

## IMPROVING ICTU STUDENTS' ENGLISH PROFICIENCY THROUGH USING ENGLISH IN ENGLISH CLASS

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### SUMMARY

This paper presents a study on the use of English in class in learning English of the second - year non - English major students at Thainguyen University of Information and Communication Technology (ICTU). Many researchers have pointed out opportunities and usefulness of using the target language in teaching a foreign language. However, the results of the study showed that the students at ICTU have to cope with many difficulties preventing them from using English in class. That is the reason why many of them cannot use English effectively after the course. The paper also presents some suggestions to help students overcome the challenges to use English in class more effectively.

**Key words:** *Using English in class, communicative approach, "social" language, organising language, explaining language.*

### INTRODUCTION

Since the early sixteenth century, methodologists and educationists have been developing methods and approaches to serve the purposes of teaching and learning foreign languages, such as: the Grammar-Translation method, the Oral approach and Situational language teaching, the Audio Lingual method, Communicative Language teaching, Total physical Response, the Silent Way, the Natural Approach and Suggestopedia [3]. . .

Most of the above methods have more or less strict attitudes towards student's mother tongue used in the classroom, and agree that the target language should be the language of the classroom.

The use of English, a target language, as a means of learning English in the classroom, has also been mentioned in books by Jack.C. Richards and Theodore S.Rodgers; Diane Larsen - Free man; Janet Willis; H. Douglas Brown...

In ICTU, English language is considered as an extremely necessary tool for students not only to study but also to work . Despite of about nine years studying English at school and two years studying English at ICTU, most of students cannot use English effectively.

One of the reasons is that, during a long time studying English, the students have not effectively exploited English as a means to learn English.

Being aware of the advantages of using English in English class, the author would like to do this research to look into some features of it, find out the difficulties preventing students from using English in English class, and suggest some relevant solutions to develop students' ability of using English in English class.

### **Advantages of Using English in English class**

The value of using English in class can be exploited by teachers. According to Doff [1], if a teacher uses English most of the time, it will give students practice in listening and responding to spoken language. These can also help students to "pick up" words, expressions beyond the language of the textbook. When the teacher gives a speech, students have a chance to be familiar with intonations and stresses used in the spoken language. They may not have much opportunity for these outside the class. Doff [1] has also pointed out that in the lesson itself, the language used is often unnatural and artificial. The situations such as new things, late comers, and local events... can

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give an opportunity for real, natural English to be used. That the teacher uses English to say real things to class will give students the feelings that English is a real language, and not a language that belongs to the textbook. Ron Forseth and his co-writers [4] also agree that teachers should speak English to students as often as possible and from the start. If teachers use English, they often challenge students to communicate in English. If students are not challenged, they will become bored and unmotivated. Thus, the teacher's use of English in the classroom can make the classroom climate positive.

Value of using English in English class is also exploited directly by students. If students use English in the classroom, they will get familiar with using the language for two way-communication: asking and answering questions. Students also have extra practice in the structures and vocabulary they have been taught. If students are aware of the importance of using English in class and always try to do it, they will be gradually more confident. In addition, students using English most the time will help them to form a good habit of thinking and expressing in English. This habit is very necessary because communication in Vietnamese language is not very similar to that in English.

### **The opportunities for Using English in English class**

According to Doff [1], basing on typical classroom opportunities, English can be seen as a "Social" language, Organising language, and Explaining language.

#### **'Social' language**

Social language is usually used at the beginning of the lesson. The teachers, instead of going straight to the textbook, can spend just a few minutes for "chatting" to students about topics of interest. Though only a little time is spent for this, this can help both the teacher and students a lot. "Social" language can help to create an English language atmosphere in the classroom and that teachers

say about real things will help students have an opportunity for real language practice. It can also help the teacher and students have a good relationship, because when the teacher communicates in a friendly manner, he/she will help the students believe that the teacher is a communicator, not just a controller. So students gain their confidence, feel relaxed and ready to learn, and learn more effectively.

For using English as a "Social" language, many opportunities can be exploited [1] such as local news, local events, a school performance, things students did the previous day, birthdays, holidays, weather...

"Social" language uses simple expressions so students can understand the teacher's speech, take part in conversations, and then gain the confidence.

#### **Organising language**

Organising language can be used most of the time from the beginning to the end of the lesson for the teacher to give commands, check attendance, introduce different stages of the lesson, set the homework, etc. It consists of simple expressions (simple commands and instructions) which are repeated lesson after lesson. There are many opportunities for using organising language. They are all real situations in the classroom, for example, the devising up of the class (individuals, pairs, and groups), attitude of students, the beginning or ending activities in the class, etc.

#### **Explaining language**

Usually, there are many situations and cases in which the teacher need to explain to students a new word, a new structure, the meaning of an item, an activity, etc... Different from "Social language" and Organising language, in Explaining language, most of the expressions used are much more complex. These expressions are also rarely repeated. So both the teacher and students find using Explaining language rather difficult. Therefore, they tend to use gestures and the student's native language instead of

English. But giving explanation in English is very necessary, "If I can give explanation in English, it will provide very useful practice for the class" [1].

**THE STUDY**

**The subjects**

The subjects under the study were 137 second year - non - English - major students who have been learning English for 3 terms at ICTU.

**Instruments**

The survey questionnaire includes twelve questions concerning the students' attitude towards the importance of using English in English class, problems that students face when using English in English class, and some implications that students suggested.

**Procedure**

The survey questionnaire was administered with 137 students. The answers were returned

within two days. The data was analyzed to find out the difficulties as well as some suggestions for developing students' English ability.

**RESULTS**

***Data-analysis and Discussion***

Among the twelve questions for students, the first question concerns the students' attitude towards the importance of using English, the next ten questions aim at finding out problems that students face when using English in English class. In these questions, question 2,3,4,8 and 11 mention opportunities for students to use English, question 5,6,7 point out the difficulties of students when using English in English class, question 9 and 12 concentrate on the student's opinion about the use of Vietnamese in teaching English and the situations given in English text-books. And question 10 is designed for students to give some suggestions of them own.

**Table 1.** *Descriptive statistics for students' survey questionnaire*

Choices Questions	A %	B %	C %	D %	E %
1	60	31	7	2	-
2	5	11	41	43	-
3	19	59	18	4	-
4	100	20	10	4	-
5	43	69	41	6	-
6	26	50	30	4	-
7					
8	39	29	10	22	-
9	19	61	15	5	-
10	55	62	53	66	40
11	25	40	20	5	-
12	7	33	50	10	-

**Table 2.** *Question 7*

Levels Choices	1	2	3	4	5	6
a %	31	29	20	16	4	0
b %	20	31	30	16	10	3
c %	26	24	26	14	6	4
d %	4	6	10	10	25	45
e %	1	1	14	4	35	45
f %	18	9	10	40	20	3

As shown in table 1, 60% students think that using English class is very important to their study.

100% of the students agree that the place they use English is in their classroom, with classmates, under the teacher's control. But they do not have much opportunity to take part in this activity. Only few students always practice English in English class (19%). The percentage of the students who are called on three times in period to practice English is rather low (only 10%). Most of the students are called on once in one period (39%). Consequently, the amount of English they use is very little. 25% of the students use 10% of English, 40% use 30% of English and only 5% use 80% of English.

In fact, there are many difficulties preventing students from using English in class.

According to question 5, a big number of students focus their study on learning new words and grammar structures to write sentences correctly (69%). And many students believe that to develop English language communicative skills are not as important as writing and reading. Consequently, 50% of the students feel embarrassed and 30% feel afraid when speaking English in front of the whole class. Besides, what the students are most afraid of is making grammar and pronunciation mistakes and their limited vocabulary (31%,20%,26%) whereas they do not care about if their speech is fluent and interesting or not.

Not only English but also Vietnamese is highly evaluated. 61% of the students think the use of the mother tongue in teaching English is necessary.

When mentioning the situations given in English books, 50% of the students find these situations boring and 30% of the students state books should be taken into consideration.

50% of the students think they need more time on English. 53% of the students suggest

reducing the number of students in class. For them, the size of 46 to 54 students in a class is too big. 56% feel the need to focus on developing the positive atmosphere in class.

Motivation is very necessary for students to use English in class as well. The students' motivation for using English in English class seems to be lessened because of some reasons, such as the way of assessment and the domination of Vietnamese language.

One more problem is only 26% of the students gain confidence when speaking English.

### **Suggested Implications**

Corrections need to be in consideration. Doff said [1]: "Students' errors are a very useful way of showing what they have and have not learnt so in stead of seeing errors negatively, as a sign of failure (by the teacher or the student), we can see them positively as an indication of what we still need to teach. Obviously, if we try to prevent students from making errors, we can never find out what they do not know". And "... we need to correct some errors, to help the students learn the correct form of the language ... But this does not mean that we have to correct students all the time - if we do, it might make them unwilling or unable to say anything at all".

Teachers' language in class is important. Teachers have to choose as much simple and clear expressions as possible so that students can understand their idea.

Visual aids are also very useful for making the language used in the class more real and alive, keep the students' attention, and make the class-hour more interesting and enjoyable. To exploit visual aids, teachers can apply the computer applications like PowerPoint and search the Internet for video, drawings, etc.

Assessments need to be adjusted. Oral tests should sometimes be used instead of or together with written ones. Written tests certainly have their own advantages. However, only written tests are used leads to the problem that students only focus their

study on writing and reading and do not care much about the use of English in class for developing communicative ability. "If we want to encourage students to speak, we should give oral tests from time to time, otherwise, students will always regard speaking as less "serious" than other skills"[1].

The levels of students must be acquainted with. Teachers should give easy questions to the weaker students so that they can respond and pay them a compliment. Students will be motivated to learn English if they sense that they are making progress.

Community plays an important role in developing individual's ability of using English in class. Students should be encouraged to work in group and in pair. Teacher should put both the stronger and the weaker students in to the same group so both the weaker and stronger students are involved

in positive interaction and the stronger can help the weaker students to use English in class better.

Topics for using English in English class help motivate students to speak out. Teachers should select topics which are familiar and related to real life or up to date.

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#### TÓM TẮT

### NÂNG CAO TRÌNH ĐỘ TIẾNG ANH CHO SINH VIÊN TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC CÔNG NGHỆ THÔNG TIN VÀ TRUYỀN THÔNG THÔNG QUA VIỆC SỬ DỤNG TIẾNG ANH TRONG LỚP HỌC

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Bài báo trình bày nghiên cứu về việc sử dụng tiếng Anh trong lớp học tiếng Anh của sinh viên không chuyên ngữ, năm thứ hai tại trường Đại học Công nghệ thông tin và Truyền thông (ICTU). Nhiều nhà nghiên cứu đã chỉ ra cơ hội và lợi ích của việc sử dụng ngôn ngữ đích vào giảng dạy ngoại ngữ. Tuy nhiên, nhý kết quả của nghiên cứu cho thấy, sinh viên ICTU còn gặp nhiều khó khăn cản trở việc sử dụng tiếng Anh trong lớp học. Đó là lý do sau khóa học nhiều sinh viên không thể sử dụng tiếng Anh một cách hiệu quả. Bài báo cũng đýa ra một số gợi ý nhằm giúp người học vượt qua những thử thách để sử dụng tiếng Anh trong lớp học hiệu quả hơn.

**Từ khóa:** *Sử dụng tiếng Anh trong lớp học, đýờng hướng giao tiếp, ngôn ngữ "xã hội", ngôn ngữ tổ chức, ngôn ngữ giải thích.*

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