Students' Difficulties in Learning Speaking Online

Wa Thái Như Phương

English Department, Tay Do University, Vietnam

ABSTRACT

Most English-majored students have to face many problems with speaking skills, especially in the current period, when students have to learn to speak online. This study was conducted to find out the difficulties when learning to speak online of freshmen at Tay Do University. Thirty English-majored freshmen were chosen to participate in the study. A questionnaire was used as an instrument for this survey with the aim of finding out the difficulties that students face and then offering solutions when learning to speak online. The results showed that the biggest difficulty that the English-majored freshmen faced in learning to speak English online was environmental problems. Next was the problems of the teacher and technology. The study also offered some methods for teachers and students to improve these situations.

Keyword: *Covid-19 epidemic, Difficulties in learning speaking online, Problems with speaking*

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the English language plays a vital role in the world. As an international language, most people use English to study and communicate with others. In fact, English is a wonderful and important language that can bring people together without any barriers. It can help people make relationships with other countries more easily than ever before.

To be able to communicate fluently, it is necessary to mention speaking skills. Speaking is an important skill in English, especially for English-majored students. In this time of complicated developments of the COVID 19 pandemic, directly affecting our daily activities. Following the government's directive on social distancing under the directive 16, everyone must live, study and work at home. Schools around the world in general and Vietnam in particular choose online learning for learners. Of course, Tay Do University is no exception.

Online learning is convenient because both students and teachers do not need to be in direct contact with each other to limit the risk of COVID disease transmission and for a number of other benefits. However, besides the benefits that online learning brings, students also face difficulties in the learning process. The difficulties are with teachers, the environment and the technology.

In recent years, there have been many studies conducted on the learning of speaking English online, particularly during the pandemic of COVID 19 (Mardiah 2020; Prima Indonesia University 2020). However, no study has previously mentioned the problems to home learning environment, as well as the obstacles of connecting to the Internet. Instead, past studies have primarily concentrated on the advantages.

The purpose of the study was to investigate the difficulties of English majored freshmen at Tay Do University in learning to speak English online.

Research question

This study was conducted in order to answer the following question:
What are the difficulties of English-majored freshmen at Tay Do University in learning to speak online?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Definitions of learning online

During the complicated development of the covid-19 pandemic, online learning has become popular. E-learning, also referred to as online learning or electronic learning, is the acquisition of knowledge which takes place through electronic technologies and media. In simple language, e-learning is defined as *"learning that is enabled*

electronically". According Sarah Guri-Rosenbilt (2005), e-learning is defined as electronic media used for various learning purposes ranging from conventional classroom add-on functions to online substitution for face-to-face meetings with online encounters. Besides Ruiz, Mintzer and Leipzig (2006) consider e-learning as using Internet technologies for enhancing performance and knowledge in their research paper *"The Impact of E-Learning in Medical Education."* Next, Arkorful and Abaido (2015) state that e-learning is using information and communication technologies to for enabling access to online teaching and learning resources in their research paper "The role of e-learning, advantages and disadvantages of its adoption in higher education." Moreover, Clark and Mayer (2016) defined E-learning as instructions delivered through digital devices with the intent of supporting learning in their research paper *"E-learning and the science of instruction: Proven guidelines for consumers and designers of multimedia learning."* From the above points of view, it can be seen that online learning is the interaction between teachers and learners through electronic devices connected to the internet to impart knowledge.

2.2 Difficulty learning to speak online

Recently, the CoVid-19 situation has become more and more serious, so universities have allowed students to study online, and this online learning is extremely difficult for freshmen. Especially in the process of learning, exchanging and developing speaking skills, first-year students will encounter difficulties such as technological difficulties, technical errors, communication with lecturers and effects from the learning environment.

Difficulty with technology

To join an online speaking class, you need a certain level of technology proficiency including the ability to successfully log in, participate in classes, submit assignments, and communicate with teachers and classmates. So freshmen often face many difficulties in accessing technology equipment. Students will be interrupted in class if the connection is unstable, micro or camera cannot be opened, especially as freshmen, so they are limited by insufficient equipment for online learning, such as laptops, Wifi, and so on.

Difficulty with instructors

For freshmen, online learning is a huge barrier, especially for English-speaking majors. Students do not have many opportunities to communicate with teachers and classmates, they are afraid that when they say the wrong thing, they will be laughed at. Because they are not under direct pressure from teachers and classmates, learners will tend to be silent, only speaking up when forced to express their opinions. Lecturers mainly teach one-way, students absorb online, cannot exchange without interaction with lecturers.

Difficulty with the learning environment

The main difficulty now is that students are still not familiar with online learning, lack of concentration and poor connection speed, the lectures are also interrupted. The general psychology of students is still unfamiliar and somewhat worried about the midterm and final results (fear of failing the subject, due to lower absorption of online lectures, less effective than face-to-face learning). The learning environment at home can be distracting due to many external factors such as children, TV sound or poor transmission signal... leading to inefficient reception of knowledge

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Participants

In this study, the participants were seventy English majored freshmen from English 16A and English 16B in Tay Do University. There were fifteen students from English 16A and fifteen students from English 16B. Their ages ranged from 18 to 22.Besides, they all spoke Vietnamese as their first language and English as their foreign language. All of them were freshmen, so they were considered as at equal level. When this research was carried out, they were studying English speaking with the course book Speak Now 1.

3.2 Instrument

The survey questionnaire was divided into two parts, starting from personal information such as gender, age, class, hometown, years of English study, and some questions about the English level of the respondents survey (to contact when there is a need to participate in the survey).The second one was designed on the basic of the five-degree scales including strongly disagree (SD), disagree (D), neutral(N), agree(A) and strongly agree(SA).This part consisted of 15 close-ended (statements) which were distributed in three clusters. The items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 focused on surveying students' difficulties in accessing technology when learning online. Next, items 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 referred to students' communication problems when learning to speak online. Finally, items 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 concentrated on environmental factors affecting students' online speaking learning.
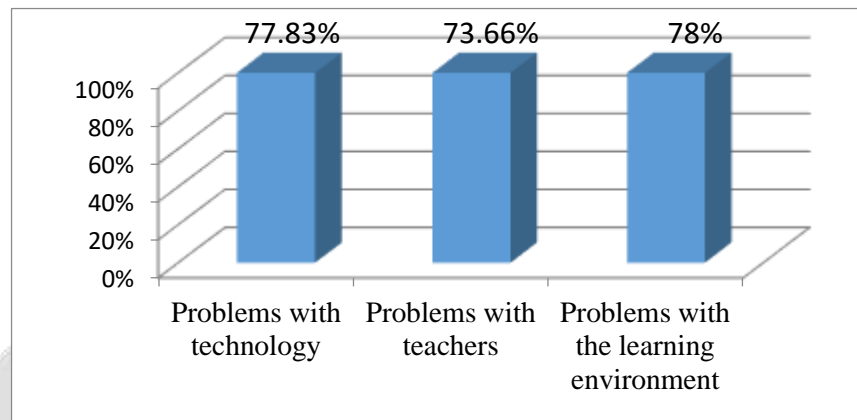
4. RESULTS

4.1 General results

The results from the second questionnaire were presented in the following table.

Table 1. Students' difficulties in learning speaking English online

Students' difficulty in when speaking English online	Percentages (%)
1.Problems with technology	77,83%
2.Problems with teachers	73,66%
3.Problems with the learning environment	78%

Fig 1. Students' difficulties in learning speaking English online

The above table stated the degree of difficulties that the participants encountered when they learnt online English speaking skill. The table implied that the students had difficulties with the effects from the learning environment (78%).The next problem was about technology (77.83%). The problem with teachers was the latest difficulty (73.66%). Especially, the percentage of both three problems was over 50 percent, so it was considered that the students encountered all these three difficulties in speaking online. Generally, the students had speaking difficulties with the effects from the learning environment and technology that offered highest rates of percentage. In contrast, problems with teachers held the lowest percentage among three major problems that students encountered.

4.2 Detailed description on students speaking online difficulties
Problems with technology

Table 2. Problems with technology

Degree	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Percentage (%)	50%	23,3%	18,7%	4%	4%

From this table, the results from the questionnaire showed that the highest percentage, also as the most prominent percentage, belonged to "Strongly Agree" (50%) and Agree" (23.3%) while the percentage of both "Neutral"(18.7%), "Disagree" (4%) and "Strongly disagree" (4%) was low. It meant that the students had a lot of problems with technology.

Problems with teachers

Table 3.Problems with teachers

Degree	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Percentage (%)	47,4%	23,3%	13,3%	8,7%	7,3%

From this table, the results from the questionnaire showed that the highest percentage, also as the most prominent percentage, belonged to "Strongly agree (47.4%) and "Agree" (23.3%) while the percentage of both "Neutral"

(13.3%), "Disagree" (8.7%) and "Strongly disagree" (7.3%) was low. The majority of students faced a lot of problems with teachers.

Problems with the learning environment

Table 4. Problems with the learning environment

Degree	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Percentage (%)	50%	28%	12%	4%	6%

From this table, the results from the questionnaire showed that the highest percentage, also as the most prominent percentage, belonged to "Strongly agree (50%) and "Agree" (28%) while the percentage of both "Neutral" (12%),"Disagree" (4%) and "Strongly disagree" (6%) was low. It meant that the students faced a lot of problems with the effects from the learning environment.

5. CONCLUSION

After conducting this research by analyzing the important information collected from the freshmen, the researchers finally figured out that the English-majored students had difficulties speaking English including technology, teacher and the learning environment. Through the research results, we found that learning English speaking online is not easy for freshmen. For teaching, the researcher hopes that the teachers will speak slowly, with clear pronunciation. As a result, the students properly understand the message that the teacher conveys. In addition, they will help students recognize and correct mistakes in the speaking process. Moreover, teachers can create many lively and innovative teaching materials so that students will be more interested in learning to speak online. For learning, in order to learn English speaking well, students need to learn more about vocabulary to understand its meaning and how to use it correctly. Students can watch more English communication videos on Youtube to learn how to speak fluently and with different intonation. Students should choose a place that is less affected by noise from the outside environment and should check the internet connection before and during online learning.

6. REFERENCES

[1]. Arkorful,V and Abaido,N (2015).The role of e-learning, advantages and disadvantages of its adoption in higher education. *International Journal of Instructional Technology and Distance Learning*,12,29-42.https://www.itdl.org/Journal/Jan_15/Jan15.pdf#page=33.

[2]. Brown, H.D. (1994). *Teaching by principles: an interactive approach to language pedagogy*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Regents.

[3]. Burns, A. & Joyce, H. (1997). *Focus on speaking*. Sydney: National Center for English Language Teaching and Research.

[4]. Cameron, Deborah.(2001). *Working with Spoken Discourse*. Oxford: SAGE Publications, Ltd. 40.

[5]. Clark, R.C and Mayer, R.E (2016) *E-learning and the science of instruction: Proven guidelines for consumers and designers of multimedia learning*. Pfeiffer.

[6]. Guri-Rosenbilt, S. (2005), Distance Education' and 'E-Learning': Not the Same Thing. *The International Journal of Higher Education Research*, 49,467-493. DOI:10.1007/s10734-004-0040-0

[7]. Mardiah,H.(2020).The Use of E-Learning to Teach English in the Time of the Covid-19 Pandemic. *English Teaching and Linguitic Journal*, 1(2), 44-55. http://dx.doi.org/10.30596%2Fetlij.v1i2.4894

[8]. Richards, J. C. (2008). *Teaching Listening and Speaking: From Theory to Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[9]. Rahmawati, (2021) The effect of e-learning on students speaking skill progress: A case of the seventh grade at SMP pencawan medan,e-ISSN:2541-3635p-2252-7427.
 https://doi.org/10.25134/ieflj.v7i1.3995and_Speaking_From_Theory_to_Practice

[10]. Ruiz,J.G, Mintzer,M.J and Leipzig,R.M (2006) The Impact of E-Learning in Medical Education. *Academic medicine: journal of the Association of American Medical Colleges*, 81-3-207-212 .DOI: 10.1097/00001888-200603000-00002.