

DETERMINANTS AFFECTING ENGLISH SPEAKING PERFORMANCE OF THE FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS AT THAI NGUYEN UNIVERSITY OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

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SUMMARY

Spoken language production is often considered one of the most difficult aspects of language learning. In real life, many language learners find it difficult to express themselves in spoken language in the target language. Each student has their own problems. The purpose of this study was to investigate determinants affecting their speaking performance of the first - year students at Thai Nguyen University of Agriculture and Forestry. The descriptive method of research was used in the study, using questionnaire as the main instrument of the data collection. The subjects of the study were one hundred and forty-five first- year students. Based on the research findings, some recommendations were made. The study was expected to help students improve their performance in speaking classes.

Key words: *determinants, speaking performance, speaking problems, English language, first-year*

INTRODUCTION

Speaking seems to be the most important skills of all the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) because people who know a language are usually referred to as speakers of that language [1]. The major goal of all English language teaching should be to give learners the ability to use English effectively, accurately in communication [2]. Not all language learners after many years studying English can communicate fluently and accurately although they have memorized hundreds of words and many grammar rules. At Thai University of Agriculture and Forestry, students often translate from Vietnamese into English before they speak; therefore, it makes them difficult to express their opinions in English. There is a big influence of Vietnamese language on the students' learning. Students have difficulties with pronunciation when they learn English because spelling and pronunciation are very different. Moreover, students lack motivation in learning English. Mother tongue also affects heavily because most students come from different mountainous provinces where

they usually use mother tongue, which is easy to use and understand. There are some reasons why students use mother tongue in class. Firstly, when the students have to discuss something about a topic that they are incapable of, they will use their own language. Another reason is that the use of mother- tongue is a natural thing to do. In addition, it is easy to use the first language to explain something to another if there is no encouragement from the teachers. Finally, if teachers frequently use the students' language, the students will feel comfortable to speak in class. [3].

During the lessons, learners listen, take notes, read textbook, do exercises... but they rarely talk. In addition, they sometimes read aloud; however, they cannot speak English outside the classrooms. Some students may get good marks in grammar test but they say nothing when they meet foreigners who speak English. Learners often complain that they cannot think of anything to say. [4].

It is necessary to find ways to improve their speaking skills of the students. Moreover, the teachers need to know the determinants that affect their students' speaking performance so that they can deal with these factors to help the students improve their speaking

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performance. However, until now, there is no research conducted at this school about these areas so the researcher is motivated to conduct this study.

SUBJECTS, RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The descriptive method was used in this study. It describes the nature of a situation as it exists at the time of the study and explores the causes of particular phenomena [5].

The participants of the study were one hundred and forty-five first-year students who were chosen randomly from three classes of three faculties: faculty of Natural Resources Management, faculty of Agronomy, Faculty of Environment at Thai Nguyen University of Agriculture and Forestry.

The research instrument employed to collect data for this study was questionnaire. For the validation of the constructed questionnaire, it was submitted to some reputable experts in the field of study for review, suggestion and recommendations. Revisions were made after the checking and validation. The questionnaire has two parts. Part 1 was designed to get their motivation in speaking such as integrative motivation and instrumental motivation. Instrumental Motivation refers to the desire to learn a language because it would fulfill certain utilitarian goals, such as getting a job, passing an exam... Integrative motivation refers to the desire to learn a language in order to communicate with people from another culture that speak that language; the desire is also there to identify closely with the target language group.

Part 2 in the questionnaire was used to get features of classroom activities in terms of Pair/ Group work, Interview/ Survey, Role-play and Problem solving.

Each item is rated on a five-point Likert scale rating from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Rating	Range	Description
5	4.21 – 5.0	strongly agree
4	3.41 – 4.20	agree
3	2.61 – 3.40	moderately agree
2	1.81 – 2.60	disagree
1	1.0 – 1.80	strongly disagree

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The presentation of the major finding follows the order in accordance with how the statement of the problem was presented namely: mean level of speaking motivation in term of Integrative Motivation and Instrumental Motivation, the significant relationship of motivational factors and student speaking performance.

Mean level of speaking motivation in term of Integrative Motivation

It can be seen in the table 1 that Integrative Motivation with regard to the students “Agree” on the items enumerated with an average weighted mean of 3.64. Among the items, item number 1 “I want to learn English to communicate with foreigners fluently” and item number 5 “I want to learn English to appreciate speaking in English” were ranked first with a weighted mean of 3.7 described as “Agree”. Item number 2 “I want to learn English to travel to other countries”, item number 3 “I want to learn English to know other English speaking countries” and item number 4 “I want to learn English to understand thoughts, emotions and behaviors of some great English writers” with a mean of 3.60 also interpreted as “agree”. Therefore, integrative motivation is appreciated.

Table 1. Mean level of speaking motivation in term of Integrative Motivation

Indicators	WM	Rank	Interpretation
I want to learn English...			
1. to communicate with foreigners fluently.	3.7	1	Agree
2. to travel to other countries.	3.6	2	Agree
3. to know other English speaking countries.	3.6	2	Agree

Indicators	WM	Rank	Interpretation
I want to learn English...			
4. to understand thoughts, emotions and behaviors of some great English writers.	3.6	2	Agree
5. to appreciate speaking in English.	3.7	1	Agree
Average weighted mean	3.64		Agree

Mean Level of Speaking Motivation in Term of Instrumental Motivation

Table 2. Mean Level of Speaking Motivation in Term of Instrumental Motivation

Indicators	WM	Rank	Interpretation
I want to learn English...			
1. To get a good job	4.2	2	Agree
2. To go abroad (study, job, travel...)	4.3	1	Strongly agree
3. To get a high salary.	4.2	2	Agree
4. To be promoted in a higher position	4.1	3	Agree
5. To be well known in the community.	4.1	3	Agree
Average weighted mean	4.18		Agree

The Instrumental Motivation which is illustrated in table 2 shows that the student respondents “agree” on the indicated items. Among the items, item number 2 “to go abroad (study, job, seminars, conferences...)” was ranked first with a weighted mean of 4.3 described as “strongly agree”. Item number 4 “to be promoted in a higher position” and item number 5 “To be well known in the community or in the profession” with the same weighted mean of 4.1 obtained “Agree”. The same interpretation of “agree” can be seen for the item number 1 “to get a good job” and number 3 “to get a high salary” with a weighted mean of 4.2. Therefore, Instrumental Motivation really plays a very important role to help students learn and use language.

Perceived Mean Features of Classroom Activities in Term of Pair/ Group work

The perceived mean in term of students' attitude toward Pair/ group work was interpreted “agree” with the mean score of 3.78. Among the items, item number 4 “provides changes and variety” was ranked first with a mean of 4.1 interpreted as “agree”. As for the item number 2 “gives students the space to exchange idea”, the respondent said that they “agree” with a weighted mean of 3.8. Least-rated was item number 5 “Promotes communicate interaction among learners” with a mean of 3.70 also interpreted as “agree”. The findings imply that the student respondents agree that pair/group work helped them speak better.

Table 3. Perceived Mean Features of Classroom Activities in Term of Pair/ Group work

Pair/Group Work	WM	Rank	Interpretation
1. provides students opportunities to talk more	3.7	3	Agree
2. gives students the space to exchange idea	3.8	2	Agree
3. enhances steam spirit	3.7	3	Agree
4. provides changes and variety	4.1	1	Agree
5. promotes communicate interaction among learners	3.6	4	Agree
Average weighted mean	3.78		Agree

Perceived Mean Features of Classroom Activities in Term of Interview/ Surveys

The perceived mean in term of students' attitude toward Interview/ Surveys can be seen from table 4 with an average weighted mean of 4.1 interpreted as “agree. Among the items, item number 3

“strengthen cooperative learning, discussion groups, and functional activities” was ranked first with a mean of 4.3 interpreted as “strongly agree”. The respondents said that they “agree” with a weighted mean of 4.2 for number 1 “reduce stress and anxiety”. Item number 4 “represent a very powerful view of EFL curriculum.” and item number 5 “promote students’ social development” were interpreted as “agree”. On the other hand, item number 2 “promote students a lot.” was rated the least with the mean of 3.5 also interpreted as “agree”. The findings imply that the student respondents agree that Interview/ Surveys encouraged them speak English better.

Table 4. *Perceived Mean Features of Classroom Activities in Terms of Interview/ Surveys*

Interview/Surveys	WM	Rank	Interpretation
1. Reduce stress and anxiety.	4.2	2	Agree
2. Promote students a lot.	3.5	4	Agree
3. Strengthen cooperative learning, discussion groups, and functional activities.	4.3	1	Strongly Agree
4. Represent a very powerful view of EFL curriculum.	4.2	2	Agree
5. Promote students’ social development.	4.2	2	Agree
Average weighted mean	4.1	3	Agree

Perceived Mean Features of Classroom Activities in Term of Role- Play

Table 5. *Perceived Mean Features of Classroom Activities in Term of Role- Play*

Role-Play	WM	Rank	Interpretation
1. encourages me to communicate fluently.	3.9	3	Agree
2. uses variety of techniques such as discussions, reading, debate, brainstorming and list- making, so I can have opportunity to explore a topic fully.	3.6	2	Agree
3. provides vocabulary and structures related, which helps me easy to speak in public.	3.6	2	Agree
4. gives evaluation and feedback during a creative process so I can arrange my ideas logically.	4.2	2	Agree
5. focuses on the process not only the final product so I am not afraid to express my ideas.	4.3	1	Strongly Agree
Average weighted mean	3.92		Agree

The findings as shown in table 5 revealed that activities in term of role-play were rated “agree” by the students with the score mean of 3.92. Among the items, item number 5 “focuses on the process not only the final product so I am not afraid to express my ideas.” was ranked first with the mean of 4.3 interpreted as “strongly agree”. Most items had the mean ranging from 3.6 to 4.2 and described as “agree”. Least-ranked were item number 2 “uses variety of techniques such as discussions, reading, debate, brainstorming and list- making, so I can have opportunity” and item number 3 “provides vocabulary and structures related, which helps me easy to write an outline.” with the same mean of 3.6 also interpreted as “agree”. It is assumed that most of the students are very much interested

in Role-play. It helps them to be more active to learn the language.

Perceived Mean Features of Classroom Activities in Term of Problem-solving

The findings as shown in table 6 revealed that activities in term of Problem-solving were rated “Agree” by the students with the score mean of 3.94. Among the items, item number 5 “is used to develop highly creative solutions to a problem” was ranked first with the mean of 4.3 interpreted as “strongly agree”. Most items had the mean ranging from 3.6 to 4.2 and described as “agree”. Least-ranked was item number 2 “appeals to reluctant speakers.” with the mean of 3.6 also interpreted as “agree”. The findings imply that the student respondents agree that Problem-solving encouraged them speak better.

Table 6. *Perceived Mean Features of Classroom Activities in Term of Problem-solving*

Problem-solving	WM	Rank	Interpretation
1. encourages creativity of thoughts	3.9	3	Agree
2. appeals to reluctant speakers	3.6	5	Agree
3. appeals to the more 'physical' learner	3.7	4	Agree
4. reinforces understanding of language as a way to communicate meaning	4.2	2	Agree
5. is used to develop highly creative solutions to a problem.	4.3	1	Agree
Average weighted mean	3.94		Agree

Test of Correlation for the Relationship between the Motivational Factors and Students' Speaking Performance

Table 7. *Test of Correlation for the Relationship between the Motivational Factors and Students' Speaking Performance*

Variables tested for relationship	r-value	P-value	Verbal interpretation
Integrative Motivation	16.050	0.373	NS
Instrumental Motivation	25.827	0.637	NS
Pair/ group work	24.515	0.037	S
Interview/ Surveys	22.095	0.050	S
Role- play	24.519	0.038	S
Problem-Solving	13.806	0.114	NS

p > .05-not significant *p* < .05-significant

The findings revealed that significant relationship exist between students' speaking performance and perceived level of classroom activities with regards to pair/group work, interviews/surveys and role-playing with p-values of 0.037, 0.050 and 0.038 respectively being less than the threshold value of 0.05 level. Integrative motivation, instrumental motivation and problem solving with p-values of 0.373, 0.673, and 0.114 respectively being greater than the threshold value of 0.05 levels are found not significant. It implies that not all variables used in this study can significantly affect the students speaking performance.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the study indicate that motivation in speaking (Integrative Motivation and Instrumental Motivation) have no effect on the speaking performance of students but Classroom activities in term of Pair/group work, Interview/ Surveys,

Role-play have significant effect on the speaking performance of the first – year students at Thai Nguyen University of Agriculture and Forestry.

Basing on the results of the study, some recommendations were made for both the teachers and the students. As for the teachers, English teachers should use communicative classroom activities to adapt to the needs of the learners; hence, it is recommended that teachers should take part in more seminars, workshops on Teaching Speaking. Another suggestion is that the teachers should give students more opportunities to speak English in class by using some speaking activities: pair/group work, role-play, and interview/surveys. Finally, the teachers should create an English speaking environment by encouraging the students to use English in the classroom through some classroom activities in terms of pair/group work, role-play, and interview/surveys.

As for the students, they should first understand the importance of speaking skills. Secondly, students had better practice speaking English in the classroom more often by doing the speaking tasks in the textbook through pair/group work, role-play, and surveys. Finally, students try to use English in the class instead of Vietnamese to make it a habit. Hopefully, the study can contribute to the improvement of English speaking teaching and learning at Thai Nguyen University of Agriculture and Forestry.

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TÓM TẮT

NHỮNG NHÂN TỐ ẢNH HƯỞNG ĐẾN KHẢ NĂNG NÓI TIẾNG ANH CỦA SINH VIÊN NĂM THỨ NHẤT TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC NÔNG LÂM – ĐẠI HỌC THÁI NGUYÊN

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Kĩ năng nói thường được coi là một trong những kĩ năng khó nhất của việc học ngôn ngữ. Trong thực tế, nhiều người học ngôn ngữ cảm thấy rất khó diễn đạt bằng ngôn ngữ nói. Mỗi người học đều có khó khăn riêng khi học nói. Mục đích của nghiên cứu này là để tìm ra các nhân tố ảnh hưởng đến khả năng nói tiếng Anh của sinh viên năm thứ nhất tại trường Đại học Nông Lâm – Đại học Thái Nguyên. Nghiên cứu sử dụng phương pháp mô tả và câu hỏi điều tra là công cụ chính để thu thập dữ liệu. Dựa trên kết quả nghiên cứu, tác giả đã đưa ra một số kiến nghị và tác giả cũng hi vọng rằng nghiên cứu này sẽ giúp sinh viên năm thứ nhất trường Đại học Nông Lâm – Đại học Thái Nguyên nâng cao khả năng nói tiếng Anh.

Từ khóa: nhân tố, khả năng nói, vấn đề nói, tiếng Anh, năm thứ nhất

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