

IMPROVING EFL STUDENTS' SPEAKING PERFORMANCE BY USING GAMES IN THE CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a literature review on the issues of using games to improve the speaking performance of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students in the classroom. Over the past several years, educators have been increasingly incorporating various games into their teaching curriculum in an effort to create a fun and engaging learning environment for students. The idea of using games to improve the speaking performance of EFL students is not new. The researchers would therefore attempt to provide some suggestions and implications for the improvement of speaking teaching by using games. The argument of this review might set lights for further experimental studies in this field.

Keywords: *games, speaking, English, EFL, teaching speaking*

TÓM TẮT

Sử dụng trò chơi để cải thiện hiệu quả nói tiếng Anh của sinh viên trong lớp học

Bài viết này là một bài đánh giá tài liệu về các vấn đề sử dụng trò chơi để cải thiện hiệu quả nói Tiếng Anh của sinh viên trong lớp học. Trong vài năm qua, các nhà giáo dục đã ngày càng kết hợp nhiều trò chơi khác nhau vào chương trình giảng dạy của họ để tạo ra một môi trường học tập thú vị và hấp dẫn cho sinh viên. Ý tưởng sử dụng trò chơi để cải thiện quả nói Tiếng Anh của sinh viên không phải là mới. Do đó, các nhà nghiên cứu sẽ cố gắng cung cấp một số gợi ý và ứng dụng cho việc cải thiện giảng dạy bằng cách sử dụng trò chơi. Tóm tắt của bài nghiên cứu này có thể hình thành cho nghiên cứu thực nghiệm hơn nữa trong lĩnh vực này.

Từ khóa: *trò chơi, nói, tiếng Anh, tiếng Anh như một ngoại ngữ, dạy nói*

INTRODUCTION

Teaching and learning English has been becoming extremely popular in Vietnam today. However, learning how to improve speaking performance of EFL student is a problem for many learners of English, especially for non- English major. The researchers found that it was hard for the English teacher to make an active speaking class. The students did not have courage to speak English in class for many reasons such as afraid of mistakes, lack of vocabulary and confidence. Meanwhile students of non- English majors give contribution in speaking learning problems. One of the main problems is the students' lack of awareness in learning speaking. They do not realize the needs of

English speaking in the real life. They just learn English as their obligation since English become the final examination. Some students understand English grammar very well, and even score high marks in examinations, but their communication skills are very poor and they are often too shy to even attempt to strike up a conversation. There still exist many difficulties in learning English in general and at Tra Vinh University in particular. These are some problems in teaching and learning speaking in classes. Speaking is a way to communicate the idea that is arranged and developed on the basis of the speakers' need in a certain situation. Nevertheless, EFL students are commonly difficult to speak in English. Their abilities in speaking need to be improved. There are some problems in teaching and learning speaking which are coming from two factors, the teachers and the students. Teachers still face problems in which they cannot create an atmosphere where the students are expected to speak. They also get some difficulties in motivating the students to speak English. Particularly, English subject included in the curriculum of almost every schools and universities. Students seem reluctantly to learn English as a compulsory discipline in their colleges. For most students, they find speaking especially important yet most challenging one. It has been proved that some students got into a habit of leaning which is obviously harmful to a language learner. Much activity such as role- plays, simulations and discussions applied for teaching but they were not effective. In language teaching, games had proved that it was very important and it could create more chances and interest to motivate students to speak English.

Considering the role of speaking as one of the English language skills that non- English majors students have to learn, we believes that an effort should be done to help students improve speaking performance. Using games is one of the ways to enhance students speaking performance. Game is an activity with rules, a goal and an element of fun. Games are instruments that really can help students improving their speaking abilities. Games have some specialties. Students can learn in a fun way by using games. Teachers can use their creativity as wide as possible in using games. Games will stimulate and motivate them to practice their English understanding through speaking. In addition, games may help and encourage many learners to support their interest and work (Wright, 2006). Games can increase motivation to learn the language as students, especially the weaker ones, feel a real sense of achievement when they manipulate a game (Hubbard, 1987).

This study will be conducted for several expected outcomes. For the theoretical, the study supplies the English language teachers with the understanding of speaking skill in and games in terms of types, advantages when employing them. In order to enhance students to speak in the classroom, teachers should choose an appropriate strategy in their teaching. In this research, the importance of using games as a strategy in the classroom that helps students to improve their difficulties in speaking English. Particularly, for the practical significance, the research provides the language teachers and learners a variety of games used in all stages in speaking classes based on Objectives PET book (Louise, Barbara & Thomas, 2010).

LITERATURE REVIEWS

Speaking is an essential tool for communicating, thinking and learning. Through speaking, students learn concepts, develop vocabulary and perceive the structure of the English language which is the essential components of learning. Additionally, speaking is a vehicle to link individuals to society. Exchanges students have with their peers and teachers can help them come to know the world in more personal and socially responsible ways. When students talk about their ideas, they clarify their thinking. They can figure out what they believe and where they stand on issues.

According to Nunan (1991), speaking is one of the skills that have to be mastered by students learning English. Speaking will be focus for the first section on speaking. It involves fluent and accuracy expression meaning, the exercising of pragmatic or communicative, competence and the observance of the rules of appropriate. Communication is a collaboration venture in which the interlocutors negotiate meaning in order to achieve their communication. In addition, according to Hybel (2001), speaking is any process in which people share information, ideas and feeling, it involves all of body language mannerism and style-anything that adds meaning to a message. Cameron (2001) says “speaking is the active use of language to express meanings so that other people could make sense of them”. From definition above, speaking is a form to say or talk something with expressing of ideas, opinions, views and description to other for getting response or way of conveying message in order to make understanding of wishes to other and to contribute to the other. To do speaking activities, it must involve the speaker and the listener or only speaker involved.

One useful strategy to encourage learning a foreign language is using language games. When using games in the classroom, it is beneficial for teachers to have a complete understanding of the definitions of games, which usually are defined as a form of play concerning rules, competition, and an element of fun. In the process of language teaching, games can play a range of roles. Generally, games have been used in the class as warm-up at the beginning of the lesson or at the end of the lesson or may be in the middle of the class. While using games in the classroom gives students the opportunity to acquire the language and communicate well. Games also can be used to provide the learners with opportunities to use language rather than simply practice it. This game concerns in fluency. Using games, the learners have the opportunity to express their ideas, feelings, and thought orally. By using games, it encourage students to interacts and communicate, learners should be able to make themselves understood, using their current proficiency to the fullest. They also should observe the social and cultural rules that apply in each communication situations. Games have a great educational worth and it can be used in the classroom to make learners practice the language. Games encourage learners to interact, cooperate, to be creative and spontaneous in using the language in a meaningful way. Researchers have come up with different descriptions about the nature of games. Haycraft (1978) confirms, “a game as an agreeable way of getting a class to use its initiative in English”. Byrne (1995) gave the definition to games as a form of play governed by rules. They should be enjoyed and fun. They are not just a diversion, a break from routine activities, but a way of getting the learner to use the language in the course of the game. Similarly, Jill Hadfield (1990) defined games as "an activity with rules, a goal and an element of fun. Using games is a good way to improve students' various skills, as Wright, Betteridge and Buckby (2006) say, "Games can be found to give practice in all the skills, in all the stages of the teaching and learning and for many types of communication".

The researchers assumed that using games can improve EFL students’ speaking performances in the classroom. There are several reasons why games can improve students’ speaking performances. Traditional games are effective because the learners are so involved in playing game that they do not realize that they are practicing language items or functions. Secondly, games as activities that encourage learners to speak. In monolingual classes, shyness and lack of wiliness to speak English in front of peers is a very common problem. One way to deal with this is to get learners to talk about the problem and agree on a solution. Games also can be used to provide the learners with opportunities to use language rather than simply practice it. This game concerns in fluency. Using games, the learners have the opportunity to express their ideas, feelings, and thought orally.

By using games, it encourage students to interacts and communicate, learners should be able to make themselves understood, using their current proficiency to the fullest. They also should observe the social and cultural rules that apply in each communication situations (as cited in Byrn, 1997). It is clear that not all games can be applied in any class. Teacher should choose the best for their students so that the games are not only for having fun but also to engage the students to get involve in English teaching and learning process.

The researchers discovered that there are many gaming formats that educators can choose from. There are many factors to consider including: which game best integrates into the existing curriculum (Harris, 2006), which game meets the objectives of the topics being taught (MacKenty, 2006, p.48). Depending on the type of game that is played, there are clear benefits to supplementing games as active learning components in the classroom. Several studies on the topic of games and speaking skills present results concerning students' improvement of speaking skills.

According to Urrutia & Vega (2006) conducted a study in order to encourage teenagers to improve speaking skills through games in a Colombian public school. The participants in this study were twenty girls and twenty boys from 14 to 18 years old. The researchers implemented activities focused on oral games for promoting the development of students' speaking skills. Questionnaires, teacher's journals and video recordings were used as data collection instruments. The researchers analyzed the data by using charts which included the percentages of student's answers about the most difficult skill for them, how often they speak in English during the class and the factors that interfere at the time to speak, such as, shyness, lack of vocabulary, fear of humiliation, among others. The data collected suggest that speaking is the most difficult skill to develop, students' usually present lack of vocabulary, shyness and fear of being humiliated; besides, the researchers explains that students show evidence about the importance of implementing games in classroom for improving the speaking skills. However, the researchers noticed that students sometimes spoke English, but the majority of the students did not speak during the English class.

Rama, Ying, lee & Lei (2007) conducted an action research study on the hypothesis of using language games to improve speech skills during English classes in primary school called "Jurong" in Singapore. The participants in this study were 78 students. The researchers used two different methods for two different groups; they divided students into experimental group in which was implemented a communicative method where were implemented language games to improve speaking skills, and a control group which was focused in a teacher-centered method in which teachers used real- life activities including the essential vocabulary to perform a conversation. Pre-tests and post-tests were used as data collection instruments. The finding showed that the participants expressed games allow more than a half of students to improve communication in as second language; there were involved an experimental group and a control group, in the first one 21% of the students considered that they were not able to speak better, but in the second group only 11% although in experimental group learners enjoyed more games activities.

Salazar & Villamil (2012) conducted a research on the application of games for the development of speaking skill in fourth grades in Remigio Antonio Cañarte. The participants in this study were chosen randomly: Agustin (a1), Brayán (b2), Santiago (s3), and Kamila (k4). The researchers considered that observation was a good method to examine what happened in the context, making an analysis of the problem at the same time of collecting the data. Field notes, checklist, and video tapes were used as data collection instruments. The researchers considered that observation

gives to the study one of the most important tools, that is: ‘the facts’. The findings of this study show that it is fundamental to have students using the language in order to have a more successful learning, and the implementation of games for the speaking skill, allows the students to put in practice the speaking skill, improve the listening skill of course and it is also important to say that using games to trigger 4th graders speaking skills is one interesting strategy to be implemented in an EFL classroom scenario.

Leó & Cely (2010) conducted a study encouraging teenagers to improve speaking skills through games in a Colombian Public School. The participants were 20 girls and 20 boys from 14 to 18 years old in this group. Video recordings, teacher’s journal, and questionnaires were used as data collection instruments. The results showed that students felt better, free and confident when they participated in oral tasks, particularly during games. However, the study just concentrated encouraging students to speak in a confident but did not mention approach with the knowledge of particular oral English features such as fluency, pronunciation, and intonation.

Based on a study related of using guessing games to improve student’s speaking skill, Herliani (2013) considered the speaking skill as the main construct and linked it to guessing games to promote freedom of speech and expression of the students in English. Nevertheless, it was mentioned in the research that it was not easy to master the speaking skill, as a result of the limited opportunities that the students have to speak the foreign language during class, second, the lack of variation of teaching strategies used by the teacher, and the last, the teaching strategy application tends to be monotonous and made the students bored and disinterested in studying English (cited in Buzanni, 2008).

It is clear that the students do not have opportunities to speak the foreign language during class and lack of variation of teaching strategies used by the teacher, and the last, the teaching strategy application tends to be monotonous and made the students bored and disinterested in studying English.

That was why this research article helped this project to help student improve speaking ability and provide some suggestions and implications for the improvement of speaking teaching by using games that teachers have to get creative in order to keep students interested.

CONCLUSION

In this research, the researchers have a greater understanding of the use of games to improve student speaking performance in the classroom. This paper implies for further research on the effects of using games on students’ speaking performance in the classroom. Also, the attitudes of students towards using games on the speaking classes should also be explored further to provide excellent insight of this issue.

The following suggestions are addressed to the English teachers and the students. Firstly, games can be applied in teaching speaking; this was the best way to improve students’ speaking performance. Additionally, teachers should consider the time allocation in applying. Especially, the teachers should also make sure that every student gets the opportunity to practice English speaking. Secondly, student should be more active in learning process because games can motivate the students to speak and made them more confident in their speaking performances. Additionally, games also can create an atmosphere in which students are expected to practice speaking and motivate them to learn speaking. Games are media which can stimulate students to express their ideas.

In conclusion, the researchers considered that speaking is one of difficult and complicated skill. In process of learning speaking, learners faced many obstacles such as lack of vocabulary, practice, motivation, and confidence. Therefore, applying game in teaching process this was the best way to improve students' speaking performance. It was one of the best and modern methods in the era of globalization.

Biodata

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The researcher has done her B.A from Mekong University of English Language since 2015. Currently, the researcher is an English teacher at Victory Center of Informatics and Foreign Languages from the faculties of Tra Vinh University (campus 2) and Tra Vinh University (campus 1) for 2 years. The researcher is also studying M.A in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) from Tra Vinh University in August, 2016.

Since starting working at Tra Vinh University, the researcher has employed advanced teaching methods in designing and conducting her lessons to actively involve her students in activities inside and outside her classrooms. Learners' teaching methods is her primary concern, and she is especially interested in teaching the four main language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. She is also interested in language teaching practice for students rather than English.

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