

Factors Affecting English-Majored Students' Speaking Skills at Ho Chi Minh City University of Food Industry

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ABSTRACT

English is one of the most active languages used in the world to express ideas and converse with each other. So popularly communicative is the language, yet a lot of HUFU English-majored students still have to cope with the speaking skill. The research was conducted with the aim of discovering factors that engender English oral performance difficulties, using quantitative methodology to gather information from 92 students whose major is English language. The data collected from participants was meticulously analysed and helped solidify the researcher's idea of such factors that cause trouble for them. As a result, the researcher came up with the deduction that intrinsic, educational, and linguistic factors are all the reason behind the respondents' inability to speak English. Hence, the findings could unfold a new horizon for those who have an inquisitive mind on the problem and a desire to solve it based on the comprehensive insights given in the paper. Educationally, the research results are also expected to contribute to the future teaching methodology reformation so that English speaking skills could be achieved in the most effective way.

Keywords: HUFU English-majored students, English speaking skills, English-speaking skills difficulties

1 Introduction

In the twenty-first century, people are striving to construct a world that idealizes the term "globalization" through the process of promoting cooperation and information exchange in a variety of fields of society. Language acquisition, therefore, must be an ever-lasting prerequisite, carried out in multiple methods to meet social, occupational, and educational needs, as well as personal desires. English has gained recognition as one of the most popular international languages used around the globe. The need to master in English increases in a geometrical ratio. This accounts for the collegiate English-language major gaining excessive concerns from high-school graduates, and Ho Chi Minh City University of Food Industry (HUFU) is not an exception. However, as a result of societal integration, the proclivity that learners tend to focus solely on grammatical aspects has shifted to a more effective, communicative approach. From all accounts, it is essential to encourage oral interaction in daily contextual involvement among people, then they will have more opportunities to cooperate well together in either work or study. Along with listening, writing and reading, speaking is fundamentally one of the most important English skills that must be mastered by college students. Getting ahold of speaking skills means a student can be able to exchange and access a large amount of information. Moreover, as we are living in an era of globalism where English is growing into dominance (Ly, 2022), the requirement for an oral proficiency is a must-have ability ever.

HUFU is among many schools that recognize the importance of speaking skills in English. The school has its own one major in English training, also known as English Language. To ensure that speaking skills are reinforced in the best way, the framework program of the discipline is designed with three levels of speaking skills. Although the school has facilitated, HUFU English-majored students often face certain difficulties in speaking English, including poor pronunciation, inappropriate English contextual applications, inability to utter native-like sounds and so on. The researcher realizes that the problem needs to be overcome, since, as mentioned above, speaking skills are immensely essential. If students cannot develop their speaking skills in a comprehensive way, they will have a lot of difficulties for themselves after graduation. The research



was conducted in order to figure out the reasons hidden behind these students' predicaments, thereby navigating compass for educators to deal with this difficulty thoroughly and ensure that the quality of English-majored graduates will meet the society demands. This paper is written to answer the question as follows:

“What factors affect HUFU English-majored students' speaking skills?”

2 Literature review

Speaking, to the common sense, is a way to convey a message to a communicative receiver. According to Boonkit (2010), speaking is one of the four macro skills necessary for effective communication in any language, particularly when speakers are not using their mother tongue. To add up the list of definitions, Yulizar and Hasibuan (2022) depicted speaking as a main form of communication to deliver messages to other people. Despite being so important in daily information and knowledge exchange, speaking still rises as one of the challenging skills for students in general. Many previous researchers have questioned what components engender English-speaking difficulties, and they have discovered diverse reasons leading to the problem. In short, these obstacles can be related to affective, educational and linguistic factors.

2.1 Intrinsic factors

The first aspect listed is the affective difficulties in the progress of achieving language learning triumphs. Students' affective difficulties comprise the fear of making mistakes, the loss of self-confidence, the feeling of confusion and, sometimes, apprehension. As for Amoah's and Yeboah's standpoint (2021), affective or psychological factors would hinder students' English speaking ability, driving them to be fearful of mistakes, shyness, and lacking either confidence or zealotry. Dinh and Ngoc (2020) came up with the idea of anxiety, which also results in speaking challenges. Anxiety plays a prime role in bewildering verbal communication among English-majored students. It is interpreted as a feeling of uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt and worry (Brown, 1994). Psychologically, anxiety is defined as a moment of knowing nothing to express when a speaker gets nervous about looking directly into the audience's eyes. Sabariyanto (2021) once clarified the feeling that “students often complain that they can think of nothing to say”. Right at the exact moment of embarrassment for being mouth-sealed, students' self-disappointment will surely arise, which leads to them having no reasons to improve what they are seemingly hopeless at. Coupled with the intrinsically emotional factors given, there are some other ones that also act as contributors to the problem, such as less exposure to English in day-to-day life. According to Alqurashi and Althubaiti (2021), students are always willing to engage in English speaking performance, but they tend to do it in their mother tongue because of insufficient English ability. At the same time, Fareh (2010) also had a strong conviction that such a practice minimizes the time of English exposure and thus the learning outcomes will not be fulfilled. As a result, the resonance of multiple factors possibly cause excessive demoralization, making students feel more disheartened, and transforming their ability to speak English into a state of bleak situation and abysmal academic achievement.

2.2 Educational factors

It is widely believed that instructional factors are not exempted from the duty to help hone students' speaking skills. Language learning progress in colleges is the educationally structural system of conducive teaching methods and approaches. Dinh and Tran (2020) drew out from their findings that the instructors' friendly and cooperative behaviour will ensure the students' comfortability in speaking English. Given the fact that teachers are the closest supporters who give students opportunities to be interactive. A good English class reflects a wise instructor and a well-operating educational system. In contrast, a bad English class is attributed to a third-rate teacher and a malfunctioning educational field. When teachers have

negative beliefs about their students' speaking abilities, they may provide less-than-standard chances for speaking practice, offer superficial feedback on speaking performance, and exercise ineffective teaching methods, which can hinder students' speaking development. Hassan Kassem (2018) examined the influence of students-centered classes and realized that students' motivation and attitudes toward speaking greatly surged. Intense dominance and non-student-centered lessons are obviously driving English-speaking peers down in mood and making them no longer find interest in conversing in the language.

2.3 Linguistic factors

Despite being one of the most popular languages, English has a linguistic structural system that is by far different compared to Vietnamese. This problem, therefore, forges gaps between the two languages, which is confirmed by Tran and Dang (2019) in their report. The gaps include features of phonology and phonetics and some more unique techniques of oral demonstration such as liaison or elision. Amoah and Yeboah (2021) discovered that linguistic factors, such as pronunciation, vocabulary shortage and grammar, deter students from developing speaking skills. In terms of pronunciation, Hassan (2014) pointed out that mother-tongue abuse and the sound system dichotomy between the two languages are hurdles that aggravate mispronunciation, hence preventing them from achieving native-like sounds. A narrow collection of English vocabulary should also be taken for granted that students may get confused as they have come up with a patchy word list to express a certain opinion. Jaelani and Zabidi (2020) found a problem during their research that nearly 50% of the project's participants say that they are often stuck when speaking English due to an inadequate source of vocabulary. As for grammatical difficulties, Tran and Dang (2019) stated that students lack grammatical knowledge in that they do not have enough basic English consciousness or have not learned about it. Speaking does not require learners to conform to a strict grammatical regulation, yet it asks learners to minimally retain basic rules to ensure the intact meaning of what the speaker wants to say. It means that if English learners cannot basically express truly what is in their mind, they will face speaking difficulty and communicative purpose failure.

3 Materials and Methods/ Methodology

3.1 Research design

As introduced by Cresswell (2014) in his book, the problem is best solved by comprehending what factors or variables influence the outcome of the quantitative project. The research is conducted using the quantitative method, which is used to analyze and interpret the deductions made from the numerical data collected. The main aim of the research design is to figure out what sort of factors involve in English speaking difficulty of HUFU English-majored students, based on a list of questions that was thoroughly made and astutely filtered. The questionnaire is designed on Google Form, consisting of 13 questions related to participants' experiences and perceptions regarding their English major program, then distributed to participants via messenger social media applications to collect their answers.

3.2 Participants

The research methodology for this study involves the use of a quantitative approach to examine the perspectives and experiences of 92 random English-majored students at HUFU. All the participants are sophomores and juniors only, as to ensure that the students have already enrolled in Speaking 1,2 and 3 courses based on the school curriculum.

3.3 Data collection & Analysis

Before being given to respondents, all questions in the questionnaire were piloted to a group of five HUFU English-majored graduates to ensure the validity of the questionnaire in terms of layout and content. The

questionnaire is then distributed to 92 HUFU English-majored students. After one week of being administered, the research receives 100 percent responses from participants.

In order to accurately deduce the participants' experiences and perceptions, the five-point Likert-scale, which includes five levels: SD (strongly disagree), D (Disagree), N (Neutral), A (Agree) and SA (Strongly Agree), was employed. The data collected were analyzed using statistical methods. The use of a quantitative method allows for the analysis of large amounts of data and enables the identification of patterns within the data set. The results of this study will provide valuable insights into the experiences and perceptions of English-majored students at HUFU, which can inform future improvements to the program.

4 Results and Discussion

4.1 Speaking difficulties caused by intrinsic factors

Intrinsic factors are the most-named condition for HUFU English-majored students to allow them to verbalize their expression in either smooth or rough manners. Table 1 manifests the results that a majority of them were found to have trouble dealing with English oral performance due to internal problems.

Table 1: Questions related to intrinsic factors.

Question	SD	D	N	A	SA
You get nervous as being requested to give an English speech	8.8%	12.1%	27.5%	27.5%	24.2%
You are afraid of being defame of your English misuse	4.4%	11%	25.3%	33%	26.2%
You cannot remember new vocabulary and use them to converse	12.1%	13.2%	28.6%	22%	24.2%
You process translation from Vietnamese to English and vice versa	6.6%	6.6%	20.9%	26.4%	39.6%
You have late exposure to English	13.2%	6.6%	25.3%	22%	33%

As shown in Table 1, 51.7% of the participants agreed and strongly agreed that they often feel anxious when having to present an English speech, followed by 59.2% who agreed that they are afraid of being defamed if they use English inappropriately. Dinh and Chan (2020) also found in their study that participating students looked very hesitant when they spoke in front of the class as they were not sure whether they were using English appropriately. Based on the first two inquiries, a problem the researcher found that the feeling of anxiety, nervousness and hence some other psychological factors heavily influence a lot of students' oral performance. The fear of making mistakes or being defamed actually subdues their effort to improve their speaking ability.

In addition, nearly half of the respondents (4.2%) said that they cannot learn by heart recently-noted words and transform them into long-term memory to use in conversations, which makes the library of their English vocabulary insufficient to serve the need of involving in verbal communication. Moreover, the overuse of Vietnamese-English translation and vice versa before physically uttering also challenges students' speaking ability, particularly when it comes to fluency, as 66% of HUFU English-majored students confirmed that they exploit this process very often. Finally, the speaking-difficulty-driven factor is also attributed to the respondents' late exposure to English. It is discernible that only 19.8% of them assumed that they had a chance to learn English early, which means, except for neutral opinions, the percentage of late use of English is too high (55%). Late exposure to the language signifies a hurdle for students to achieve complete linguistic skill development.

4.2 Speaking difficulties caused by educational factors.

Table 2: Questions related to educational factors.

Question	SD	D	N	A	SA
Your speaking class is overcrowded	17.5%	5.3%	26.3%	19.3%	31.6%
English teaching method in highschool does not much support speaking skills	0%	1.1%	10.9%	34.8%	53.3%
Lecturers give you less chance to speak in the class	29.3%	19.6%	31.5%	8.7%	10.9%
Some of your lecturers does not have good pronunciation	13%	15.2%	29.3%	22.8%	19.6%

The second factor is assumably related to the educational structure formed to support students' speaking ability. Table 2 will indicate educational problems discovered to cause hardship for HUFU English-majored students to speak.

Another cause is deduced from the question of whether the participants' speaking classes were crowded. Over 50% of them unanimously suggested that the number of students enrolling in a speaking class is too high, leading to low-quality efficiency in English oral performance as the need for English utterances is not equally given to individuals due to the finite amount of time allocated to each lesson. Despite lecturers seemingly trying to pull out all the stops to lend a hand to peers (as confirmed by 48.9% of respondents), overcrowded classes are the main reason accounting for students' inability to have their speaking skills ameliorated. Besides, the way the lecturers perform incorrect pronunciation occurs frequently, as pointed out through data collected from 42.4% of the respondents. All agreed that some of their instructors do not meet the requirement for accurate pronunciation, hence creating a huge impact on degrading speaking performance among students. In research conducted in 2012, Atli and Bergil also revealed that three-fourths of the participants said that they tried to use what they learned from pronunciation class when they speak English, which helps underpin the fundamental role of lecturers' pronunciation accuracy to improve their learners' speaking skills. The study also discovered an interesting factor related to the language teaching methodology in pre-college education. There is an enormous number of HUFU English-majored students (88%) who think that secondary and high schools did not provide them with a curriculum that ensured English speaking regularities. It is allegedly believed that speaking skills are off the radar of educational program editors. Consequently, students whose aim is to opt for English as their major in higher education are not well-equipped with the basic knowledge of speaking performance in either daily communication or professional presentation.

4.3 Speaking difficulties caused by linguistic factors.

Table 3: Questions related to linguistic factors.

Question	SD	D	N	A	SA
You find unfamiliar when pronouncing an English multi-syllabic word	14.1%	15.2%	28.3%	18.5%	23.9%
You find English liaison technique too intricate to learn	16.3%	21.7%	25%	17.4%	19.6%
You find the difference between Vietnamese and English language structure troublesome	6.5%	17.4%	31.5%	21.7%	22.8%
Cultural differences affect your English expression	17.4%	28.3%	29.3%	14.1%	10.9%

The last four questions in Table 3 are designed to test the participants' perceptions and figure out some possible linguistic factors that have yet to be divulged.

The analysis of Figure 3 shows that 42.4% of HUFU English-majored students find uttering a multi-syllabic English word a challenge as it is relatively hardening the smoothness of speaking flow to students whose language comprises only mono-syllable words. Bybee (2007) was one of many linguists who found in her study that English vocabulary often consists of multi-syllabic words, due to the language diverse history and a large inventory of borrowed words. It is worth noting that English tends to have a prevalence of words that contain more-than-one-syllable components. Whereas, in Nguyen's (2014) article, the author discussed and mentioned the popularity of mono-syllabic words in Vietnamese, which defines characteristics of the language's phonology. On top of that, along with the phonological aspect, 44.5% of respondents also think that the languages difference in syntax can be considered troublesome. Obviously, the dichotomy in terms of phonology and language structure between the two languages appears to engender difficulty in speaking English. The researcher also added up a question about a technique in English speaking skills called liaison – the act of joining sounds together, like pronouncing a consonant that is not usually pronounced at the end of a word, because the next word begins with a vowel (Cambridge Dictionary) - and found that the problem is another troublemaker for 37% of participants. Last but not least, cultural differences were also taken into consideration. Being asked to assess the influence level, a quarter of HUFU English-majored students showed their upvote. Cultural factor is easily noticed when it comes to respondents communicating verbally via certain idiomatic phrases, collocations, culture-specific slangs and so on, putting some of them in a tight corner, hence not being able to perfectly express their ideas in English.

5 Conclusions

Procuring the ability to speak English in the most natural, influential and professional way is an important goal for any HUFU English-majored students. Accordingly, understanding what factors are blocking the way to skill improvement helps them unravel the difficulties. Based on the research findings, the researcher concluded that HUFU English-majored students' difficulty in speaking can be traced back to some intrinsic factors, namely affective reasons such as anxiety, nervousness or the fear of being defamed, the inability to remember new vocabulary, tendency to process translation and having late exposure to English. Secondly, educational factors, including inconducive curriculum structure design and educators' influence, are also attributed to the research problem. Finally, the cultural, phonological and syntactic dichotomy between Vietnamese and English constitutes a big barrier for participants to develop their own speaking skills.

As for the research limitation, it is worth noting that the findings are somewhat not 100% reliable since the research selected only the quantitative methodology to collect data and bypassed the qualitative one. Accordingly, the findings are not deduced to get further information regarding each problem discovered, and the data collected solely represented a specific group of participants. It is recommended for future research to exploit deeper insights by using more viable data-collecting methods, thereby having higher opportunities to reveal what is yet to be found and help improve speaking efficiency for HUFU English-majored students.

6 Declarations

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