FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND VIETNAMESE

USING COMMUNICATIVE ACTIVITIES TO MOTIVATE NON-ENGLISH MAJOR STUDENTS IN THE SPEAKING LESSONS

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ABSTRACT: Speaking skill is quite difficult for students in general, especially for non- English major ones. Most of them have difficulty in speaking because of many different reasons. There are a lot of studies showing different ways to improve speaking. In particular, communicative activities (CA) are effective ways to motivate students in the speaking lessons. As a result, this study is to investigate the problems, the advantages and disadvantages of using communicative activities in the speaking lessons. It also gives some recommendations to advance speaking skill for the non-English major students at Hanoi University of Industry (HaUI).

KEY WORDS: speaking skill; communicative activity; improve; problem; recommendation.

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1. Introduction

Motivation in the speaking lessons has attracted a great many researchers. So far, such factors as students' background knowledge, effort, language aptitudes, personality traits or parental influence and learner commitment have been examined in correlation studies or surveys. Motivation is what pushes a learner's try to learn, in the traditional language of the teacher, "to motivate". Norris (2001) states that motivation means *to get the students to apply them to the learning at hands*. Motivation is a concept without physical reality and we canot see motivation, we see behaviour only. Thus, the measůement of motivation is indirect, just as measement of other psychological construct such as attitudes, interest and values or desire.

This study, however, limits to an examination of motivating the non-English major students' talking time in the speaking lessons by improving current use of communicative activities. Under serious time and recourses, both human and financial constraints of this study and the teaching and learning situations, the researchers only focus on teaching and learning conditions, the teachers' organization of communicative activities and the students' language aptitude and psychological factors.

The purpose of this research is to investigate the ways to encourage students actively participate in the speaking lessons. This paper attempt to hightlights findings that address the following questions: (1) What are the causes of students' low motivation in the speaking lessons? (2) How should the communicative activities be improved to motivate students' participation in the speaking lessons?

In general, it is hoped that the study will identify the causes of students' low motivation in the speaking lessons and appropriate suggestions based on the findings could be made to solve.

2. Literature review

2.1. Factors affecting motivation

Motivation is a key factor in successful language teaching. There has been a great deal of research on the role of motivation in second language learning. Gardner (1985) states that positive attitudes and motivation are related to success in second language learning. According to Harmer (1998), motivation includes such critical factors as aptitude, opportunity or method. From his point of view,

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motivation decides the amount of time a learner will spend on the task of language learning. He claims that the more motivation a learner has, the more time he/ she will spend learning an aspect of a second language. Lightbown & Spada (1999) conclude that motivation and attitudes are important factors, which help to determine the level of proficiency achieved by different learners. The effects of motivation seem to be separated from effects of attitude. The most successful learners will be those who have both talent and a high level of motivation for learning. Dornyei (2001) proposes that motivation needs generating, actively maintaining, protecting and retrospectively evaluating.

There are many factors affecting students' motivation to take part in the speaking lessons such as teaching and learning conditions, the factors from teachers and students.

Harmer (1998) believes that teaching and learning conditions in the classroom have a great effect on learning and can alter the students' motivation either positively or negatively. More importantly, according to Dorneyei, (2001) the ownership of the classroom among students should be created as "*Personalizing the classroom can be seen as students' increasing control over their environment*." (p.42). In other words, the atmosphere in which a language is learnt is vitally important. It may have good or bad effects on students' motivation.

Teachers play such an important role in motivating students in the foreign language lessons. Dornyei (2001) believes that the teacher is one of the most important factors that might motivate students' participation in the foreign language lessons. Teachers can create students' willingness to pursue knowledge by showing their love, dedication and passion together with commitment towards the subject matter. Moreover, the students' motivation depends on the teachers' expectations and good relationship with them. According to Gower (1995), when high expectations are set by teachers, students seem to perform better at the subject matter and even feel more competent. Additionally, the teachers' organization of the language activity greatly affects the success of the speaking lessons. From Dornyei's point of view (2001), the way the teachers eliciting vocabulary, ideas and structures relating to the tasks, giving instructions to the activities, modeling the tasks, setting pair/ group activities, giving feedback might also have a great effect on the students' motivation.

Lightbrown & Spada (1999) show that learners' preferences refer to learning style describing as an individual's natural, habitual and preferred way of absorbing, processing and retaining new information and skill. They also state that learners have their own expectations of how classes should be organized or taught. Additionally, intelligence refers to the performance on certain kinds of tests while aptitude refers to language ability. The language ability consists of the ability to identify, memorize and recall the sounds and vocabulary. It also comprises of the ability to understand the function of particular words in sentences and to figure out grammatical rules form language sample. In addition, learners' background knowledge is a vital part in motivating them to take part in the lessons. If learners lack of vocabulary or ideas, they cannot express their ideas. It is believed that students' intelligence and good language aptitude/ competence play an important role in motivation.

2.2. Role of using communicative activities in language teaching

Communicative language teaching (CLT) method has brought many advantages. Burns (1997) suggests that one of the major benefits of communicative language teaching is that it brought about a more comprehensive view of teaching and learning.

Sheils (1993) says that the goal of CLT is learners' ability to communicate and willingness to use the target language appropriately and accurately for the purposes of effective communication. According to Burns (1997), CLT emphasizes the idea about linguistic competence by taking up the issue of the speaker's performers or language use. Communicative competence, according to Canle and Swain (1980), includes not only linguistic knowledge but also knowledge of the cultural and communicative systems available to the speaker, and their relationship with the setting, participant, purpose, channel of communication and topics. CLT in teaching speaking focuses on teaching how to use language for communicative purposes.

The process of teaching speaking involes 3 stages. The first one is pre-speaking. According to Lewis & Hill (1992), this phase must accomplish both of two goals: Building new background knowledge as well as activating existing background knowledge. With the aims to arouse students'

interest in the activity, to motivate students by giving them reasons to speak and to provide students with some language preparation relating to the task.

The second stage is while- speaking. It is the time for students to do most of talking as they are provided maximum amount of practice in the form of controlled and guided activities to improve vocabulary and grammar knowledge as well as fluency of speaking. The activities are usually pair work, group work or sometimes students do individual work.

The last one is post- speaking. At this last stage of learning speaking, students are given chances to speak freely. Being in a real situation, students use English by themselves, not nearly depend on the teachers' help. Free activities are also in the form of pair work, group work and individual work. However, pair work and group work are of great importance and effectiveness as students can have chances to participate in talks, and they seem more confident and more motivated. Moreover, this can save a great deal of time.

2.3. Problems in the speaking lessons

Students can have some certain difficulties in the speaking lessons. Parrott, M. (1993), points out some of the problems of difficulty in the speaking activities (p.92).

The first is the students' lack of confidence and fear of making mistakes. Learners often seem shamed worried about making mistakes, fearful of criticism or losing face.

The second is the students' feeling of having nothing to say. Students often complain that they cannot think of anything to say, they have no motivation to express themselves beyond the guilty feeling that they should be speaking.

The third is low or uneven participation. Only one participant can talk at a time if he/ she is to be heard. This problem is compounded by the tendency of some students to dominate, while others speak very little or not at all.

The fourth is lack of appropriate language. Students often complain that they do not have enough vocabulary and structures to make discussion or to talk about the topic.

The fifth is the teachers' organization of the activities and classroom management to get students involved in the speaking activities. According to Lewis, M. & Hill, J. (1992), the ways the teacher gives instructions to the activities, brainstorms necessary ideas, vocabulary and structures and arranges the seating contribute great success to the speaking lessons. Additionally, the ways the teacher controls the class and sets time for the activities are also important for the success of the speaking lessons.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

The participants of this research include 2 groups. They are 90 non-English major students from three classes specializing in electronics and electrical engineering and three teachers at HaUI. They were observed in speaking lessons and invited to complete survey questionnaires and follow-up interview.

3.2. Instrumentation

In this study, three questionaires and follow-up interviews were designed to collect information about the reasons why students were reluctant to take part in the communicative speaking activities and how the teacher's organization of the communicative activities affects the students' participation. Questionnaire 1 was to collect students' self- motivation. Questionnaire 2 and 3 were to collect information about causes affecting on students' participation generated by activities in speaking lessons and the suggestions on how to encourage students' participation in CA.

3.3. Treatment

To confirm the problems and to establish the baseline of students' low motivation in oral communicative activities in speaking lessons, the researchers analyzed the data collected from observation sheets as well as questionaires.

3.4. Proceduce

The data collection procedure was collected during the second term of the school year 2021-2022 at HaUI. The necessary data for the study was collected from questionnaires, classroom observation and follow-up interviews.

To analyze the collected data, the researchers used mean score method chosen to interpret and present them.

4. Results and discussion

Table 1. *Overall class motivation and students' self-motivation*

Overall class motivation	**16.25**
Students'self motivation	**18.50**

As can be seen from Table 1, the overall class motivation (16.5 out of a maximum possible of 40) as well as students' self-motivation (18.5 out of a maximum of 49) was very low. This result indicates that students found the tasks difficult, which explained for the decrease in their effort as well as their involvement and persistence in the lessons. Additionally, the most common problem was that students were not eager to take part in the tasks. When the teacher asked students to work in pairs or groups, only some of them did so. Some others sat and did nothing, some worked alone and the others had small talks. Thus, the students' talking times were very low and how to motivate students to take part in the CA was a serious issue calling for urgent attention and action.

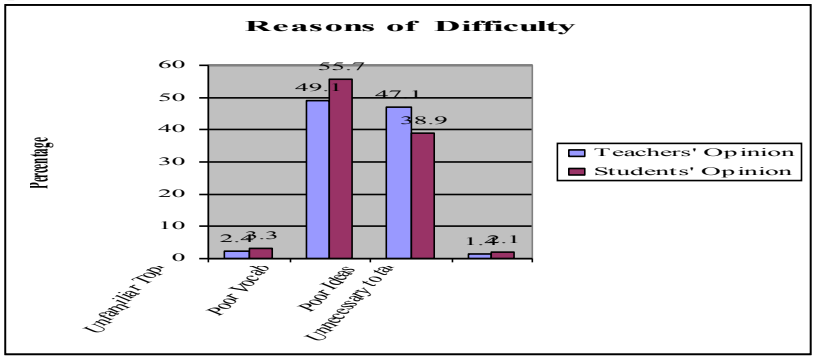


Figure 1*: Reasons of Difficulty*

About the difficulty of the task, 55.7% of the students said that they lacked of vocabulary, 38.9 % of the students did not have ideas relating to the assigned task. The problems of unfamiliar topics (only 3.3% of the students) and unnecessary to talk (2.1 % of the students) do not have great impacts on the students' motivation.

Table 2. *Reasons of students' under participation*

Reasons	Teachers' Mean Score	Students' Mean Score
Poor Vocabulary	4.1	3.6
Poor Ideas	4.1	3.6
Not Understanding the Tasks	2.5	2.4
Shyness	3.9	3.5
Afraid of Making Mistakes	3.7	3.5
Dislike working in pairs/ groups	2.3	2.0

The reasons why students were reluctant to take part in the communicative speaking activities should be taken into consideration. The majority indicates factors such as *poor vocabulary, poor ideas relating to the task, shyness and afraid of making mistakes* with the mean score ranging from 3.5 up to 4.1. Most of the students said that the tasks were understandable, which is opposed to the results from the observation sheets.

Also, according to appendix 1, the way the teachers organized CA, to some extend, also affects the students' participation in the speaking activities. The total mean score of all the items relating to the way the teacher organized the CA is 2.97, which is very low.

Based on the above data, the researchers have come up to two problems. The first one is the students' lack of vocabulary and ideas relating to the topic. The second one is the teachers' organization of CA in the speaking lessons. Therefore, the solutions focus on the ways of presenting vocabulary and ideas to provide students necessary vocabulary and ideas and the teachers' organization of CA in the speaking lessons.

Eliciting

Before each speaking lesson, the whole class was requested to brainstorm vocabulary and ideas relating to the task and given frequently-used structures.

Proper instruction

Short, clear and precise instruction was given before students were asked to do any activity in the speaking lesson in order for the students to understand what was expected of them.

Appropriate organization of the class

Suitable arranging the seating with pair/ group was set up sometimes randomly, sometimes by using numbers or seating face to face, circle shape etc. to help students interact with different people and increase opportunities for student talking time.

Friendly atmosphere

The teacher also created a friendly, relaxed learning environment to reduce students' shyness and unwillingness to take part in the activity. While the activity was taking place, the teacher went round the class to support and offer help if necessary. Sometimes she took part in the discussion with a certain group.

Time control

Before each activity, having given explanation and suitable arranging the seating with pair/ group, the teacher set time for the activity so that students could prepare for the task. After the time for the activity was over, the teacher checked the answers from the students by calling representatives to perform or report in front of the class and gave feedbacks.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

It is obvious that CA have their own advantages such as creating the relaxing, natural and friendly learning environment, where students are highly motivated and show less shyness, thus increase students' participation in learning English in general and in the speaking lessons in particular. To be effective CA should be well organized and managed by the teachers. CA require the teacher to be a facilitator of his/ her students' learning and in order to fulfill this role the teacher has to work both as a manager of the classroom activities and as a co- communicator with the students. The role of the students in CA is active communicators. Therefore, the teacher should know when the best time to use CA, choose appropriate CA and prepare or adapt the teaching materials carefully. Besides, the teacher should pay attention to the classroom management. The teacher should give short and clear instruction before the activity starts, organize the class appropriately so that students can interact easily with each other and have more time to interact. Additionally, creating a friendly and relaxing atmosphere, encouraging students and raising competitiveness are very necessary in management. Furthermore, to organize the activity well, the teacher should monitor, get the right time and make the discipline become a routine in the classroom.

Based on the data collected, the researchers have suggested the following recommendations, which not only help to get students involved in the CA, but also stimulate their motivation in the speaking lessons.

Firstly, a well - planned lesson is very essential. A very careful- prepared lesson helps the teacher know exactly what to do in every stage and anticipate what might happen during the teaching progress. A lesson becomes more successful if the teacher is creative and flexible in classroom management, classroom and CA organization.

Moreover, achievable and relevant materials are not only needed for CA but also for the activities in the other stages such as warm-up, presentation and practice. To attract students during the progress, the teacher should try to use vocabulary that the students could relate to the topic. Besides that, a good way that has been done is to make learning visual. It is recognized that memory is often connected with visual images.

Another important aspect helping to improve students' motivation is a caring teacher. In spite of the fact that guidelines and rules must be set up and understood by the students, and if they cross the guidelines, a punishment will follow, the teacher must be approachable and understanding.

Last but not least, the teachers' enthusiasm leads to the situation that students have been more motivated. If the student sees that the teacher is happy to be in the classroom and excited to teach them, they can learn well. Positive approval and praise for the student's efforts are very effective, even if the student is wrong as "student errors are evidence that learning is taking place" according to Gower, (1994) [5]. Making errors can simply be a part of the normal language learning process. Realizing this, students are not reluctant the next time they are called on to participate. Positive energy affirming a belief in the students' ability develops a comfortable atmosphere for the student in the class.

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Sử dụng các hoạt động giao tiếp để khuyến khích sinh viên không chuyên tiếng Anh trong giờ học nói

Tóm tắt: Kĩ năng nói khá khó đối với sinh viên nói chung, đặc biệt là đối với sinh viên không chuyên tiếng Anh. Hầu hết các em đều gặp khó khăn trong việc nói bởi nhiều lí do khác nhau. Nhiều nghiên cứu đã chỉ ra những cách khác nhau để cải thiện khả năng nói. Đặc biệt, sử dụng hoạt động giao tiếp là cách hiệu quả để tạo động lực cho sinh viên trong những bài học nói. Nghiên cứu này điều tra các vấn đề, những thuận lợi và khó khăn của việc sử dụng phương pháp giao tiếp trong các bài học nói. Nghiên cứu cũng đưa ra một số khuyến nghị để nâng cao kĩ năng nói cho sinh viên không chuyên tiếng Anh tại Trường Đại học Công nghiệp Hà Nội.

Từ khóa: kĩ năng nói; hoạt động giao tiếp; khuyến khích; vấn đề; đề xuất.