a book.'
- b. Tôi đi đến công viên  
1SG go to park  
'I go to the park.'

In contrast, Korean is considered a head-final language, with the modifier (e.g., the object) preceding the head (e.g., the verb) and the location being followed by the postposition (Cho and Whitman 2020), as illustrated in (2).

- (2) a. 나는 책을 읽어요.  
Na-neun cha-keul ik-eo-yo  
1SG-TOP book-ACC read-PRES  
'I read a book.'
- b. 나는 공원에 가요.  
Na-neun gong-won-e ga-yo  
1SG-TOP park-DAT go-PRES.  
'I go to the park.'

Korean and Vietnamese are also different in terms of the expression of directed motion. Talmy (1985, 2000) categorizes languages worldwide into two contrasting typological frames: verb-framed languages such as Spanish, Japanese, and Turkish where the direction element is marked directly on the main verb and satellite-framed languages such as English where the direction element is marked within the complement of the verb.

Korean is typically classified as a verb-framed language (Choi and Bowerman 1991; Choi 2006, 2009) due to the directional element marked in the verb, whereas Vietnamese, according to the works of Brown (1999); Nguyen (2001); Beecher (2004); Pace (2009) and Nguyen (2019), can be classified as both a satellite-framed language and a third type known as equipollently-framed language, as proposed by Slobin (1996, 2004, 2006), in which direction is encoded in serial verbs. The following two sentences illustrate the differences in the typology of Vietnamese and Korean based on the criterion of directionality in motion constructions:

- (3) a. 병이            동굴            속으로            떴다  
Byeong-i    dong-gul    sokeuro        tteotda  
bottle-SUB    cave            inside-ADV    float-PAST  
'The bottle floated into the cave.'
- b. Cái chai    trôi    vào    trong    hang  
CLF    bottle    float    enter    in    cave  
'The bottle floated into the cave.'

The examples in (3) illustrate three difficulties that Korean learners of Vietnamese may encounter. First, the verb 'float' is head-final in Korean, whereas it is head-initial in Vietnamese. Second, in Korean, the location 'cave' comes before the postposition, whereas in Vietnamese, it follows the preposition. And finally, the direction is encoded within the verb 'float' in Korean but is expressed separately from the verb in Vietnamese. Due to space constraints, detailed discussion is omitted here. For a theoretical examination of the typological and language-specific differences between Vietnamese and Korean motion constructions, please refer to Phan, Basciano and Chu (2024). These typological differences make the acquisition of Vietnamese by Korean learners an interesting subject for examination.

### 3. PARTICIPANTS AND PROFICIENCY MEASUREMENT

#### 3.1. Participants

This study was conducted on 63 Korean students with a ratio of 38 males and 25 females. Following ethical guidelines for research involving human participants, we recruited participants from two distinct sources: undergraduate students enrolled in the Vietnamese Language program at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in Seoul, and participants from the Kmove Program, operated at VNU University of Languages & International Studies in Hanoi at the time of testing.

Regarding the students of Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, these are full-time students specializing in Vietnamese within the Vietnamese Language Program. Over the span of four years, students will undergo a comprehensive study of Vietnamese language, ranging

from fundamental to specialized aspects. The ultimate objective is for students to attain advanced proficiency in professional and academic Vietnamese and develop a solid understanding of Vietnamese culture and society. Upon obtaining an BA degree, students will have various career prospects, including Vietnamese language interpreters, Korean-language teachers for Vietnamese learners, and researchers in the field of Vietnamese studies, etc.

The Kmove Program, on the other hand, is part of a project initiated by the Human Resources Development Service of Korea (HRD Korea), an agency under the Ministry of Labor of Korea. HRD Korea is the managing and funding entity responsible for training Korean learners who will work in Korean companies in Vietnam as key managerial personnel. According to the plan, the learners will be taught Vietnamese language for a duration of two months in Korea, followed by a six to seven-month training period in Vietnam. The training program in Vietnam includes instruction in Vietnamese language, accounting, and the current economic laws applicable in Vietnam. Upon graduation, the learners will be provided with free referrals to Korean companies operating in Vietnam. During their stay in Vietnam, the learners will study approximately 20 hours per week for a period of six to seven months, with the aim of achieving an intermediate level or higher proficiency. The objective of the course is to enable the learners to effectively use the Vietnamese language in workplace communication and daily life situations.

### **3.2. Proficiency measurement**

In order to assess the proficiency levels of Korean students, we considered three distinct factors: (1) their placement in appropriate language classes, (2) their self-reported evaluation of their linguistic capabilities, and (3) a multiple-choice assessment that centers on the placement of the verb *đi* 'to go' in directed motion constructions.

Firstly, we took into account their placement in appropriate language classes. For Seoul-based students, at the time of testing, they were second-year students at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies. On the other hand, Hanoi-based students had been part of the Kmove program

in Hanoi for 6 months. Hence, all of them belonged to the intermediate to advanced level.

Secondly, we evaluated their linguistic capabilities through their self-reported assessments. We requested them to rank their proficiency approximately according to the ACTFL scale. For an introduction to the ACTFL scale and its guidelines for Vietnamese oral tests, see Phan and Chu (2024). Specifically, they had four options: Intermediate Low, Intermediate Mid, Intermediate High, and Advanced Low. Notably, none of them self-identified as Intermediate Low.

Finally, a multiple-choice survey of 33 sentences containing the verb *đi* ('to go') was conducted. The 33 sentences were divided into directed and non-directed motion constructions. The directed motion constructions was further categorized into Goal-oriented, Source-oriented, and Route-oriented. Examples of each category is given below.

(4) Goal-oriented motion constructions:

- a. Hoa đi chợ  
Hoa go market  
'Hoa goes to the market.'
- b. Hoa 씨는 시장에 간다.  
Hoa-ssi-neun si-jang-e gan-da.  
Hoa-POL-TOP market-DAT go-PRES  
'Hoa goes to the market.'

(5) Source-oriented motion constructions:

- a. Hoa đi từ chợ  
Hoa go from market  
'Hoa goes from the market.'
- b. Hoa 씨는 시장에서 간다.  
Hoa-ssi-neun si-jang-eseo gan-da.  
Hoa-POL-TOP market-LOC go-PRES  
'Hoa goes from the market.'

(6) Route-oriented motion constructions:

- a. Hoa đi qua chợ  
Hoa go across market  
'Hoa goes across the market.'
- b. Hoa 씨는 시장을 지나간다.  
Hoa-ssi-neun si-jang-eul ji-na-gan-da.  
Hoa-POL-TOP market-ACC pass-PRES  
'Hoa goes across the market.'

(7) Non-directed motion constructions:

- a. Hoa đi mua thịt ở chợ  
Hoa go buy meat at market  
'Hoa goes buy meat at the market.'
- b. Hoa 씨는 시장에서 고기를 산다.  
Hoa-ssi-neun si-jang-eseo go-gi-reul san-da.  
Hoa-POL-TOP market-LOC meat-ACC buy-PRES  
'Hoa goes buy meat at the market.'

Korean learners of Vietnamese may encounter a number of challenges, at least three of which deserve particular attention. Firstly, there is a notable difference in the verb's position between the two languages, with Korean exhibiting a head-final pattern while Vietnamese follows a head-initial pattern. Secondly, the ordering of location and postposition varies between Korean and Vietnamese, as Korean places the location before the postposition whereas Vietnamese follows a preposition followed by the location. Lastly, the encoding of direction is internal to the main verb in Korean, whereas in Vietnamese, it is expressed as a separate element from the verb. These typological distinctions present intriguing areas for investigation when examining the acquisition of Vietnamese by Korean learners. The mastery of directed motion constructions in Vietnamese by Korean students signifies their ability to surpass the influence of their first language (L1) and acquire second language (L2) patterns that deviate from their L1.

Phan, Basciano, and Chu (2024) offer a comprehensive discussion on the typological and language-specific variations between Vietnamese and Korean motion constructions, which form the theoretical basis of our

study. Our survey aims to test the linguistic construct of motion constructions, focusing on the verb *đi* 'to go', to assess the proficiency of Korean learners in Vietnamese. This construct was chosen because it highlights significant syntactic and semantic differences between the two languages.

The data was collected through a survey conducted on Google Forms and through direct surveys in class. The survey consisted of 33 multiple choice questions, each with 3 choices, of which 1 was the correct option regarding the order of the verb *đi* 'to go' in relation to other surrounding elements in Vietnamese motion constructions.

For participants who self-identified as Intermediate Mid and achieved approximately 50% correct answers out of the 33 stimulus sentences, they were categorized as Intermediate Mid. Self-identifying as Intermediate High and achieving approximately 70% correct answers results in classification as Intermediate High, while self-identifying as Advanced Low and achieving approximately 90% correct answers leads to being labeled as Advanced Low. Furthermore, we also took their placement in appropriate language classes into account.

We acknowledge that our approach is not ideal, however, it serves our specific purpose. It provides a more precise measure of learners' linguistic competence in areas where Korean and Vietnamese diverge significantly. By analyzing responses to a specific linguistic construct, we aim to gain deeper insights into the learners' proficiency and the impact of their exposure to the L2 speaking environment.

Based on the findings, out of the 63 participants, 28 were classified as Intermediate Mid learners, 25 as Intermediate High learners, and 10 as Advanced Low learners.

Table 1. Participants' proficiency level

| <b>Proficiency level</b> | <b>Number of participants</b> |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Intermediate Mid         | 28                            |
| Intermediate High        | 25                            |
| Advanced Low             | 10                            |

## **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The survey findings demonstrate the influence of extralinguistic time-related factors on the Vietnamese language learning process among Korean students. These factors encompass the length and intensity of exposure to a native Vietnamese-speaking environment, the overall duration dedicated to Vietnamese language study, and the age of initiation in learning Vietnamese. We present the results for each variable and discuss their implication sequentially.

### **4.1. Length and intensity of exposure to a native Vietnamese-speaking environment**

The initial time-related factor under consideration is the duration and intensity of exposure to a native Vietnamese-speaking environment. The impact of time spent in an immersive environment where the target language is spoken has garnered significant attention and has become a focal point of investigation in the existing literature on second language acquisition (see Gu 2018 for a more recent review). There is a rapid growth of research comparing language gains attained from time spent abroad with those achieved in other learning contexts, including foreign language settings and domestic immersion programs. Researchers have dedicated their efforts to examining the variations in the acquisition of different aspects of language ability across these learning contexts. These aspects include listening skills, reading proficiency, grammar and vocabulary knowledge, oral proficiency, writing skills, and pragmatic competence (Freed 1995; Llanes 2011; among others). The findings so far support the hypothesis that a longer duration of stay in a foreign country positively correlates with increased linguistic competence in the respective language.

By integrating these insights, we aim to shed light on the specific influence of exposure duration and intensity to a native Vietnamese-speaking environment on the acquisition process of grammar knowledge (i.e. knowledge of directed motion) among Korean learners. In particular, this study categorizes this time-related factor into two groups: those who have never been to Vietnam, those who stayed in Vietnam for

at least 6 months. This classification aims to investigate the impact of living in Vietnam, as opposed to not residing there, on the acquisition of the Vietnamese language. To explore this, we examined two groups of Korean learners, comprising students from Seoul and Hanoi. The study examines both the duration and intensity of L2 exposure on language acquisition, a point emphasized by a reviewer, highlighting the significance of immersive experiences.

The analysis involved 33 stimulus sentences administered to two groups of participants: 36 individuals who had not visited Vietnam and 27 who had spent at least six months in the country. The former group provided a total of 1188 responses, while the latter contributed 891 responses. This comparison aims to evaluate whether prolonged and intense exposure to authentic Vietnamese in a native environment yields a better language acquisition outcomes.

Table 2. Participants' length and intensity of exposure to a native Vietnamese-speaking environment

|                       | Number of students | Number of answers | Number of correct answers |
|-----------------------|--------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|
| Never been to Vietnam | 36                 | 1188              | 945                       |
| Been to Vietnam       | 27                 | 891               | 757                       |

Among those who hadn't been to Vietnam, 945 responses were correct, equating to an 80% accuracy rate. Conversely, participants with over six months of exposure to Vietnam achieved an 85% accuracy rate, with 757 correct responses out of 891. A one-tailed p-value of 0.0008 indicates statistical significance.

*Time-Related Factors in Korean Learners' Vietnamese Acquisition*

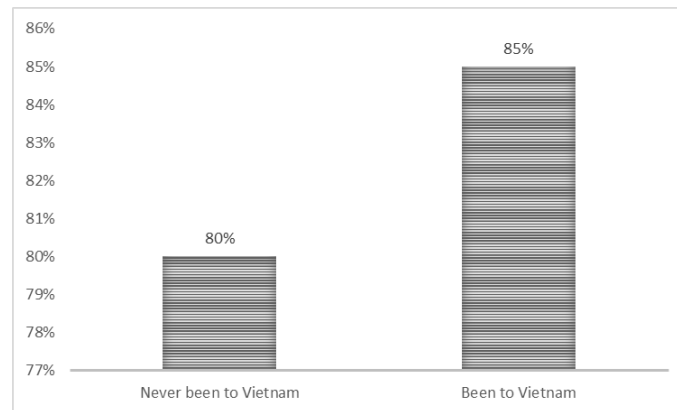


Figure 1: Length and intensity of exposure to a native Vietnamese speaking environment and Accuracy rate

The findings underscore the significant influence of immersion in a language-speaking environment on language acquisition.<sup>2</sup> Exposure to an immersive environment where the target language is spoken, even for a relatively short period such as six months, can positively affect the acquisition of motion constructions. Specifically, these results emphasize the importance of experiencing a native Vietnamese-speaking environment for Korean learners to effectively acquire and use the motion constructions. They highlight the beneficial impact of immersion in Vietnam for language development, indicating that authentic exposure provide greater opportunities for learners to internalize and utilize the linguistic patterns associated with motion constructions. These findings have implications for language education and curriculum planning. They suggest that incorporating opportunities for immersive experiences and

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<sup>2</sup> As one of the anonymous reviewers suggested, it is also important to consider the medium of instruction used for teaching Vietnamese to Korean speakers in Korea. This raises the question of whether bilingual instruction, which may involve using Korean alongside Vietnamese, significantly impacts language acquisition compared to exclusive immersion in an L2-speaking environment. The findings suggest that while extended study in Korea can facilitate learning, meaningful progress in acquiring nuanced language skills, particularly in using motion constructions, might require the intensity and authenticity of immersion in a Vietnamese-speaking environment. This is a compelling area for future research, and we leave it for further exploration.

creating study abroad programs or language exchange programs can greatly enhance the acquisition of motion constructions and overall proficiency in Vietnamese among Korean learners.

#### **4.2. Overall length of time of learning Vietnamese**

It can be observed that learning a foreign language requires a considerable investment of time and effort. Determining the exact amount of time required to reach a desired level of proficiency in a foreign language can be influenced by various factors, including individual abilities, motivation, learning strategies, and the complexity of the language itself. Although estimating the timeline for language proficiency is challenging, educators and researchers have made efforts to provide approximate guidelines. For instance, Hakuta et al. (2000) presents research findings on the length of time language minority students require special services, such as ESL courses or bilingual education, to develop oral and academic English proficiency. The study examines four school districts in California and Canada and concludes that it typically takes 3 to 5 years to develop oral proficiency and 4 to 7 years to achieve academic English proficiency, even in the most successful districts. Their research report challenges policies that assume rapid language acquisition within a short period and emphasizes the need for realistic expectations and adequate language instruction. Realistic expectations should acknowledge the gradual nature of language acquisition, avoiding the assumption that learners can achieve proficiency quickly. Adequate language instruction must include sustained, high-quality teaching that supports both oral and academic language development. This involves not only immersive exposure to the target language but also structured learning environments that cater to the individual needs of learners, providing ample opportunities for practice, feedback, and cultural integration.

It is widely acknowledged that the longer one studies a foreign language, the higher the likelihood of reaching proficiency. Normally, simply investing a short amount of time does not guarantee adequate language skills. The current study conducted among Korean students examined the relationship between the duration of studying Vietnamese

and the level of language output achieved. The results show distinct average scores for two different categories: less than 2 years of study, and more than 2 years of study.

In the analysis, 33 stimulus sentences were presented to two participant groups: 38 individuals who had studied Vietnamese for less than 2 years and 25 who had studied for at least 2 years. The former group generated a total of 1254 responses, while the latter contributed 825 responses.

Table 3. Participants' length of exposure to a native Vietnamese-speaking environment

|  | Number of students | Number of answers | Number of correct answers |
|--|--------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|
| Studied Vietnamese for less than 2 years | 38                 | 1254              | 1000                      |
| Studies Vietnamese for at least 2 years  | 25                 | 825               | 702                       |

Among participants with less than two years of Vietnamese study, 1000 responses were correct, resulting in an 80% accuracy rate. Conversely, those with over 2 years of Vietnamese study achieved an 85% accuracy rate, with 702 correct responses out of 825. A one-tailed p-value of 0.0001 was obtained, indicating statistical significance in the relationship between study duration and language proficiency level.

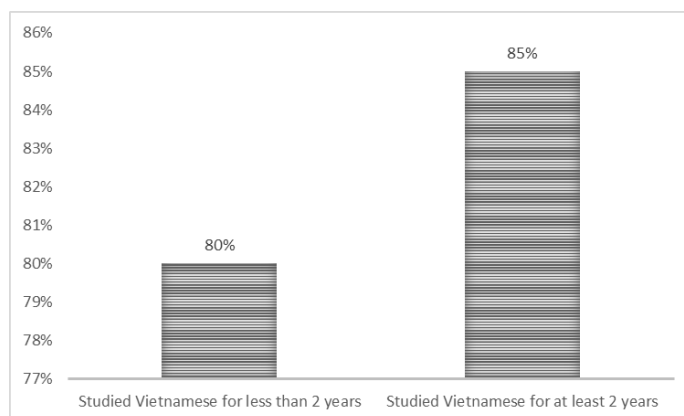


Figure 2. Overall length of time of learning Vietnamese and Accuracy rate

These results highlight a clear trend: as the duration of study increases, the average level of language output also increases. This suggests that longer periods of study provide students with more opportunities to practice and develop their language skills, resulting in improved proficiency and output.

These findings emphasize the importance of investing sufficient time and effort in language learning. For Korean students interested in achieving higher levels of proficiency in Vietnamese, the results suggest that studying for more than 2 years yields the best outcomes. It implies that language learners should be patient and persistent, understanding that language acquisition is a gradual process that requires dedicated time and practice. Furthermore, educators and language learning institutions can take these results into consideration when designing language programs. They can provide students with realistic expectations regarding the time and effort required to achieve specific language proficiency goals. Additionally, the findings suggest that longer-duration language courses or extended study opportunities may be more effective in facilitating language output and proficiency. Overall, the study's results underscore the positive relationship between the duration of language study and language output, highlighting the significance of prolonged and consistent effort in language learning to achieve higher levels of proficiency.

#### **4.3. The relationship between the length and intensity of exposure to a Vietnamese-speaking environment and the duration of study**

The current study not only examined the relationship between the duration of studying Vietnamese and the level of language output but also established a link between the duration of study and the time spent living in a native environment, specifically in Vietnam. This additional factor further influences the accuracy rate, leading to variations among different groups of learners.

Table 4. Participants' length and intensity of exposure to a native Vietnamese speaking environment & the duration of study

|                                       |  | Number of students | Number of answers | Number of correct answers |
|---------------------------------------|--|--------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|
| Never have been to Vietnam            | Studied Vietnamese for less than 2 years | 23                 | 759               | 602                       |
|                                       | Studies Vietnamese for at least 2 years  | 13                 | 429               | 343                       |
| Been to Vietnam for at least 6 months | Studied Vietnamese for less than 2 years | 15                 | 495               | 398                       |
|                                       | Studies Vietnamese for at least 2 years  | 12                 | 396               | 359                       |

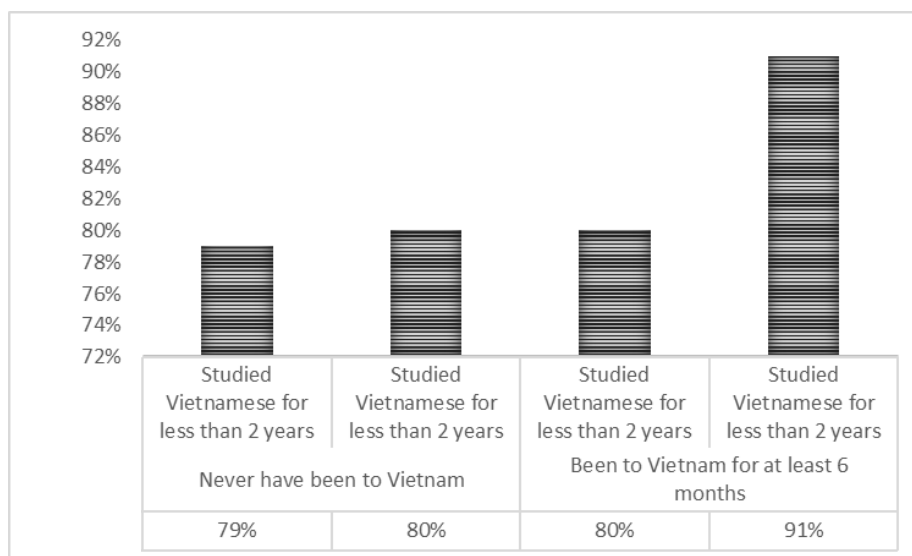


Figure 3. The length and intensity of exposure to a native Vietnamese speaking environment & the duration of study and Accuracy

The results, as presented in the table, show two categories based on whether the learners have been to Vietnam or not. Within each category,

the accuracy percentages are further differentiated based on the duration of study: less than 2 years, and at least 2 years.

Comparing the scores for each category, we can observe interesting patterns. Among those who have never been to Vietnam, 23 individuals studied Vietnamese for less than 2 years, yielding a total of 759 answers, with 602 being correct, resulting in an accuracy rate of 79%. Additionally, 13 individuals studied Vietnamese for at least 2 years, obtaining a total of 429 answers, with 343 being correct, yielding an accuracy rate of 80%. These findings suggest that among those who have never been to Vietnam, there is no significant difference between those who study Vietnamese for more than 2 years compared to those who study for less than 2 years. It seems challenging to make significant progress solely by studying Vietnamese in South Korea without experiencing immersion in Vietnam.

Among those who have been to Vietnam for at least 6 months, 15 individuals studied Vietnamese for less than 2 years, garnering a total of 495 answers, of which 398 were correct, resulting in an accuracy rate of 80%. In contrast, 12 individuals studied Vietnamese for at least 2 years, accumulating a total of 396 answers, with 359 being correct, yielding an impressive accuracy rate of 91%. The analysis reveals a significant disparity (one-tailed  $p$ -value  $< 0.001$ ) between individuals who have been to Vietnam for 6 months or more and have studied Vietnamese for over 2 years versus those who have been to Vietnam for the same duration but have studied Vietnamese for less than 2 years. This underscores the substantial impact of prolonged study duration on language proficiency, particularly when coupled with real-world immersion experiences.

When comparing individuals with the same duration of study (less than 2 years), there is no significant difference between those who have never been to Vietnam and those who have spent at least 6 months in the country. However, it is only when the study duration extends to 2 years that a significant difference is observed between individuals who have never visited Vietnam and those who have spent 6 months there (one-tailed  $p$ -value  $< 0.0001$ ). This suggests that to make substantial progress, students should immerse themselves in a native environment and at the same time engage in long-term study.

The implications of these findings highlight the significance of both study duration and exposure to the native environment in language acquisition. Simply dedicating a certain amount of time to studying the language is beneficial, but the results suggest that learners who have the opportunity to live in Vietnam, even for a short duration, tend to achieve higher levels of language output and proficiency. This suggests that immersion in the native environment provides valuable opportunities for practicing the language, experiencing cultural nuances, and enhancing overall language skills. Educational institutions and language programs can consider incorporating immersive experiences or study abroad opportunities to complement formal language instruction. This can provide learners with the chance to apply their language skills in real-life contexts, further accelerating their language acquisition process. Overall, the results highlight the importance of both study duration and exposure to the native environment, shedding light on the benefits of combining formal study with immersion experiences to maximize language proficiency.

#### **4.4. Age of onset**

The impact of age of onset on language learning has been extensively discussed in the literature, with numerous studies highlighting differences in foreign language acquisition across various age groups (Krashen 1973; Krashen et al. 1979; Harley 1986; Harley and Hart 1997; Singleton and Ryan 2004; Abrahamsson and Hyltenstam 2009; Birdsong 2018). Patkowski (1980) examined the correlation between age and phonetic perception in language learning, specifically comparing teenagers and adults. The results indicated that teenagers achieved a higher level of proficiency in the target language compared to adults, supporting the theory that age influences the ability to master phonetics in a second language. Wu (2022) proposed the perspective of "the younger the better" to explore the relationship between age and foreign language learning, acknowledging that age does affect the ability to acquire a second language, but emphasizing that being young does not guarantee an advantage in learning a foreign language at any given time.

Our research on the acquisition of Vietnamese by Korean students with different age groups has identified three variables: under 12 years old, 12-18 years old, and over 18 years old. The results are shown as follows:

Table 5. Participants' age of onset

|                 | Number of students | Number of answers | Number of correct answers |
|-----------------|--------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|
| < 12 years old  | 8                  | 264               | 227                       |
| 12-18 years old | 9                  | 297               | 244                       |
| >18 years old   | 46                 | 1518              | 1231                      |

Among the students examined, 8 individuals commenced studying Vietnamese before the age of 12, amassing a total of 264 answers, of which 227 were correct, yielding an accuracy rate of 86%. Additionally, 9 individuals began studying Vietnamese between the ages of 12 and 18, gathering a total of 297 answers, with 244 being correct, resulting in an accuracy rate of 82%. Furthermore, 46 students initiated their Vietnamese studies after the age of 18, accumulating a total of 1518 answers, with 1231 being correct, yielding an accuracy rate of 81%.

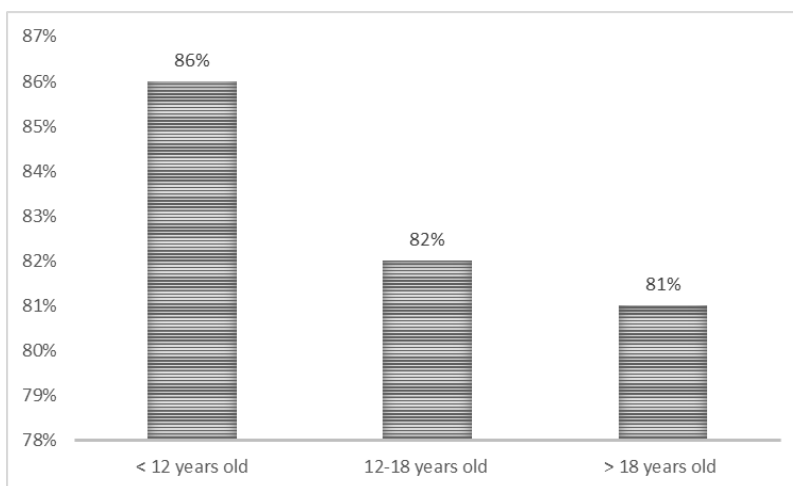


Figure 4: Age of onset and Accuracy

The analysis uncovers a significant discrepancy (one-tailed  $p$ -value  $< 0.05$ ) between individuals who commenced their Vietnamese studies before the age of 12 and those who began after the age of 12.

These findings suggest that individuals under the age of 12 exhibit a greater ability to absorb and assimilate a new language, as evidenced by their higher average scores compared to those over 12. This information holds valuable implications for teaching Vietnamese to native Korean speakers and other foreign language learners. Recognizing the critical age for acquiring new language grammar becomes a strategic consideration for educators (Johnson and Newport 1989, Herschensohn 2007).

The findings underscore the benefit of initiating language acquisition during the pre-adolescent stage. The superior average scores evident in the group under the age of 12 signify their heightened language proficiency. This observation resonates with the concept of a sensitive period or critical phase for language learning, during which individuals in their pre-teen years exhibit heightened cognitive capacities and aptitude for language acquisition. Leveraging this critical phase can maximize the efficacy of language learning endeavors. The implications of these findings extend to language pedagogy, especially in programs for young Vietnamese learners in different countries around the world. Educators should pay particular attention to the age factor when teaching Vietnamese to native Korean speakers and other foreign language learners. Designing language programs that cater to the specific needs and abilities of different age groups can enhance the effectiveness of language instruction. Moreover, acknowledging the critical age range for language acquisition can inform curriculum development, instructional strategies, and assessment methods.

It is essential to note that individual differences, motivation, and exposure to the language also contribute to language learning outcomes, and age alone should not be the sole determinant. However, the present study underscores the significance of early language learning and the potential advantages associated with language acquisition during the pre-adolescent period.

Further research could delve into the underlying cognitive and neurological factors that contribute to the observed age-related differences in language proficiency. Additionally, exploring the impact of age on different aspects of language learning, such as pronunciation, vocabulary acquisition, and pragmatic skills, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between age and language acquisition.

In summary, the study's analysis highlights the superior language proficiency observed in individuals under the age of 12 compared to those over 12. This information has practical implications for teaching Vietnamese to native Korean speakers and other foreign language learners. Acknowledging the critical age range for language acquisition and tailoring instructional approaches accordingly can optimize language learning outcomes.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

This study offers practical insights into how Korean learners acquire proficiency in the Vietnamese language. We collected a unique dataset including 63 Korean students (38 males and 25 females), enrolled at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in Seoul and the Kmove Program at VNU University of Languages & International Studies in Hanoi. To assess the proficiency levels of Korean students, three distinct factors were considered: (1) placement in appropriate language classes, (2) self-reported evaluation of linguistic capabilities, and (3) a multiple-choice assessment focused on the placement of the verb *đi* 'to go' in directed motion construction. This assessment holds particular significance as it reveals notable differences between Korean and Vietnamese, making it a valuable metric for measuring language proficiency in Korean learners.

In addition to the linguistic typological disparities between the two languages, several time-related variables were examined for their influence on Vietnamese language acquisition. These variables include the duration and intensity of exposure to a Vietnamese-speaking environment (preferably exceeding 6 months), the overall length of time dedicated to studying Vietnamese (preferably exceeding 2 years), and

the age at which learners commence studying Vietnamese (preferably younger than 12 years old).

The implications of the above results are significant for the teaching and learning of Vietnamese among Korean learners, as well as for foreigners in general who are interested in engaging with the Vietnamese language and culture.

Firstly, the findings underscore the importance of considering time-related factors in Vietnamese language acquisition. The study highlights the influence of variables such as the length of exposure to a Vietnamese-speaking environment, the overall duration of Vietnamese language study, and the age at which learners commence their Vietnamese language journey. These factors should be taken into account when designing language programs and curricula, as well as when providing guidance to Korean learners and foreign individuals who aspire to achieve proficiency in Vietnamese. Teachers and educational institutions can use this information to create effective learning pathways and tailor instruction to optimize language acquisition outcomes.

Secondly, the recognition of the significant differences between Korean and Vietnamese, particularly evident in the assessment focused on the placement of the verb *đi* 'to go' in directed motion construction, highlights the areas where Korean learners may face specific challenges. Educators can use this knowledge to design targeted instructional strategies that address these specific linguistic differences and promote accurate language usage. By addressing these areas of difficulty, teachers can facilitate the development of greater language proficiency among Korean learners.

Additionally, the findings emphasize the importance of creating immersive language learning environments and opportunities for Korean learners to engage with native Vietnamese speakers. Extended exposure to a Vietnamese-speaking environment for at least six months was identified as a beneficial factor for language acquisition. This suggests that study abroad programs, cultural exchanges, and language immersion experiences can play a crucial role in enhancing Vietnamese language proficiency.

Furthermore, the age at which learners begin their Vietnamese language study also emerges as a significant factor. The ideal age range of younger than 12 years old is associated with greater language

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acquisition potential. These findings can inform decisions regarding when to introduce Vietnamese language learning opportunities within the educational system or language programs, maximizing the chances of successful language acquisition.

Given the limited studies on Vietnamese as a second language, this paper offers valuable insights for L2 teaching professionals and policymakers, especially for the development of Vietnamese programs and exchange initiatives globally. This research highlights the necessity of immersive experiences and suggests that program designers should incorporate substantial in-country exposure to enhance language acquisition. Our data offer a unique contribution by specifically addressing the acquisition of Vietnamese by Korean learners, an underexplored area. This paper serves as a foundational reference for future research and development in Vietnamese language education, providing actionable insights for improving L2 Vietnamese teaching methodologies and program effectiveness.

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