

STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE SPEAKING SKILLS USED BY THE ENGLISH-MAJORED FRESHMEN AT TAY DO UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

Speaking skills are recognized as an important and essential skill in the process of learning foreign languages in general and English in particular. However, not all students recognize the importance of speaking skills and actively develop them. This research was conducted with the purpose of finding common methods used by the English-majored freshmen at Tay Do University to improve their English speaking skill. 121 English majored freshmen at Tay Do University were chosen as participants in the study. The questionnaire and the interview were employed as two major instruments throughout the whole research. Some strategies used were practicing speaking English alone, practicing speaking English in group, practicing speaking English with native speakers, Improving pronunciation by listening to music, watching movies and using spoken apps on the phone, improving fluency by joining the English clubs.

Keyword: *Strategies, Speaking, Improve speaking skills*

1. INTRODUCTION

These days, English has become the global language, which means that most countries in the world consider English as their second language. More and more people are dedicating time to studying English. In addition, many countries include English in their school syllabus and children are starting to learn it at a younger and younger age. Knowing English can help you progress in life, both personally and professionally. In fact, you can compete in the global job market, increase your career skills and interact with many people around the world thanks to good English.

To have a good job opportunity, you need to communicate well in English, so speaking is an important skill. Collie and Slater (2005, p.8) express their idea about speaking: "Speaking will encourage the development of fluency in spoken English." Speaking fluently, of course, involves speaking easily and appropriately with others but it carries a further assumption in simple term. It requires your attention, which affects a lot when you communicate with foreigners. Speaking English smoothly gives you the opportunities to explore your knowledge about many other things. It is an essential for your future job, people have to speak publicly on a frequent basis in order to prove their ability in their work. Speaking English

well helps you to make new friends easier or impress interviewers better than you expect.

Speaking plays an important role in English major. However, speaking skill is not easy for many students, especially freshmen. Most of students usually have problems in speaking such as lack of vocabulary, pronunciation, and psychology. Similarly, some English freshmen at Tay Do University complain that they cannot speak English naturally when meeting foreigners. They also say they have not found an effective way to learn how to speak well yet. Those are some common difficulties that most students face in speaking English. Consequently, the study on "A study on strategies to improve speaking skills for the English-majored freshmen at Tay Do University" was conducted with the aim of helping freshmen majors in English at Tay Do University to improve their speaking skills.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Definitions of speaking are taken lots of attention and concern from different researchers. There are several definitions of speaking presented in language learning methodology.

Bums & Joyce (1997) define that: "Speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving and processing information." Its form and meaning are captivated

with the context within which it occurs, including the participant themselves, their collective experiences, the physical environment and therefore the purpose for speaking.

Another definition of speaking is that speaking is the delivery of language through the mouth. To speak, we create sounds using many parts of our body, including the lungs, vocal tract, vocal chords, tongue, teeth and lips. Speaking includes two forms: formal and informal. Informal speaking is usually used with family and friends, or people you recognize well. Formal speaking occurs in business or academic situations, or when meeting people for the primary time.

Besides, Nunan and Carter (2001) develop the idea that: "Speaking during a second language involves the development of a particular type of communication skill." It's occupied a special position in the history of teaching, and only in the last twenty years has it begun to emerge as a branch of teaching, learning and testing in its claim, rarely specializing in the production of spoken discourse.

In the field of action, speaking is that the action of: conveying information or expressing one's feelings in speech, the activity of delivering speeches, communicating during a specified language, conveying meaning as though in words.

Furthermore, there's also another definition of speaking is that speaking and the art of communication are a productive skill. Good speaking skill are the act of generating words that may be understood by listeners.

Brown (1994) also shares the opinion that: "Speaking ability is integrated closely to writing, reading, and listening." So, in language teaching, it is of great importance to emphasize the interrelationship of skills. From the above definitions and explanations of speaking in second language and foreign language studies, the definition of speaking during this study is summarized as the process of building and sharing meaning through the employment of verbal and non-verbal symbols in a very various context to express ideas, opinions, or feelings to others by using words or sounds of articulation in order to inform, influence, and entertain, which may be learned by using some teaching learning methodologies.

Speaking is one of the most crucial factors in determining a person's English ability. Brown and Yule (1983) said that: "Speaking is the skill that the students will be judged upon most in real life situations." English speaking skill is very essential in international relationships to be able to participate in the wider world of business. Zaremba (2006) indicates that: "While reading and listening are considered to be the two receptive skills in learning and use, writing and speaking are the other two productive skills necessary to be integrated in the development of effective communication." Of all the four macro English skills, speaking seems to be the most important skill required for communication. Zaremba (2006) also explains that: "Speaking skills or communication skills are usually placed ahead of work experience, motivation, and academic credentials as criteria for new recruitment for employment."

Speaking is one of the most difficult skills to master since it is one of the most important aspects of communication, which is the most important of all living skills. Al Hosni (2014) states that: "Students may face numerous problems in the way of developing their speaking skills regardless of their linguistic knowledge." It can be beneficial in all parts of life, from work to social gatherings. Nevertheless, speaking is more essential than the others because in public communication, people often ask "Can you speak English?" instead of "Can you listen, read, or write English?" As a result, if one can communicate in English, he or she can travel to other countries and to business with foreigners without worrying about language.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research question

The research was implemented to answer the following question:

What are some strategies that the English-majored freshmen at Tay Do University use to improve their speaking skill?

3.2 Participants

The participants of this research were 121 English-majored freshmen, course 16 at Tay Do University and they came from different areas, both rural and urban. The students' age was from 18 to 21. They spoke Vietnamese as their mother

tongue, and English was considered as their foreign language. Participants had been learning English at least 7 years. They were given a questionnaire and interview in order to get information about some strategies they use to improve speaking skills.

3.3 Instruments

To collect data, the researcher randomly selected 30 students to take part in an interview about strategies to improve their speaking skills. There were four interview questions in total. In the first question, freshmen are asked about what strategies the students used to improve speaking. The second question is employed to get more details about how often they used these strategies to practice speaking English. In the third question, the researcher would like to find out how effectively students improve their pronunciation in speaking English thanks to these strategies. Lastly, question four is designed to find out how students improve their fluency in speaking English.

4. RESULTS

The interview data were analysed and classified into groups according to the information the students provided in their answers.

4.1. Practicing speaking English alone

Speaking English alone allowed the students to enhance their skills without having to worry about how others may respond. According to the students, when they spoke English alone, they were free to say whatever they wanted without fear of being heard or condemned. This assisted them in becoming less shy and more self-assured.

“One of my effective ways to practice speaking English alone is to practice speaking in front of a mirror. When practicing speaking in front of a mirror, I will check my mouths as well as my actions to express what I want to convey.” (Male, English translation)

“Recording is a good way to practice speaking English for me. When I record my voice. I will know where I am wrong if I record the pronunciation and compare it to the sample pronunciation in the electronic dictionary.” (Female, English translation)

4.2. Practicing speaking English in group

Group discussion was one of the best methods of learning to speak English. It helped the students improve their speaking skills.

“In a group, I have the opportunity to use English and practice with my friends. Practicing speaking with my friends will increase my confidence in expressing many words without worrying about saying them incorrectly.” (Female, English translation)

“Learning in a group helps me improve vocabulary for speaking.” (Female, English translation)

4.3. Practicing speaking English with native speakers

Practicing speaking English with foreigners was a useful and effective strategy to improve students' language skills. This was also the best way to practice English reflexes, correct errors, and learn the best English pronunciation and intonation.

“In Can Tho city, there are a large number of foreigners who speak English. Volunteering is a great way for me to connect with them.” (Female, English translation)

“I often practice speaking English with foreigners through social websites and apps. I just need internet connection to speak. These websites and apps all have modern, simple, easy-to-use interfaces. (Male, English translation)

4.4. Improving fluency by joining the English club

Speaking club was defined as the students extra learning activity besides regular English class. The students who joined the English-speaking club could participate in the activities like debates, games, sketches, poems, and songs, among other things. An English club was a real place where the learning of English was more practical.

“In an English club, I get the opportunity to practice a variety of skills in a more realistic situation.” (Male, English translation)

“My speaking ability increases, and I feel more confident in speaking practice, even if I still make some grammar mistakes.” (Female, English translation)

“My English speaking abilities have improved, and I am speaking English more fluently.” (Female, English translation)

5.5. Improving fluency by thinking everything in English

When speaking English, most students admitted that they had to pause for a short moment to translate what they were thinking in their minds from their original language to English. Therefore, one method to overcome this situation was to think of everything in English.

"I practice this method by talking about things I see every day in my minds. At first, it can be a vocabulary word or a short phrase. Gradually, as my English level increases, I can practice speaking a sentence or even a conversation." (Male, English translation)

5. CONCLUSION

This research was conducted with the expectation of finding out techniques to improve speaking skills for the English-majored freshmen at Tay Do University and whether they use these strategies effectively. The research results were expected to help the students recognize the importance of using strategies in their English speaking skills. They also needed to be aware of the speaking strategies that are necessary for dealing with improving English speaking skills, as well as ways to use these strategies effectively and ways to avoid difficulties in using them. In addition, this study could help the students use strategies in learning to speak effectively as well as help them improve their speaking ability and get better results in their English speaking skills.

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