

# Activities to Promote students speaking English at Haiphong University

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Received: 13/2/2023; Accepted: 16/2/2023; Published: 23/2/2023

**Abstract:** In the process of teaching and learning English, speaking skill is one of the necessary skills to help students improve their communication ability. Having good speaking skills, students will find it easier to express their thoughts and feelings directly. However, at present, equipping students with speaking skills and encouraging the number of learners to participate in speaking lessons are still limited. From pointing out the shortcomings and limitations in practice in this regard, the article proposes a number of activities to promote students to participate and improve their English speaking skills.

**Keywords:** Speaking skill, promote

## 1. Introduction

Speaking is “the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, in a variety of contexts” (Chaney, 1998, p. 13). Speaking is a crucial part of second language learning and teaching. Despite its importance, for many years, teaching speaking has been undervalued and English language teachers have continued to teach speaking just as a repetition of drills or memorization of dialogues. However, today’s world requires that the goal of teaching speaking should improve students’ communicative skills, because, only in that way, students can express themselves and learn how to follow the social and cultural rules appropriate in each communicative circumstance. In order to teach second language learners how to speak in the best way possible, some speaking activities are provided below, that can be applied to ESL and EFL classroom settings, together with suggestions for teachers who teach oral language.

## 2. Contents

### 2.1. How To Teach Speaking

How to give an effective speaking lesson, Kayi (2006) points out that teachers should:

- Provide maximum opportunities for students to use the target language by creating a collaborative work environment where students can share knowledge and experience and achieve success work together.
- Try to encourage all students to participate in the speaking activity.
- Reduce teacher’s speaking time and increase

student’s speaking time.

In another study, Bailey (2005) also emphasized that to encourage students to participate in speaking in class, teachers need to:

- Give students something to say.
- Create many opportunities and needs for students to interact with each other.

### 2.3. The reality of students’ participation in English speaking at Hai Phong University

In the context of teaching English in general and teaching speaking skill in particular at Hai Phong University today, the vast majority of students are learners of English as a foreign language (EFL). Unlike students learning English as a second language (ESL), students learning English as a foreign language (EFL) have less opportunity to use English in daily life. In speaking class, especially for non-English major students, students often do not actively speak English. In fact, when teachers ask questions, students rarely voluntarily answer or express their views. A common response is to stand still and say nothing.

There are many reasons why students do not actively participate in speaking in class. It may be due to cultural, psychological, cognitive, methodological and linguistic factors, in which the choice of teaching activities by teachers can also lead to students’ silence in speaking lesson. There are many ways and strategies to promote student speaking engagement in the classroom such as choosing appropriate speaking topics, organizing discussion activities, role-playing, brainstorming, etc.

#### 2.4. Activities to Promote students speaking English

##### \* Discussions

After a content-based lesson, a discussion can be held for various reasons. The students may aim to arrive at a conclusion, share ideas about an event, or find solutions in their discussion groups. Before the discussion, it is essential that the purpose of the discussion activity is set by the teacher. In this way, the discussion points are relevant to this purpose, so that students do not spend their time chatting with each other about irrelevant things. For example, students can become involved in agree/disagree discussions. In this type of discussions, the teacher can form groups of students, preferably 4 or 5 in each group, and provide controversial sentences like “people learn best when they read vs. people learn best when they travel”. Then each group works on their topic for a given time period, and presents their opinions to the class. It is essential that the speaking should be equally divided among group members. At the end, the class decides on the winning group who defended the idea in the best way. This activity fosters critical thinking and quick decision making, and students learn how to express and justify themselves in polite ways while disagreeing with the others. For efficient group discussions, it is always better not to form large groups, because quiet students may avoid contributing in large groups. The group members can be either assigned by the teacher or the students may determine it by themselves, but groups should be rearranged in every discussion activity so that students can work with various people and learn to be open to different ideas. Lastly, in class or group discussions, whatever the aim is, the students should always be encouraged to ask questions, paraphrase ideas, express support, check for clarification, and so on.

##### \* Role Play

One other way of getting students to speak is role-playing. Students pretend they are in various social contexts and have a variety of social roles. In role-play activities, the teacher gives information to the learners such as who they are and what they think or feel. Thus, the teacher can tell the student that “You are David, you go to the doctor and tell him what happened last night, and...” (Harmer, 1984)

##### \* Information Gap

In this activity, students are supposed to be working in pairs. One student will have the

information that other partner does not have and the partners will share their information. Information gap activities serve many purposes such as solving a problem or collecting information. Also, each partner plays an important role because the task cannot be completed if the partners do not provide the information the others need. These activities are effective because everybody has the opportunity to talk extensively in the target language.

##### \* Brainstorming

On a given topic, students can produce ideas in a limited time. Depending on the context, either individual or group brainstorming is effective and learners generate ideas quickly and freely. The good characteristics of brainstorming is that the students are not criticized for their ideas so students will be open to sharing new ideas.

##### \* Interviews

Students can conduct interviews on selected topics with various people. It is a good idea that the teacher provides a rubric to students so that they know what type of questions they can ask or what path to follow, but students should prepare their own interview questions. Conducting interviews with people gives students a chance to practice their speaking ability not only in class but also outside and helps them becoming socialized. After interviews, each student can present his or her study to the class. Moreover, students can interview each other and “introduce” his or her partner to the class.

##### \* Picture Describing

Another way to make use of pictures in a speaking activity is to give students just one picture and having them describe what it is in the picture. For this activity students can form groups and each group is given a different picture. Students discuss the picture with their groups, then a spokesperson for each group describes the picture to the whole class. This activity fosters the creativity and imagination of the learners as well as their public speaking skills.

##### \* Think- pair – share

As the name implies, Think - pair - share is a combination of pair-work and group work. After the teacher raises the discussion topic, students will have time to think about the topic and then share and discuss in pairs. Each pair then combines with another pair to share t

he results and report the results to the whole class. In Think-Pair - Share activity, students will

have a certain amount of time to find ideas and get ready for discussion in pairs or groups. This activity helps students build knowledge through personal thinking and learning from others. Teachers need to choose topics that are close to the life or that students have had certain experience with. With such lesson, this activity will be the ideal technique to improve students' speaking engagement because the self-finding and pairing phase will help students become more confident when presenting in front of them. big group

### 5. *Suggestions For Teachers in Teaching Speaking*

Here are some suggestions for English language teachers while teaching oral language:

- Provide maximum opportunity to students to speak the target language by providing a rich environment that contains collaborative work, authentic materials and tasks, and shared knowledge.

- Try to involve each student in every speaking activity; for this aim, practice different ways of student participation.

- Reduce teacher speaking time in class while increasing student speaking time. Step back and observe students.

- Indicate positive signs when commenting on a student's response.

- Ask eliciting questions such as "What do you mean? How did you reach that conclusion?" in order to prompt students to speak more.

- Provide written feedback like "Your presentation was really great. It was a good job. I really appreciated your efforts in preparing the materials and efficient use of your voice..."

- Do not correct students' pronunciation mistakes very often while they are speaking. Correction should not distract student from his or her speech.

- Involve speaking activities not only in class but also out of class; contact parents and other people who can help.

- Circulate around classroom to ensure that students are on the right track and see whether they need your help while they work in groups or pairs.

- Provide the vocabulary beforehand that students need in speaking activities.

- Diagnose problems faced by students who have difficulty in expressing themselves in the target language and provide more opportunities to practice the spoken language.

### 6. *Conclusion*

Teaching speaking is a very important part of second language learning. The ability to communicate in a second language clearly and efficiently contributes to the success of the learner in school and success later in every phase of life. Therefore, it is essential that language teachers pay great attention to teaching speaking. Rather than leading students to pure memorization, providing a rich environment where meaningful communication takes place is desired. With this aim, various speaking activities such as those listed above can contribute a great deal to students in developing basic interactive skills necessary for life. These activities make students more active in the learning process and at the same time make their learning more meaningful and fun for them.

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