

## INVESTIGATING HANOI UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY ELITECH STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF HOW WARM-UP ACTIVITIES MAY SUPPORT THE LEARNING OF ENGLISH SMALL TALKS

Nguyen Hanh Dao\*, Nguyen Minh Nguyet, Nguyen Thi Quynh Anh, Tran Thu Trang  
Ha Noi University of Science and Technology

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<b>Received:</b> 07/12/2024	This study investigates the role of warm-up activities in supporting the learning of English small talks among Elitech students at Hanoi University of Science and Technology. The problem addressed is the limited focus on communicative English skills in technical education, where students often lack opportunities to practice casual conversation in English. To explore how warm-up activities might enhance this aspect of language learning, the study employed a qualitative research design. Data were collected through focus group interviews with seven students and in-depth interviews with four participants enrolled in the IELTS Speaking 1 course. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns in students' perceptions and experiences. The findings revealed that warm-up activities contributed to a low-stress, engaging, and socially supportive learning environment. Key features such as real-life relevance, peer interaction, and enjoyment were found to increase student confidence and participation. These results suggest that integrating warm-up activities into English instruction can significantly improve students' small talk skills and overall communicative competence. The study offers pedagogical implications for enhancing language education in technical programs and calls for broader implementation of such practices.
<b>Revised:</b> 11/6/2025	
<b>Published:</b> 11/6/2025	
<b>KEYWORDS</b>	
Warm-up activities	
Small talks	
Student language perception	
Learning styles	
Technical non-English majored students	

## NGHIÊN CỨU NHẬN THỨC CỦA SINH VIÊN ELITECH TẠI ĐẠI HỌC BÁCH KHOA HÀ NỘI VỀ NHỮNG HỖ TRỢ CỦA HOẠT ĐỘNG KHỞI ĐỘNG VỚI VIỆC HỌC NÓI TIẾNG ANH

Nguyễn Hạnh Đào\*, Nguyễn Minh Nguyệt, Nguyễn Thị Quỳnh Anh, Trần Thu Trang  
Đại học Bách khoa Hà Nội

THÔNG TIN BÀI BÁO	TÓM TẮT
<b>Ngày nhận bài:</b> 07/12/2024	Nghiên cứu này khảo sát vai trò của các hoạt động khởi động trong việc hỗ trợ sinh viên chương trình Elitech tại Đại học Bách Khoa Hà Nội học nói hội thoại ngắn bằng tiếng Anh. Vấn đề đặt ra là kỹ năng giao tiếp tiếng Anh thường bị xem nhẹ trong chương trình đào tạo kỹ thuật, khiến sinh viên thiếu cơ hội luyện tập giao tiếp thông thường. Để tìm hiểu cách các hoạt động khởi động có thể cải thiện kỹ năng này, nghiên cứu áp dụng phương pháp định tính. Dữ liệu được thu thập thông qua phỏng vấn nhóm với bảy sinh viên và phỏng vấn sâu với bốn sinh viên đang theo học học phần IELTS Speaking 1. Dữ liệu được phân tích theo phương pháp mã hóa chủ đề nhằm khám phá các lớp suy nghĩ và trải nghiệm của người học. Kết quả cho thấy các hoạt động khởi động giúp tạo môi trường học tập tích cực, giảm căng thẳng, tăng sự gắn kết và tương tác xã hội. Các yếu tố như tính thực tiễn, tính tương tác nhóm và yếu tố giải trí góp phần nâng cao sự tự tin và mức độ tham gia của sinh viên. Việc tích hợp các hoạt động này vào giảng dạy tiếng Anh có thể nâng cao đáng kể kỹ năng hội thoại ngắn và năng lực giao tiếp nói chung, đồng thời góp phần cải thiện chất lượng giáo dục ngoại ngữ trong các chương trình đào tạo kỹ thuật và các bối cảnh giáo dục rộng hơn.
<b>Ngày hoàn thiện:</b> 11/6/2025	
<b>Ngày đăng:</b> 11/6/2025	
<b>TỪ KHÓA</b>	
Hoạt động khởi động	
Cuộc nói chuyện ngắn	
Nhận thức ngôn ngữ của sinh viên	
Phong cách học tập	
Sinh viên kỹ thuật không chuyên tiếng Anh	

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34238/tnu-jst.11661>

\* Corresponding author. Email: dao.nguyenhanh@hust.edu.vn

## 1. Introduction

The Fourth Industrial Revolution has significantly impacted various sectors, including engineering and sciences, necessitating a skilled workforce proficient in both specialized domains and foreign languages, particularly English [1], [2]. This revolution has created a demand for professionals who can effectively communicate in English, which is often the lingua franca in global industries. Consequently, there is a pressing need to enhance English language education for engineering students to prepare them for the global job market. This study aimed to address this need by exploring innovative teaching methods that could improve English language acquisition among engineering students, thereby equipping them with the necessary skills to thrive in their respective fields [3], [4].

In literature, warm-up activities have traditionally been associated with physical exercises, but their application in language learning has gained recognition for their ability to prepare students mentally and physically for class. These activities, which include vocabulary games and storytelling, help students relax and create a conducive learning environment [5]. Research indicates that warm-up activities can significantly enhance student engagement and participation, making them an essential component of effective language instruction [6]. Despite their proven benefits, while warm-up activities are essential for fostering an active learning environment, they are often neglected by educators who prioritize lesson content. This oversight is particularly prevalent in technical fields, where the emphasis is typically on specialized content rather than language skills [7], [8].

The theoretical foundation for this study is grounded in Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which posited that learning was most effective within a learner's immediate potential for growth, facilitated by supportive guidance [9]. Warm-up tasks serve as scaffolding tools, bridging the gap between the existing skills and lesson goals of the students. For Elitech students at Hanoi University of Science and Technology (HUST), these activities could enhance their learning experience by connecting their current proficiency with the communicative demands of their field. Additionally, Krashen's theory of language acquisition emphasized the importance of comprehensible input and a low-stress environment for effective learning [10]. Integrating warm-up activities into small talk settings aligned with these principles, fostering critical thinking and language development [7], [11]. Obviously, small talk is a vital component of social interaction and professional communication. It involves brief exchanges on non-controversial topics and includes fixed expressions like greetings and farewells [1], [2]. Warm-up activities could help students master these fixed expressions, develop fluency in predictable topics, and become more comfortable with casual conversations. This is crucial for engineering students who need to communicate effectively in various professional settings [1], [3].

The integration of warm-up activities into language learning for engineering students was supported by multiple theoretical frameworks and empirical studies, underscoring the significance of this research. ZPD highlighted the role of scaffolding in bridging the gap between current skills and learning objectives, suggesting that warm-up activities could effectively support this process for HUST Elitech students [9]. Krashen's theory of language acquisition further emphasized the importance of providing comprehensible input in a low-stress environment, where warm-up activities could facilitate, thereby enhancing language acquisition and critical thinking [10]. Additionally, Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences advocated for tailored educational approaches that addressed diverse learning styles, indicating that customized warm-up activities can cater to individual strengths and improve language learning outcomes [11]. By synthesizing these perspectives, this research aimed to fill the gap in literature regarding the practical application of warm-up activities in technical education, providing valuable insights for educators and contributing to the development of more effective language teaching methodologies [8].

The primary objective of this study was to integrate warm-up activities into the English language curriculum for Elitech students at HUST. These activities were designed to engage students, create a positive learning environment, and enhance participation, ultimately improving their speaking skills and overall language proficiency [7]. By focusing on the specific needs of engineering students, this research sought to develop pedagogical approaches that can be effectively implemented in technical education settings. The study also aimed to provide empirical evidence on the benefits of warm-up activities in language learning, thereby encouraging educators to adopt these practices in their teaching methodologies [3], [4]. It investigated two research questions (RQ):

- **RQ1:** What are the typical features of warm-up activities that HUST Elitech students believed support their learning of English small talk?

- **RQ2:** How might the students perceive these warm-up activities aid the learning of English small talks?

## 2. Research Methodology

To investigate student perceptions about how warm-up activities contribute to small talk learning, we employed a qualitative research approach. According to Asper and Corte [13], qualitative research involved an iterative process where researchers gain deeper insights into a phenomenon by continuously refining their understanding through exploration. This method often focused on specific individuals, events, and contexts, allowing for a detailed analysis tailored to each case [14]. Qualitative research enables researchers to grasp participants' perspectives, experiences, and the meanings they attach to certain phenomena, providing a comprehensive understanding of the topic. Additionally, qualitative methods are flexible and adaptable, allowing researchers to modify their approach based on emerging findings and participant feedback.

The research employed qualitative methods involving two sources of interview data: initial in-depth interviews with seven participants from the B1 HUST Elitech program, specifically those studying IELTS Speaking 1, integrating small talks in exams and lessons and follow-up interviews in depth with four Elitech students at Hanoi University of Science and Technology to gather insights from learners [15]. In fact, the objective of the Elitech program was to train high-quality human resources in science and technology for socio-economic development. Elaborately, each of the initial interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes, including a total of 10 questions divided into three main aspects of warm-up activities. Three questions focused on identifying typical features of warm-up activities, such as social support networks, engagement, and relevance to real-life scenarios. Four questions explored the application of these activities in enhancing English small talk skills, examining how participants applied these activities in their learning process. Lastly, three questions addressed the perceived benefits of warm-up activities, investigating improvements in confidence, engagement, and practical language use. This structured approach ensured a comprehensive exploration of the participants' experiences and insights into the effectiveness of warm-up activities.

In this study, in-depth interviews with four Elitech students at Hanoi University of Science and Technology aided to explore their perceptions of warm-up activities in learning English small talks. It is evident that it provided rich, nuanced data that helped identify key themes and pedagogical implications for enhancing that learning. These questions were targeted to detect effective warm-up activities and understand their perceived benefits in enhancing the conversational skills of the students.

In terms of data analysis methods, thematic coding and triangulation were used. Thematic coding, a flexible qualitative data-analyzing method, involved identifying patterns or themes within the data [16]. This method allowed researchers to uncover emerging themes without being constrained by predefined categories [17], providing a comprehensive understanding of how warm-up activities impacted the learning of small talks from the perspectives of language

learners. The researchers began by thoroughly reading the interview transcripts multiple times to gain a deep understanding of the content and context [16]. This immersion helped identify subtle nuances and recurring ideas, such as the importance of social support and real-life relevance of warm-up activities. Several significant passages were assigned to descriptive tags to capture the essence of the information [15]. These tags helped organize the data into segments related to students' experiences and perceived benefits, such as increased confidence, improved engagement, and practical application of skills.

Broad insights from seven focused interviews identified preliminary themes like social support networks, learner engagement, and real-life relevance. The in-depth interviews of four students provided detailed insights, reinforcing and expanding these themes. The participants shared their personal stories, clarifying the themes given and revealing additional aspects. These narratives provided a richer understanding of the themes and uncovered new sub-themes, such as the role of peer support in overcoming language anxiety in the acquisition of English small talks.

The triangulation involved comparing and cross verifying the themes identified in both sets of interviews to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. This process facilitated the confirmed consistency of the data and provided a robust grasp of the participants' perceptions and experiences. By integrating insights from both sources, the analysis highlighted effective warm-up activities and their perceived benefits, ensuring a thorough and systematic examination of the data from multiple perspectives.

### 3. Findings and Discussion

The data analyses above detailed the key findings from the data collected on HUST Elitech students' perceptions of warm-up activities and discusses their implications in relation to existing literature on language acquisition and educational practices. Each subsection addressed specific aspects of warm-up activities identified in the study and explains why these findings were relevant and appropriate for answering the research questions posed in this research.

#### 3.1. Perceived typical features of warm-up activities (RQ1)

The findings identified several typical features of warm-up activities that HUST Elitech students believed support their learning of English small talks. These features included social support networks, engagement and enjoyment, and relevance to real-life scenarios.

First, the support from peers and instructors was crucial for student engagement and confidence. This finding aligned with Vygotsky's [9] theory of the Zone of Proximal Development, which emphasized the role of social interaction in learning. According to Vygotsky [9], learning occurred most effectively within a learner's immediate potential for growth, facilitated by supportive guidance. The supportive environment created by warm-up activities helped students feel more confident and engaged, facilitating effective language acquisition. This is consistent with the findings of Smith [17], who highlighted the importance of social support networks in education.

Besides that, the students reported that warm-up activities, such as vocabulary games and storytelling, made the learning process enjoyable and engaging. This finding is consistent with research by Akther and Ashia [6], who highlighted the importance of creating a positive learning environment through engaging activities. The enjoyable nature of these activities helped students relax and prepare mentally for the lesson, increasing their participation and interest in learning English small talks. Saputra [5] also found that engaging activities could significantly enhance student engagement and participation.

Lastly, the participants appreciated warm-up activities that were relevant to real-life scenarios. This finding supports Krashen's theory of language acquisition [10], which emphasized the importance of comprehensible input in a low-stress environment. Activities that simulate everyday conversations or technical discussions in English help students see the practical

application of their language skills, making the learning experience more meaningful. Gardner's theory of multiple intelligence also advocated for tailored educational approaches that addressed diverse learning styles, indicating that customized warm-up activities could cater to individual strengths and improve language learning outcomes [11].

Obviously, the finding underscored the numerous advantages of warm-up activities in enhancing HUST Elitech students' proficiency in English small talks. By fostering a supportive social environment, making learning enjoyable, and ensuring relevance to real-life scenarios, these activities not only boosted student engagement and confidence but also aligned with established educational theories. The integration of such activities into language learning curricula could significantly improve students' communicative competence and overall learning experience. Future research could explore the long-term impacts of these activities on language retention and fluency, further validating their effectiveness in diverse educational settings.

### **3.2. Perceived ways of how warm-up activities aid English small talk learning (RQ2)**

The findings indicated that warm-up activities significantly aided the learning of English small talks for HUST Elitech students by building confidence, fostering resilience, and enhancing professional growth. Warm-up activities were particularly effective in matching the learning needs of English small talks due to several key features. Firstly, they created a low-stress environment that helped students relax and reduces anxiety, which is crucial for building confidence in speaking [9]. This aligned with the need for a comfortable setting where students could practice small talk without fear of making mistakes. Secondly, warm-up activities often involved interactive exercises such as role-playing and group discussions, which enhanced active listening skills and encouraged meaningful exchanges. These skills were essential for engaging in small talks, where listening and responding appropriately are key components [10]. By simulating real-life conversations, these activities provided practical applications of language skills, motivating students to improve their proficiency and see the value of their learning efforts [11].

Moreover, warm-up activities addressed various barriers to language learning, such as anxiety and lack of resources, by providing a supportive environment [10]. They enhanced active listening skills through interactive exercises like role-playing and group discussions, which were essential for effective communication. These activities also expanded students' vocabulary and expression through games and storytelling, helping them develop fluency in predictable topics and master fixed expressions commonly used in casual conversations [11]. This is particularly beneficial for engineering students who need to communicate effectively in various professional settings. Furthermore, the relevance of these activities to real-life scenarios enhanced their effectiveness, as students could see the practical application of their language skills, increasing their engagement and participation [9].

In summary, the findings above indicated that the study provided valuable insights for educators aiming to improve their teaching methods and better support the language acquisition journeys of the students. The enhancement of confidence and engagement, development of resilience, impact of mentorship, and mitigation of barriers were all critical factors that contributed to the effectiveness of warm-up activities in English language learning of small talks.

## **4. Pedagogical Implications and Conclusion**

From the findings above, several important implications have been made for educators and institutions aiming to upgrade the learning of English small talk, particularly in technical fields. Warm-up activities played a crucial role in enhancing HUST Elitech students' ability to engage in English small talks. By creating a low-stress environment, these activities helped students relax and reduce anxiety, which is essential for practicing small talks without the fear of making mistakes. This supportive atmosphere aligned with educational theories emphasizing the importance of guidance and social interaction in learning. As a result, students felt more

confident and engaged, which is vital for effective small talk practice. Engagement and enjoyment were significantly enhanced through warm-up activities, which is particularly beneficial for learning English small talks. Activities such as vocabulary games and storytelling made the learning process enjoyable and engaging, helping students to relax and mentally prepare for the lesson. When students find the activities enjoyable, they are more likely to participate actively and retain the conversational skills they acquire.

The practical application of language skills is another key benefit of warm-up activities, especially for small talks. By simulating everyday conversations or technical discussions in English, these activities helped students see the relevance of their language skills in real-life scenarios. This makes the learning experience more meaningful and aligns with theories emphasizing the importance of relevant and comprehensible input in a low-stress environment. When students could relate their learning to real-life situations, they were more motivated to improve their proficiency in small talks. Warm-up activities also contributed to the development of essential communication skills needed for small talks. Interactive exercises such as role-playing and group discussions enhanced active listening skills and encouraged meaningful exchanges. These skills are vital for engaging in small talks, where listening and responding appropriately are key components. This is particularly beneficial for engineering students who need to communicate effectively in various professional settings. By practicing these skills in a supportive environment, students could develop the confidence and competence needed for effective small talk.

In conclusion, the study at Hanoi University of Science and Technology highlighted the importance of warm-up activities in supporting the learning of English small talks, particularly for technical students. These activities enhanced the confidence and engagement of the students, creating a positive learning environment. They also built flexibility, crucial for technical fields, and mentorship during these sessions boosted professional growth and confidence in using English. Additionally, addressing barriers like discrimination through warm-up activities advances an inclusive atmosphere. Clearly, incorporating these strategies could significantly further English language learning and sustain both the academic and professional development of the students.

Despite the significance, the sample size of the study was relatively small, potentially affecting the generalizability of the results. Additionally, the short duration of the study might not capture long-term effects. The reliance on self-reported data could introduce bias, and the lack of a control group limits the ability to draw causal conclusions. Thus, future research should include larger, more diverse samples and longer follow-up periods to validate the findings of the study.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] K. Schwab, "The Fourth Industrial Revolution," Crown Business, 2016. [Online]. Available: [https://law.unimelb.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0005/3385454/Schwab-The\\_Fourth\\_Industrial\\_Revolution\\_Klaus\\_S.pdf](https://law.unimelb.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/3385454/Schwab-The_Fourth_Industrial_Revolution_Klaus_S.pdf). [Accessed Nov. 25, 2024].
- [2] World Economic Forum, *The Future of Jobs Report 2018*, World Economic Forum, 2018.
- [3] J. Kim, "Enhancing language skills in engineering education," *Journal of Technical Education*, vol. 15, no. 1, pp. 34-50, 2019. [Online]. Available: <https://www.weforum.org/publications/the-future-of-jobs-report-2018/>. [Accessed Dec. 1, 2024].
- [4] J. Juhary, "Industrial revolution 4.0 and its impact on language and cultural studies," *International Journal of Languages, Literature and Linguistics*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 65-68, 2020. [Online]. Available: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341483217\\_Industrial\\_Revolution\\_40\\_and\\_Its\\_Impact\\_on\\_Language\\_and\\_Cultural\\_Studies](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341483217_Industrial_Revolution_40_and_Its_Impact_on_Language_and_Cultural_Studies). [Accessed Apr. 2, 2025].
- [5] K. D. O. Qizi, "The Effectiveness of Using Warm-Up Activities in Language Teaching," *International Journal on Integrated Education*, vol. 6, no. 8, pp. 133-135, 2023, doi: 10.17605/ijie.v6i8.4745.
- [6] H. Savaş, "Maintaining the Efficacy of Warm-up Activities in EFL Classrooms: An Exploratory Action Research," *Journal of Qualitative Research in Education*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 1-25, 2016, doi: 10.14689/issn.2148-2624.1.4c2s4m.

- [7] T. T. H. Le and T. C. Nguyen, "Perceptions and Practices of Warm-up Activities by English Teachers in Thai Nguyen," *IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education (IOSR-JRME)*, vol. 3, no. 12, pp. 05-12, 2022. [Online]. Available: <https://www.iosrjournals.org/iosr-jrme/papers/Vol-12%20Issue-3/Ser-1/B1203010512.pdf>. [Accessed Apr. 2, 2025].
- [8] I. M. Chirișescu and F. A. Păunescu, "Innovative methods and techniques of languages teaching and learning," *International Journal of Arts & Sciences*, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 375-382, 2017. [Online]. Available: <https://www.universitypublications.net/ijas/1001/pdf/S7Y14.pdf>. [Accessed Jan. 10, 2025].
- [9] L. S. Vygotsky, "Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes," Harvard University Press, 1978. [Online]. Available: [https://w.pauldowling.me/rtf/2021.1/readings/LSVygotsky\\_1978\\_MindinSocietyDevelopmentofHigherPsycholo.pdf](https://w.pauldowling.me/rtf/2021.1/readings/LSVygotsky_1978_MindinSocietyDevelopmentofHigherPsycholo.pdf). [Accessed May 15, 2023].
- [10] S. Krashen, "Theory versus practice in language training," In *Enriching ESOL pedagogy*, Routledge, 2002, pp. 235-252. [Online]. Available: [https://www.sdkrashen.com/content/books/principles\\_and\\_practice.pdf](https://www.sdkrashen.com/content/books/principles_and_practice.pdf). [Accessed May 10, 2023].
- [11] K. Davis, J. Christodoulou, S. Seider, and H. E. Gardner, "The theory of multiple intelligences," in *Cambridge Handbook of Intelligence*, R. J. Sternberg and S. B. Kaufman (Eds.), 2011, pp. 485-503. [Online]. Available: <https://shorturl.at/ykPiu>. [Accessed June 06, 2023].
- [12] M. K. McCuddy, M. Pinar, and E. F. Gingerich, "Using student feedback in designing student-focused curricula," *International Journal of Educational Management*, vol. 22, no. 7, pp. 611-637, 2008. [Online]. Available: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/235262567\\_Using\\_student\\_feedback\\_in\\_designing\\_student-focused\\_curricula](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/235262567_Using_student_feedback_in_designing_student-focused_curricula). [Accessed Dec. 1, 2024].
- [13] A. Cropley, "Qualitative research methods: A practice-oriented introduction," *Bucharest: Editura Intaglio*, 2022. [Online]. Available: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/285471178\\_Qualitative\\_Research\\_Methods\\_A\\_Practice-Oriented\\_Introduction](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/285471178_Qualitative_Research_Methods_A_Practice-Oriented_Introduction). [Accessed Nov. 20, 2024].
- [14] J. Gerring, "Qualitative methods," *Annual Review of Political Science*, 2017. [Online]. Available: <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev-polisci-092415-024158>. [Accessed Dec. 10, 2024].
- [15] D. C. Diehl and D. McDonald, "Conducting an in-depth interview," *Florida Online Journals*, 2013. [Online]. Available: <https://journals.flvc.org/edis/article/download/127025/126671>. [Accessed Dec. 10, 2024].
- [16] G. Gibbs, "Analyzing qualitative data," *Sage Publications*, 2007. [Online]. Available: [https://www.betterevaluation.org/sites/default/files/Thematic\\_coding\\_and\\_categorizing.pdf](https://www.betterevaluation.org/sites/default/files/Thematic_coding_and_categorizing.pdf). [Accessed Dec. 10, 2024].
- [17] L. B. Rosenfeld, J. M. Richman, and G. L. Bowen, "Social support networks and school outcomes: The centrality of the teacher," *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, vol. 17, pp. 205-226, 2000. [Online]. Available: <https://shorturl.at/bMMYK>. [Accessed Dec. 29, 2024].