

COMMON DIFFICULTIES IN SPEAKING OF ENGLISH-MAJORED FRESHMEN AT TAY DO UNIVERSITY IN VIET NAM

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ABSTRACT

It is said that English speaking plays a crucial role in this modern society. Nowadays, more and more non-native English people have studied English speaking for their better future in working. However, this skill is a big challenge for those who want to master it, particularly for English-majored students. For this reason, the research is conducted to figure out some difficulties that first-year students have faced in English speaking class. A questionnaire embraced 30 questions including questions and statements was used as the main instrument to collect the data. The participants were 100 English majored freshmen at Tay Do University, in Vietnam. The results pointed out English-majored freshmen had some common errors and difficulties with vocabulary, pronunciation, and psychology. It is hoped that this research can be helpful for both English-majored freshmen and non-English majored students at Tay Do University to realize their common errors in the process of improving and developing speaking skills.

Key words: *English majored students, speaking, difficulties, university*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale

The English language has become increasingly significant in recent decades. This global language is currently widely recognized as the principal language of intercommunication, science, and technology, in addition to nations' national languages widely employed in parts of life. Moreover, the English language has become an essential factor in strengthening trade and travel in many countries. There is an increasing necessity of knowing and using this communication through modern technology and media communication devices such as mobile telephone, electronic mail, and the Internet. People, from children to adults, learn English for different purposes such as to pass the exams, to study abroad, or to find a good job in the future, to communicate with foreigners or, to do business. Undoubtedly, people around the world need this language as the main means of their communication.

As a result, speaking is a vital skill for individuals learning English, because people cannot interact with each other without first understanding each other. By speaking, speakers do not mean only uttering words through the mouth which means conveying the message through words utterance. They learn to speak their mother tongue just by listening and repeating in a similar manner, a foreign language is learned by imitation and reproduction. Richards (2008) stated, "When people meet, they exchange greetings, engage in small talk, recount comfortable zone of interaction with others." The ability to speak is considered as a passport to success. This implies that speaking fluently or being skilled at speaking is a basic part of humans' ability to stay linked to recent experiences, and so on, in order to be sociable and build connections with others.

Speaking skill is the one that can satisfy the principal function of a language, serving for communication; therefore, a person who can speak English well will certainly find it is easy to master English in general. Unfortunately, to those who study English as a non-native language, speaking is regarded as the most difficult competence among the four main skills of English including speaking, writing, listening, and reading.

Many English learners in Vietnam also realize that it is much more difficult to communicate English fluently and automatically in the classroom. Particularly at Tay Do University, there is a fact that English-majored students especially the first-year ones have poor English speaking skills. They spend a lot of time learning grammar, writing, reading and seem to ignore speaking when being high school students. That is why most of English-majored freshmen are passive in their speaking performance. Although first-year students majoring in English at Tay Do University have more chances to get involved in English speaking environment by learning with foreign teachers, they have encountered specific difficulties in their speaking performance. Obviously, it is the right time that they choose the appropriate learning methods to solve the problem. This study will explore some problems in learning English speaking of the first-year English-majored students.

The study “Common Difficulties in Speaking of English-Majored Freshmen at Tay Do University” was conducted for the reasons stated above. The purpose of the research is to help students identify their challenges they have had with English speaking in order to adapt their English learning style.

1.2 The significance of the study

The purpose of this study is to identify some of the difficulties that freshmen majoring in English at Tay Do University have encountered when speaking. Students will benefit from the study’s findings since they could enable students to recognize their own challenges to minimize their mistakes. Since then, they have been able to discover several English-speaking techniques that are valuable to their learning. After that, they can correct and find out effective methods to enhance their speaking skill as well as never meet those troubles again.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Definitions of speaking

According to Burns and Joyce (1997), speaking is an active process of constructing meaning that comprises the production, reception, and processing of data. Its shape and meaning are determined by the context in which it happens, which includes the speaker, their collective experience, the physical environments, and the speech's purpose. In recent years, linguists have found it easier to “see what is happening in words” thanks to the availability of linguistic resources - a computer database that contains “real-life” examples of both spoken and written English.

It is said that a good speaker synthesizes this array of skills and knowledge to succeed in a given speaking topic. 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 cords, tongue, teeth, and lips. Speaking includes formal and informal forms. That is, informal speaking is typically used with family and friends, or people you know properly whereas another occurs in business or academic situations, or when meeting people for the first time. 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 skill.

As a result, it is critical to highlight the link between skills while teaching a language. From the above definitions, it can be inferred that speaking is expressing ideas, opinions, or feelings to others by using words or sounds of articulation to inform, persuade, and entertain that can be learned by using some teaching-learning methodologies.

2.2 The importance of speaking

Speaking is the most often utilized language skill in almost all circumstances, and in everyday human life, communication, notably speaking, is seen as a way for individuals to show affection, get information, and establish community connections. There have been several opinions on the relevance of communication skills in various fields.

People, according to Sesnan (1997), always learn to speak before learning their mother tongue. As Rivers (1981) argues, speaking is used twice as much as reading and writing in our communication. Regarding language learning, most researchers agree that speaking is the most important of the four foreign language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Pattison (1992) asserts that when individuals learn a language, they aim to be able to speak that language. In support of this idea, Celce-Murcia (2001) states that, “Being able to speak a language is synonymous with knowing the language because speech is the 66 most basic means of communication of human.” Furthermore, speaking can support other language skills and plays an important role in developing a learner’s developing language (Gass & Varonis, 1994). For example, it has been shown that speaking can help develop listening skills (Regina, 1997), developing writing (Trachsel & Severino, 2004) as well as developing reading ability (Hilferty, 2005).

Additionally, the ability to communicate effectively provides the speaker with a variety of notable academic and professional advantages. Baker and Westrup (2003) claim that, "A student who can speak English well may have higher education opportunities, find work and get promoted." Employers always value the ability to speak well, because "It is a skill for which people are valued while the first impression is being formed." (Hedge, 2000).

In conclusion, speaking is seen as one of the most essential skills for human being, especially English speaking. This is likely to determine the level of any individuals' success. Thus, high-education students, more importantly English-majored students should take advantage of their university time to learn, practice, and improve their English speaking performance since this could have an influence on their future.

2.3 Common difficulties in speaking

2.3.1 Linguistic factors

Vocabulary

A word or a group of words with a definite meaning is referred to as vocabulary. According to Kamil and Hiebert (2005), vocabulary is the understanding of the meanings of words. Additionally, Rubin and Thompson (1994) declare "Vocabulary learning is at the heart of mastering a foreign language." Bowen et al (1985) and McCarthy (1990) indicate that vocabulary is the single and biggest component of any language course. The words come in at least two forms; oral and print. Oral vocabulary is the set of words for which we know the meanings when we speak or read orally. While print vocabulary consists of those words for which the meaning is known when we write or read silently. The problems of vocabulary occur when someone lacks the vocabulary needed to talk and does not know how to combine the vocabulary into a good sentence. Hedge (2000) says, "The neglect of vocabulary is also surprising in view of the fact that errors of vocabulary are potentially more misleading than those of grammar." In fact, without having a sufficient vocabulary, people cannot communicate effectively or express their ideas in both oral and written form. Possessing limited lexis is an obstacle for students in learning a language. Khan (2005) once again states that the numbers of students who learn English as a foreign language have difficulties using words and expressions to speak. In addition, Doris and Jessica (2007) also state that in real-life communication, nobody paid much attention to the correct grammar expression, but emphasized the content and how to reply. Furthermore, the aim of lexical learning includes both remembering words and the ability to use them automatically and properly in a wide range of language contexts when the need arises (McCarthy, 1984). However, in the little time allotted for the conversation, English learners are unlikely to find the appropriate words quickly and properly, resulting in a failed interaction. In oral communication, this is also a prevalent issue for the majority of Vietnamese learners. In short, students should put more attention to vocabulary since this is really an important part for their speaking performance success.

Pronunciation

Pronunciation is also a crucial aspect of verbal skills since it helps people understand what is being said in a conversation. Learners who correctly pronounce words attract listeners to communicate more and are more confident than those who do not. The way of speaking the language is called pronunciation which is generally understood and accepted by Redmond and Vrchota (2007). In such a case, learners of English often expect to be able to speak that language like a native speaker. However, they encounter many factors to gain their desire. According to Gilakjani (2012), "Learners with good English pronunciation are likely to be understood even if they make errors in other areas, while learners with bad pronunciation will not be understood, even if their grammar is perfect." One of the common factors that they find difficult is the pronunciation of another sound system. Learners find that their mother tongue influences their pronunciation of English. Avery and Ehrich (1992) argue that, "The native language affects both the ability to produce English sounds and the ability to hear sounds." If they cannot hear English well, they are cut off from the conversation with native speakers. Pronunciation is most definitely the first aspect that people can notice in second language learners when they are speaking English. Nation (2009) states, "When some teachers and students complain about difficulties in speaking; they are often talking about pronunciation." Pronunciation also plays a very important role in learning a language, as Derwing and Munro (2005) declare that, "Having good pronunciation of the language can help in normal communication, particularly intelligibility" (cited in Nation & Newton, 2009). That is the reason why learners usually face difficulties in pronunciation.

Grammar

Grammar, like pronunciation and vocabulary, is another significant part of linguistics that affects a student's capacity to communicate. That is, grammar provides learners with the knowledge of syntax and semantics helping students to form a correct sentence using in conversation. Merriam Webster Dictionary defines grammar as "the study of the classes of words, their inflections, and their functions and relations in the sentence." In addition, grammar gives learners the opportunity to manipulate the structure and to differentiate the appropriate grammatical forms that suit their context.

Richards (2008) states that, “Our knowledge of grammar helps us find the appropriate chunks, and the speaker also assists us in this process through intonation and pausing.” As a result, grammatical rules are said to be one of the fundamental aspects of speaking skills. Nevertheless, it is not simple to apply correct grammatical structures in English speaking. Learners find it difficult to remember all grammatical rules because of their diversity and complexity. Thus, students often worry about using the wrong structures when speaking English. In conversation, if mistakes are made in one’s pronunciation, grammar, or words spelling, it will lead to misunderstanding and boredom to others, and even damage their relationship. Additionally, students also get obstacles when making sentences because they usually make unclear sentences since they arrange the wrong sentence order. When the learners learn a foreign language, they often make grammatical mistakes because they apply their mother tongue or first language structure to the structure of the foreign language which is different from their native language (Haryanto, 2007). The role of grammar in communication is obvious. Swan (1998) believes that knowing how to build and use certain structures makes it feasible to communicate common types of meaning successfully. Therefore, those learners should understand English language structures accurately to become fluent.

2.3.2 Psychological factors

Confidence

More than half of a million people suffer from low self-esteem. Self-confidence is recognizing that we have the ability to do excellent things and think positively. According to Elliot (1998), the concept of self-confidence relates to self-assuredness in one’s personal judgment, ability, power, etc. sometimes manifested excessively. Good self-confidence comes from a focus on self-consciousness. However, one of the most common problems that students meet when communicating is lacking confidence. Being less confident, the speakers feel uncomfortable when they get involved in any conversation, they are prone to talk with the other as their big challenges. When English speakers lack confidence, no one wants to hear or trust the information they give in their presentations. Lack of self-confidence can be made up of several different aspects like guilty feeling, shyness turned inward, unrealistic expectations of perfection, false sense of humility, fear of change or making mistakes, depression, etc. Lack of self-confidence may bring the students into a threat of believing they are not going to be excellent English speakers. This lack of self-confidence also becomes a great problem that affects students’ speaking performance. It is difficult for the students to master English speaking if they are unconfident with their speaking ability. It is commonly understood that students’ lack of confidence usually occurs when students realize their conversation partners have not understood them or when they do not understand other speakers. In this situation, they would rather keep silent while others do talking showing that the students are lack of confidence to communicate. In response to this, according to Nunan (1999), students who lack confidence in themselves and their English are vulnerable to communication anxiety. To conclude, lacking confidence is one of the barriers for those who learn English speaking. Learners need to find ways to overcome this psychological problem.

Motivation

Dornyei (2015) states that motivation refers to the efforts learners make to study a foreign language when it comes to English-majored students practicing and improving their speaking skills. Motivation is one of the keys that influence the rate and success of language learning. Norris-Holt (2002) referring to Crookes and Schmidt defines motivation as “The learner’s orientation with regard to the goal of learning a second language.” Motivation involved desire to learn a language, intensity of effort to achieve this, and attitudes toward learning the language. In this context, it can be understood as the one relating to attitude and vice versa with both having an influence on learning and acquisition. In addition, Zua (2008) further adds that motivation is inner energy and that no matter what kinds of motivation the learners possess it will enhance their study interest. Therefore, lack of motivation or de-motivation is likely to significantly affect English learners’ speaking learning. Deci and Ryan (1985) used a similar term ‘a-motivation’, which means “The relative absence of motivation that is not caused by a lack of initial interest but rather by the individual’s experiencing feelings of incompetence and helplessness when faced with the activity.” Based on Dornyei’s study in 2015, factors affecting students’ motivation can be classified into learner’s factors, teacher’s factors, environmental factors, and teaching and learning conditions. In short, motivation is a crucial component that helps to the construction of a successful conversation, and psychological elements have a direct impact on the effectiveness of any communication.

2.3.3 Background knowledge

For English majors, background knowledge is also a problem while learning and enhancing their speaking skills. In fact, understanding language components such as vocabulary and grammatical structures appears to be necessary yet insufficient. What makes speaking distinct from the other skills is that the speaker needs to have quick access to all the relevant knowledge required to produce the appropriate language in relatively short lags of time, whereas in other skills the learners normally have enough time to match the input with the existing knowledge, for example, in reading or writing or to search for the accurate forms to produce the language with no immediate recipient who might be waiting

even some times impatiently to receive the language, for example, in writing. It can be realized that the level of understanding of learners is assessed through the knowledge they have such as religious, technical, and cultural knowledge or topic familiarity. In reality, students meet difficulty to show their opinion because of lack of general knowledge. Turner, Husman and Schallert (2002) say that "A person's background knowledge, often called prior knowledge, is a collection of 'abstracted residue' that has been formed from all of life's experiences." Some researchers have investigated the effect of background knowledge on improving language learning in general, and learning language skills and sub-skills in particular. Some specialists consider the role of schematic knowledge as a determining factor affecting and influencing language components especially comprehension. Brown and Yule (1983) define schemata as "organized background knowledge which leads us to expect or predict aspects in our interpretation of discourse." They said that the listener uses two basic principles to relate the new information to his or her previous experience: the principle of analogy, i.e., things will be as they were before and the principle of minimal change, i.e., things are as like as possible to how they were before. Gebhard (2000) points out that background knowledge relates to our real world experiences and expectations that we have. This knowledge is very important when we consider the language processing problems of English learners.

2.3.4 The influence of mother tongue on speaking English

Most new language learners are influenced by their mother tongue in most situations. Mother tongue is one of the basic mistakes that all students make when practicing speaking skills in class. Because the most of students were born in Vietnam. In fact, both English and Vietnamese use the Latin script but the speech is not the same, there are many other differences between English and Vietnamese. Firstly, Vietnamese is a monophonic language. Monophonic language means each Vietnamese word is a syllable, a language, a complete block in pronunciation.

For example: Tôi là một học sinh.

They will be spoken clearly each word is "Tôi" "là" "một" "học" "sinh"

Secondly, meanwhile, English is a polyphonic language. This means that many words in English are not made up of one syllable, but from many syllables.

For example: I am a student.

/aɪ æm ə 'stju: dnt/

The two example sentences above have the same meaning but in Vietnamese sentences, each word is a separate syllable, the noun "student" is also speak and separated into two completely separate words, "student" and "birth". In the English example, "student" is a single word and speak as two separate 'ti' syllables that are joined together.

To sum up, many people have the habit of speaking English like speaking Vietnamese, meaning that for English words with many syllables, they are also broken down into separate sounds, all stemming from this difference. The most common reason is translation or interference from the mother tongue.

Generally speaking, vocabulary errors are caused by differences in the sound system and symbols between the native language and English, leading to similar thoughts and responses in the native language when speaking a second language. Before speaking, the students have sometimes translated Vietnamese into English in their heads, and the native speakers do not clearly understand what the students mean when communicating that leads to errors and misunderstandings. Therefore, the evidence of mother tongue influence on English is very obvious. This manifests in different cultural forms also makes it difficult for students to connect. Especially, when the students do not understand or know the answer they tend to say "Uh, Oh, Ah"... to extend the time for replying.

The learning environment is a cause that hinders the development of students' speaking skills when there are too few opportunities to practice. Especially, in Vietnamese community, people use Vietnamese as their main language, so students cannot communicate in English with them in daily life. So they have to speak Vietnamese with their family and relatives after leaving their class in school. Students do not want to be rejected because of the people around them so they use their native language in everyday conversation. That leads to many students being unable to communicate in English well outside of classrooms without classmates or teachers on Saturdays or Sundays. When students who do not have a good environment to practice makes many important things easily forgotten.

For example: A teacher asks "How to become a successful person?"

Student respond: "Firstly, we need a 'Đam mê'. It means very powerful feeling, for example love, want or other emotion."

The students cannot remember the word “Passion” (Đam mê). They need to clarify other ways to ensure that native speakers know what they mean and then use dictionaries to search for the words they need. This takes a lot of time and the number of listeners will not involve too much.

To sum up, living in a mother tongue environment is very difficult for the English learners to remember how to speak and practice English speaking skills well.

2.4 Related studies

As indicated in certain following studies (Cao et al, 2021; Huynh, 2020; Trinh, 2019; Vo et al, 2018), a variety of researchers have investigated challenges surrounding English speaking in the last decade.

In 2021, Cao Minh Ky Cao et al who are English teachers in the Mekong Delta, collaborated to conduct a study entitled “ELF Students’ Speaking Skills: Difficulties and Solutions: A Case at Can Tho University, Vietnam.” It aimed to investigate the difficulties that many English students faced during their English speaking courses at university, and also hope to provide possible solutions or directions to take into account or at the very least mitigate these problems for students on their process of becoming future fluent English speakers. A survey was conducted on 43 English-majored students ranging from freshmen to seniors at Can Tho University. The results showed the primary cause leading to unfluent speeches in English was the lack of vocabulary needed to convey thoughts and ideas. The solutions were to be an increased interaction with the language itself and also the improvement of other essential English skills.

In 2020, Huynh Thi Anh Tram from the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Social Sciences, Ba Ria-Vung Tau University carried out the research “Problems of Learning Speaking Skills Encountered by English Major Students at Ba Ria-Vung Tau University, Vietnam.” The aim of the research was to discover and analyze the problems in learning speaking skills faced by English major students at Ba Ria-Vung Tau University (BVU), 65 students participated in this study by completing the questionnaire made by the researcher. The result reveals that the dominant problems these students often encounter are associated with linguistic problems and non-linguistic problems. Although students have striven to deal with their learning speaking problems, their attempts seem to be unsuccessful. Therefore, some recommendations in the light of findings are also presented in this research.

Trinh Thi Tuyet performed a study in 2019 titled “Difficulties in English Speaking Skill of Thuong Mai University’s Majored English Freshmen and Solutions” to offer background on English and English speaking. The paper also indicated some problems and difficulties that English learners have to encounter when speaking English. Based on given theories and previously related studies, the paper conducted a survey and made a questionnaire to interview English major freshmen. The study showed the frequency of learning English speaking of freshmen and the main way that most of freshmen applied when they practiced speaking English. Afterwards, the study showed the advantages and disadvantages in their learning ways and found out some main difficulties and problems they face to. Then, to each difficulty and problem, the paper provided some solutions to deal with, solutions for students and for Thuong Mai University’s students as well.

Vo Phuong Quyen et al conducted research at Can Tho University in 2018 named “Challenges to Speaking Skills Encountered by English-majored Students: A Story of One Vietnamese University in the Mekong Delta” to look into the challenges of speaking skills faced by English-majored freshmen in a Vietnamese university. The data obtained from the questionnaire with 131 students, individual interviews with lecturers, and class observation. The findings show that English freshmen faced both internal and external challenges, especially the latter ones regarding the limitation of English speaking environment and extracurricular activities. Possible measures are proposed to tackle such challenges in helping students speak English more effectively.

In summary, despite the fact that many studies have focused on the difficulties faced by English learners in speaking, there are still few concerns for pointing out difficulties encountered by first-year English-majoring students at Tay Do University.

3. RESEARCH AIMS, RESEARCH QUESTION AND HYPOTHESIS

3.1 Research aims

The study aims to identify some of the difficulties that freshmen majoring in English at Tay Do University have encountered when speaking. Students will benefit from the study’s findings since they could enable students to recognize their own challenges. Since then, they have been able to discover several English-speaking techniques that are valuable to their learning.

3.2 Research question

This study is conducted in order to answer the question: “What are common difficulties in speaking that English-majored freshmen at Tay Do University experience?”

3.3 Research hypothesis

According to the literature review, it is hypothesized that most of the English majored freshmen at Tay Do University experience some difficulties in speaking which are relevant to factors such as linguistic factors, psychological factors, and background knowledge.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Design

The research was carried out at Tay Do University which is a private university in the Mekong Delta. English-majored freshmen are the research population who would be delivered the questionnaire for the researcher collects information about their problems in speaking. This is a combination of quantitative and qualitative studies.

4.2 Participant

The research participants are 100 students of first-year English majors at Tay Do University. They are aging from 18 to 23 years old. They speak Vietnamese as their mother tongue and English is their foreign language. These students mostly come from urban areas and a small number comes from rural regions. Besides, they have been learning English about 8 years. All of the participants have studied speaking and listening as two combined subjects in class. They have many chances to practice English in class with both Vietnamese and foreign English-speaking teachers.

4.3 Instrument

The instrument of this study is questionnaires. The questionnaire is used to gather information from students. It can survey difficulties in English speaking. Furthermore, the questionnaire can be used to find the causes of difficulties.

The questionnaire has two parts. Part 1 included 7 questions that aim at getting background information from students such as participants' English learning years, participants' perspectives toward English speaking skill etc. Part 2 was involving 23 statements relevant to difficulties of English majored freshmen at Tay Do University in speaking with five levels of assessment such as strongly agree, agree, no idea, disagree, and strongly disagree. Students could tick on the appropriate column next to the statements.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After analyzing the information in the questionnaire, there were some results about student's common errors in English speaking class of English majored freshmen at Tay Do University which include 3 main parts such as, linguistic factors, psychological factors, student's background of learning speaking. All those challenges could be explained as following. First, linguistic factors could concern 3 main problems such as vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar. Second, with the psychological factors, confidence and motivation are two main essential factors, and the third one could be the background knowledge and the influence of mother tongue on speaking English might be the last factor.

5.1 Students' background

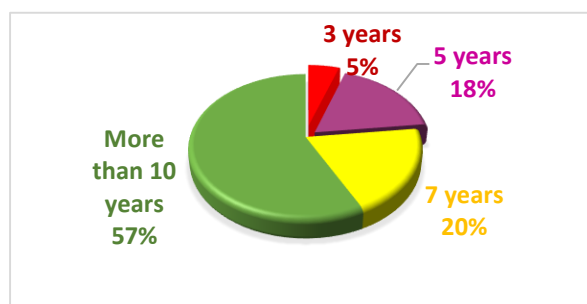


Figure 1. Students’ year of learning English

The graph illustrated that the number of students has been studying English more than seven years accounted nearly 65%, and 23% of students have only studied English from three years to five years. It means that a small minority of students doesn’t have the standard of English when they enter Tay Do University, so they choose English as their major is really a big challenge. They don’t keep up with the pace of study with the others in their class. So, English majored students studying English for over 7 years comprised of 64%, that means they can communicate English well if they know clearly their obstacles. Regarding the remaining students who have only started learning English for 3 years, it will take long time and great effort for them to keep up with the learning pace and to improve their English speaking skills.

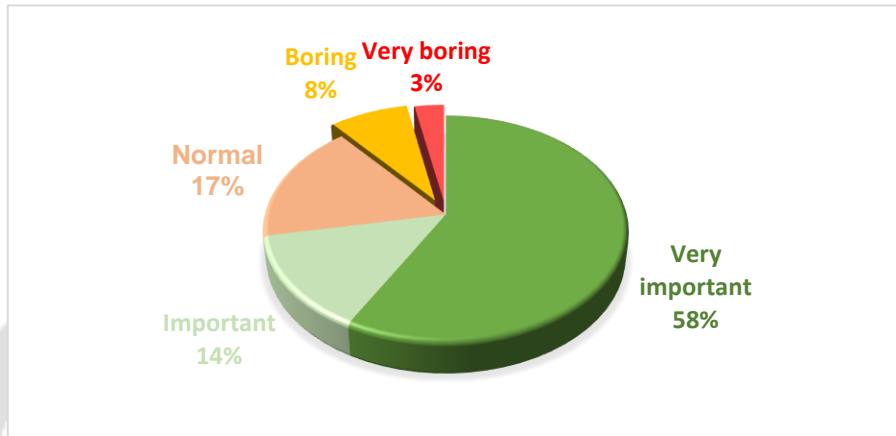


Figure 2. The importance of learning speaking English

The chart demonstrated that the majority of students always cared much about the importance of learning English, especially speaking skill. As can be seen from the data that more than 60% of students who considered that English is very important and significant for their future careers. There was growing tendency to concern the significance of speaking English. Over 10 percent of students got bored with speaking class and they showed no interest in this subject. The remainders who showed no attitude toward speaking is more than 17 percent. Generally speaking, most of students consider that learning speaking English is essential. This is a very positive thing for the students involved in this paper.

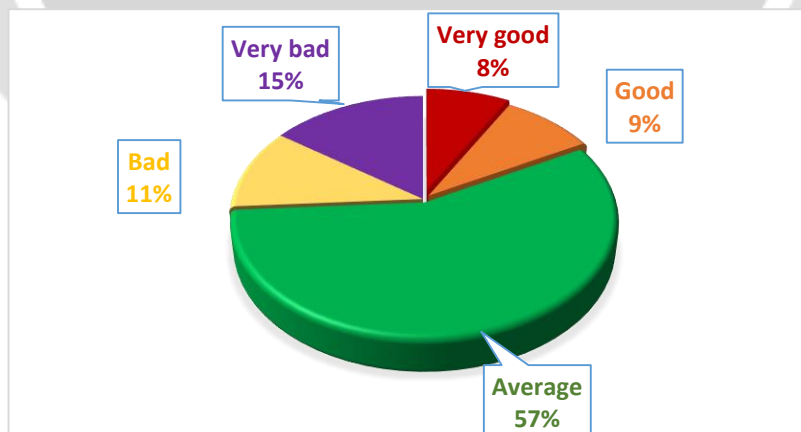


Figure 3. Student’s English speaking proficiency

English speaking proficiency is one of students’ demand, however in order to be competent in speaking English, students need a long process. If they only worry much about their low skill in English, but they do not try hard. They cannot be good English communicators. Nearly 25 percent of students felt that their speaking skills are not good enough to communicate with each other. Only 17% of students who were excellent and quite confident with their fluency can have great speaking proficiency. Remarkably, the most proportion of students are average at English acquisition, it accounted for 57%. The survey result claimed that students having difficulty in speaking English who are often poor in speaking skill.

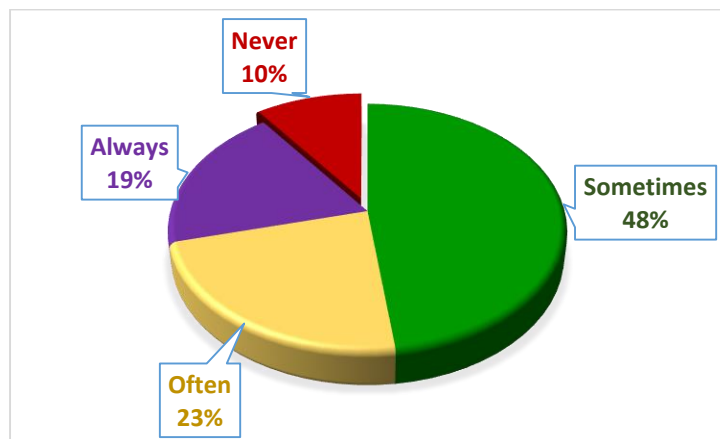


Figure 4. Students’ practicing-time on speaking per day

According to random statistics, only 23 percent of the students often spent one hour a day practicing English speaking. From the pie chart, it can be seen that almost all students spent very little time on practice speaking English which will impede their speaking abilities of the students. It is nearly 50 percent of students (48%) are not interested in practicing speaking every day. Many students said they were really lazily when mentioning in English speaking practicing daily. They sometimes practiced speaking about 30 minutes a day. On the contrary, there were about 20% of students mentioned that they always enjoyed practice speaking about 2 hours a day to improve their speaking skills.

In short, as can observed from the figure 4, students’ attitude toward English practicing was declared pretty clearly. However, there was 10 percentage of students did not care much about their English improvement by practicing day by day. They hardly ever spent time practicing English to better their speaking skills. That could be their obstacles when learning in English speaking class.

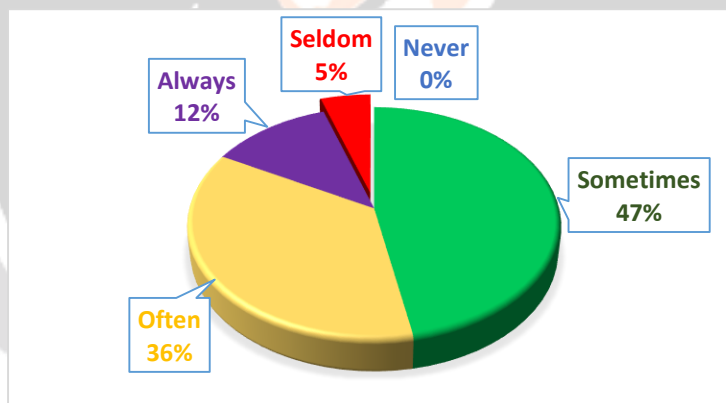


Figure 5. Students’ frequency in making mistakes

When discussing the common mistakes in English speaking class, the proportion from the chart reflected the reality in English speaking class. Almost all students thought that they often or sometimes or usually made mistakes when speaking English in class with more than 80%. Especially, 12 % of students always realized their mistakes while speaking. No one claimed that they have never made errors, but 5% of students affirmed that they seldom made mistakes in English speaking class. It means they are excellent students in class. This data described that the regular mistakes made by first-year students in English-speaking class is obviously. Therefore, students having difficulties in the speaking process did not know how to correct it better and overcome their challenges smoothly.

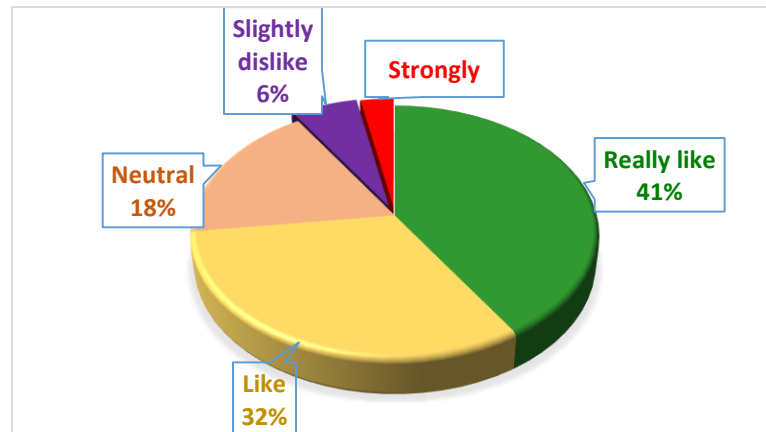


Figure 6. Students’ favorite in communicating foreigners

Communication or conversation with foreigners is one of the common interests of English majored students at Tay Do University. This number could reach to more than 70%. However, there was a very small proportion of students (about 9%) disliked communicating with foreigners. The remain students who slightly enjoy communicating with native speakers or foreigners fall on the group of three-year learning English. That explained they still liked talking to native speakers or foreigners but they did not have enough English ability, so they were not confident enough to communicate with foreigners. There was about 18% students had no idea while talking to foreigners. In short, it can be seen that, many students really enjoyed talking to foreigners. This will have also helped them recognize their exact common mistakes that they had encountered when speaking English. Therefore, they will gain more confidence to communicate with foreigners.

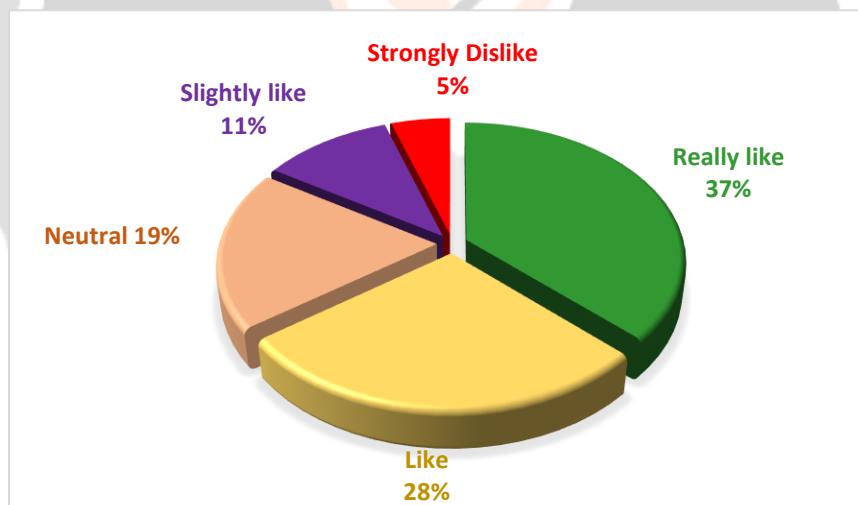


Figure 7. Students’ interest in joining English speaking clubs (ESC)

All English students seem to be attracted with English speaking club (ESC) with many reasons. They attended ECS to make friends, to improve their speaking skill or just to be fun. However, with the majority of students really liked and enjoyed attending English clubs, it was calculated up to 65%. Very few students were not interested in joining English speaking clubs, it only took 5%. The students involved in English-speaking events from which students also participate in English-speaking clubs. However, English speaking is not a regular activity at school, so that can also be an obstacle for students who want to join ESC. To English freshmen at Tay Do University, English speaking class is one of their challenging classes, because students do not have the habits of speaking at high schools. Consequently, after entering university, they are really afraid of speaking in front of their classmates. There were many problems in English speaking class, but the most common mistakes which students usually made in speaking are mother tongue interference, vocabulary, pronunciation, and psychology.

Through the table 1 listed in the survey, most students have confided their difficulties in speaking English, especially about vocabulary and pronunciation. Besides that, the students also make some common mistakes such as: linking word, mother tongue, psychology.

All those challenges could be explained as following. First, linguistic factors could concern 3 main problems such as vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar. Second, with the psychological factors, confidence and motivation are two main essential factors, and the third one could be the background knowledge and the influence of mother tongue on speaking English might be the last factor.

5.2. Common difficulties in speaking

5.2.1 The influence of linguistic factors

Table 1. Students' vocabulary problem

Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
8. Vocabulary is actually a big challenge for me in any English conversations.	7%	4%	20 %	50%	19%
9. Poor vocabulary, I cannot express my ideas easily, I rarely use slang, idioms, phrasal verbs.	8%	7%	22%	59%	4%
10. Due to lack of vocabulary, I cannot convey my messages to the listeners when speaking.	6%	5%	30%	46%	13%
11. I often use vocabulary in the wrong context.	8%	9%	25%	49%	9%

Through the results listed above, vocabulary had an influence on the English speaking process of English majored students, it was actually a big challenge for them in any English conversations with 69 percent of students showed their agreement. I have supposed that insufficient vocabulary was the most common cause of misunderstandings when students had conversations in English. The poor vocabulary with uncommon slang, idioms, phrasal verbs were the second barrier in the English speaking process of students with 63% confirmation. Many freshmen admitted that they could not convey messages to the listeners when speaking due to lack of vocabulary with 59%. The last obstacle was about 58% of freshmen who claimed that they often used vocabulary in the wrong context. If vocabulary is an essential issue in learning speaking process, pronunciation is also very important in speaking, too. If students did not care much about their pronunciation; they could not achieve their high goal in English communication. When students could not pronounce the words well, the listeners would never catch up their ideas. Therefore, the communication or conversation would fail completely. The below table would show some data to prove the pronunciation problems.

Table 2. Students' pronunciation problem

Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
12. Pronunciation is a challenging aspect for me in speaking practices.	7%	9%	18%	52%	14%
13. Due to poor pronunciation, the listeners are unable to understand my speaking content.	9%	8%	17%	56%	10%

14. In English speaking, I usually make a lot of mistakes in pronouncing.	5%	8%	19%	58%	10%
15. Sometimes, I am omissible of final consonants (“s”)	5%	9%	21%	54%	11%

From the information in this table, the results of the statistics described that pronunciation was also a challenging aspect for English majored freshmen in speaking practices with 63%, participants agreed that they usually made mistakes in pronunciation. Up to 66% of students said that the listeners were unable to understand thier speaking content due to poor pronunciation. Sometimes, they missed out the final consonants and it was not easy for them to pronounce some difficult letters correctly and this was also considered as one of the obstacles for students. Therefore, the listeners were unable to understand their speaking’s content due to poor pronunciation. However, usually adding “s” to the end of words or structures, 65% students who agreed were both routine and errors which often caused them to speak English while speaking, but some students were also hindered by adding “s” at the end of the negative 14%. In general, it doesn’t matter too much to add the final consonant.

Table 3. Students’ grammar problem

Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
16. I often get bad marks when studying an English-speaking subject due to grammatical errors.	3%	6%	18%	46%	27%
17. The listeners cannot understand what I speak because I usually speak ill-formed sentences.	2%	7%	21%	51%	19%
18. It finds difficult for me to produce a sentence with correct grammatical structures when speaking.	2%	9%	29%	47%	13%
19. I often get bad marks when studying an English-speaking subject due to grammatical errors.	3%	9%	23%	48%	17%

As can be seen from table, there was a remarkable number of students (73%) who think that their grammar knowledge is not good enough, such as using tenses, subject-verb, and noun-adjective agreement in the statement 16. Besides, in the statement 17, students also claimed that they usually speak may ill-formed sentences because they do not understand clearly the functions and rules of part of speech leading them to misuse the function of the word making the readers unable to understand or the sentence is wrong meaning with more than 70% of participants agreed with statement 17. English majored freshmen agreed with statement 18 and 19 that their speaking was often full of grammatical mistakes and errors with nearly 60%. According to the examined data, the most challenging aspect of grammar use for students was tenses used in a sentence. They also lacked a basic knowledge of how to use 12 tenses in English competently that results in using grammatical or meaningless sentences. An article requires many kinds of sentences, all of which must be well-organized and interconnected in tenses and sentence structures.

To summarize, grammar is an essential aspect of teaching and learning, students can focus on grammar constructs if English learners want to be competent at speaking skill.

5.2.2 The influence of psychological factors (confidence and motivation)

Table 4. Students’ psychology problem

Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
20. Unconference is a great problem affecting my speaking performance.	9%	7%	38%	40%	6%
21. I regularly keep silent in almost in crowded places, I cannot react fast while speaking, I have to wait for having enough vocabulary.	6%	7%	28%	54%	5%
22. Lack of motivation makes my speaking performance unsuccessful.	8%	7%	28%	48%	9%
23. Due to demotivation, I cannot create an effective English conversation.	10%	16 %	32%	36%	6%

Psychology in English speaking class is also one of the mentioned factors that students are often encountered. From the information shown in this table, the data collected shows that psychological factors affect students' ability to speak English, students were afraid of making mistakes and lacking in confidence in front of my classmates almost all participants (46%) agreed that the psychological is one of the biggest obstacles while 16% of participants disagreed with that statement. Large number of students felt that they could not react fast while speaking English because they rarely communicated in English in crowded places. There were up to 60% of freshmen who always waited until they had enough knowledge to be ready to communicate that also made them confused. Besides, 13% of students are perfectionists, so they seldom said something wrong. Many students did not have enough motivation that made their speaking perfectly with nearly 60% (57%). Through the data results, it is found that the psychological problems of self-fear, lack of self-confidence, as well as factors affecting friends, make it difficult for students to speak English, too.

5.2.3 The influence of background knowledge

Table 5. Students' background knowledge problem

Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
24. Background knowledge in an essential component in the process of second or foreign language acquisition.	4%	18%	20%	28%	30%
25. I have less information about religion, culture, technology etc. to be able to discuss with the speaking partner because of unfamiliar topics.	15%	3%	14%	21%	47%
26. It is very essential to have the good background knowledge in order to learn speaking better.	2%	15%	3%	39%	41%
27. I am not confident in talking a new topic because I do not have sufficient background knowledge of the topic that I am going to talk about.	12%	28%	17%	27%	16%

In the first statement “Background knowledge is an essential component in the process of second or foreign language acquisition.” it was crucial to determine whether background knowledge had a significant impact in learning English or not. Approximately 60% of respondents (28% agreed and 30% strongly agreed) believed that background knowledge was a significant element in speaking process while the percentage of people who did not realized the importance of background knowledge was exactly 22% and those having no idea was 20% in the statement 24. Dealt with the statement number 25, the students’ questions faced by unfamiliar topic, specifically, more than half of freshmen (68%) shared that they had faced obstacles with unfamiliar topics in their English speaking. Besides, 47% of them completely agreed. In contrast, there were only 18 % of participants who believed that was not a big deal and 14 % who did not give any opinion.

With the response to the statement 26, the majority of students (nearly 80%) quite agreed that “It’s very essential to have the good background knowledge in order to learn speaking better” with 39 % of participants who agreed and 41 % who fully agreed that in some reasons, they did not have enough good information or experience that made them less confident while speaking. On the opposite side, the percentage of sophomores choosing “disagreed” and “strongly disagreed” were 17% whereas 3 % of them showed the neutrality. In the last statement 27th of the background knowledge, 43% of students felt unconfident when talking about new topic without the good background knowledge.

5.2.4 The influence of mother tongue

Table 6. The influence of mother tongue

Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
28. I have often translated Vietnamese into English in mind before speaking and I often use Um, Ah, oh, so on” when speaking English in class.	5%	4%	28%	50%	13%
29. I speak English in class, but sometimes add a few Vietnamese words.	7%	9%	30%	40%	14%
30. I love to speak with Vietnamese more than foreigners because of Vietnamese accent easily to hear.	9%	7%	32%	40%	12%

As can be seen from the question 28 to question 30 in the table, English majored freshmen faced many difficulties in speaking, especially, the influence of mother tongue on speaking English. Through the statistical analysis, most of students admitted that they have problems in mother tongue. Students who did not understand the native speakers were the most influential factor in the English speaking process of university students because up to 53% of students agreed to this. More than 60% of students often used the words “Um, Ah, oh, so on” when speaking English in class and they have often translated Vietnamese into English in mind before speaking. With 54% of students agreed that they speak English in class, but sometimes added a few Vietnamese words to explain their ideas. However, they loved to speak to Vietnamese more than foreigners. Because when they felt unsure something, Vietnamese accent was easily to hear more than English. Due to 16% of students disagreed and 52% of students were not affected this idea much. To sum up, most of students still found that the mother tongue has an influence on their English speaking skills. Besides, vocabulary is the one of the key factor in speaking process.

DISCUSSION

After collecting information about the problems that often occurred in thesis speaking through the questionnaires. The researchers analyzed and calculated data of 7 questions and 23 statements. From the table, it can be easily seen that English majored freshmen faced many challenges in speaking. All those challenges could be explained as following. First, linguistic factors could concern three main problems such as vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar. Second, with the psychological factors, confidence and motivation are two main essential factors, and the third one could be the background knowledge and the influence of mother tongue on speaking English might be the last factor. However, the two most influential factors were that because students’ vocabulary and grammar problems on speaking English because the percentage of students having difficulty dominated the highest proportions. Next, students’ pronunciation and psychology problem in speaking English occupied the second influence, the background knowledge and influence

of mother tongue on speaking English were the least influential elements. In general, those factors have had a great impact on the English language learners of first-year students majoring in English at Tay Do University.

6. CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

After conducting this research by analyzing the important information collected from the freshmen, the researchers finally figured out some common errors that English-majored freshmen at Tay Do University could encounter some difficulties in speaking related to some main points, namely linguistic factors (vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation), psychological factors (confidence and motivation), the background knowledge and mother tongue.

Linguistic factors

English-majored first-year students have had to deal with many problems related to linguistics when speaking. Firstly, most students cannot entirely express their ideas smoothly, and the words they use when speaking are not absolutely appropriate for the context due to lack of vocabulary. Secondly, these students have faced challenges in grammatical structures. In fact, they hardly ever create a grammatically correct sentence completely, resulting in the wrong content to be conveyed. Thirdly, poor pronunciation is also a direct way leading to the ineffective speaking performance of students. They are unable to make the audiences understand what they said because of mispronunciation.

Psychological factors

Initially, most students claim that lacking confidence is one of the psychological factors they have to make every effort to deal with. Most of them realize that being unconfident causes their speaking's failure. In terms of motivation, this factor also plays a significant role in a successful conversation. However, almost every student has said that due to demotivation, they cannot create an effective English conversation.

Background knowledge

For English majors, background knowledge is also another worry while learning and developing their speaking skills. Many students have admitted that they suffer difficulties to show their ideas due to the shortage of general knowledge. These speakers have less information about religion, culture, technology, etc. to be able to discuss with the speaking partner. They sometimes have no topics to communicate with their partners. As a result, this causes an unsuccessful conversation.

Mother tongue

The effect of mother tongue on English speaking is the least influential factor, English majors freshmen have a little concern about this factor while learning and developing their speaking skills. Many students have admitted that they often use Vietnamese while they are speaking or they have less information about the given topics to communicate with their partners. As a result, this causes the listeners' misunderstanding.

To be brief, basing on above difficulties mentioned, the researchers expects that the first-year English major students at Tay Do University can realize and overcome their obstacles in English speaking. In addition, English teachers can encourage and suggest appropriate solutions for students to help them tackle their speaking problems.

5.2 Implications

Through the research results, the researchers realized that it was not easy for Vietnamese students to speak English fluently. Especially for first-year English-speaking majors, the speaking skill must be taken more seriously.

- ✓ Therefore, I would like to suggest some implications for correcting and learning speaking skill for English majored students at Tay Do University as the following ideas.
- ✓ Self-practice. Students can practice speaking on a specific topic, or writing a questionnaire and practice answering them.
- ✓ Increase vocabulary. The university students can talk about many different topics.
- ✓ Try and learn many useful new words in many contexts. Using a large dictionary is an effective way to increase vocabulary.

- ✓ Take time to listen more. Listen while reading the text with eyes and then read aloud.
- ✓ Try to imitate the pronunciation when hearing in the lesson.
- ✓ Sing along to favorite English songs that helps the learner speak English fluently.

As a result, not only could students widen their knowledge but also help their voice become more natural speaking with foreigners. Besides, they should search for videos related to the speaking teaching on YouTube so that they could learn strategies and then apply these ways for practicing when communicating in English. These suggestions would be very useful and essential for students in their speaking learning process.

5.3 Recommendations

It is better if the further research will focus on a larger scale with students from many different courses so that the results could be more diversified, practical and reliable. In addition, as the researchers already completed the work of investigating the common errors in English speaking class of English majored freshmen at Tay Do University, hopefully in the near future, other researchers are going to conduct research to figure out other mistakes as well as solutions to minimize students' obstacles as much as possible. Besides that, some recommended books for the students to research on speaking skill. Practice makes perfect, that is the reason why the students should find out some kinds of books to help them have more understanding about this field. There are some suggested books below which can be helpful for students including: Speak now, Let's talk or Speaking for IELTS...etc.

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