

# An Investigation into Difficulties in English Speaking Skills Encountered by English-Majored Students at a University in Can Tho City

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**Abstract:** Speaking is one of the most important skills to acquire when learning a foreign language, yet it remains one of the most challenging skills in English language learning. The study titled “An Investigation into Difficulties in English Speaking Skills Encountered by English-Majored Students at a University in Can Tho City” was conducted to evaluate the factors affecting learners’ speaking performance and to identify effective solutions for improving the English proficiency of English majors. A survey questionnaire and interviews were used as the primary data collection methods. Eighty-six respondents participated in the speaking difficulty questionnaire, with ten of these respondents selected randomly for follow-up interviews. The study identified both internal and external factors affecting speaking performance. Internal factors included vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, background knowledge, and psychological aspects such as confidence, fear of making mistakes, and lack of motivation. External factors comprised the learning environment, teaching curriculum, and syllabus. The findings highlight the need for targeted strategies to address these challenges and enhance speaking skills among English majors.

**Keywords:** Difficulties, English speaking skills, English-majored students

## 1. Introduction

In contemporary education, proficiency in an additional language is imperative for global integration. English, being the predominant global language, holds unparalleled significance (Ilyosovna, 2020). Its widespread adoption as the primary medium of communication across more than 60 nations underscores its universal utility, permeating diverse spheres like science, economics, and tourism. Consequently, English has emerged as an indisputable lingua franca amidst globalization efforts.

Vietnam’s educational landscape reflects this trend, with English assuming a pivotal role in its national curriculum alongside the native language (Hoang Van Van, 2008). Governmental initiatives promoting international collaboration, academic exchanges, and overseas faculty training signify a concerted effort towards fostering global competencies among university students (Thi Tuyet Tran, 2015). However, mastering a foreign language presents formidable challenges, necessitating comprehensive development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, with speaking proficiency being paramount (Rao, 2019).

Recognizing these challenges, the researcher embarked on an inquiry titled “An investigation into difficulties in English speaking skills encountered by English-majored students at Tay Do University.” This study aims to delineate prevalent impediments in speaking proficiency, facilitating stakeholders in devising pragmatic interventions to bolster students’ oral communication aptitude.

## 2. Research content

To ascertain the challenges encountered by English majors in developing their speaking proficiency at a university located in Can Tho City, this investigation endeavors to address the following inquiry: *What specific obstacles in English speaking skills do English majors confront at the aforementioned university in Can Tho City?*

To scrutinize the impediments to English speaking skills among English majors at the institution in Can Tho City, this research adopts a mixed-methods approach. As delineated by Creswell (2014), mixed methods encompass the integration of quantitative and qualitative methodologies for data collection. The quantitative facet employs structured questionnaires to elicit a comprehensive understanding of the

research quandary. Meanwhile, the qualitative dimension employs semi-structured interviews to allow participants to articulate their perspectives and insights concerning the challenges associated with English speaking skills.

Data were gathered from a cohort of 86 English major students spanning Cohort 14 through Cohort 17 at Tay Do University. This cohort comprised 21 first-year students, 12 second-year students, 26 third-year students, and 27 fourth-year students. Among these participants, 19 were male and 67 were female, aged between 18 and 23 years. All participants hailed as native Vietnamese speakers with English designated as a foreign language. Hailing from diverse socio-geographical backgrounds, encompassing both rural and urban locales, these students boasted an English learning trajectory spanning 10 to 13 years. Notably, this cohort was selected due to their identification as encountering difficulties in mastering English skills, particularly in the domain of oral communication. Both questionnaires and interviews were administered to the participants, targeting the nuances of challenges encountered during English verbal expression, thereby enriching the dataset underpinning this research endeavor.

**3. Result**

The data in this study were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 20) computer software, based on the Likert scale and open-ended questions. The analysis was divided into two parts, including students' background and the student's common problems in speaking English.

**3.1. Students' background**

The results from a descriptive statistical analysis have been conducted on students' background information, including the number of years studying English, students' living environment, and students' perception of the importance of learning to speak English.

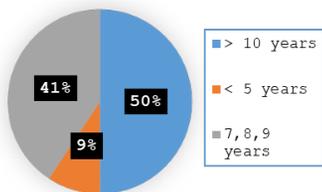


Figure 2.1: Students' years of learning English

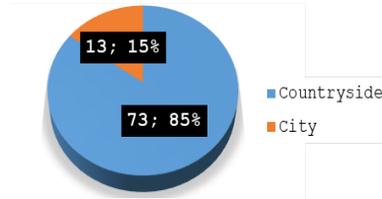
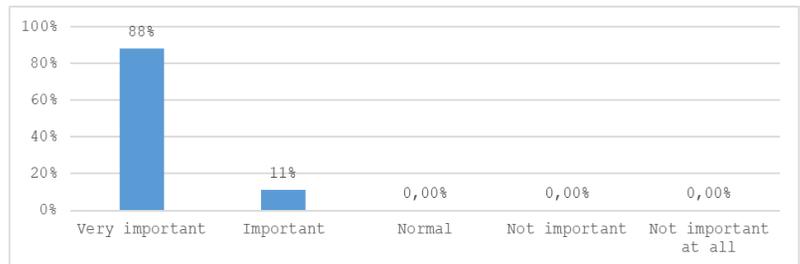


Figure 2.2: Students' living environment

As seen from the pie chart in Figure 2.1, the majority of students have studied English for more than 10 years, constituting 50% (43/86) of the total. This indicates that English major students have been learning English since the 6th grade, dedicating 7 years to mastering the language before entering university. Figure 2.2 presents the results concerning students' living environments, indicating that 73.85% (73/86) of English major students at a university in Can Tho originate from rural areas, with only 13.15% (13/86) coming from urban areas. In reality, rural students have fewer learning opportunities and face limitations in terms of resources compared to their urban counterparts.

Figure 2.3: Students' perception of the importance of learning to speak English



According to the chart in Figure 2.3, the majority of students highly value the importance of speaking English. The chart indicates that 88% (76/86) of the students agree that speaking English is "Very important." It can be observed that survey participants acknowledge the significance of speaking English, which predominates in the statistics presented.

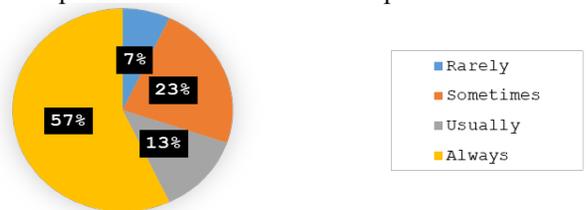


Figure 2.4. Students' frequent having difficulty speaking English

The results regarding the frequency of students encountering difficulties when speaking English

indicate that 57% (49/86) of students agree that they “Always” struggle with speaking skills when learning English. Following this, 23% (20/86) of students encounter difficulties “Sometimes,” while only 13% (11/86) do so “Usually,” and 7% (6/86) “Rarely.” In summary, students universally encounter challenges in speaking English.

### 3.2. Some common problems in English-speaking

Results for some common problems in speaking English showed that students agreed vocabulary was the main problem preventing them from speaking with a rating of 87% (75/86). According to the statistics in the chart, grammar is the next big problem faced by students accounting for 74% (64/86). Moreover, pronunciation, background knowledge, and psychological factors are other barriers that students had to overcome to speak English more effectively, accounting for 67% (58/86), 66% (57/86), and 65% (56/86). In addition, 55% (47/86) of students said that the influence of the learning environment was one of the problems they faced when learning English. Accordingly, 44 out of 86 survey participants, accounting for 51%, admitted to having difficulties due to the curriculum and syllabus in English-speaking classes. Finally, a small fraction of students had other minor problems in speaking English, but it was a negligible 9% (8/86). In summary, from the students’ responses to this question, one concludes that despite having studied English for many years, students still face some specific difficulties when speaking the language.

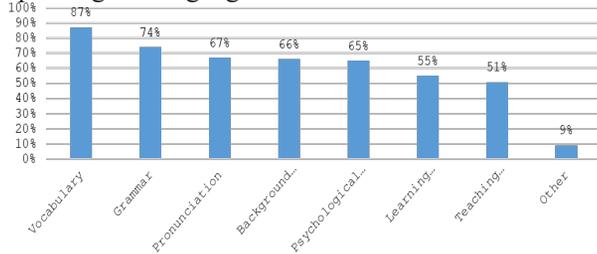


Figure 2.5: Some common problems in English-speaking

The results from the interviews, 100% of respondents, indicated that speaking is one of the most challenging skills in learning a foreign language. Concerning students’ issues in speaking English, ten interviewees (100%) agreed that most of the students pointed out that the problems they often faced when speaking English were mainly related to vocabulary and pronunciation. Due to their limited vocabulary, it was difficult for them to communicate fluently.

Moreover, they also mentioned that grammar was one of their problems when speaking. They stated that it was extremely difficult to properly apply grammatical structures to a conversation. In addition, they lacked stress, intonation, and incorrect pronunciation when speaking. Besides, psychological factors were also a barrier for them to speak English.

Regarding improving English speaking skills, the majority of interviewees revealed that vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation need to be improved while speaking English. Furthermore, they suggested spending more time practicing speaking with students to improve their pronunciation.

### 4. Discussion

These findings not only help researchers gain a better understanding of real-life situations but also provide a foundation for addressing their research questions comprehensively and accurately. The results of questionnaires and interviews showed that vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, background knowledge, motivation, fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, learning environment, curriculum, and syllabus are the most common problems of students. The first is that the author finds it difficult for Vietnamese students to speak English fluently, especially students majoring in English. Secondly, this study hopes to help teachers gain insight into students’ problems. As a consequence, they can find suitable teaching methods or provide students with more lasting learning material on speaking skills.

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