

A STUDY ON WAYS TO IMPROVE ENGLISH-MAJOR STUDENTS' SPEAKING SKILLS

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Summary: *Speaking is considered to be the most essential skill for an individual to be able to communicate successfully with other people. The inceptive observation in this paper discovered that most of the beginning speaking students who learn English as their second language tend to mispronounce. As the results, students will encounter numerous problems during the speaking procedures. This study will find out the reasons for the problems and then suggest recommendations to improve student's speaking skills.*

Keywords: *speaking, problem, solution.*

1. INTRODUCTION

English today is believed to be the most influential medium for the global communication. During the process of acquiring English, the four language skills are always important parts and gain focus from teachers and learners, but in my opinion, speaking skill is the most essential to communicate successfully all over the world.

For English-major students at Hanoi University of Business and Technology (HUBT), English is taught from the first to the fourth year but not every student is able to communicate and use this language properly. To find out the problems related to their English speaking skills, it is necessary to sort out the problems and then suggest solutions to deal with them accordingly. Therefore, the aims of this study are to find out some problems and then investigate the ways to improve HUBT's English-major students' speaking skill.

2. DEVELOPMENT

2.1. Theoretical background

2.1.1. What is speaking?

Speaking is one of the skills that students have to master when learning English. Oxford Dictionary defines speaking as 'the action of conveying information or expressing one's thoughts and feelings in spoken language'. Speaking occurs everywhere and has become an important part of our daily activities. When we speak, we interact and use a kind of language to express our ideas, feelings and thoughts and also share information with other people. If the students can speak English fluently, that can help them easily communicate and access up-to-date information in fields including science, technology and health and so on.

2.1.1. What is speaking skill?

According to Cameron (2001:40) and Brown (2004:40), speaking skill is a productive skill in the organs of speech

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to express meaning which can be directly and empirically observed. There are three key ideas within this definition of speaking skills. First, productive skill is meant the ability of a person to actively produce the language by coordinating the organs of speech such as the lips, tongue, teeth, vocal cords, larynx & pharynx, etc. Second, to express meaning means that the aim of language production in communicating verbally is to deliver ideas and experiences so that the speaker can convey meaning to the listener and others. Third, being able to be directly and empirically observed means that the implementation of speaking can be directly heard or seen and empirically measured in the speaking process by looking at the correctness and effectiveness of the speaker.

2.2. Research methodology

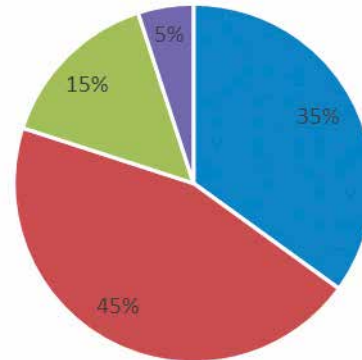
This research used a qualitative descriptive approach, and in order to find out the difficulties that students often have, a questionnaire survey was carried out. The participants included 50 students from K22 of Faculty of English Language Studies. Most of them have been learning English for more than ten years since they were in their primary school. Each student was asked 6 questions, which are (1) How long have you been learning English? (2) How often do you speak English? (3) How do you often feel when you speak English? (4) What can be your difficulties when you speak English? (5) What may be the reason(s) for your difficulties? (6) What have you done to improve your speaking skill?

The questionnaire was designed on Google Form and the link was sent to the participants via Zalo application, then all the responses were recorded and saved by the system.

2.3. Findings and discussion

Here are the results of the survey.

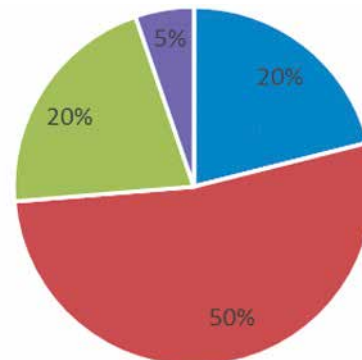
Question 1: How long have you been learning English?



■ 1-5 years ■ 5-10 years ■ 10-15 years ■ 15-20 years

The majority of students studied English for 5-10 years, which accounts for 45% because English is often taught since secondary school. 35% of students have been learning for between one and five years. They just started to learn English when they went to their university. 15% of the students have been taught English for 10-15 years, and most of them are from big cities. Very few students have studied English since kindergarten, so only 5% of the respondents began studying English from 15 to 20 years ago.

Question 2: How often do you speak English?

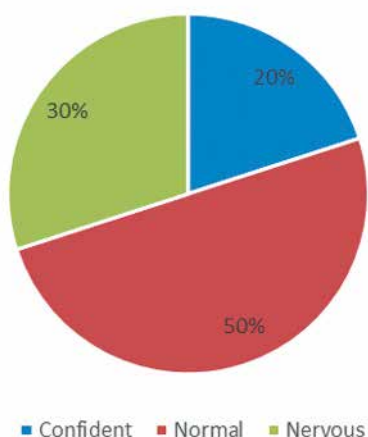


■ (Always (80->100%)) ■ Usually (50->80%)
 ■ Sometimes (20-50%) ■ Seldom (1%-20%)

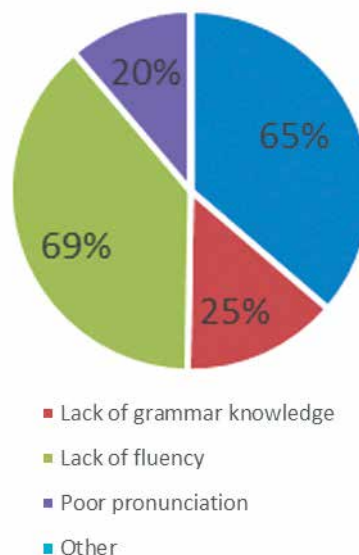
50% of the students surveyed usually speak English because their subjects are English, so they usually use English in the class or when they have a chance to communicate with foreign people. Some hard-working students can practice speaking every day, and this number accounts for 20%. Another 20% of the participants sometimes speak English, and there is 5% of them seldom use English to communicate even though English is their specialization.

Question 3: How do you often feel when you speak English?

As the chart shows, 50% of students feel normal when speaking English because they all have a basic background in this skill. However, some excellent students feel confident in speaking because they have good pronunciation and enough vocabulary to communicate with other people, and they account for 30%. The rest of the students (20%) often feel nervous when speaking because their knowledge and pronunciation are poor.

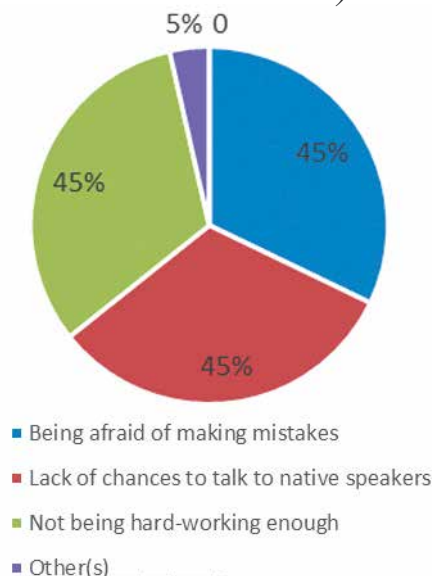


Question 4: What can be your difficulties when you speak English? (You can choose more than one choice)



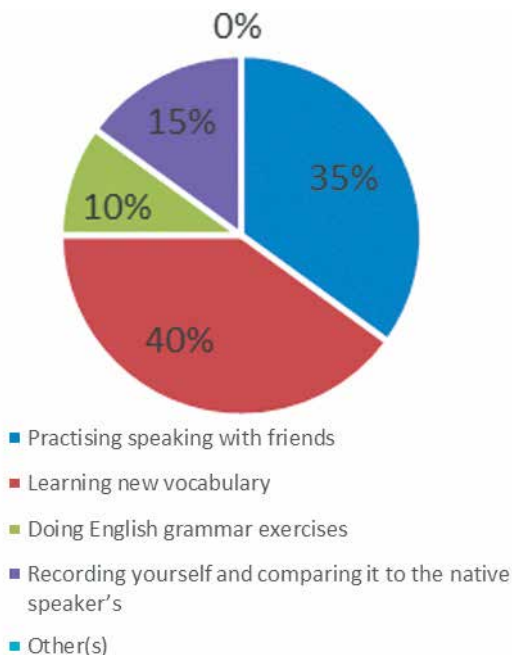
As the chart presents, the two biggest problems for most students are their lack of vocabulary and lack of fluency. Many of them (69%) have found being fluent in speaking English really difficult. Also, 65% of students think that lack of vocabulary is a barrier for them to communicate successfully in English. One-fourth of the students consider their lack of grammar knowledge and poor pronunciation to be the problems that prevent them from speaking English well.

Question 5: What may be the reason(s) for your difficulties? (You can choose more than one choice)



We can see from the pie chart that the three mentioned reasons for the students' difficulties in speaking English have an equal percentage of 45%. Then it can be understood that these are common among the students and this is a fact that there have been very few chances for them to talk to native speakers as there are no foreign teachers for them during their four-year course at the university. Also, they admitted that they are still lazy to speak English and they are afraid of making mistakes when they speak English. This prevents them from spending more time using spoken English. Besides, 5% of the students mentioned other reasons for their difficulties in speaking English such as their shyness, their nervousness, or their lack of motivation.

Question 6: What have you done to improve your speaking skill?



75% of the participants have improved their speaking skill by practicing with friends and widening their vocabulary. A quarter of them have chosen doing English grammar exercises and recording

themselves and compare it to the native speaker's to be a good way for them to make their English better.

2.4. Ways to improve English-major students' speaking skill

After analyzing the survey results, some solutions to help HUBT's English-major students improve their speaking skill have been suggested.

First of all, it is really necessary for the students to practice speaking in English with their friends, teachers, and even native speakers as much as they can. They can also practice by themselves in front of the mirror to control their own language and expression. It is also a great idea for students to join an English club or any international volunteer organization to have a lot more opportunities to practice speaking English. Moreover, students can register online speaking courses or find and meet a tutor using popular social networking tools such as Zoom, Skype, or Google Hangouts. By this, students themselves can make a lot of chances to practice speaking English.

Secondly, students should try to balance their speaking and listening. Before starting their conversation, they can prepare some questions in advance so that the conversation can be prolonged. If their conversation partner asks them a question and they can answer it, then they can always turn the question back to the partner by asking, "What do you think?" or "What about you?" Listening helps them become familiar with the rhythms and intonations of English. As soon as the sounds are familiar, they should spend time imitating them.

Thirdly, it is advisable for the students to record or video their speaking practices. They can then listen to their own

pronunciation again and notice where they need to improve. Moreover, they can review the content of the conversation, take notes on grammar, new vocabulary and pronunciation so that they can master for other situations.

Fourthly, learning through music and movies is also an effective way. Music is one of the best tools to learn pronunciation. Students can listen to and sing along English songs in order to remember vocabulary and phrases more easily and naturally as they copy the singer unconsciously. Besides, movies are also a good choice for students to learn pronunciation, idioms, slangs, vocabulary and the way how to speak similar to the native. Both movies and music do not make students feel bored or pressured like when they study in their classrooms, so they will study with excitement and they are more receptive to knowledge.

The final suggestion can be that the students had better read aloud when they cannot find any partner to practice speaking with. By doing so, they can focus

on pronunciation and pacing without worrying about the lack of vocabulary. Students can use a lot of suitable materials from textbooks for other skills like reading or listening to read aloud as these are easy for them to understand and they have audio recording which they can use to compare to their pronunciation and make improvements if necessary.

3. CONCLUSION

In English language study, speaking skill is said to be rather difficult to all students. During their course at HUBT, they only had a few chances to practice with native people; they had little time to speak in class; they lack time to practice speaking English outside class as most of them have part-time jobs. As a result, the students encounter many problems when speaking English. With some solutions suggested and great effort from teachers and students, the researcher does hope that in the future, all of these problems would be solved and the students all have the skills and ability to communicate in English successfully./.

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NGHIÊN CỨU CẢI THIỆN KỸ NĂNG NÓI CHO SINH VIÊN CHUYÊN NGÀNH TIẾNG ANH

Nguyễn Minh Miền

Tóm Tắt: Nói được coi là kỹ năng cần thiết nhất đối với bất kì ai để thực hiện giao tiếp một cách thành công. Bài viết này đã phát hiện ra hầu hết học sinh mới bắt đầu nói tiếng Anh như ngôn ngữ thứ hai của họ có xu hướng phát âm sai. Hậu quả việc phát âm sai là học sinh sẽ gặp phải vô số vấn đề trong quá trình nói. Nghiên cứu này sẽ tìm ra lý do của các vấn đề và sau đó đưa ra các đề xuất nhằm cải thiện kỹ năng nói của học sinh viên học tiếng Anh.

Từ khóa: kỹ năng Nói, vấn đề, giải pháp.