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Examining the Issues of English-Speaking Skills that University EFL Learners Face

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Abstract

Speaking English is a regular part of the academic routine for EFL students enrolled in Vietnam's top undergraduate English programs. Occasionally, this approach poses numerous issues for first-year undergraduate students at both public and private universities. Despite its significance, not enough information was discovered regarding the difficulties Vietnamese university students have speaking English. One hundred and one students and twelve teachers from six universities participated in the current study, which used mixed methods to investigate the speaking issues encountered by undergraduate students. The outcome

demonstrates that English majors at public and private universities encounter numerous difficulties when trying to communicate in the language. But according to this survey, students at public universities have somewhat better English proficiency and experience fewer issues than those at private universities. The participants shared their varied perspectives on how curricula, methods of instruction, and specific institutions might help students overcome their limited proficiency in speaking English. Lastly, the study offers the relevant stakeholders a number of highly detailed recommendations based on the findings.

Keywords: EFL Learners, English-Speaking Skills, Public Universities, Private Universities

1. Introduction

As in many parts of the world today, learning English is considered one of the most important factors for a successful career (Ahmad, 2008; Hamid, 2010; Hamid, Jahan, & Islam, 2013; Leitner, Hashim, & Wolf, 2016; Rahman & Pandian, 2018) ^[1, 6, 8, 11, 12]. Although there is debate about whether English is ESL (English as a Secondary Language) or EFL (English as a Foreign Language), it is taught as a compulsory subject from primary to upper secondary level. English is also used as the language of instruction at tertiary level in all universities. In today's world where English is the dominant language, there is no doubt that speaking skills are an important aspect of English communication ability. Vietnam is one of the countries in Asia in terms of population and is a country where English is widely spoken.

When a learner attends a university where English is the medium of instruction, speaking problems become more acute and pronounced. In Vietnam, first-year English major students at both public and private universities have problems speaking English. This is indeed a surprising fact, because this is exactly what they want to graduate from. In this case, this is certainly a common problem for all students and shows the standard of English language teaching (ELT), especially speaking skills, at secondary and high school levels in Vietnam. According to the researchers' own experience, EFL learners face several problems with speaking English, especially in the first year of undergraduate English studies. Additionally, it is available to students regardless of their educational institution. Whether you are in a public or private school, you face problems. Therefore, in this study, both public and private universities were considered to identify and evaluate the issues in general.

Speaking skills have been found to be the most problematic skill for learners, even at higher education levels. Classroom learners primarily use English for educational purposes, but when there are problems communicating in English, the entire educational process becomes problematic for implementation and success. English is a compulsory subject from primary school, and communication is also emphasized, but not being able to speak English is a cause for concern. Therefore, research is needed. By focusing on and comparing the speaking problems of new students at public and private universities, the essence of this will become clear. This research will reveal ways to eliminate or overcome students' problems and will tell if other factors related to the educational institution, learning environment, or other students are involved in the problem.

2. Literature review

Current research on issues and challenges in teaching and learning spoken English focuses on specific participant groups. New students in the English department of the university targeted for this study are not eligible. Some of the studies were conducted in urban areas, while others were conducted in rural areas. Hamid (2011)^[7] conducted another study regarding the problems and English skills of his EFL learners in rural schools of this country. He analyzed several socio-economic factors that influence the teaching and learning of English. Several other studies have shown that factors such as language anxiety or "English phobia", family ability to pay, family educational background, and location of the educational institution are important to the quality of ELT and motivation of EFL learners. It turned out to be an element. Speaking ability is the most neglected language skill in rural and urban universities (Ahmad, 2014; Ahmad, 2017)^[2, 3]. Hasan & Akhand (2009)^[9] conducted a study on the challenges and sustainability of ELT at higher education level. This large-scale study covered all 64 districts of the country, including both urban and rural universities. The results showed that the two factors that affected the teaching and learning of spoken English were the lack of appropriate teaching materials and the teachers' low ELT proficiency.

2.1 Communication and speaking skills

In order to enhance professional learning, researchers propose the creation of professional learning communities with the suggestion that the focus is not just on individuals' learning but on professional learning for collective knowledge and growth, i.e., professional learning communities help teachers enhance their own and their school's development. The concept of professional learning was further developed as the continuous acquisition of new knowledge and enrichment of the teaching profession. In the teaching context and the corporate one alike, if teaching professionals have opportunities to learn to improve excellence and understanding of learners' needs, they may improve their teaching practice and help learners better. Leedy, 1997, said that school reform could be successful and sustainable unless the support staff defines the professional learning community embraced it. In the same manner, numerous researchers stress the importance of professional development activities, such as workshops, conferences, action research, team teaching, and so on, thanks to which schools learn by listening to teachers' ideas for innovations and the modes of workshops, conferences, and sharing sessions for professional learning, which could be delivered face-to-face or virtually using conferencing technology.

There are also empirical studies in the context of English language teaching with similar conclusions about creating professional learning communities to enhance professional learning among teachers as the ultimate goal for the sustainability of a language school. In practice, there have been many professional learning projects implemented in local English language teaching institutions in Vietnam, such as the RMIT, Scottish School, ILA, etc., to name some. Professional learning has stepped beyond the context of higher education to prove itself a meaningful practice at all academic levels, from primary to high school.

2.2 The importance of speaking skills in education

You need knowledge to empower yourself and to acquire

knowledge requires formal education. English is widely used as a medium of education and instruction in many countries. Even in Vietnam, the language of instruction at the higher education level is English. The language of instruction at many public and private universities in this country is English. Most of the following books and materials are written in English. Lectures will also be given in English. We all know that education is an interactive process and that gaining knowledge requires interaction. Since the language of instruction is English, students' speaking skills are very important. Assume that the students do not know how to use this language in the classroom. In this case, it is easy to understand why students may feel reluctant or lack confidence in using English in everyday conversations outside the classroom. Therefore, it is very important for learners to practice and master their speaking skills.

2.3 Speaking skills in Vietnam

Speaking skills in English are used as the official language in both public and private universities in Vietnam and as the medium of instruction in higher education. English is taught as a compulsory subject starting in elementary school, but students must reach a level of proficiency both inside and outside the classroom. Bhattacharjee (2008)^[4] found in her study that exposure to speaking situations in the classroom was very limited. Additionally, students have very limited access to English outside the classroom. They spend most of their time with family, friends, and communities where Vietnamese is primarily spoken.

In an EFL environment, learners do not have to engage with English in practical situations outside academic contexts. Therefore, they are unable to practice oral communication in English. Learners see it as just an academic subject and not as a means of communication.

2.4 Research purpose

The main purpose of the study was to investigate the problems of speaking English as an undergraduate student. It is designed to identify and analyze the nature of language problems and the most common difficulties encountered. Part of our goal was to see if there were significant differences in the language problems of the two types of college students. This study aimed to provide database recommendations to affected ELT practitioners to improve their English language skills.

3. Methodology

3.1 Educational framework and participants

The purpose of the study was to identify the language problems faced by first-year English majors and to conduct a comparative study between students at public and private universities. Therefore, the study was conducted at three public and three private universities in Ho Chi Minh City. This included her four university professors and her 110 randomly selected students. All students were first-year English majors.

Table 1: Research participant

Participants	Public	Private	Total
Number of universities	3	3	6
Students	55	55	110
Groups of students	6	6	12
Teachers	6	6	12

3.2 Research design

In order to obtain sufficient valid data, this study followed the mixed methods approach by Creswell (2014) [5] and investigated the relevant questions. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected in parallel.

3.3 Research tools and data collection

Both qualitative and quantitative data collection tools were used in this mixed methods study. This study used a 17-item questionnaire and a 5-point Likert scale to collect quantitative data. Students' speaking problems were self-identified and measured. Self-reported data on speech problems has been the main tool for measuring and analyzing the phenomenon. Qualitative data was collected through interviews and targeted group discussions. The researchers conducted targeted group discussions among students and conducted interviews with teachers to collect and analyze qualitative data.

3.4 Data analysis

Three main questions from the survey were used to analyze the quantitative data. The interviews were then transcribed for coding. Next, a thematic analysis of the qualitative data was prepared. Finally, we triangulated the two data types to present overall results and recommendations.

Three main questions are:

1. How well can you communicate in English?
2. How often do you have trouble connecting sentences when speaking?
3. Do you think your current educational institution is playing an active role in improving your speaking skills?

4. Discussion of the results and findings

4.1 Research question 1: How well can you communicate in English?

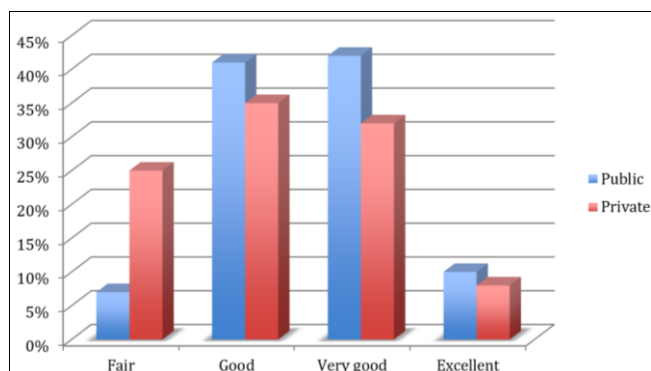


Fig 1: How well can you communicate in English?

Figure 1 shows that 7% of the private universities' evaluations and 25% of the public universities understudy appraisals of the communication capacity in English are "excellent". No one evaluated their competence as "poor". After the by and large calculation of the appraisals given by the understudies, a normal of 41% of appraisals go to private college understudies, while 35% go to open college understudies. In this manner, concurring with the students' claim reactions, we will state that open college understudies are somewhat more competent than private college understudies in terms of English communication abilities.

4.2 Research question 2: How often do you have trouble connecting sentences when speaking?

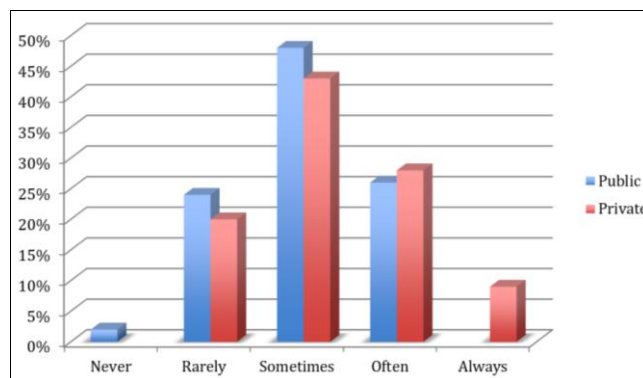


Fig 2: How often do you have trouble connecting sentences when speaking?

It appears that interfacing sentences while talking may be a common issue for most of the respondents. As it were, 2% of reaction is "never." Regarding interfacing sentences, open college understudies are once more in a profitable position. The proportion of effectiveness of this issue is "private" 43, "public" 48.

4.3 Research question 3: Do you think your current educational institution is playing an active role in improving your speaking skills?

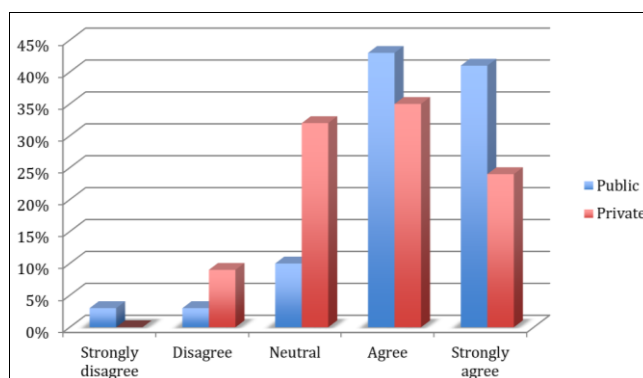


Fig 3: Do you think your current educational institution is playing an active role in improving your speaking skills?

Here, public universities communicate on the supposition that education has a part to play with respect to talking about expertise improvement. The proportion of reactions from private and public understudies is 35: 43.

4.4 Suggestions from students

Few members have tended to a few more issues that are significant to the issue of talking. They have proposed a number of ways of their encounters to create their English talking.

“Unused vocabulary or intense words are issues. For illustration, somebody utilized the word "affinity" while talking to me, and I was humiliated as I didn't know its meaning. It takes time to urge on the energy. I do not discover suitable words, and I too make syntactic botches” (Student, public university 2; student, public university 1).

“As English is our dialect, we interpret it from Bangla to English. Subsequently, it causes issues and stalking” (Student, private university 3).

“Tuning in is the foremost critical thing to me for the advancement of talking abilities” (Student, public university 3; student, private university 2).

“A number of understudies have proposed “reflect treatment” to diminish the fear of talking. We have to be sure. Everyone makes botches. It isn't vital to be super rectified. Body dialect is also important. Practice with an accomplice or before a mirror is necessary. We need to have a desire to create our talking level, but we don't fundamentally have to be like local speakers. We will also tune in to podcasts and have outside companions' conversations with them” (Student, private university 1).

4.5 Teachers' viewpoint

The instructors from both public and private colleges opined that, to begin with, students face talking about English issues all through the year. They said a few variables behind their impedance in talking English. They consider collected bits of knowledge collecting the nature of the issues confronted by the understudies. They characterized the education and educational programs as extensive. Finally, the instructors of both public and private universities have given a few, more or less comparable, recommendations so that primary year undergrad English major understudies can overcome their English talking issues. The instructors met and pointed to a few variables that are causing challenges for the understudies. The interviewees talked around a few features of students' issues they have experienced. The issues of private and open college understudies have small contrast. Most of the issues are exceptionally common to the learners of English as a second or foreign language.

▪ **Vietnamese medium or destitute tutoring foundation**

It is outstanding that all the instructors have specified that the understudies who are from Vietnamese medium foundations confront more or less the same issues about talking English.

▪ **Social and financial imperatives.**

One of the interviewees specified that understudies at public universities don't get sufficient time to hone and create their abilities because of a few budgetary issues.

▪ **Public speaking**

Nearly all the understudies felt uneasy speaking before an open group of onlookers. Most of the instructors have shared their encounters approximately this issue with the analysts.

▪ **Interpret from Vietnamese**

The work of the learner to begin with dialect is considered a major issue in dialect learning. Here, in this investigate, it was found that students attempt to form sentences first in their local dialect, i.e., Vietnamese, and after that attempt to interpret them into English.

▪ **Emotional channel**

The instructors have recommended that the student's tall level of emotional channels ruin their dialect generation.

▪ **Need for lexicon**

All the instructors met have said that their understudies confront issues generally since of their need of lexicon.

▪ **Elocution and emphasize**

Another reason the instructors have specified is that

understudies face issues with the right education of English. They, too, have inconveniences understanding the English highlights.

▪ **Part of the educational programs**

All the instructors have communicated the significance of arranged and reliable educational programs. They have shared distinctive suppositions with respect to the status of the educational programs and what changes ought to be brought to them.

▪ **Instructing methods**

Both the instructors of open and private colleges have concurred that the education procedures of the educational modules have a major part in overcoming the students' talking issues.

▪ **Syllabus plan**

Nearly all the interviewees have put accentuation within the syllabus. A few of them have said that more changes ought to be brought to the school and college levels.

▪ **Inspiration**

The instructors have commented that inspiration is an imperative figure that impacts students' talks. Agreeing with them, on the off chance that understudies can feel the need to create aptitudes, they will put more exertion into it.

▪ **Part of the institution**

All the interviewees have opined that the institution has monstrous significance in creating students' aptitudes. Most vitally, education can give great instructors and guides and guarantee a neighborly environment for creating talking aptitudes.

▪ **Part of the educator**

As the instructor can be a role show before the understudies' dialect learning, interviewees have recommended that understudies may take after them and their involvement in acting the English dialect (Instructor 1)

▪ **Environment**

Interviewees have essentially emphasized the need for a great environment for learning English: *I prompt understudies to go to the American center and the British Board to get an English talking environment. I welcome a few outsiders to our college. Understudies can have a conversation with them and, in this way, they can learn their English more quickly.* (Instructor 2)

▪ **Advanced innovation**

An educator commented that current understudies, not at all like the college students clusters a long time prior, are getting more offices because of the accessibility of mixed media gadgets and substance. The students are continuously moving forward, sometimes since we did not have these openings, just like the web, YouTube, etc., some time recently. (Instructor 3)

▪ **Private university understudies get more care, almost about familiarity and advancement.**

“One of our interviewees claimed an awfully critical issue that the private colleges take more care almost talking aptitudes than open colleges do. Besides, the interviewee moreover commented that these days, college understudies are getting to be more fascinated by dialect abilities and etymology than writing, which gravely influences. They are unwilling to memorize talking in spite of the fact that it is exceedingly fundamental for the work advertised. Indeed, a few English major understudies do not cherish perusing books or observing motion pictures. Indeed, I too studied and rehashed pixie stories like Cinderella. I watch movies with my kids. I examined books for my kids. These days,

English major understudies are becoming more curious about etymology than writing”. (Instructor 4).

5. Conclusion

In this investigate, a few issues came forward with respect to the English major undergrad understudies, which incorporate the need for hone, direction, and self-inspiration of the EFL learners to make strides in their talking in their essential and auxiliary level instruction. It, too, investigated their need to hone and inadequacy in language structure and lexicon, the nonattendance of the scope of an inviting environment to hone talking. The overemphasis on language structure is common within the ELT situation of the nation at the school level, where the Language structure Interpretation (GT) strategy is taken after in spite of the nearness of communicative educational module. The least ELT input with the least center on the tuning in and talking abilities at the school level caused the EFL learners of the undergrad level to appear destitute in execution in talking English. The socio-financial foundation was moreover found to play a pivotal part in this regard.

The delimitation to consider was that it was attempted in six universities due to a need of time and financing. But this inquiry investigated a few experienced English teachers' suppositions and input based on their long-time educational encounters. In this manner, it brought out a few imperative components that included the parts of higher instructive education and the parts of English undergrad syllabuses in this respect. It moreover sheds a few lights on the center regions of the undergrad English educational module: Writing, dialect abilities, and etymology. All these variables play critical parts in affecting the English talking execution of the EFL learners at the undergrad level.

The issues which came to light all through this investigate recommend that the nature of issues confronted by the understudies are more or less the same in public and private teaching. The challenges are moreover comparable in both sorts of teaching. However, the approach towards the issue is variable in a few angles. The instructors of these educators, moreover, have nearly comparative focuses on seeing the issues, in spite of the fact that their input towards the arrangement is flexible and distinctive on a few focuses. The instructors and understudies ought to consider English more as a medium of communication than as it were a scholarly subject. The discoveries emphatically request more consideration from the national instruction policymakers to create ELT quality at auxiliary and higher auxiliary levels. The nation needs a compelling execution of a steady and farsighted dialect instruction approach and multidimensional brief term and long-term plans for the school level and the undergrad level. Assume the EFL learners pick up the least familiarity with talking English at the school level. In that case, they can be fed and cleaned in advance at the undergrad level, which is able to empower them to communicate within the English dialect to outlive within the competitive age of globalization.

6. Acknowledgement

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