



Some Difficulties in Learning Speaking of English Majored Freshmen at Tay Do University, In Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

Published Online: March 20, 2023

“*Some difficulties in learning speaking of English majored freshmen at Tay Do University*” is performed to the purpose of this study help student recognize their problem in speaking English. The participants of this study are the English majored freshmen course 13 (2018-2022) from Bachelor of English class at Tay Do University. The instruments are used in this study are questionnaire and interview. The researcher will collect student’s information through questionnaire and paper interview question. The expected outcomes will show the difficulties in learning speaking of English-majored freshmen at Tay Do University.

Keywords:

speaking, difficulties, English-majored freshmen, university.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale

Language is the medium of expressing our thoughts, views and ideas. In other words, language is a medium to communicate of the whole world. When it comes to English, people immediately think of it as an international language and a medium of communication in this age of globalization. It is the official language of more than 53 countries and territories and is the official language of the European Union. The developed countries with highest per capita income in the world often use English fluently. In Singapore, English is considered as a second language and Singapore’s GDP Per Capita was 90531 dollars and its sort was number 3 in the Annual Report 2017 of the International Monetary Fund. Moreover, learning English is also one of the necessary requirements for those who want to get a good job. It is obvious that if two people who are come from two different countries want to communicate with each other, they might have to use English to connect together. According to AJ Hoge (2012), “*English is very important because it can help you get real results in studying English, such as connecting with the native speaker easily as well as making friends, participating in business meeting, talking to customer, understanding movies, and getting better jobs*”. In Vietnam, English is used everywhere and every field such as

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***Cite this Article: Nguyen Thi Thuy Hang, Phan Thi Minh Uyen, Ho Thi Le Uyen (2023). *Some Difficulties in Learning Speaking of English Majored Freshmen at Tay Do University, In Vietnam. International Journal of Social Science and Education Research Studies*, 3(3), 430-436**

advertising, commerce, science, diplomacy and transmitting advanced technology, business, tourism, pharmacy, etc.. Understanding that, Vietnamese education system has given English a compulsory subject from the primary school. When starting to learn English, students are taught four basic skills, they are speaking, listening, reading and writing. Among these skills, speaking is considered as one of the most vital skills. So, Nunan (2000) considered that “*speaking skill is the most important aspect of leaning a second or foreign language*”. In addition, Grognet A.G (136:1997) also stated that “*speaking is one of the skills that should be mastered by student in leaning English*”. Although student know speaking skill is vital, they do not have much time to practice because they spend time to learning English in the classroom. Students at Tay Do University face some obstacles when studying speaking subject. Firstly, lacking of vocabulary to express their opinions is the common problem in the process of learning English speaking. Secondly, they have faced difficulties in making others to understand because of mispronunciation. Finally, freshmen cannot arrange ideas because of their grammar errors. Therefore, this research is designed to find out difficulties in learning speaking English of English freshman at Tay Do University.

1.2 The significance of study

This study is expected to help the English majored freshmen at Tay Do University realize their difficulties in learning English speaking subject. In addition, basing on the problems mentioned in this study, some useful methods will be suggested to improve these problems and help students study speaking subject better.

1.3 The organization of study

The research consists of five chapters

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Literature review

Chapter 3: Research Aim-Research question – Hypothesis

Chapter 4: Research methodology

Chapter 5: Expected outcome

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Definition of speaking and its importance

2.1.1 Definition of speaking

“*Speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing and receiving and processing information*” (Brown, 1994; Burns & Joyce, 1997). In Oxford Dictionaries defines “*speaking is the action of conveying information or expressing one's feelings in speech*”. This is one of the most important ways to communicate that means the sharing of information between different individuals.

Moreover, “*speaking requires that learners understand when, why, and in what ways to produce language*” (Burns & Joyce, 1997; Cohen, 1996 and Harmer, 2001: 269-270). It means that the speakers can express their ideas suitably. Roger Gower and Steve Walter 1995 also said that “*speaking is also a productive skill which consists of two main aspects: accuracy and fluency*” Students speak well or unwell that is also depends on phonetics, tone. Therefore, it is more attractive the listeners than learners who speak stammeringly, incoherently.

In short, a lot of ways to define speaking has been observed. From the above explanations, it can be concluded that speaking is a tool of communication in convey ideas, information and feelings with another person.

2.1.2 The importance of speaking

Speaking skill is very important for the language learners. Without speech, a language is reduced to a mere script. We communicate with others, to express our ideas, and to know others' ideas as well. Almost conversations rely on speech. Without speech we cannot communicate with one another. The use of language is an activity which takes place within the confines of our community. We use language in a variety of situations. People at their work places, i.e. researchers working either in a medical laboratory or in a language laboratory, are supposed to speak correctly and effectively in-order to communicate well with one another. Any gap in communication results misunderstandings and problems. Harmer (2001:270) pointed out that “*without speaking, show that you do not understand what the speaker saying, by looking confused, and scratching your head in confusion*”.

Rasyid (1991) exemplified that “*most job after for private companies require the applicants to be conversant with English, but certainly not limited to one's professional aspirations*”. Indeed, learning English can help you pursue and obtain more career opportunities. These days, the job market is global—many companies need employees who can communicate with partners and clients all over the world that

means they find employees who can speak English. So English is the tool that helps students get good job in the future. Thanks to speaking English fluently, they are quite confident in communication, negotiation, business, interpreters, etc. Moreover, English can also enhance one's personal life; it will strengthen the relationship among people. Therefore, speaking skill is very important for students when learning English. It is considered a key factor to the success of learning language. That is the reason why students majored in English has to attend to this skill.

2.2 Problems in speaking skill

These days, due to the global trend of internationalization, the ability to communicate in English is needed as an essential skill. However, speaking skill is not an easy subject in the process of learning language. This is also the problem that English majored freshmen at Tay Do University faced when they learning this subject. There are a lot of elements affecting student's ability of speaking would be analyzed in this study. They are including both linguistic and psychological causes.

2.2.1 Linguistic cause

In this part, the researcher will concern with the linguistic causes. It consists of lots elements such as vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, structure, listening skill, background knowledge. This is some factors that cause difficulties in the process of learning speaking English.

2.2.2 Vocabulary

When studying the language, students must learn the vocabulary first. Learning vocabulary will give learners understand the meaning of words. Vocabulary plays an indispensable role in language learning, it is viewed as a critical tool for language learners. According to D.A Wilkins, “*without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed*”. With the same point of view, Hunt and Beglar (2005, p. 2) said that “*the heart of language comprehension and use is the lexicon*”. Luppescu and Day (1993) also mentioned that “*vocabulary building is pre-requisite when learners are learning a second language*”. In order to communicate well, students need to know a lot of vocabulary.

If students have abundant vocabulary, they will improve their speaking skill as well as improve other skills. Knowledge of vocabulary help students create a communication successfully. Speakers can convey information easily thanks to vocabulary. If students know an extensive vocabulary, they will express their views or opinion accurately and fluently. Therefore, vocabulary can be considered as the heart of learning a new language.

Moreover, there are polysemantic words that means some words can have more than a meaning. If the students do not know all meaning of those words, they will misunderstand the sentences. However, it probably has many different meanings in a particular context. Students have problems in using suitable words in different contexts because of the limitation of their vocabulary. Therefore, students need to learn a lot of vocabulary so that they can use and combine words to the

particular context when communicating. In addition, students often forget some words because vocabulary is not often used regularly, it will be easily forgotten.

In short, vocabulary seems to be a main cause that students feel inconvenient to express their ideas, thoughts, and emotion in speaking English.

2.2.3 Pronunciation

Pronunciation plays an indispensable role in learning speaking English. It is the way a word or a language is spoken, or the manner in which someone utters a word. Redmond and Vrchota (2007, p.104) claimed that "*It is imperative that you use the correct word in the correct instance and with the correct pronunciation. Pronunciation means to say words in ways that are generally accepted or understood*". Additionally, if the learners' pronunciation is correct, their speech then will not be understood. Gilakjani (2012) pointed out that "*learners with good English pronunciation are likely to be understood even if they make errors in other areas, whereas learners with bad pronunciation will not be understood, even if their grammar is perfect*". Therefore, if the speakers mispronounce, the listeners may misunderstand. Many situations of communication misunderstanding were caused by the mispronunciation of words or the improper intonation, so learners should be aware of the divergent sounds and their features.

Moreover, they also must know of where the words should be stressed, when use raising intonation and when to use a falling one. Hughes (2002, p.67) claimed that "*the aim of pronunciation improvement is not to achieve a perfect imitation of native account, but simply to get the learners to pronounce accurately enough to be easily and comfortably comprehensible to other*". When pronouncing English words, students frequently forget to pronounce the final sounds which are remarkably principal in speaking English because those ending sounds are what help listeners to know which words are being mentioned. Additionally, students often make mistakes about the system of consonant, vowels, and syllable.

To sum up, if students are poor English pronunciation, they should learn the way to pronoun, stress up or down, consider about linking word, rhythm, and spend time to practice regularly to improve pronunciation. Good pronunciation skill can give students more self- confidence when they speak in front of many people.

Pronunciation is the element that cannot be neglected if students want to master in speaking, it is a key factor leading to the success of communication.

2.2.4 Grammar structure

All languages have elements of grammar, and each of these languages has its own grammar. It is one the important factors to get good speaking skill. Ur (1996) confirmed "*grammar is the way words are put together to make correct sentences*" Besides, James (2005:2) declared that "*grammar is a study of the structure of the language and describes the*

way of putting words together to make meaningful sentences". For that reason, grammar is considered as the foundation for learning language. However, Vietnamese students also faced difficulties in grammar so they are narrow in speaking skill. Actually, when learners study a new language, they have to learn many things. It is not facile to remember all of the grammatical rules; students often get many mistakes such as errors in tenses, parts of speech, phrases, plural forms, etc.

Students do not have many opportunities to practice English speaking together or they are often afraid to make a complete sentence in English because of lack of grammar knowledge, so they are rarely applied grammar in conversation. In addition, the learners often apply their mother tongue structure into the sentences, they forget about using a grammar of foreign language. Nguyen (2013) assumed that "*the grammar of their mother tongue seems to be deeply rooted in their mind so students tend to inference their mother tongue structure to the structure of the foreign language*".

From the above explanations, grammar is one of the vital factors in learning speaking English. If students do not know the rules of grammar, they will never be able to communicate and use English effectively.

2.3 Listening comprehension

Listening comprehension is very essential in learning a language. Howatt and Dakin (1974) recognized that "*listening is the ability to identify and understand what others are saying. The listeners have to understand what the speakers say in order to respond to them that is a successful conversation*". In addition, Rivers (1981) also said that "*the understanding of spoken messages depend on comprehension of semantic meaning, moving from what one comprehends in the sound sequence with respect to the knowledge of syntax only when the meaning is not understandable*". Listening incorrectly will receive wrong information from speakers; it can lead to serious misunderstanding with others. In fact, if learners know many words, standard pronunciation, correct grammar but they cannot understand the opposite, all the conversations will fail. Listening is the ability to understand what others are saying. If students are good at listening, they can listen what the speaker say and they also speak well. Wolvin and Coakley (1985) concluded that "*listening as the process of receiving attending to and assigning meaning to aural stimuli; that is, message transmitted through the medium of sound*". This definition showed that listening skill is a complicated process, it is required that listeners must to focus and attention.

Students must concentrate on listening if they want to capture information accurately to recognize speech sounds, understand the meaning of individual words, and comprehend the syntax of sentences in which they are presented. Most students cannot hear English language well because it is not the same as Vietnamese language dependent on the speed of the speaker or

other regions. Therefore, it is laborious to listen a new language without an enable listening skill, especially, when listening to the natives or CD too fast; English learners cannot find out the keywords. Therefore, listeners must focus on finding the core issues in the dialogue. Sometimes, students also faced difficulties in listening English of Australian or British because the pronunciations are not same. It makes them very hard to catch the content of conversation. For the English majored freshman at Tay Do University, they need to know the necessity of listening in the learning process. In short, listening comprehension is a key factor to the success of learning another language, especially in studying English. So learners should practice regularly to improve listening skill to have a successful communication with the others. Not only listening comprehension but background knowledge is also one of the difficulties in learning speaking English.

2.4 Background knowledge and new topics

Background knowledge is a skeleton point in learning language. Biemans and Simon (1996) defined that "*background knowledge is all knowledge learners have when entering a learning environment that is potentially relevant knowledge*". In learning speaking, background knowledge includes many aspects in practical life such as technology, science, business, culture, and so on. If students have background knowledge, many students cannot explain their ideas or message. They do not know how to express what they want to say. So, Gebhard (2000) affirmed that "*background knowledge related to our real world experiences and expectations that we have. This knowledge is very important when we consider that language processing problem of students*". During the conversation, depending on the subject of the communication, there are different topics such as many people like sports, entertainment or cosmetics, etc... so speaking skill requires the learners to have immense knowledge on many fields to apply their knowledge to the speaking English process.

Many students rarely listen or read some materials to enrich the knowledge about various topics in practical life. Therefore, when they meet unfamiliar topics, they are confused to show their thoughts. If learners have good background knowledge, they will respond the information with the others in the communication easily. Consequently, students should take time to broaden that knowledge, which can be life experiences, daily news from newspapers or social networking to become a good speaker. Apart from those problems above, psychology is also a difficult factor for English speaking learners.

2.5 Psychological cause

In this part, the researcher will notice the psychological cause. It consists of lots elements such as learners' attitude and motivation, learners' strategies and learning environment. This is some issues that cause difficulties in the process of learning speaking English.

2.5.1 Learners' attitude and motivation

Learners' attitude and motivation are two major factors influencing the success of foreign language learning. Gardner and Lambert (1972,p3) noticed that "*his [the learner] motivation to learn is thought to be determined by his attitudes towards the other group in particular and by his orientation towards the learning task itself*". Indeed, the motivation of learner is affected to their attitudes. If they have motivation, they will have reason to impact their passion. If learners have positive motivation, they will have good results in the process of learning English. Brown (2000,p.160) stated that "*it is easy in second language learning to claim that a learner will be successful with the proper motivation*".

Hence, motivation is an important factor which impulses students to study. Nunan (1999) confirmed that "*motivation is an important factor affecting students' reluctance to speak in English. If the learners have a positive attitude towards English, they will try their best to study this language.*" If the learners have a negative attitude towards English, they feel lazy and not motivated to learn. On the other hand, "*Learners are motivated if they need to learn the language in order to achieve a goal or if they want to communicate with speakers of the target language and learn about the country where the language is spoken*" (Nakanishi T 2002). The majority of those who can speak foreign language they will be confident and active because they are brave enough to stand in front of the crowd to speak out their opinions, they are confident to speak without fear of failure.

Besides that, the teachers often teach their students: "Let's speak; you need to build confidence in order to speak a new language". Sometimes they are afraid of grammar, pronounced incorrectly; they often are shy and nervous that if they make a mistake, others will laugh at them. Hence, they cannot make progress or may give up about learning English. In short, the attitude and motivation of learners are very significant, both of them are interactive each other that help motivated learners change the positive attitude in learning languages.

2.5.2 Learners' strategies

Language learning strategies are one of the foremost factors that help learners to succeed when learning a foreign language. In order to obtain a good result, students not only have the right motivation, positive learning attitude, but also need to learn strategy rightly. In fact, the use of appropriate strategies, it can help students maximize their goals and successfulness. "*Research has repeatedly shown that the conscious, tailored use of such strategies is related to language achievement and proficiency*" (Oxford, 1990). Furthermore, Stephen (2006) said that "*Strategy has the power to transform passive students into active learners equipped with the tools to promote strategic planning and independent reflection*". Actually, learning strategies can greatly improve learning outcomes for students with different learning styles and abilities. Each learning strategy has a

certain step or procedure. The students who want to apply a special learning strategy must understand the whole steps to apply it. Learning strategies refer to the techniques learners apply. They can understand remember and learn contents, which it is the object of learning. In fact, learning strategies are the combination of learning plan and actions to gain the best achievements. However, many students probably do not know how to adopt suitable strategies the process of learning English speaking.

For example, reading English books can improve their grammar, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and writing skills, but it cannot improve their speaking skill, and pronunciation. If students do not achieve the desired results, so they will be lazy and discouraged. Hence, it is very hard to improve their speaking skill and their language learning.

To sum up, language learning strategies are the tools to assist language learning. It is one of the most important factors that help language learners will be more successful.

2.5.3 Learning environment

Learning environment is a factor affecting strongly to students natural English speaking. Students should use English both inside and outside classrooms so that the knowledge acquired would be reinforced and retained. Especially, students of English majors should speak English at school as well as outside of school to improve their levels. Most of these students speak English in school but the students always communicate with each other in the native language out of school. That is why they cannot progress in learning English. Thus, Bose (2007) pointed out that "*in the case of the mother tongue, the child learns it easily, due to the favorable environment and by the great amount of exposure to the language. However, learning a second language requires conscious efforts to learn it and the exposure to the second language in most cases is limited*". In fact, when the learners do not speak English more, they will not be confident enough to talk to other people or even foreigners. It is hard for students to find out a good environment to support their learning as well as English speaking, so they cannot upgrade their speaking skill.

In brief, learning environment is the drawback of most students in learning English speaking subject. Learners do not have a real language environment; it is tough for them to produce authentic language. Therefore, students need to overcome it in order to study well. The factors are mentioned in this chapter to be the difficulties in learning speaking English which English majored Freshmen at Tay Do University usually face with.

3. RESEARCH AIMS - RESEARCH QUESTIONS – RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

3.1 Research aims

In the process of learning English, speaking is considered the difficult skill for students. This study is conducted to find out the difficulties in learning speaking of English majored

freshmen at Tay Do University. Therefore, they can recognize their problems to improve speaking ability.

3.2 Research questions

This study is required to answer the following research questions:

- 1) *What are common difficulties in learning speaking of English majored freshmen at Tay Do University?*
- 2) *Why do English majored freshmen at Tay Do University encounter those difficulties?*
- 3) *How to overcome the difficulties in learning speaking of English majored freshmen at Tay Do University?*

3.3 Hypothesis

According to most of English majored freshmen at Tay Do University, speaking is the most difficult skill. Depending on the literature review and the research questions, the study will find out difficulties when learning speaking English. Moreover, the researcher hopes to help English majored freshmen at Tay Do University recognize the difficulties in learning speaking English and they can apply some suggestions to solve their problems effectively. Thanks to this study, English majored freshmen at Tay Do University can have motivation and positive attitude while learning speaking English.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Design

The research is carried out to answer the research questions and to test the hypothesis. The accuracy and value of the study results are based on the instruments. The English majored Freshmen (course XIII) at Tay Do University are chosen as the sample to the study. The data from the participants will be collected bases on the questionnaire and the interview for students. Finally, the data will be analyzed to show the difficulties in learning speaking English.

4.2 Participants

The participants in this study are English majored Freshmen at Tay Do University, course (2018-2022). Vietnamese is their first language and English is considered as their second language. They will be given questionnaires and paper interview in order that the researcher get information about problems which they have faced in learning speaking English.

4.3 Instruments

Information received from participants through questionnaire and interview that share many difficulties in learning speaking English.

4.3.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire will be used as an instrument which plays an important role in the research. The questionnaire includes two parts. In part 1, there are eight questions that aim at getting background information from students such as students' hometown (urban/rural), students' years of learning English, their frequency of practicing speaking English, etc. In part 2, there is the table which has 9 sentences about speaking skill. The problems are related to three factors, including

Nguyen Thi Thuy Hang et al, Some Difficulties in Learning Speaking Of English Majored Freshmen at Tay Do University, In Vietnam

vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar.

4.3.2 Interview

The interview is created for the purpose of collecting information about the difficulties in the process of learning speaking English. It consists of 4 questions which mentioned the students' thought about speaking, problems of learning speaking and the way to improve speaking skill.

5. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

This research aims to point out some difficulties in learning speaking that English majored Freshmen at Tay Do University usually faced.

First, lacking of vocabulary makes students face difficulties in expressing ideas as well as choosing suitable word in particular contexts. Moreover, mispronunciation is the main factors that students usually have faced, they do not know how to pronounce the words, they often forget to pronounce the last sound and they usually place the wrong stress patterns, etc. In addition, they are often afraid to make a complete sentence in English because of lack of grammar knowledge, they usually have a lot of mistakes in usage of tense, sentence structures, etc.

Second, if student' listening comprehension is not good, they do not recognize and understand the sound of the speaker. So listening comprehension is the useful part to help the learners in learning speaking. In other words, because of having poor background knowledge, many students cannot explain their ideas or message.

Third, learning a new language encountered many difficulties. The learners will feel discouraged, they have no motivation to study and have no positive attitude toward speaking English. Furthermore, many students probably do not know how to adopt suitable strategies the process in learning and thus they will be lazy and discouraged when learn speaking English.

Finally, many students are not given a good learning environment to get a good speaking skill at school as well as outside. Lacking of English practiced environment could be a source of hindrances of speaking ability. In short, the researcher hopes that English majored Freshmen at Tay Do University can recognize the difficulties in learning speaking English and they can overcome these problems.

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