

FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND VIETNAMESE

USING DISCUSSION ACTIVITIES TO IMPROVE THE SECOND YEAR CADETS' ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS AT NGUYEN HUE UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT: The article is about an action research project carried out at Nguyen Hue University, a military university in Vietnam. The participants of the study were 28 second-year cadets. The aim of the study is to improve the cadets' English speaking skills through discussion activities. The contents of the study focus on (1) investigating the second year cadets' learning attitudes towards discussion activities in their speaking periods, and (2) evaluating the effectiveness of discussion activities applied to teach English speaking skill for the second year cadets. Both qualitative and quantitative methods are exploited in this action research project. Survey questionnaires, classroom observation and oral tests were used as the tools to collect the data. The results of the study show that discussion activities helped positively change the cadets' attitudes in speaking periods. In addition, after applying discussion activities in speaking periods, the cadets' speaking outcomes were improved. It proves that discussion activities are an effective and practical teaching technique to improve the cadets' speaking skill.

KEYWORDS: English speaking skills; discussion activities; action research project; learning attitude; English speaking outcome.

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1. Introduction

In the process of teaching and learning English as a foreign language, learners are taught according to four basic language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Thus, speaking is regarded as one of the most important and essential skills. It is a productive skill that language is generated by learners in speech. And the fact shows that many college and university students possess weak abilities to communicate in English language environments. They often lose self-confidence or have limited ideas when having conversations in English. It is said that students' speaking skills can be developed through communicative activities. According to Harmer (2002), speaking activities provide students opportunities for rehearsal and motivate them. There exist different speaking activities, which are enjoyable such as information gaps, debates, layout problems, discussion, games, role-play, etc. If the teachers can set up speaking tasks properly and effectively, they can motivate their students a lot in learning speaking skills.

In fact, using what kinds of methods to promote learners' motivation and participation in speaking periods is very important to the teachers of English. Discussion is a teaching technique to improve verbal communication and critical thinking skills. This technique enables the learners to organize their ideas and express them freely. The ideas in their mind will motivate them to talk and link ideas with other fields of knowledge, which will create heated conversations in the classroom. The reasons above made the authors decide to conduct a research project in the case of second year cadets at Nguyen Hue University. It is hoped that the findings will be a significant contribution to the improvement of the cadets' speaking ability and the quality of teaching speaking skill for the cadets.

2. Literature review

2.1. Speaking skills

Speaking is the verbal use of language to communicate with others. It is one of two ways of oral communication process, and is the productive skill. The speaker has to encode the message he wishes to convey in an appropriate language, while the listener has to decode (or interpret) the message. Chaney & Burk (1998) defined speaking as "the process of building and sharing meaning through the

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use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, in a variety of contexts". Spratt, et al. (2005) supposed that speaking is a productive skill which involves using speech to express meanings to other people. Florez (2005) had a comprehensive definition when stating that speaking is "an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving and processing information". It is clear that speaking is an activity involving two or more people in which the participants are both the listeners and the speakers having to act what they listen and make their contribution in this activity.

Brown (2001) suggested six types of speaking: (1) *imitative speaking* (This type requires the ability to learn an intonation and to concentrate on certain specific aspects of the language structure), (2) *intensive speaking* (This is the students' speaking performance that is practicing some phonological and grammatical aspects of language); (3) *responsive speaking* (This is a kind of short answer to questions or remarks initiated by the teachers or students, giving instructions and directions), (4) *transactional dialogue* (It is done with the intention of transmitting or sharing specific information), (5) *interpersonal dialogue* (It is done more for the sake of preserving social ties than for the purpose of transmitting facts and knowledge) and (6) *extensive monologue* (It prepares students to the advanced level by requiring them to report events, summaries, and stories orally). These types of speaking are all paramount to enhance learners' speaking skills.

Speaking is the skill that students will be judged upon most in real-life situations. It is an important aspect of daily interaction, and an individual's ability to communicate fluently and comprehensively. There are four main characteristics of a successful speaking activity, which are introduced by Ur (1996). First of all, learners have to talk a lot. Secondly, participation is even. The third characteristic is that motivation is high. And finally, language is of an acceptable level. Learners express themselves in utterances that are relevant, easily comprehensible to each other and of an acceptable level of language accuracy. In a successful speaking task, the language is at the right level. In fact, however, few classroom activities achieve any of the above requirements. Therefore, language teachers should make an effort to use a range of effective methods to achieve some of the above goals. The two discussion activities used in this research, debates and layout issues, will help the cadets participate more actively in speaking practices, and the language used in these activities is acceptable because it is focused on what they have learned in class.

2.2. Discussion activities

In Cambridge Learner's Dictionary (2004), discussion is defined as the activity in which people talk about something and tell each other their ideas or opinions. It can be understood that discussion is an activity in which people talk together in order to share information about a topic or problem or to seek a solution. In language teaching, discussion has the potential to be implemented because it is expected to enable students to promote their speaking ability and to provide for greater interaction between teachers and students.

There are a lot of activities used in discussion; however, focusing on task-centred discussions, Ur (1996) divided the activities into three sections: brainstorming, organizing activities and compounding activities.

- *Brainstorming* is a technique in which members of the group let loose a hail of possible ideas or thoughts in a random sequence as they come to them. There are some common activities such as guessing games, finding connections, ideas from a central theme, implications and interpretation, etc.

- *Organizing activities* include comparing, detecting differences, putting in order, choosing candidates, layout problems and combined versions.

- *Compounding activities* involve composing letters, debates and surveys.

In the present study, the discussion activities were used in the classroom. Whole-class discussions can encourage students to learn from one another and to articulate course content in their own words. While generally not conducive to covering large amounts of content, the interactive dynamic of discussion can help students learn and motivate them to complete homework and to prepare for class. Leading discussion activities in which students contribute meaningfully requires a great deal of instructor forethought and creativity.

2.3. Discussion activities in English teaching and learning

It has been mentioned that discussion plays an important part in the process of learning English speaking. According to Killen (1996, p. 27), discussion is an appropriate technique for English as a foreign language teacher because it helps students to think critically about the subject and develop their skills of analysis, synthesis and evaluation, rather than just memorize facts. Discussion also helps encourage students to work together and share their ideas by talking about them publicly, and develops students' communication skills such as stating their ideas clearly, listening to others, or responding appropriately to others. In addition, through discussion, students can generate their own ideas, and discover new knowledge by sharing ideas in groups. Specifically, when being given a certain task to discuss after the lessons, students are supposed to work in pairs or in groups analyzing the task together. Each member of the group has to share his or her idea with the others, learn to listen to his or her friends, and cooperate with friends so that they can fulfill the given task. In the long term, students can develop their critical thinking and cooperative learning skills; hence, students are able to improve their speaking proficiency.

Killen's concept above is in line with Brown's notion. Brown (2001, p.178) affirmed some essential advantages of group discussion in English as a foreign language teaching: students are able to generate interactive language; students are embraced by an effective climate; students are to promote learner responsibility and autonomy; and students are able to understand individualizing instruction. In other words, when discussing in groups, students are free to share their ideas with friends in a friendly atmosphere because they work with a small group of other students. Through group discussion, students are able to practise the target language and make contribution to their group work. It requires each of them to be more autonomous and responsible for fulfilling the task given to their groups. It can be summed up that the strong points of discussion techniques are that students are able to promote their high-level thinking, initiative learners, autonomous language users, caring students and high responsible students.

There are some discussion activities that are often used in speaking periods at the university. They are guessing games, comparing, surveys, and detecting differences. However, the condition of teaching and studying English speaking has shown that some practices are not demanding or exciting enough, and others do not encourage cadets to practise cooperative learning. The two discussion activities used in this study were debates and layout problems. Cadets were supposed to work in small groups and then discussed with the whole class. The debates may produce the relative lack of participation. Therefore, to increase cadets' involvement in the activities, the class was divided into small groups, each of whom was given a motion for debates. This activity is suitable for multi-level cadets. The layout problems can necessitate some preliminary reading from the cadets before they can solve the problems. Cadets will be more motivated and more self-confident in classroom discussion activities if they are assigned at home before the class.

No language skill is so difficult to assess with precision as speaking ability, and for this reason it seemed wise to defer our consideration of oral production tests until last. Moreover, some of the problems involved the evaluation of speaking skills occur in other forms of language testing. Like writing, speaking is a complex skill requiring the simultaneous use of a number of different abilities which often develop at different rates. Either five components are generally recognized in analyses of the speech process (Brown, 2001): (1) pronunciation (including the segmental features-vowels and consonants and the stress and intonation patterns), (2) grammar, (3) vocabulary, (4) fluency (being able to speak a language easily and well), and (5) comprehension. Actually, oral communication certainly requires a subject to respond to speech as well as to initiate it. The five factors of speaking skills above have important role in speaking. By mastering all the factors, people can produce good speech.

2.4. Previous research

The subject of using discussion as a teaching method has been discussed through several studies. Gall & Gillett (1980) focused on the discussion method in classroom teaching. Rahman, et al. (2011) investigated the impact of discussion methods on students' performance. It proved that discussion is

an effective technique in the teaching and learning process. Oradee (2012) in her article stated that three communicative activities including discussion, problem-solving, and role-playing help to develop speaking skills. According to Menggo, et al. (2013), the effect of discussion technique and English learning motivation towards students' speaking ability are considerable.

In Vietnam, several research projects have been carried out to improve students' English speaking skills such as *"Using discussion activities to increase motivation and speaking proficiency of second-year EFL students"* by Huong (2011), *"The use of role-play activities in improving speaking skills for the first-year English major students"* by Huyen (2012), *"Using discussion activities to improve the EFL students' speaking skills At Dong Nai Technology University"* by Hanh (2019), etc. The findings of the above studies show that discussion activities are an effective technique to increase the students' motivation and English speaking proficiency. The present action research project has been carried out in the case of the second year cadets at a military university for the first time. Thus, the findings of the study will be original.

3. Methodology

The objectives of the study are uncovering the cadets' attitudes towards discussion activities used in speaking periods and evaluating the effectiveness of discussion activities applied to English speaking skill teaching. In order to achieve the objectives, both qualitative and quantitative methods are exploited in this action research project. The data are collected via survey questionnaires, classroom observation and oral tests.

3.1. Research setting

The study was conducted at Nguyen Hue University, a military university located in Dong Nai province. It is a training center of command and staff officers offering bachelor's and master's degree programs at tactical level in southern Vietnam. Its main function is to train cadets to become army officers. Therefore, military-oriented subjects are the mainstream, and the majority of time is for military-skill training.

At Nguyen Hue University, where the research project was conducted, all the cadets are non-English majors. English is a compulsory subject in the training programme. The cadets' English outcomes are level B1 in the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). Actually, cadets do not have the same level of English language proficiency, and during the learning process, especially speaking periods, their interaction is restricted. Many cadets can hardly ever communicate in English because of low motivation and poor language performance. They are not able to express their thoughts and opinions satisfactorily.

The English language subject at the university is often taught at the beginning of the second academic year. It is divided into two stages. In the first stage, cadets have to complete the general English program, and the second stage is reserved for English for military purposes. The textbook used for general English is New Headway (pre-inter) along with some other supplemental materials. Command English by James Arnold and Robert Sacco is for English for military purposes. By the end of the course, cadets are expected to be able to communicate in English at level B1. However, the cadets' learning results are not as good as expected.

3.2. Participants

One of the two researchers worked as an intervener. She has been a teacher of English for more than 15 years. At present, she is responsible for teaching both general English and English for military purposes. 28 second-year cadets were selected to take part in this action research project. All of the participants are from 19 - 22 years old. They come from different provinces and they do not have same level of English language proficiency. The main reason for choosing the second year cadets is that they are still very new to the training method at tertiary level. Perhaps, they are still affected by the teaching and learning methods at high schools, and it seems that they are better at reading English than speaking it. Many of them possess little experience working with teachers and other cadets in English. They appear to be passive learners in English class and have low motivation in speaking English and participating in the classroom activities. It is hoped that an effective teaching

technique implementation could change the situation and help cadets achieve better results in their next school years.

3.3. Research procedures

In order to carry out this study, classroom action research was applied. Action research is a kind of research that is conducted in the classrooms by teachers. According to Kemmis and McTaggart (2005), “action research is a form of self-reflective inquiry that can be utilized by teachers in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out”. In addition, Harmer (2002) explained that action research is the name given to a series of procedures teachers can engage in, either because they wish to improve aspects of their teaching, or because they wish to evaluate the success or suitability of certain activities and procedures.

In the present study, before the action, the authors carried out a preliminary investigation to identify the level of cadets’ motivation and their speaking proficiency. The observation class learning and pre-test helped the authors measure the English speaking proficiency of the cadets’. Then, the action research was implemented through four steps according to Kemmis and McTaggart’s model (2005): (1) planning, (2) action, (3) observation, and (4) reflection (see Figure 1).

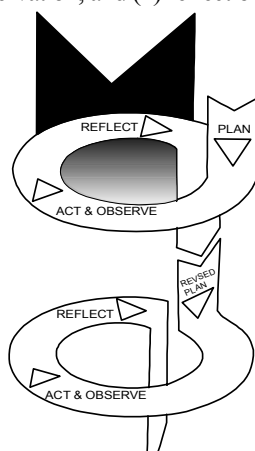


Figure 1. Kemmis and Mc Taggart’s action research spiral

In the first step, two discussion activities (debates and layout problems) were chosen to use during the pilot teaching. The activities were carefully prepared before each of the speaking lessons, including arranging the lesson plans, preparing the media related to the materials, preparing teaching materials, preparing checklist observation, and making the test materials. Next, the materials were explained, and debates and layout problems were introduced to the cadets. The cadets were asked to make groups and conduct discussion activities based on the topics given. During the discussion activities, the emphasis was on the cadets' input. The teacher moved around the classroom, monitored the activities to see the strengths and weaknesses of the cadets, how they communicated with each other, how influent each of them was, and noted down errors in grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and communicative problems. After the activities, the teacher gave feedback to the cadets. Next, the observation was done to check the cadets’ activities in discussion, the cadets’ responses during the teaching and learning process, and the cadets’ speaking skill improvement. Finally, the reflection was done at the end of the cycle. The data collected through the observation during implementing the action, the survey questionnaires and the post-test after the action were analyzed. The results of the analysis were consulted to find out how much the cadets participated in the speaking lessons and whether they could improve their speaking proficiency or not.

3.4. Data collection instruments

In order to collect the information about the cadets' attitudes during speaking lessons and their speaking proficiency, survey questionnaires, classroom observation and two oral tests were used in this study.

3.4.1. Survey questionnaires

The survey questionnaire consists of five questions concerning cadets' attitudes towards the discussion activities used in speaking lessons after 6 weeks of implementation and the effectiveness of the discussion activities in improving their speaking skills.

3.4.2. Classroom observation

The classroom observation was carried out during six weeks of the pilot teaching. The observation in the speaking periods was noted down thoroughly. The observation sheet used in this study is adapted from Peacock (1997) in order to check the overall level of class motivation including cadets' interest, concentration, enjoyment, enthusiasm and persistence with the learning task. There are eight items in the observation sheet; each item is scored on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high). The cadets' levels of motivation are evaluated through the total score of the eight items (the maximum score is 40).

3.4.3. Oral tests

In the present study, the use of oral tests is seen as the main instrument to collect data about the cadets' English speaking proficiency. A pre-test and a post-test were used to measure the cadets' English speaking proficiency before and after the action. Both of the tests have three parts: (1) introduction, (2) topic presentation, and (3) extended discussion. The contents of the two tests are relatively the same.

To make the tests more reliable, the authors invited three teachers of English at Nguyen Hue University to observe and evaluate the cadet's learning in English speaking periods, and the author also invited them to participate in marking the oral exams for the cadets. One measured the cadets' speaking proficiency before the action, and the others assessed the cadets' speaking proficiency after implementing the action. The cadets' speaking abilities were assessed separately by three teachers – examiners according to four oral testing criteria: fluency and comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation, with a maximum score of 20 for each. This ensures that the test results are truly trustworthy. The contents of topics in the pre-test and post-test were the same. Most of cadets were familiar with these ones, and they had been learning more carefully during the six weeks of the experiment. Therefore, in the final tests, the extended questions for discussion were more difficult, and the cadets had to give their own views on the issues raised by the examiners.

3.5. Data analysis

Both qualitative and quantitative data were used in the study. Quantitative data were gathered from the two tests and the survey questionnaires, while the qualitative data was obtained from the class observation. The mean formula was applied to give the average of the cadets' scores. This helped to check the cadets' improvement in speaking. The formula is as the following:

$$M = \frac{\sum x}{N}$$

(M: The average of cadets' score; $\sum x$: Total score; N: The number of the cadets)

For the results of the tests and the survey questionnaires, percentage count was calculated. For the classroom observation, the information was noted down carefully, and the level of cadets' motivation was evaluated in the observation sheet in each speaking lesson.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1. Cadets' attitudes

The first objective of the study is uncovering the cadets' attitudes towards discussion activities used in English speaking periods. Survey questionnaires and classroom observation are the tools that help to reach this objective.

4.1.1. Results and analysis from survey questionnaires

The questionnaire includes 5 statements used to investigate the cadets' attitudes towards the researchers' intervention. Item 1 is to investigate the students' attitudes towards discussion activities. Items 2, 3, 4 and 5 expose the participants' evaluation on the effectiveness of discussion activities in speaking periods.

Table 1. *Cadets' opinions about discussion activities*

No	Opinions	Consent levels	Number of cadets	%
1	Discussion activities make me feel relaxed and enjoyable.	1	06	21.43
		2	17	60.71
		3	04	14.29
		4	01	3.57
		5	0	0
2	Discussion activities help lower my anxiety and develop confidence.	1	12	42.86
		2	16	57.14
		3	0	0
		4	0	0
		5	0	0
3	Discussion activities give me more opportunities to speak English.	1	13	46.43
		2	10	35.71
		3	05	17.86
		4	0	0
		5	0	0
4	Discussion activities make the speaking lessons more interesting because I can get involved in the tasks, and work out the solutions to the problems with my friends.	1	10	35.71
		2	13	46.43
		3	04	14.29
		4	01	3.57
		5	0	0
5	Discussion activities help me a lot in improving my speaking motivation.	1	03	10.71
		2	13	46.43
		3	05	17.86
		4	0	0
		5	01	3.57

(1: Highly agree; 2: Agree; 3: Neutral; 4: Disagree; 5: Strongly disagree)

Table 1 shows that 23 cadets (82.14%) highly agree and agree with the first statement (Discussion activities make me feel relaxed and enjoyable). A small number of cadets (14.29%) seem not to be really satisfied with this technique. Their answer is "neutral". Only one cadet (03.57%) disagrees with this statement. More than half of the cadets (57.14%) agree that discussion activities help lower their anxiety and develop confidence. The number of cadets highly agreeing are in second place, accounting for 42.86%. 13 out of 28 (46.43%) cadets highly agree that discussion activities give them more opportunities to speak English. Also, there are 35.71% of the cadets saying that they agree with the third statement and only 5 cadets (17.86%) have neutral opinions.

For the fourth opinion, 13 out of 28 cadets (46.43%) agree that discussion activities make the speaking periods more interesting. 10 cadets (35.71%) have positive attitudes towards speaking skill and discussion activities. 14.29% of the cadets admit that they disagree with this opinion. They find that these activities are still difficult, and there is only one choosing "Strongly agree". When being asked about the effectiveness of discussion activities in improving the cadets' speaking motivation,

13 cadets (46.43%) evaluate that their speaking skill is much improved. 3 cadets (10.71%) highly appreciate the usefulness of discussion activities in speaking periods while 05 cadets (17.86%) think their speaking is a little developed. They are not sure about their choice, and only 01 cadet choose “Strongly disagree”. The findings from survey questionnaires prove that discussion activities can do a good job in changing cadets’ attitudes towards speaking periods and it is an effective way in teaching speaking skill.

4.1.2. Results and analysis from classroom observation

In order to give more reliable conclusions about cadets’ positive attitudes in learning speaking skills through discussion activities, classroom observation was also employed in the study.

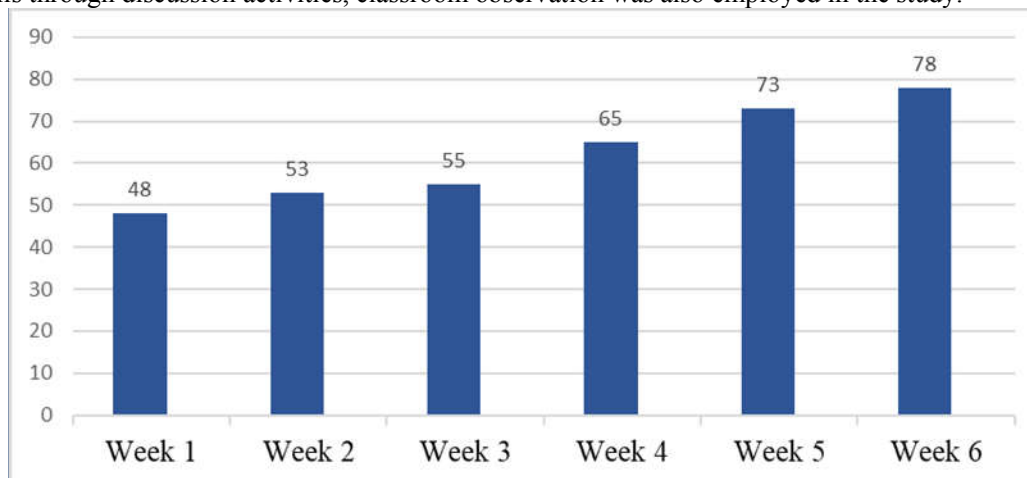


Figure 2. Cadets’ positive attitude level during the intervention

It is revealed in figure 2 that cadets’ positive attitudes remarkably increase from week 1 to week 6. In each period, discussion activities are applied in different stages of the lesson. Through discussion activities, the cadets are motivated to be responsible for their learning. They are the main processors in the classroom. They have more opportunities to interact, to use English for communication and show good performance in the discussion activities with their partners. They feel more self-confident and more participative when working in a team. The evidence collected from the classroom observation also supports that the cadets are more and more interested in the discussion activities. Their confidence increases while their stress and anxiety decrease considerably during the activities. It can be concluded that most of the cadets join in the class enthusiastically. The teaching and learning process runs well.

4.2. Cadets’ speaking proficiency

One of the objectives of the study is evaluating the effectiveness of discussion activities on the cadets’ speaking outcomes. Before and after the intervention, the cadets were given a pre-test and a post-test. The aim of post-test 1 is to find out whether there is any difference in result between pre-test and post-test so that the researchers can draw out the effectiveness of discussion activities in speaking skill teaching and learning.

4.2.1. Results and analysis from pre-test

Before the intervention, 28 cadets were invited to take an oral test. The marking criteria are based on vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, fluency and comprehension.

Table 2. Results of pre-test

Scores	Number of cadets	%
1-3 (Very poor)	0	0
4 (Poor)	02	7.14
5 (Fair)	12	42.86
6 (Fairly good)	10	35.71

7 (Good)	04	14.29
8 (Very good)	0	0
9-10 (Excellent)	0	0
Total	28	100
Mean score	60.5	

As can be seen from table 2, there are two cadets who still have low scores in speaking. 4 out of 28 cadets (14.29%) achieve good marks. The rest of the cadets (78.57%) get mark 5 or 6, and no-one gains mark 8 or 9. The mean score is 60.5. The percentage of cadets getting good marks before the action implementation is still low, and there are not any very good or excellent cadets.

4.2.2. Results and analysis from post-test

In order to see whether there are any changes in cadets' speaking proficiency after implementing the action, a post-test was carried out.

Table 3. Results of post-test

Scores	Number of cadets	%
1-3 (Very poor)	0	0
4 (Poor)	0	0
5 (Fair)	03	10.71
6 (Fairly good)	16	57.14
7 (Good)	07	25.00
8 (Very good)	02	7.15
9-10 (Excellent)	0	0
Total	28	100
Mean score	67.3	

Table 3 shows the cadets' results in the post-test. There are no cadets who get low marks. 16 out of 28 cadets get mark 6, accounting for 57.14%. There is an increase in the number of cadets gaining mark 7 (25%). 2 cadets getting mark 8. The findings demonstrate that English speaking proficiency of the cadets is improved. The mean score is 67.3.

4.2.3. The whole meeting

As the whole meeting runs well, there is some significant improvement from the pre-test and the post-test. In the pre-test, the average score is 60.5 and, in the post-test, the mean score is 67.3 (see table 4). Thus, cadets' speaking skill is considerably improved after implementing discussion activities. They presented a high level of participation during the speaking periods by showing interest and motivation. It means that the implementation of discussion activities is successful because these are interesting activities where cadets have a lot of opportunities to practise speaking English. Cadets also have active involvement during the discussion process in order to express their opinions.

Table 4. Results of pre-test and post-test

Scores	Pre-test		Post-test	
	Number of cadets	%	Number of cadets	%
1-3 (Very poor)	0	0	0	0
4 (Poor)	02	7.14	0	0
5 (Fair)	12	42.86	03	10.71
6 (Fairly good)	10	35.71	16	57.14
7 (Good)	04	14.29	07	25.00
8 (Very good)	0	0	02	7.15
9-10 (Excellent)	0	0	0	0
Total	28	100	28	100
Mean score	60.5		67.3	

4.3. Implications

For teachers of English at the university where the research project was carried out, they should pay attention to how and when discussion activities should be used in order to obtain the maximum effectiveness of this teaching technique. Based on the research results, the use of discussion activities in a flexible manner will encourage cadets to participate in speaking lessons. Teachers also pay more attention to cadets whose speaking proficiency is limited, helping them feel more confident when participating in group activities. Teachers also spend more time studying the university's curriculum, teaching materials that serve throughout the teaching process. It is essential to provide cadets with necessary vocabulary, expression and basic knowledge about issues related to the lessons for them to have an overview before conducting discussion activities. Besides, teachers should set up the classroom in such a way that cadets can talk freely. It will assist cadets in openly forming and expressing their thoughts and opinions, as well as encouraging cadets to use English in class. And one very important thing is that teachers should know how to give appropriate feedback to help cadets to improve their language skills.

For cadets, they should realize the importance of speaking skill in their future work and in real life, and then make a plan to improve their speaking proficiency. They should work with friends to practise speaking English more regularly and actively not only in speaking classes but also in daily life. Furthermore, in order to be more self-confident in speaking English in classes, cadets should spend more time before class individually or in groups planning for required knowledge as well as useful language. By this, their English speaking skill will be soon improved.

5. Conclusion

The present study focuses on the effectiveness of the use of discussion activities in promoting second year cadets' positive attitudes and participation in speaking periods. Through the analysis of the data collected from survey questionnaires and classroom observation, the results show that using discussion activities in speaking lessons help almost every cadet in the class become more motivated. In addition, the findings of the study reveal that after applying discussion activities in speaking periods, cadets' speaking outcomes are improved. It proves that discussion activities are an effective and practical teaching technique in teaching speaking skills. They should be widely used in teaching and learning English in general and English speaking lessons in particular.

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**Sử dụng hoạt động thảo luận để cải thiện kỹ năng nói tiếng Anh
cho học viên năm thứ hai tại Trường Đại học Nguyễn Huệ**

Tóm tắt: Nội dung bài viết trình bày kết quả nghiên cứu của dự án nghiên cứu hành động thực hiện tại Trường Đại học Nguyễn Huệ, một trường quân đội ở Việt Nam. Đối tượng tham gia dự án nghiên cứu là 28 học viên năm thứ hai. Nghiên cứu có mục đích cải thiện kỹ năng nói tiếng Anh cho học viên thông qua hoạt động thảo luận. Nội dung của nghiên cứu tập trung vào: (1) tìm hiểu quan điểm của học viên năm thứ hai về hoạt động thảo luận trong các giờ học nói tiếng Anh và (2) đánh giá hiệu quả của hoạt động thảo luận trong giảng dạy kỹ năng nói. Nghiên cứu sử dụng cả phương pháp nghiên cứu định lượng và định tính, trong đó bảng hỏi, quan sát lớp học và kiểm tra nói là các công cụ chính để thu thập dữ liệu. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy hoạt động thảo luận giúp học viên có thái độ tích cực hơn trong các giờ học nói tiếng Anh. Ngoài ra, sau khi áp dụng hoạt động thảo luận vào các giờ học, kết quả học tập của học viên đã được cải thiện. Đây là minh chứng cho thấy hoạt động thảo luận là một phương pháp giảng dạy hiệu quả và thiết thực để cải thiện kỹ năng nói tiếng Anh cho học viên.

Từ khóa: Kỹ năng nói tiếng Anh; hoạt động thảo luận; dự án nghiên cứu hành động; thái độ học tập; kết quả học nói tiếng Anh.