

ENHANCING ENGLISH SPEAKING PERFORMANCE OF THE FIRST-YEAR NON ENGLISH MAJOR FROM ETHNIC GROUPS AT THAI NGUYEN UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION BY USING COOPERATIVE ACTIVITIES

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ABSTRACT

These day English is considered to be an international language; and it plays an important role in the current integration of globalization from communication to opportunities in many sectors such as learning, working, expanding relationships to business cooperation, etc. People have to learn four main skills including speaking, listening, reading and writing when learning any language. In fact, many people who have studying English for more than 5 years can not speaking English fluently because many reasons, especially the first-year non English majors from ethnic groups in Vietnam in general and at TUE in particular. This study aims at investigating the current situation of speaking performance, the current situation of using cooperative activities and the effectiveness of using cooperative activities to enhance English speaking performance of the first-year non English majors from ethnic groups at TUE. Questionnaire, T-test and class observation were used to collect data in order to discover the answers to research questions. The participants were twenty of the first-year non English majors from ethnic groups at TUE. They were the participants of the study. The participants were taken part in a pre-test and divided into two groups: the experimental group and control group. The result of the study is certainly meaningful and useful for not only the ethnic students' learning process but also the teachers in teaching speaking skill for ethnic students at FLE in particular and TUE in general.

Key words: *speaking skill; cooperative activities; ethnic groups; the first-year non English majors.*

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NÂNG CAO KHẢ NĂNG NÓI TIẾNG ANH CHO SINH VIÊN DÂN TỘC THIỂU SỐ KHÔNG CHUYÊN NGỮ NĂM NHẤT TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC SƯ PHẠM THÁI NGUYÊN THÔNG QUA CÁC HOẠT ĐỘNG HỢP TÁC

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TÓM TẮT

Ngày nay Tiếng Anh được xem là ngôn ngữ quốc tế, và nó đóng một vai trò quan trọng trong thời kỳ hội nhập và phát triển toàn cầu. Khi học bất kỳ ngôn ngữ nào thì người học luôn phải học 4 kỹ năng gồm nghe, nói, đọc và viết. Thực tế, nhiều người học Tiếng Anh hơn 5 năm nhưng vẫn không thể nói lưu loát vì rất nhiều lý do khác nhau, nhất là các bạn sinh viên dân tộc thiểu số không chuyên ngữ năm nhất nói riêng và các bạn sinh viên Đại học Thái Nguyên nói chung. Nghiên cứu này nhằm khảo sát thực trạng nói Tiếng Anh, thực trạng sử dụng các hoạt động hợp tác và hiệu quả có việc sử dụng các hoạt động này để nâng cao khả năng nói cho sinh viên dân tộc thiểu số không chuyên ngữ năm nhất. Bảng hỏi, bài kiểm tra nói và quan sát lớp được chọn để thu thập dữ liệu. Đối tượng là 20 bạn sinh viên dân tộc thiểu số năm nhất đến từ các khoa khác nhau. Họ được chia thành 2 nhóm: 1 nhóm tham gia thực nghiệm và 1 nhóm không. Kết quả của nghiên cứu sẽ phần nào có ích không chỉ cho các em sinh viên mà còn có ý nghĩa trong quá trình giảng dạy của các thầy cô.

Từ khóa: *kỹ năng nói; các hoạt động hợp tác; dân tộc thiểu số; năm nhất không chuyên ngữ.*

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1. Introduction

Nowadays English is considered to be the most widely used language in the world; and it is also known as the international language. English is extremely a best way to connect with people from other countries all over the world. Therefore, it is clear that one of the main goals of learning English is to use it effectively in communication. However, in fact, many people have learned English for a long time, over 5 years, but they could not speak English fluently; and ethnic students are no exception. Although the ethnic students may study English for more than 3 years, they can not speak fluently because they do not have good opportunities to learn English effectively. When they enter universities, they have to learn English in higher level, which makes some of them can not keep up with their classmates. In addition, they have to study 3 terms of English and take part in exams including speaking skill. Almost ethnic students are very afraid of studying English due to lack of basic knowledge or skills. Therefore, they may get low result or even they have to resit. Besides, if they want to graduate, they have to take English diploma at least at A2 level of CEFR. In fact, many people who learn English merely concentrated on practicing reading and writing skills, regardless of attaching the special importance to speaking skill. Thus, teachers should create an English environment in the classroom in order to motivate their students to participate in speaking lesson through cooperative activities that helps students to interact or communicate more with other students effectively. Cooperative learning is not a new topic in educational research because of many previous researches related to this issue done in Vietnam as well as overseas. However, there are few researches related to this topic have been done at TNU, especially at TUE. Besides, the participants are the first-year non

English majors from ethnic groups of TUE. Moreover, the essential in modifying the teaching activities, the usefulness and the effect of cooperative learning are the reasons to carry on this research. For all the mentioned reasons above, “*Enhancing English speaking performance of the first-year non English majors from ethnic groups at Thai Nguyen University of Education by using cooperative activities.*” was chosen as the topic for the study and carried out to investigate the current state and the effects of using cooperative activities to enhance English speaking performance of the first-year non English majors from ethnic groups at TUE.

2. Literature review

2.1 Definition of speaking

It can not deny that English speaking is very essential nowadays. In fact, speaking skill is one of the important language skills which is considered as essentials means to communicate with other people. Only if the learners were proficient in its using, they would study a new language well.

Bygate (1987: 1) [2] argues: “*Speaking skill is the ability in using oral language to explore ideas, intentions, thoughts and feelings to other people as a way to make the message clearly delivered and well understood by the hearer.*”

2.2 Definition of cooperative learning

Nowadays cooperative learning is a new educational trend that is regarded as the teaching methods of collective characteristics with interdependences, helps each other between individuals, in order to learners open their knowledge by way of using different mutual activities between learners with learners, between learners with teachers, and between learners and the environment.

According to Richards & Rodgers (2001:192) [1], cooperative learning is “*an approach to*

teaching that makes maximum use of the cooperative activities involving pairs and small groups of learners in the classroom".

Cooperative learning techniques and activities in a speaking lesson are illustrated below:

- Jigsaw
- Think- Pair-Share
- Three-Step interview
- Cooperative projects
- Numbered Heads Together
- Round Robin
- Solve – Pair – Share

2.3 Definition of ethnic minorities

According to Phinney, Jean S. [2] "*Ethnic identity is central to the psychological functioning of members of ethnic and racial minority groups, but research on the topic is fragmentary and inconclusive.*" (Phinney, 1990). Indeed, the ethnic group is a group of people living in mountainous areas where most people are from a different race or nationality. In other words, the definition can be understood that an ethnic group is an immigrant or racial group regarded by those claiming to speak for the cultural majority as distinct and unassimilated.

3. Methodology

In terms of methodology, the researcher used experimental and quantitative methods. The questionnaire, T-test, and class observation were used to collect data in order to discover the answers to research questions. The participants were twenty volunteer students who are the first-year non English majors from ethnic groups at TUE.

4. Findings and discussion

After applying effective researched methods, the researcher could answer the three given researched questions. In fact, speaking skill plays an important role in our modern society. Based on the results analyzed from the questionnaires, experiments and class observation, it is clear that both the teachers

and the students are well aware of the importance of English in general and speaking skill in particular. In other words, they could not deny the important role of speaking skill in our modern life and work. Moreover, they all have positive attitudes towards the role and benefits of cooperative activities in both teaching and learning English speaking skill for the first-year non English majors from ethnic groups at TUE. The effectiveness of cooperative activities in learning speaking skill was clearly described in the experiments, class observation and questionnaires. Students showed that they preferred joining cooperative activities than working individually. The researcher observed that the students of the experimental group were very happy and confident when taking part in cooperative activities. In the first two lessons, they did not know well other friends coming from different faculties, so they did not talk much. However, they made friends with other ones and worked in cooperative activities together. In addition, they were more active than work individually because when they studied with their friends, they felt confident and gained more knowledge as well as experiences from their classmates.

Result of questionnaire showed that most students have learnt English for more than seven years. All of them knew the importance of English in general and English speaking in particular. Most of them like English; however, they did not practise speaking more outside the class with their friends. In addition, they felt English speaking quite difficult to learn unless they had enthusiasm partners. Although they have learnt English for more than seven years, they can not speak fluently because of many reasons. Many students got low result (*about 70 percent gained result from 5.0 to 6.0, approximately 20 percent got a result under 5.0 and only 10 percent of the students gained higher marks*)

in subject English 1 in the first term, and so did the national entrance exam. In addition, they gained the lowest mark in term of speaking skill.

They said that they had had two English lessons per week. Although the teacher often organised cooperative activities in the class, the students work in groups or pairs to do grammar exercises; as a result, they did not have chance to practise English speaking in the class. Some of the prominent cooperative activities are group-work activities, work in pair, think-pair-share, etc. Based on the result of class observation and marks of the T-test of experimental groups, the researcher saw that the students were very interested in cooperative activities when learning speaking skill and using cooperative activities could enhance English speaking performance of the researched students. They showed their participation and motivation in the lessons. They spoke English frequently both inside and outside the experimental class; sometimes they also chatted or talked with their friends actively in common situations. In addition, the result of the questionnaire presented that approximately 30 percent of the students have taken part in English clubs where could give them many useful knowledge and necessary skills.

After using cooperative activities in speaking lessons, the researcher observed that the students were very interested in cooperative activities organised by the teacher. They participated more in the speaking lessons as well as spoke English actively both inside and outside the class. Cooperative activities are considered their motivation, and the activities help the students increase their participant and motivation in learning speaking which the students are always shy and afraid of making mistakes when talking in front of many people.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, teaching speaking skill in foreign language is not easy and it requires both the teacher and students to be active and

self-improve or widen their knowledge as well as skills whenever they have free time. To help them study well, cooperative activities are excellent tools and effective in increasing motivation and participant as well for learning speaking, positive feeling for the friendship, and problem-solving. By taking part in cooperative activities, students are centered and trained to be a cooperative, independent, and active learner. Moreover, they knew how to work with their friends as well as how to divide duties equally so that they work together, which helps them more and more mature, especially for the first-year non English majors from ethnic groups at TUE. Cooperative activities are extremely useful in teaching other subjects as well as when the teacher apply to teach English in general and speaking skill in particular.

This study was on small scale; it was only researched in the first-year non English majors from ethnic groups at TUE. There are 209 ethnic students; however, the researcher only choose 20 volunteer ones to take part in the study. Therefore, it cannot cover and investigate deeply all aspects of the matter because this study was only conducted at one university because the researcher lacked time and human power. Moreover, the features of the metioned students differ from other students of different universities and faculties as well. Hence, further studies should be expanded to more universities and investigate more facts surrounding the currents state of learning and teaching English speaking skill through cooperative activites.

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