

Students' Obstacles in Communicating with Foreigners

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ABSTRACT

Communicating with foreigners is difficult for anyone learning English. This study was conducted with the aim of identifying the difficulties when communicating with foreigners. The participants were the fifteen English majors from Tay Do University. Interview was used as an instrument to collect data about the difficulties that students faced when communicating with foreigners. The results of this study showed that students were often encountered obstacles due to lack of vocabulary, problems of psychology and pronunciation in communicating with foreigners. From those difficulties, some solutions were proposed to help English learners communicate easily.

Keyword: *Communicating with foreigners, Obstacles in communicating, Difficulties in communication*

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, English is considered a global language. Thanks to English, foreign affairs have become easier. English breaks down all barriers to help people all over the world get closer to each other. English makes studying and doing business around the world simple and convenient. English is used everywhere, so in the world, it is the most popular and widely used language. With the economic development gradually, trade with other countries is also gradually focused, so English helps people communicate with each other more easily.

Communicating with foreigners is very important in the integration era. When the economy is open to welcome business or tourists from abroad. Fluent communication in English helps us easily integrate with them; then that brings many benefits to us. The ability to communicate well with foreigners also makes it easy to learn many wonderful things from them. Moreover, today more and more students in Vietnam in particular and the world in general tend to study abroad. The most chosen schools are usually located in the UK and the US. Having good communication skills in English helps people to easily integrate in a new environment. Using good English also makes it easier for us to travel. When you come to any country, you just need to know how to communicate in English, you can enjoy that place without an interpreter. The benefits of good communication in English are abundant. However, the difficulties when communicating with foreigners are also numerous. Therefore, the researcher decided to conduct this study on the obstacles in communicating with foreigners in order to help the teachers and students better understand the common difficulties when communicating with foreigners. From there, they could find the most effective teaching and learning methods for themselves.

Research question

This research was conducted in order to answer a following question:

What are the difficulties that the English-majored students at Tay Do University may encounter when communicating with foreigners?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 What is communication?

Communication is the most basic human need from birth to death. When a child has just been born they have a need to communicate to connect with people through crying and laughing instead of using language to speak - they can cry when they are hungry, laugh when they are hungry.

Communication is a condition for the existence and development of society. Society is a community in which people exist with links and ties to each other, people connect with each other through communication. Ask a small question "If there is no communication, can humans survive and develop?"

Communication skills help you expand your relationships when you know how to connect and interact with people around you, know how to learn and exchange to cement relationships. This is also the basis for maintaining and developing life. If you do not know how to communicate, you will become isolated from society and that is scary.

Communication skills to help coordinate actions: Communication helps people express their thoughts and actions, and helps people understand their needs, desires or what others convey through language. On that basis, all will work together to work towards a common goal.

Good communication makes it easier for you to succeed: Society is developing constantly every day, the needs of life are increasing, and the competition is also becoming fierce. If you have enough working skills, enough enthusiasm, but weak communication skills, it will be difficult for you to develop - further progress in your work. It is because communication has such a special meaning that people elevate it to become the art of communication.

2.2 Difficulties in communicating with foreigners

Vocabulary

If speaking is a significant factor in expressing information, vocabulary is the key to help people understand what they hear in social life and what to respond to in communications. Lewis (1993) mentions that "Lexis is the core or heart of language" because vocabulary is used in all aspects of language. Even when people speak incorrectly or make mistakes in grammar through using body language and symbols, foreigners can guess their messages. However, when students lack vocabulary, they cannot adequately convey what they would like to. Moreover, knowing many words help people to easily enter intellectual doors which take them to many places in order to enjoy different cultures and make friends coming from all over the world. Obviously, lexis is the crux of all issues even more than the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. According to website wisegeek.com, "vocabulary is the body of words that make up a language, and the importance of vocabulary in reading comprehension cannot be overstated. Without a good working knowledge of words and their meanings, both written and verbal communication will be muddled or poorly understood". However, "English vocabulary is complex, with three main aspects related to form, meaning, and use, as well as layers of meaning connected to the roots of individual words (Nation & Meara, 2010)". Thus, it requires choosing words carefully from the students to avoid the misunderstanding of unwanted.

On the other hand, remembering all words is not easy for students. They only retain the common words or words from their majors. That is the reason why "students carry around dictionaries and not grammar books" (Schmitt, 2010). Moreover, they also encounter problems in using appropriate words in each case because they just memorize each word individual instead of studying them in certain contexts, as well as the lazy reading books, speaking daily and writing dairy.

Psychological factors

Psychological cause is one of the difficulties faced by Tay Do students that makes them unable to communicate with foreigners. This is one of the psychological factors that need to be overcome in order to be able to communicate easily with foreigners. They depend on many factors based on difficulties in communication with foreigners but this is the most important to be lack of confidence in communication.

In fact, people with confidence will communicate better with foreigners than shy people who have confidence will dare to talk freely with foreigners without fear of mistakes, they are also people who dare to try many different styles of speaking with native speakers. When influenced by psychological factors, the speaker will not be able to think carefully to find the right words to express his thoughts. This leads to a pause in speaking, which makes the listener feel uncomfortable. It can be seen that psychological factors are also one of the basic problems that make it difficult for students to communicate with foreigners.

Pronunciation

Pronunciation is one of the important factors that determine our ability to communicate with foreigners. If you don't grasp the grammar and have limited vocabulary, it is okay because you can use simple words to express thoughts without the right 100% grammar. Foreigners will still understand what you want to express. However, if your pronunciation is wrong, you will not listen to native people who are saying anything and more important than foreigners not understanding what you want to say. In English there are many words that are almost the same but their ideals are completely different. A simple example for the above is pronouncing the word "Pen" and "Ben", if you turn on the steam, the sound /p/ and vice versa is negative / b /. If in the process of speaking, you can't pronounce correctly, the listener will not be able to understand what you are saying. The wrong pronunciation also causes a lot of towels for listening skills and speaking skills. This leads to the ability to communicate with foreigners which is limited.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Participants

To clarify the difficulties in communicating with foreigners, fifteen English majored sophomores at Tay Do University were randomly selected to participate in the survey. They had learned listening and speaking skills with foreigners in their first and second years, so they could show the basic and most common difficulties when communicating with foreigners.

3.2 Instrument

In order to collect data, the researcher interviewed the participants with 5 open-ended questions. The purpose of the interview was to find out whether the participants had difficulties in communication with foreigners and what difficulties they often faced. Besides, the researcher also wanted to know how the students overcome these difficulties to communicate with foreigners.

4. RESULTS

The students' responses from the interviews were analyzed and classified into groups according to the obstacles they faced in communicating with foreigners. In general, their obstacles fell into three groups as follows.

4.1. Lack of vocabulary

Eleven over fifteen students gave the answers that they did not have enough vocabulary to express their ideas when communicating with foreigners.

"When I communicate with foreigners, the lack of vocabulary makes it impossible for me to say everything I want to say and makes it difficult for the other people to understand what I mean."

"I often think in Vietnamese first, but when I want to translate my ideas into English, I don't have enough vocabulary to say. Sometimes, I have to use another words with similar meaning, which makes the foreigners misunderstand me"

"I felt nervous when talking with foreigners because I don't know what to say. My English words were so limited"

It was obvious that lack of vocabulary was a very important factor that prevented them from communicating with foreigners.

4.2 Psychological problems

When asked about psychological problems, 100% of the students said that they felt shy, nervous and even scared when communicating with foreigners.

"When communicating with foreigners, I feel very shy in words and actions. It makes me feel awkward and difficult to convey ideas."

"I feel worried and nervous, so my tongue becomes hard. I will try to improve my reasoning by practicing speaking in front of the mirror to be more confident, when I meet foreigners I will put more effort in communicating to reduce embarrassment."

They all said that they felt very shy when they had to directly communicate with native speakers or even that they were very nervous so they could not communicate effectively and confidently. Some of the students thought that practicing English in front of the mirror was very effective because they could control their expressions and mouth shape. Some also thought that it should be combined with recording when practicing English in front of the mirror because they could hear their own pronunciation again.

4.3. Pronunciation problems

Pronunciation became a big problem for many students when communicating with foreigners.

"Speaking correct pronunciation in English causes many difficulties for me, the sounds are often difficult to distinguish like /i:/ and /i /, /u:/ and /u/... they make me confused when I talk with foreigners."

"Poor pronunciation makes me not understand what the native speakers say, and when I speak English they don't understand me too."

All students participating in the survey found that pronunciation was the most basic mistake they were likely to encounter when communicating in English. They believed that listening to music and watching foreign movies were the best methods to improve listening and speaking skills, and it also helps to increase vocabulary and correct pronunciation. However, some students thought that it was better to communicate directly with foreigners, rather than learning indirectly through listening to music and watching movies.

"I think at a high-power English level, I should listen to music and watch foreign movies to learn the pronunciation of native speakers."

5. CONCLUSION

The results of the present study showed that the English major students had difficulties when communicating with foreigners including vocabulary, pronunciation and psychological problems. They had more psychological difficulties than vocabulary and pronunciation difficulties. Through this results, the researcher hopes that teachers will give students more practice on communication skills to help students become more confident. Moreover, the universities should have more opportunities for students to communicate and exchange with foreigners. In addition, teachers help students consolidate their vocabulary and remind them of their mistakes during communication. Teachers regularly share with students about their difficulties to help students perfect their skills. For learning, students should cultivate their communication skills, read more books to support the communication process with native speakers. Thanks to that, students not only expand their knowledge but also communicate more naturally and closer. In addition, students should search for videos related to communication on YouTube to be able to draw strategies and put these lessons into practice. Besides, students should join clubs and be more proactive when starting a conversation with foreigners to be more confident. These suggestions will greatly help students in the communication process.

6. REFERENCES

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