THAI NGUYEN UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

NGUYEN TUYET ANH

USING PROBLEM SOLVING TASKS TO IMPROVE GRADE 12 STUDENTS' ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS

(Ứng dụng các bài tập giải quyết vấn đề nhằm giúp nâng cao kỹ năng nói cho học sinh lớp 12)

M.A THESIS

Field: English Linguistics
Code: 8220201

THAI NGUYEN – 2019

THAI NGUYEN UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

NGUYEN TUYET ANH

USING PROBLEM SOLVING TASKS TO IMPROVE GRADE 12 STUDENTS' ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS

(Ứng dụng các bài tập giải quyết vấn đề nhằm giúp nâng cao kỹ năng nói cho học sinh lớp 12)

M.A THESIS

M.A. THESIS
(APPLICATION ORIENTATION)

Field: English Linguistics
Code: 8220201
Supervisor: Dr. Nguyen Thanh Long

THAI NGUYEN – 2019

DECLARATION

----------*****----------

I certify that the thesis entitled “Using problem-solving tasks to improve grade 12 students’ English-speaking skills” is my own study in the fulfillment of the requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts at Foreign Language Faculty, Thai Nguyen University.

Thai Nguyen, July 15, 2019

Nguyen Tuyet Anh

Approved by
SUPERVISOR

Dr. Nguyen Thanh Long

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis could not have implemented if I did not have a great support and assistance of many people. Therefore, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to all of them.

First of all, I would like to express my deepest thanks and gratitude to my supervisor Dr. Nguyen Thanh Long for his patience, kindly support and useful advices during the time I conducted my research. But for his precious comments and instructions, the thesis could not have done effectively.

Secondly, I received tremendous support from my school – Hon Gai High School. I would like to give many thanks to the students who directly engaged in the lessons throughout the process of data collection. Their enthusiasm and serious contribution made the process of data collection effective and reliable. I also acknowledge my thankfulness to my headmaster who helped facilitate my research conducted smoothly. I would also like to state my thanks to the colleagues for their engagement in the interviews.

Another special thank goes to teachers of English Department, School of Foreign Languages, Thai Nguyen University. Without their advices and encouragement, I would not have been able to pursuit my research.

My endless thanks approve to my parents, especially my mother, for their time, encouragement and support me on my way of study. My mother did not only helped me to take care of my baby and me but she also worried about each step of my completion of the study. Another gratitude sends to my little daughter who was born at time of my Master study. Despite the difficulty, her appearance motivates me a lot.

Finally, I am grateful to my classmates for their spiritual support and encouragement. They encouraged me through my rough time. Without their support, my thesis could not have been completed.

ABSTRACT

English speaking skills have received more and more concern as these skills make a great contribution to students' communication skills. The study aims at measuring the effectiveness of using problem-solving tasks to help students of grade 12 improve their speaking skills. The study was carried out using both qualitative and quantitative approaches. 44 students of grade 12 from Hon Gai High School were the participants of the study. Students were taught speaking skills with a practice session using problem-solving tasks. The researchers used Pre-Test, Post-Test, Observation Sheet, Interviews as the tools to find out the answers. The results of the thesis showed that problem-solving tasks influenced positively on students' speaking ability, made them feel more confident to speak and can speak more fluently. At the same time, the problem-solving tasks motivated students to speak as well as overcome their fear of speaking in front of the class. In the light of the results, it is recommended that teachers should use problem-solving tasks to improve students' speaking skills.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION ..... *ii*
PART A: INTRODUCTION *1*
1. Research topic area **1**
2. The study context **1**
3. Focus of the study **2**
4. Rationale of the study **2**
5. Structure of the thesis **3**
PART B: DEVELOPMENT *4*
CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW *4*
1.1. Problem-solving tasks **4**
1.1.1 Problem-solving 4
1.1.2 Problem – solving tasks 5
1.2. Speaking skills **6**
1.3. Language Learning Motivation **7**
1.4. Problem-solving tasks in teaching speaking skills **8**
1.3.1 The relationship between problem-solving tasks and speaking skills 8
1.3.2 The steps to apply Problem – Solving Tasks into teaching English-speaking process 9
CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY *11*
2.1. Field site and participants **12**
2.2. Data collection methods **12**
2.2.1. Classroom observation 13
2.2.2. Interviews 15
2.2.3. Speaking Tests 16
2.3. Data analysis methods **17**
2.4. Ethical considerations and data reliability **18**
CHAPTER 3: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION *19*
3.1 Students' motivation on learning English by engaging in problem-solving speaking tasks **19**
3.1.1. Learner's motivation and autonomy 19
3.1.2. Learner's motivation and confidence 20
3.1.3. Learner's motivation and positive peer interaction 21

3.2. The positive effects of problem-solving tasks on student's speaking skills **22**
PART C: CONCLUSION ***29***
1. Summary of the key findings **29**
2. Pedagogical implications of the study **30**
3. Limitations of the study **31**
4. Recommendations **31**
REFERENCES ***33***
APPENDICES ***36***
The test results 38

Abbreviations

PST:	Problem-solving tasks
CEFR:	The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
EFL:	English as Foreign Language
s:	seconds
L2:	Language learning
SDT:	Self-determination theory

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Observation details
Table 2: Problem-solving tasks
Table 3: Classroom Observation sheet
Table 4: Interviews
Table 5: Criteria for assessing students' speaking skills
Table 6: The longest pausing time
Table 7: Result of the Students' Speaking Pre-test and Post-test Scores
Table 8: Paired Samples Statistics
Table 9: Paired Samples Correlations
Table 10: Paired Samples Test
Table 11: The longest time of the participants' speaking
Table 12: Students' using Vietnamese

PART A: INTRODUCTION

1. Research topic area

English is obviously the most popular language learned by people in the world. Teaching English as a foreign language in many countries becomes an important goal of many Departments of Education and Training. In learning English, learners focus on developing skills, including reading, speaking, listening and writing. Recently, speaking has been regarded as the most important skills. One issue in this area is to make language learners become better with different proficiency. Speaking skills play the significant role in real life. In speaking, the ability to communicate in different situations is a need. However, improving students' speaking skills is not easy at all. Speaking English in classes is different from speaking English in real life. Teaching students to speak needs to activate students' background knowledge and then produce a message. Language teachers have tried out many ways to improve students' speaking skills. One of the techniques that can be helpful is problem-solving tasks. Because life is full of problems. Problems are a central part of life. Every day, people are facing tremendous problem-solving and decision-making situations. Fortunately, a problem is a stimulus situation which requires an organism response without ignoring it (Shulman, 1975). Language teachers can take advantage of problems in real life as a stimulus to motivate learners to speak.

However, the difficulty in speaking English fluently and effectively is faced by many students because of the limitation of vocabulary, reluctance to participate in the conversation, lack of confidence, fear of committing errors, slow reaction of the real-life situations and so on. This research aims at finding out whether teaching English attaching to real life problem solving can help students become better in speaking skills or not and figuring out if students are interested in applying problem-solving activities into their English studying.

2. The study context

The present study was conducted in a Vietnam EFL teaching context. With the aim to totally change the ways of foreign language teaching and learning in the educational system to make foreign languages become Vietnamese's strength. (Prime Minister, 2008), the government of Vietnam launched a national foreign language