

USING EXTRA CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' ENGLISH SPEAKING FLUENCY AT A GIFTED SCHOOL IN THE NORTH OF VIETNAM

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ARTICLE INFO		ABSTRACT
Received:	11/4/2023	This action research was carried out at a Gifted High School in the North of Vietnam in order to improve the students' speaking fluency after participating in extracurricular activities and find out suitable extracurricular activities for them. The research process was divided into seven key steps including selecting a focus, taking action, collecting data, analyzing and interpreting the data, modifying action reflection and reporting action research. Speaking tests, observation checklists, and questionnaires were employed as parts of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The study's findings showed that there was noticeable improvement in the students' speaking fluency, and extracurricular activities assisted them become more fluent speakers. Moreover, they became more enthusiastic and active in doing speaking activities, and they were excited about carrying out their speaking tasks through extracurricular activities. In conclusion, the objective of this research was successfully achieved through the implementation of extracurricular activities.
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CẢI THIỆN KHẢ NĂNG NÓI TIẾNG ANH TRÔI CHẢY CỦA HỌC SINH THÔNG QUA HOẠT ĐỘNG NGOẠI KHÓA Ở MỘT TRƯỜNG PHỔ THÔNG CHUYÊN Ở PHÍA BẮC VIỆT NAM

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THÔNG TIN BÀI BÁO		TÓM TẮT
Ngày nhận bài:	11/4/2023	Nghiên cứu hành động này được tiến hành tại một trường Trung học Phổ thông Chuyên ở miền Bắc Việt Nam nhằm cải thiện khả năng nói lưu loát của học sinh sau khi tham gia các hoạt động ngoại khóa và tìm ra các hoạt động ngoại khóa phù hợp với các em. Quá trình nghiên cứu được chia thành bảy bước chính bao gồm chọn trọng tâm, thực hiện hành động, thu thập dữ liệu, phân tích và giải thích dữ liệu, sửa đổi phản ánh hành động và báo cáo nghiên cứu hành động. Các bài kiểm tra nói, danh sách kiểm tra quan sát và bảng câu hỏi được sử dụng như một phần của cả phương pháp định tính và định lượng. Kết quả của nghiên cứu cho thấy có sự cải thiện rõ rệt về khả năng nói lưu loát của học sinh và hoạt động ngoại khóa đã giúp các em trở thành những người nói tiếng Anh lưu loát hơn. Hơn nữa, các em trở nên nhiệt tình và tích cực hơn trong các hoạt động nói, và các em hào hứng thực hiện các nhiệm vụ nói của mình thông qua các hoạt động ngoại khóa. Tóm lại, mục tiêu của nghiên cứu đã đạt được thành công thông qua việc thực hiện các hoạt động ngoại khóa.
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1. Introduction

In Vietnam, English becomes a compulsory subject in a high school graduation exam as well as a certificate needed for higher education. Therefore, each learner must be equipped with a certain level of English to prepare for exams and graduation and to communicate in their English class or their working environment. To supplement the deficiency needs of the society and the learners in Vietnam, in the general education curriculum designed by the Ministry of Education and Training, English is taught with the aim at communication. Consequently, forming communication skills, especially speaking skill, is one of the goals of the teaching process, and the learning environment in general and the English practice environment in particular play a vital role.

1.1. English speaking skills

Speaking can be defined in a variety of ways. Bailey and Lance Savage [1] state that “speaking is the productive oral skill”. Brown and Burns [2], [3] claim that speaking is an interactive process of meaning construction that includes producing, receiving, and processing information. Its form and meaning are determined by the context, which includes the participants, their collective experiences, the physical environment, and the reasons for speaking. It is frequently impromptu, open-ended, and evolving. According to Goh [4, p. 105], as an important aspect of language skills, English speaking should not be diminished but be “developed in its own right”.

1.2. Speaking fluency

Fluency is the area of language competence that refers to the speed and ease with which a language learner performs in one of these four core language skills. Fluency is a term that applies to all four language skills; however, it is most frequently connected to speaking. Hughes [5] identifies fluency as the learners’ ability to speak understandably and not break down communication because listeners may lose interest. Hedge [6] defines speaking fluency as “the capacity to connect speech units with ease, without strain, improper slowness, or excessive hesitation”.

Speaking fluency is “the features which give the speech the qualities of being natural and normal, including the native-like use of pausing, rhythm, intonation, stress, the rate of speaking, and use of interjections and interruptions” [6]. Speaker conveys the messages in a natural way that the listener can understand. Fluency, according to Skehan [7], is the capacity to continue speaking at a regular pace without pausing.

1.3. Extra-curricular activities

Extracurricular activities are those that are organized by the school and held at the school but are not part of the academic curriculum. Extracurricular activities can include a wide range of activities, including sports that are not organized or supervised, as long as they involve a social community [8]. Extracurricular activities, on the other hand, are separate from unstructured and unsupervised social activities such as chatting or playing sports with friends, according to [9]. Extracurricular activities could emphasize community, communication, leadership, and other social skill-building and positive development for students if they are structured and supervised by educators.

Holt, Sehn, and Spence [10] state that extracurricular activities assist children to develop competence and confidence by guiding them toward proper behaviors and activities while challenging them. These learning settings provide pupils with a safe environment as well as numerous (social) learning opportunities [11]. Thus, extracurricular activities may reduce harmful behaviors in students' development and instead provide good influences on students such as discipline, intelligence, confidence, and character.

1.4. Previous studies related to using extracurricular activities to improve students’ speaking skill

In an investigation into how extracurricular activities can help students improve their speech and communication abilities, Bahdi [12] conducted a study. His efforts were primarily directed

toward fostering a warm atmosphere that allowed students to utilize language extensively and to maximize oral performances. The data collected from third-year students at Kasdi Merbah University have been evaluated through a self-established questionnaire, and there have been significant associations between extracurricular activities participation and the language and academic maturity of the students. The students who participated in extracurricular activities could improve oral skills and adopted a very descriptive approach to explaining extracurricular activities as an independent variable and its role as a dependent variable in developing oral skill.

Coskun [13] examined the advantages of extracurricular speaking activities for EFL students. A state institution in Turkey gave twenty-one first-year students the option to participate in any extracurricular activities for six weeks in order to improve their speaking abilities. After six weeks, they received a survey with open-ended questions asking them about the activities they picked and their opinions on their advantages.

In order to determine the impact of extracurricular activities on students' speaking skills at the tertiary level, Kardiansyah [14] conducted research that examined inside and outside of the classroom activities. The students in this study were from the second-year discussion class at Teknokrat Indonesia's English department of universities. The goal of the study was to help students improve their English communication skills by identifying a problem and finding a workable solution. It also looked at how English extracurricular activities could promote students' success in English-speaking conversation. However, there are few opportunities to practice speaking during school hours in Indonesia. The greatest way to develop your speaking skills is to join the English Club extracurricular activities.

All the studies mentioned above investigated the positive impact of extracurricular on students' speaking skill in general but no study focused on the effect of extracurricular activities on a particular aspect of speaking skill fluency. Therefore, this research was conducted to fill the gap.

The study sought answers to the following questions:

1. How is the respondents' speaking skills performance in terms of fluency before and after taking extracurricular activities?
2. What extracurricular activities concerning English may be proposed to be suitable for students in Cao Bang Gifted High School?

2. Methods

2.1. Research design

The study was conducted in the direction of an action research [15]. With this research direction, the research was carried out according to the following steps: Step 1 - selecting a focus, step 2 - taking action, step 3 - collecting data, step 4 - analyzing and interpreting the data, step 5 - modifying action, step 6 – reflection, and step 7 - reporting action research.

2.2. Participants

Respondents of the study comprised of 35 students from grade 10C whose specialized subject is physics. These students had learned English as a compulsory subject in school settings for at least 7 years. However, students' psychology in mountainous areas towards learning a foreign language may prevent them being comfortable and confident in general and in this study in particular.

2.3. Data collection instrument

In this study, questionnaires were selected as one of the important data collection instruments because it not only provides information gathered from a large number of participants but also helps to obtain information about different kinds of issues. The questionnaire was delivered to 35 non English-majored students in 10th grade at Cao Bang Gifted High School. Specifically, the questionnaire put more focus on the effects of extracurricular activities. As most of the participants have low English proficiency, the questionnaire was conducted in Vietnamese so that they could understand all needed information.

Pre-test and post-test were taken to see if extracurricular activities have effects on students' speaking fluency and the researcher used the rubric adapted from Brown [16] to assess and score students' speaking tests.

The observation was conducted mainly in extra-curricular activities in 8 periods of the first semester of this year. Each group, which consists of five members, participated in the extracurricular activities. Teacher observed not only the attitude of the students in the lesson but also the progress in their speaking skill as well as evaluate their improvement in English speaking fluency.

2.4. Data analysis

The data were arranged into different categories to analyze: the data from the questionnaires, the results of the pre-test and post-test, and the data from classroom observations, all of which were gathered to analyze both descriptively and interpretively.

Based on the results of returned questionnaires from the students, the researcher began to classify the data to give answers to the first research question. The results of this analysis were converted into statistics, numbers and percentage in the form of tables and charts for the purpose of comparing and analyzing.

The content analysis became helpful when the researcher made a thorough analysis from pre-test and post-test. The speaking rubric which is adapted from Brown [16] to assess the students' speaking fluency was used. Then the researcher analyzed the scores to find the mean score of fluency through Microsoft Excells. After that a comparison between the mean of pre-test and post-test was made to find out the significance of the mean score of the pre-test and post-test.

Observation was also carried out to help the teacher give feedback for the students' presentation and to see the changes in their level of fluency.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. The respondents' speaking skills performance in terms of fluency before and after taking extracurricular activities

To find out the students' speaking skills performance in terms of fluency, the teacher used the results of the questionnaire shown in the figure 1:

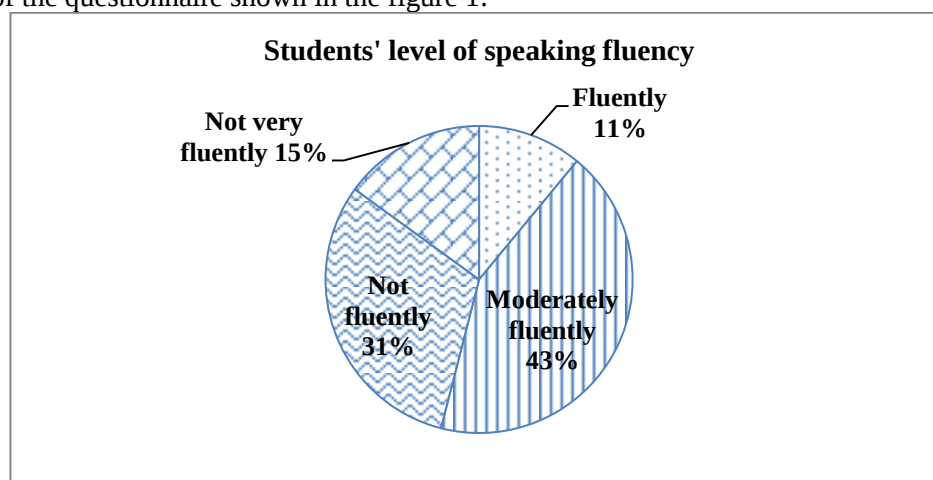


Figure 1. Students' self-assessment of their level of speaking fluency

The provided pie chart describes students' level of speaking fluency. It can be clearly seen that most students are in the range of speaking English moderately fluently, while none of them can speak very fluently. Moreover, the primary reason for students unable to speak English fluently is due to issues in pronunciation.

According to the pie chart, 43% of the students can speak English moderately fluently, whereas 31% cannot speak English fluently. While the proportion of students who speak English not very fluently is half that of not fluently, 11% can speak fluently. Interestingly, no student is a very fluent speaker of the language.

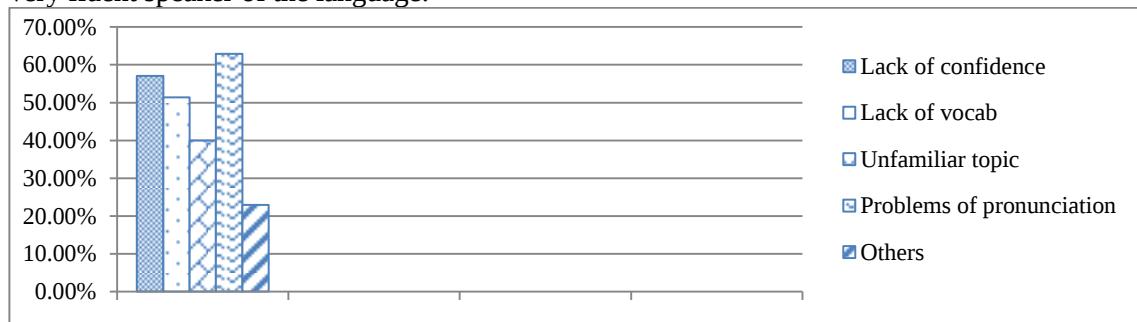


Figure 2. Student's difficulties in oral fluency

The figure 2 gives information on the difficulties preventing the students from speaking English fluently. The students find problems in pronunciation being the major impediment to achieve fluency in English, at over 60%, while the lack of confidence being the runner-up at under 60%. 50% of the students have an insufficient vocabulary, and 40% experiences unfamiliar topics which prevent them from speaking fluently. Over 20% of them have other problems.

To find out the impact of extracurricular activities on the improvement of students' oral fluency, a pre-test and post-test were taken by thirty-five 10th grade students whose names were coded in numbers. The pre-test had been taken before the teacher applied extracurricular activities to teaching speaking while the post-test was done after extracurricular activities used in teaching speaking. In this research, the researcher focused on the significance of extracurricular activities to students' oral fluency. Therefore, the fluency aspect was chosen to be tested. The comparison of the mean test score for the students' pre- and post-test in terms of fluency is shown in the table 1.

Table 1. The result of the pre-test and post-test

No	Pre- test score	Post -test score	No	Pre- test score	Post -test score
1	3	3.5	19	4	4.5
2	2	2.5	20	1.5	2.5
3	2	3	21	3.5	4
4	2	2.5	22	3	3.5
5	2	2.5	23	1.5	2
6	3	3.5	24	2.5	3
7	3	3.5	25	1.5	1.5
8	2	2.5	26	3	3
9	3	3.5	27	2.5	3.5
10	1	2	28	2	3
11	3.5	4	29	1	1.5
12	2.5	3.5	30	4	4.5
13	4	4.5	31	3	3.5
14	2.5	3	32	3.5	4
15	3	3.5	33	3.5	4
16	3.5	4	34	3	3.5
17	1.5	3	35	1	1.5
18	3.5	4			

Table 2. Results of speaking fluency from Pre-test and post- test

Aspects	Number of students	Pre-test	Post-test
Mean score of fluency	35	2.600	3.214

The speaking rubric modified from Brown [16] was used to assess the students' speaking fluency in the pre-test and post-test. The chart above depicts the mean score of the pre-test and post-test. It can be clearly seen from the chart that the mean score of the post-test (3.214) was higher than that of the pre-test (2.600) (Table 2). In other words, the students' achievement in speaking fluency level got better. This proves that the adaptation of extracurricular activities to teaching speaking had positive effect on students' fluency improvement.

Table 3. *Speaking rubric adapted from Brown (2001)*

Score	Aspects				
	Grammar	Fluency	Pronunciation	Vocabulary	Comprehension
5	Grammatical and lexical accuracy are extremely high	Speak fluently without hesitation or searching for words	Very clear, stress and intonation help to make meaning clear	Effective words choice	Understand everyday conversation at normal speech
4	Quite accurate; some errors, but meaning is always clear	Some hesitations and sometimes has to search for words	Generally clear; Mostly reasonable control of stress and intonation	Mostly effective words choice	Understand nearly everything at normal speech. Although occasional repetition may be necessary
3	Frequent errors; meaning is not always clear	Quite hesitant, limited range of vocabulary and structure	Frequent errors; not always clear enough to understand	Frequently errors in words choice	Understand most of what is said at slower speed with repetition
2	Very frequent errors; difficulty in making meaning clear	Extremely hesitant; very limited range of language available	Very frequent errors; often difficult to understand	Ineffective words choice	Difficult to understand what is said. Able to comprehend only social conversation spoken slowly and with frequent Repetition
1	Almost unable to communicate	Almost unable to communicate	Almost unable to communicate	Almost unable to communicate	Almost unable to understand even simple conversation

3.2. English extracurricular activities concerning English proposed for students in Cao Bang Gifted High School

There are a lot of extracurricular activities which can be implemented with view to help the students improve their oral fluency, but the matter is to find out extracurricular activities that are both suitable for the students and the topics in the text book. To meet these requirements, the teacher ask the students to participate in some particular extracurricular activities, including volunteer work, learning projects, and real trips.

Before participating in these extra-curricular activities, the students' oral fluency was still poor, they were still hesitant to speak. However, when these activities were applied to teaching speaking skills, practical experiences and the obligation of practicing speaking a lot before presenting made them speak more fluently.

In summary, through monitoring the students' speeches, the researcher can confirm that the application of extracurricular activities such as volunteer work, real trips and learning projects in teaching speaking help the students' speaking ability improve dramatically and they are suitable for high school students.

4. Conclusion

The findings of the study demonstrated that before implementing extracurricular activities, there were a few issues with how English speaking skill was taught and learned. Due to their still-

poor speaking abilities, the majority of students found it challenging to participate in speaking activities. They not only lacked of confidence when speaking English because of their constant concerning with making mistakes but they were also passive in participating in speaking activities. Besides, when they were asked to speak, they stuttered a lot and were not confident enough to speak. Additionally, there was no speaking environment for the students to practice speaking which made them bored with the speaking lessons and then easily lost enthusiasm.

Amazingly, these problems have been overcome when the students were involved in extracurricular activities. With more practice speaking, more interaction and more practical experience from extracurricular activities, the students became more confident when presenting their speech, and what is more, their speaking fluency has improved dramatically.

By carrying out this research, the researcher also found out extracurricular activities like volunteer work, real trips and learning projects which were suitable for students in Cao Bang Gifted High School. These extracurricular activities supplied the students with real-world experiences and assisted them in expanding their vocabulary during the process of preparing for presentations. Furthermore, while preparing for the small talks, they had to spend much time practising speaking which helped them speak more fluently and confidently. Consequently, the researcher suggested using these extracurricular activities as the primary medium for enhancing the students' speaking fluency ability.

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