

CHALLENGES ENGLISH TEACHERS FACE IN TEACHING SPEAKING SKILLS: A GUIDE FOR A REMEDIAL PROGRAM

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Received:	18/4/2025	This study aims to examine the challenges that English teachers face when teaching speaking skills to non-English major students and to develop a remedial program that addresses their specific needs. Using a descriptive research methodology, the study involved classroom observations, conducted with 62 first-year students from Thai Nguyen University of Agriculture and Forestry over the course of one semester and interviews with 5 English teachers. The data analysis identified several key challenges faced by students and teachers, including limited vocabulary, lack of confidence, inadequate pronunciation skills, and passive learning tendencies among students, along with difficulties in classroom management, student engagement, and providing sufficient speaking opportunities in large classes for the teachers. Quantitative data from the student surveys revealed that more than 70% of the students experienced anxiety when speaking English, while 65% expressed the need for more structured support to enhance their speaking proficiency. Based on these findings, a tailored support program was proposed, incorporating communicative activities, task-based learning, and pronunciation training. The study concludes that with the implementation of appropriate pedagogical strategies, including the integration of AI tools, teachers can significantly improve students' speaking performance and boost their confidence in English communication. AI-driven feedback and simulation activities are expected to enhance students' speaking opportunities and reduce anxiety. The findings of this research are expected to contribute to the development of more effective teaching methodologies in similar English as a foreign language contexts.
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NHỮNG THÁCH THỨC MÀ GIÁNG VIÊN TIẾNG ANH GẶP PHẢI TRONG VIỆC DẠY KỸ NĂNG NÓI: ĐỀ XUẤT CHƯƠNG TRÌNH HỖ TRỢ

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THÔNG TIN BÀI BÁO		TÓM TẮT
Ngày nhận bài:	18/4/2025	Nghiên cứu này nhằm khảo sát những thách thức mà giảng viên tiếng Anh gặp phải khi dạy kỹ năng nói cho sinh viên không chuyên tiếng Anh và đề xuất một chương trình hỗ trợ khắc phục các vấn đề cụ thể của họ. Sử dụng phương pháp nghiên cứu mô tả, nghiên cứu này đã thực hiện quan sát lớp học trong suốt một học kỳ, khảo sát 62 sinh viên năm thứ nhất và phỏng vấn 5 giảng viên tiếng Anh của Trường Đại học Nông Lâm – Đại học Thái Nguyên. Phân tích dữ liệu đã chỉ ra một số thách thức chính mà sinh viên và giảng viên gặp phải, bao gồm từ vựng hạn chế, thiếu tự tin, kỹ năng phát âm chưa đủ tốt và thái độ học thụ động của sinh viên, cùng với những khó khăn trong quản lý lớp học, thu hút sự chú ý của sinh viên và cung cấp cơ hội thực hành nói trong lớp học đồng học sinh đối với giảng viên. Dữ liệu định lượng từ khảo sát sinh viên cho thấy hơn 70% sinh viên cảm thấy lo lắng khi nói tiếng Anh, trong khi 65% cho biết họ cần sự hỗ trợ có cấu trúc hơn để cải thiện khả năng nói của mình. Dựa trên những phát hiện này, một chương trình hỗ trợ được thiết kế riêng đã được đề xuất, bao gồm các hoạt động giao tiếp, học dựa trên nhiệm vụ và đào tạo phát âm. Nghiên cứu kết luận rằng với việc triển khai các chiến lược sư phạm phù hợp, bao gồm việc tích hợp công cụ AI, giảng viên có thể cải thiện đáng kể hiệu quả nói của sinh viên và tăng cường sự tự tin của họ trong giao tiếp tiếng Anh. Phản hồi và các hoạt động mô phỏng dựa trên AI dự kiến sẽ nâng cao cơ hội nói của sinh viên và giảm bớt lo âu. Các phát hiện từ nghiên cứu này được kỳ vọng sẽ đóng góp vào sự phát triển các phương pháp giảng dạy hiệu quả hơn trong các bối cảnh tiếng Anh như một ngoại ngữ tương tự.
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1. Introduction

Speaking represents a core communicative competence in language acquisition, enabling learners to convey ideas and engage in authentic interactions. Despite its importance, the teaching of speaking in many English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts remains fraught with pedagogical challenges. Among the most common obstacles are learners' anxiety, scarce practice opportunities, and limited exposure to authentic language use [1]. Notably, language anxiety has been widely recognized as a major impediment, characterized by fear of negative evaluation, fear of failure, and difficulty in expressing thoughts clearly [2], [3]. In under-resourced educational environments, the absence of authentic speaking contexts further hampers oral fluency development.

Educators must also address various systemic constraints, including overcrowded classrooms, insufficient training in communicative teaching methods, and external pressures to meet examination benchmarks [4]. To mitigate these challenges, innovative teaching approaches such as Project-Based Learning and the use of AI-assisted technologies, including ChatGPT-4 and mobile applications, have emerged as promising strategies for enhancing speaking instruction [5], [6]. These approaches promote student-centered learning environments in which learners are more engaged and supported in practicing spoken communication effectively.

Although speaking plays a crucial role in language acquisition and learner confidence, it often receives less instructional attention than skills like grammar and reading, which align more closely with traditional testing formats [7]. However, studies have shown that technological tools can significantly enhance speaking outcomes by lowering learners' affective barriers, offering immediate feedback, and enabling additional practice beyond class time [8]. AI-powered platforms in particular have demonstrated their ability to simulate real-life conversations and provide customized feedback, thereby supporting fluency development in meaningful ways [9].

A persistent issue is the limited exposure to English outside of formal education. Regular and meaningful interaction with the target language is vital for reinforcing linguistic patterns and improving fluency [10]. In response, teachers have adopted real-world communication tasks and digital tools such as Quizizz in conjunction with project-based learning. These methods have shown positive results in developing vocabulary and oral proficiency in various EFL settings, including those in Indonesia [11]. Moreover, asynchronous platforms such as Flipgrid offer students more flexible opportunities to practice speaking and receive feedback, particularly in large classes where individual speaking time is often constrained [12].

Despite these advancements, grammar-oriented instruction continues to dominate many EFL classrooms due to rigid curricula and limited teaching resources. As a result, opportunities for meaningful spoken interaction remain scarce. Digital tools such as ChatGPT-4, when incorporated into communicative frameworks, can help overcome this limitation by facilitating simulated conversational practice and encouraging learner participation [13]. Recent research also highlights how AI-based instruction can offer accessible, personalized support, particularly for students who are not majoring in English [14], [15].

Another challenge involves the overemphasis on standardized assessments, which often leads to the neglect of oral language skills. This issue can be addressed through more formative assessment strategies, including oral presentations and role-play activities, which provide a more holistic understanding of learners' speaking abilities [16].

To emphasize the relevance and originality of the present study, it is necessary to compare its scope with prior research. Several studies have investigated the challenges of teaching speaking to non-English major students, focusing on psychological aspects, the impact of project-based learning, and the use of AI tools.

One study highlighted how psychological barriers such as anxiety and lack of confidence negatively affected the speaking performance of first-year students [17]. While that research focused on affective dimensions, the current study takes a broader view by incorporating a

remedial program designed to simultaneously improve speaking competence and build confidence. Another study demonstrated the benefits of project-based learning in promoting student collaboration and oral output [18], whereas the current study introduces a more flexible intervention that combines conventional instruction with technological enhancements.

In addition, recent studies examining AI applications such as ChatGPT-4 have reported their effectiveness in enhancing communication skills by delivering real-time feedback and personalized learning experiences [19]. However, the present study expands on this by integrating AI into a structured remedial program, offering more systematic and targeted support for non-English major students.

By synthesizing psychological, instructional, and technological elements into a unified intervention model, this research provides valuable insights into how speaking instruction can be improved for learners in higher education settings who face substantial communicative challenges.

2. Method

2.1. The population of the study

This study focuses on a population of 62 first-year students at Thai Nguyen University of Agriculture and Forestry (TUAF), who are enrolled in English language courses at the university's English center. All participants were motivated to improve their English communication skills, particularly speaking. The group consists of 25 male and 37 female students.

The research began with a placement test to assess the students' English proficiency and to select appropriate textbooks. Subsequently, 62 students with similar test scores were selected to participate in the speaking improvement program. The program was conducted over one semester, lasting 14 weeks, and included communication activities and practice using various teaching methods aimed at improving students' speaking skills and confidence.

The first lesson in the program was designed to be an icebreaker, helping to create a comfortable environment for students to engage in speaking activities, reduce anxiety, and encourage active participation. Upon completing the program, students reflected on the challenges they faced in developing speaking skills, particularly their fear of making mistakes, the lack of opportunities for practice outside the classroom, and limited exposure to English in real-world contexts. As a result, the researchers decided to incorporate project-based learning (PBL) and modern learning tools, such as mobile applications and AI technologies, to address these challenges.

2.2. The research instruments

The researcher employed the following instruments in this study: classroom observations, student surveys, and teacher interviews.

A series of classroom observations were conducted across various English-speaking classes at TUAF. These observations aimed to identify the difficulties teachers faced while delivering speaking lessons. Observation sessions were carried out twice a month over one academic semester and focused on aspects such as student engagement, teaching techniques, error correction, and classroom interaction. The researcher used an observation checklist adapted from Ur [9], which allowed for systematic data collection related to teaching practices and learner responses.

A structured questionnaire was distributed to 62 first-year non-English major students who were enrolled in an English communication course. The questionnaire consisted of both multiple-choice and open-ended questions aimed at understanding students' attitudes, motivation, and perceived difficulties regarding speaking English. The items focused on factors such as speaking anxiety, vocabulary limitations, pronunciation challenges, and opportunities to speak English both inside and outside the classroom. The survey followed a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly agree" (5) to "strongly disagree" (1), and Vietnamese translations were provided to ensure accurate understanding.

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with five English teachers at the university who had at least three years of experience in teaching speaking skills. Each interview lasted between 30 to 45 minutes and explored the teachers' perspectives on student needs, available materials, classroom constraints, and their personal strategies for enhancing speaking performance. The interviews were recorded and transcribed with the participants' consent for qualitative analysis.

2.3. Data collection

The study was conducted over one academic semester at TUAF with the participation of 62 first-year non-English major students and their English teachers. Data collection included five steps as follows:

Step 1: In the first month, classroom observations were carried out weekly to identify common teaching practices, student responses and classroom dynamics during speaking lessons.

Step 2: In the fifth week, a structured questionnaire was distributed to students to collect their perceptions of the challenges in learning speaking skills and their expectations for support.

Step 3: In the sixth and seventh weeks, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five English teachers to explore the difficulties they experienced in teaching speaking skills.

Step 4: In the eighth week, informal discussions were conducted with selected students and teachers to verify and clarify the information collected in the earlier stages.

Step 5: In the final weeks of the semester, all collected data were analyzed and synthesized to design a support program addressing the identified challenges and promoting students' speaking skill development.

2.4. Data analysis

To identify the main challenges in teaching speaking skills and inform the development of a support program, data from classroom observations, student surveys, and teacher interviews were analyzed. Descriptive statistics from the surveys were processed using SPSS 20, while qualitative data from interviews and observations were thematically analyzed to identify recurring patterns and concerns.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Empirical insights into challenges in teaching speaking skills

Table 1 highlights several key challenges students face in developing their English speaking skills. Fear of making mistakes, lack of speaking opportunities, and limited use of English outside the classroom are significant barriers, with 82%, 76%, and 88% of students affected, respectively. These issues prevent students from gaining confidence and fluency in speaking. Additionally, 64% of students struggle with pronunciation models, and 70% report boredom with traditional teaching methods, further hindering their progress.

To address these challenges, a more interactive and student-centered approach is needed. Teachers should create a supportive environment where mistakes are viewed as part of the learning process. Providing more speaking opportunities in class, incorporating real-life practice, and using engaging teaching methods can help students overcome these obstacles and improve their speaking skills.

In conclusion, the data suggests that by shifting to more dynamic, student-focused teaching methods, students can be better supported in developing their speaking abilities.

Table 1. Summary of survey responses

No.	Issues	Percentage of students affected (%)
1	Fear of making mistakes while speaking	82
2	Lack of speaking opportunities in class	76
3	Rare use of English outside the classroom	88
4	Difficulty understanding pronunciation models	64
5	Boredom with traditional teaching methods	70

3.2. A Guide for a remedial program

To address the speaking challenges faced by first-year English major students at TUAF, a remedial program should be designed with clear objectives, practical strategies, and supportive tools. This program aims to enhance students' confidence, participation, and oral fluency through structured practice and continuous feedback.

The first component of the program focuses on building a supportive classroom environment. Teachers should adopt positive reinforcement techniques, encourage peer collaboration, and minimize the fear of making mistakes. Regular pair and group activities can promote mutual support and reduce anxiety, while flexible seating arrangements and inclusive classroom language help foster a psychologically safe space for speaking.

The second component emphasizes the integration of communicative tasks that mirror real-life contexts. Activities such as storytelling, debate, and role-playing are particularly effective in promoting spontaneous speaking and vocabulary usage [9]. These tasks not only simulate authentic communication but also create opportunities for students to personalize their responses and engage more deeply with the language.

The third component involves the integration of digital tools and AI-powered resources. Platforms like Flipgrid can be used to collect students' video responses outside of class, allowing teachers to provide individualized feedback and enabling students to self-assess their progress. Applications such as Duolingo or Elsa Speak can support pronunciation improvement, while AI chatbots like ChatGPT-4 can simulate real-life conversations, helping students to gain confidence and practice in a low-pressure environment [10] - [12].

Additionally, the program should include regular formative assessments to monitor progress and provide timely feedback. Oral presentations, peer evaluations, and teacher-student conferencing are useful techniques that allow students to reflect on their speaking abilities and set personal learning goals. This ongoing assessment process fosters learner autonomy and keeps students engaged throughout the learning journey.

Finally, the remedial program should be flexible and adaptive to learners' needs. Teachers are encouraged to gather feedback frequently and adjust content, pace, and activities accordingly. By combining supportive pedagogy, authentic speaking tasks, technology integration, and continuous assessment, the program can effectively address the current shortcomings in speaking instruction and significantly improve students' oral communication skills.

3.3. Analysis of student speaking performance improvement following the remedial program

Table 2 provides a detailed comparison of student speaking performance before and after participating in the remedial program. The data clearly demonstrates substantial improvements across all evaluated criteria, highlighting the positive impact of the program on the students' speaking abilities. Fluency, a critical aspect of speaking skills, showed a significant increase, rising from a pre-program average of 4.1 to 5.9, suggesting that students became more confident and fluid in their speech. Similarly, pronunciation clarity, which is often a challenge for EFL learners, improved from 4.4 to 5.6, reflecting enhanced articulation and the ability to produce clearer sounds.

Perhaps most notably, the students' willingness to participate in speaking activities grew considerably, increasing from an average of 3.7 before the program to 5.5 afterward. This shift indicates that the program helped reduce anxiety and created a more supportive environment for students to engage in speaking tasks. Additionally, vocabulary use showed a notable increase, from 4.9 to 6.1, suggesting that students not only improved their fluency but also expanded their lexical range, allowing them to express themselves more effectively and precisely.

These improvements are a testament to the program's success in addressing key speaking challenges such as anxiety, limited speaking opportunities, and lack of real-world practice. The overall progress in all four criteria underscores the importance of integrating interactive,

communicative methods in language instruction. The data from Table 2 confirm that the remedial program was effective in fostering essential speaking skills, offering valuable insights into how targeted interventions can significantly enhance student performance in contexts of English as a foreign language.

Table 2. Comparison of student speaking performance (before and after program)

No.	Criteria	Pre-program average (out of 10)	Post-program average (out of 10)
1	Fluency	4.1	5.9
2	Pronunciation clarity	4.4	5.6
3	Willingness to Participate	3.7	5.5
4	Vocabulary use	4.9	6.1

4. Conclusion

This study explored the challenges English teachers face in teaching speaking skills and evaluated a remedial program designed to improve students' performance. Findings show that student anxiety, limited speaking opportunities, and large class sizes are key obstacles, compounded by limited teacher training and exam pressure.

The remedial program, which utilized communicative activities, project-based tasks, and digital tools, helped improve students' fluency, pronunciation, and confidence. Data from pre- and post-program assessments showed clear progress, aligning with previous studies emphasizing interactive, student-centered approaches [1], [4], [9], [11], [12].

However, students still lack real-life speaking practice, and teachers require more support and resources. To address this, schools should integrate more speaking tasks into the curriculum, adapt technology to student needs, and provide continuous teacher training. Flexible assessment methods are also essential for more accurate tracking of speaking progress.

In conclusion, this study underscores the need for further research with larger sample sizes and longer durations. It provides a foundation for improving speaking instruction in EFL classrooms, aiding teachers and students in overcoming persistent challenges in developing effective speaking skills.

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