

Using pictures to improve speaking skills for the second year students at ICTU

*Hoang Thu Giang**

**Thai Nguyen University of Information and Communication Technology*

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Abstract: *English is a very important language, for it is an international mean of communication today. The majority of Vietnamese students have always faced difficulty in communicating orally in front of the crowd and this is one reason why speaking skills have become an indispensable part of teaching and learning English in schools. People with proficiency of speaking skills can become good speakers and listeners as well, especially in global world today. Therefore, a language class with interesting speaking lessons requires the presence of funny elements including using pictures. The particular focus of this study is on the use of pictures to improve speaking skills for the second year students at ICTU.*

Keywords: *Improving, speaking skills, using pictures, ICTU*

1. Introduction

English is one of the mandatory subjects taught in a university in Viet Nam. There are four skills to master: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Therefore, this research is focused on the speaking skills. Speaking is considered an important skill students have to accomplish. Students should be able to express their thoughts, opinions, feelings and ideas through the language. Oral language is a very important link in the process of students' learning and thinking development. Oral language provides a foundation for the development of other language skills. Students talk about themselves and their experiences, they are learning to organize their thinking and to focus their ideas. The oral language is important to provide opportunities for oral language to continue to grow in the classroom from those foundations.

Before students achieve proficiency in reading and writing, oral language is one of the important means of learning and of acquiring knowledge. In fact, throughout life, oral language skills remain essential for communication of ideas and intelligent conversations.

Learning speaking at schools can be done with many medias to help students in speaking skill such as: pictures, card, paper sheet, etc. By using media, it is hoped that the students will be able to learn and pay attention to the material. Brown (1973; 1) stated that using a variety of media will increase the probability that students will learn more and retain better what they are expected to develop, and also

media are used to motivate students in learning.

2. Literature review

2.1. Importance of improving speaking skills

Speaking is the active use of language to express meanings so that other people can make sense of them. Also adds that attention to precise details of language is required to speak in a foreign language in order to share understandings with other people. Speaking or oral communication as an activity which includes two or more people in which hearers and speakers have to react to what they hear and make their contribution at speed of high level. While Speaking is the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and

non-verbal symbols, in a variety of contexts. Speaking is a productive skill, like writing. It involves using speech to express meanings to other people.

According to Harmer (2007:284) speaking is the ability to speak fluently and presupposes not only knowledge of language features, but also the ability to process information and languages. Moreover, according to Nunan (in Brown, 2001:205) writes that generally there are two types of spoken languages, as follow:

a. Monologue

Monologue is the speaking where one speaker uses spoken language for any length of time, such as in speeches, lectures, readings, news broadcasts, and etc. , then the listener have to process the information without interruption and the speech will go on whether or not the listeners comprehends what the

speaker means.

b. Dialogue

It is different from monologue, that dialogue is the speaking that involves two or more speakers. Speaking includes some components which should be mastered by students: structural accuracy, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency and comprehension for oral communication in the classroom context.

2.2. Importance of using pictures

The use of using pictures to get more significant achievements on speaking skills can be viewed as an innovative approach that helps the students to be more active in real life situations through the means of individual, pair and group work activities.

It is easily to be seen that language pictures which are used to teach Vietnamese students to speak English normally appear in training courses, in English Clubs or English Centers. However, they are seldom used in the speaking lessons of the universities as the time for each lesson is not much. Through the interviews between the researchers and some students at Thai Nguyen University of Information and Communication Technology (ICTU) – the researcher noticed that frequently-used activities for speaking lessons are normally talks about topics, news reporting, story telling or questions and answers.

Based of that students need to choose one of media which is the best for students in order that

Students get more effective speaking learning to improve their skill. Using pictures may be very useful to help teacher to improve students speaking skill.

There are some definitions of picture stated by the experts. According to Wright (1989) pictures are not just an aspect of the method but through their representation of places, objects, and people they are an essential part of the overall experiences that the teacher must help the students to cope with. It can be in the forms of flashcards (small cards which we can hold up for students to see), large wall pictures (big enough for everyone to see detail), cue cards (small cards which students use in pair or group work), photograph, or illustrations, typically in a textbook (Harmer, 2007). Pictures meet with a wide range of use not only in acquiring vocabulary, but also in many other aspects of foreign language teaching. There are many reasons for using pictures in language teaching. Hill (1990: 1) listed several

advantages of pictures, such as availability (one can get them in any magazines, on the internet, etc.); they are cheap, often free; they are personal (teacher selects them); flexibility - easily kept, useful for various types of activities (drilling, comparing, etc.), they are “always fresh and different”, which means they come in a variety of formats and styles and moreover the learner often wonders what comes next. (Hill 1990: 1).

With the findings gathered from this research, the teachers should take serious action and start to include variations in their teaching. A committee of teachers of English in each school start researching and collecting suitable pictures to use in language classroom and address to developing essential skills of learning language including speaking skills.

3. Research Methodology

To carry out the study, the research was conducted using Classroom Action Research with 30 second-year students of the academic year 2022-2023 at ICTU for two months. According to Burns (2010), Action Research is a self-reflective, systematic and critical approach to an inquiry by participants. The aim is to identify problematic situations or issues considered by the participants to be worthy of investigation in order to bring about critically informed changes in practice. Action research is underpinned by democratic principles in that ownership of change is invested in those who conduct the research. The data of this research are qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative data were in the forms of the descriptions

of the process during the actions written in field notes, observation checklists, interview transcripts, and the students' speaking performances.

Inter-rater reliability was employed in this research. The researcher involved more than one rater or scorer in assessing the students' performance. They were the researcher himself and the English teacher.

4. Research Results and Discussions

All of the actions had been conducted in two cycles. Based on the result of the actions in

Cycle 1 and Cycle 2, the researcher discontinues the research up to this cycle. The implementation of pictures and the complementary actions were successfully accomplished and the objective of the research had been achieved. The research findings would be inferred from the qualitative and quantitative

data gathered during the research. The qualitative data are from the observation of the teaching and learning process, interview with the English teacher and also the students. While the quantitative data are derived from the speaking scores of pre-test and post-test and the result of questionnaires given at the end of each cycle. Regarding the implementation of those two cycles, the researcher presented the following changes as a result of Cycle 1 and Cycle 2.

a. Using pictures in the teaching and learning process of speaking.

In cycle 1, pictures were successful in attracting the students' interests and attention in learning. In addition, through pictures, the students were motivated and stimulated to speak as the pictures provided illustrations and new vocabulary which could be explored by the students. In Cycle 2, the implementation of pictures in the teaching and learning process of speaking was successful. Pictures attracted the students' attention during the teaching and learning process.

b. Implementing picture-based activities.

In cycle 1, the picture-based activities implemented in Cycle 1 were quite successful. The researcher makes fun of learning activities and gave more opportunities to the students to practice speaking. The students were motivated as they learned English in fun ways so that they were gradually brave to speak English. While, in the cycle 2 the learning was joyful, the students were motivated and enjoyed the teaching and learning process. This way, the students were not shy and silent anymore. Most students became more confident and active.

c. Giving feedback on the students' performance.

The action was effective in helping the students to improve their fluency and also pronunciation during Cycle 1. However, some students were still shy to speak English. They still mispronounced some words very often. Most students also had the same problem in constructing simple past tense as they were still confused with the Past verbs. The action of giving feedback to the students in cycle 2 improved the students' works covering the aspects of fluency, pronunciation, accuracy, and vocabulary. As their mistakes were reduced, the students also became confident to speak in English.

d. Accustoming students from accessing a dictionary.

In Cycle I, most of the students brought their dictionaries in the classroom. However, some of them were not aware of the benefits of using dictionaries. They did not bring dictionaries with them and preferred to always directly asking the researcher to consult dictionaries so that it made the class became crowded. In cycle 2, most students became aware of the importance of using a dictionary to consult difficult words. Some students used dictionary Books while the rest used electronic dictionaries. In this cycle, few students relied on the teacher's help related to vocabulary. The class also became more conducive than before.

e. Giving handouts as daily materials.

In cycle 1, the handouts to the students were very helpful as the students were provided with complete materials and speaking exercises completed with the procedures. This also minimized the students who wrote the materials on their notebooks during the speaking class. In cycle2, it helped the students to learn the learning materials and do the speaking practices. From the handouts, they know what to learn and what to do.

f. Giving rewards to active students.

In cycle 1, this was not applied. The researcher had only just begun the action in the classroom. In Cycle 2, the action of giving rewards was effective to boost students' motivation and to improve their involvement in the classroom. They became active not only in participating in the class activities in groups and in pairs but also in individual activities.

In this research, the students' speaking ability in pre-test and post-test were scored. The summary of the student's achievements of the pre-test and post-test is presented below.

Table 1: The Students Achievement Notes

The Average	Fluency	Pronunciation	Accuracy	Vocabulary
Pre-Test	56.6	52.6	50.6	54.8
Post-Test	74.8	70	74.8	73.4
Gain Score	20.6	19.8	26.6	20.6

Besides, their utterances were not linked perfectly to one another. Through the implementation of pictures, the students' speaking abilities were improved. The improvements

were revealed from the result of the students' performances in the post-test. In the post-test, their grammatical mistakes were reduced and their

pronunciation also got better. Their vocabulary was also varied. The students were more confident and fluent in delivering the monologue. Some of them were able to use facial expressions and gestures. The general findings of the students' mean score in pre-test and post-test are presented in the table below.

Table 2: The Students Mean Score

Mean scores	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Gain Score
	53.65	73.25	19.6

Table 1 shows that the mean score of the post-test is higher than the mean score of the pre-test. The gain score of the students' speaking ability is 19.6 showing that there is an improvement of students' speaking skills.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

The results of this study revealed an increase in students' speaking skills at ICTU. Pictures are believed to be effective in increasing student motivation. Pictures are able to attract the attention of students and are interested during the teaching and learning process of speaking. Pictures can also provide students with illustrations and ideas in their minds. Improvements can be seen in the teaching and learning process. The absence of media is overcome through picture implementation. In addition, the pictures can provide a variety of fun learning activities so that researchers can reduce student boredom during the learning process. Students become more confident to talk and be active in class activities. Students are motivated and the speaking class goes well. Hence, students' speaking skills, such as fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and vocabulary also increase. This can be seen from the difference between the average results of the pre-test that is 53.65 increased to 73.25 with a difference in score of 19.6. The use of picture as a medium in the teaching and learning process of speaking is very effective for improving students' speaking skills at ICTU.

Based on the result of the study, the researcher set some suggestions for English teachers, researchers, and students. It is important for English teachers to improve teaching and speaking learning. One of the media that can improve students speaking skills is images. The pictures are considered effective to be implemented in the teaching and learning process of speaking. The need for common language forms to be used in the classroom, various speaking practices

that are fun and are able to improve students speaking skills not only in aspects of students' pronunciation, but also their fluency, grammar, and also vocabulary mastery, and focus of interest for students.

Base on the objective of this study, it is suggested for students to keep practices to improve their speaking skills by using the method that the researcher used in this study. Overall, the students supposed to being active and continuously practice their speaking skill in daily life.

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