Factors Affecting Students' English Proficiency at Lac Hong University

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate severe factors affecting speaking English ability at Lac Hong University. In order to achieve the objectives of this research, the researcher has made a questionnaire, and it was circulated by hand to 30 students in AV113 class at the University of Lac Hong. Furthermore, the researcher also participated in the class and observed many classroom activities to collect compelling data for this study. The findings of this research depicted a smorgasbord of severe factors affecting Lac Hong University students' competence of oral fluency in English speaking, and the researcher has also cited viable solutions to address the severe factors impacting the fluency of speaking English of Lac Hong University’s students based on the results.

Keywords: speaking English’s ability, severe factors, Lac Hong University’s students

Introduction

"Why do students in tertiary school speak English badly even though they have been learning English since they were a knee-high to a grasshopper? " (Dinh & Tran, 2020)

This question asked by Dinh and Tran (2020) has never failed to galvanize me into doing research about looking over the problematic factors having an adverse bearing on Lac Hong university student's competence in speaking English, and this is also the aspiration for me to concentrate on doing this study related to the fluency in speaking English of Lac Hong University students.

Being proficient in speaking English has been recognized as one of the most important factors in identifying a suitable path for a career in many regions of the current world (Ahmad, 2008; Hamid, 2012; Hamid, Jahan, & Islam, 2013; Leitner, Hashim, & Wolf, 2016; Rahman & Pandian, 2018). Indeed, speaking is regarded as one of the most indispensable & needed skills to be strengthened regularly as a means of effective communication.

There are three different levels of being fluent in speaking English: elementary, intermediate, and advanced, respectively, but it is incredibly complicated for learners to achieve these levels if they choose the wrong study method for learning English speaking (Dinh & Tran, 2020).
Shumin (2002) once said that being proficient in grammar and semantics of a specific language is still insufficient in learning a foreign language, and we have realized that speaking English fluently not only focuses on several skills in English such as writing, listening, reading, but it also needs a perfect study's environment for communication to cultivate this skill. Students' ability to use English in university has had underbellies so far, the majority of English learners encounter severe problems in speaking, and they still have a lack of capacity in order to use English for communicating (Zhang, 2019), and a scarcity of confidence is one of the key problems that students faced in speaking English, and they are always worried about making grammatical mistakes when they use English for communicating besides other problems such as lacking lexical resources and mispronunciation, (Dash, 2012; Floriasti, 2013) stated that the scarcity of competence in speaking English such as the in-depth knowledge, study's momentum, the personality of students are the host of main contributors to the incapacity of speaking English. They will be going to feel extremely tough to illustrate their ideas in a digestible way, and they will gradually lose their drive to study.

Referring to mentioned researchers' citation, speaking skill is the most problematic for everyone, irrespective of students in Lac Hong university. Therefore, the researcher aims to investigate the research in order to find out the challenges of speaking English that students at Lac Hong University have encountered recently. This study will help Lac Hong University students find out many challenges that affect their competence in speaking English, cite solutions to tackle problems in speaking English, and find out if any other factors related to institutions, study environment, or peers are related to the problem.

**Literature review**

A host of researchers have researched the capacity of speaking English of students, and I would like to share some of the recent research that could be able to assist my research in a significant way:

English learners' personality & thought has been impacting their progress in learning English speaking. It is depicted by an abundance of factors such as feelings, moods, and attitudes (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015) and a group of factors related to moods, feeling, and attitudes of language learning (Meng & Wang, 2006), particularly towards learning of English speaking will be taken into consideration in this study. The researchers illustrated the problems of the students, which consist of students' emotional responses when they use English in daily conversation with their friends and acquaintances. Dörnyei and Ryan (2015) cited several affective factors: senses of anxiety, shyness, self-consciousness or confidence, and a fear of making mistakes, which are the key impacts on the capability of fluency in English speaking. Acquiring a skill is never easy as many obstacles keep blocking the development of the skills and make it harder for the learners to grasp. Speaking problems are faced by learners all over the world. Studies conducted so far have pointed out several speaking problems the learners face. Speaking is an interactive skill that has problems and difficulties of many kinds.

The issues students faced were knowledge and skills (Thornbury, 2005). The encyclopedic knowledge from all walks of life, which English learners could make better use of for presenting
their ideas verbally. As a matter of fact, skillful factors mean that the language learners had a lack of cultivation in learning foreign language orally, and they were insufficient fluency in learning speaking skills. Therefore, having in-depth knowledge in all walks of life and practicing speaking skills play an indispensable role in the fluency of speaking for EFL learners. To say the least, students should be able to arm adequate knowledge related to the speaking purposes like communication, interaction, and working with either individuals or groups. Second of all, the speakers need to have discourse competence which controls the capacity to connect and organize individual utterances.

Erny S.N Hambandima said that one of the challenges which students may encounter is vocabulary. Indeed, they tend to look up appropriate words in order to combine and make sentences, and this situation has occurred to several students at the University of Lac Hong. They have told me that finding appropriate words was an incredible burden for them to use for either having English conversations with foreigners or illustrating their ideas in the English speaking exam. As a matter of fact, they also said that English is a language that has many types of word formations. English learners must be careful in choosing the words to build their ideas in a meaningful way and understandable utterances in a conversation. Lac Hong University's students also mentioned that words in the English language have their own different meanings, which will be able to be used in loads of different contexts, and they have realized that their severe trouble in speaking English is not just only building their ideas, but it also is about using proper words in every different context. Moreover, Hadijah mentioned in her study in the year of 2014 that it was the key reason why EFL learners students had a problem in their speaking English which was attributed to having a lack of knowledge of the vocabulary, fluency, pronunciation, grammar, and comprehension, and students also have some psychological problems such as having a lack of self-confidence, being shy to speak in front of many people, having a scarcity of time for cultivating the speaking skills.

English is one of the core subjects, and it has been commonly taught as an interesting foreign language in my nation. Frankly speaking, it is an undeniable fact that someone is laughed at their mistakes when trying to use English as their second language to converse with their friends in daily conversation. On top of that, students at the Lac Hong university said that they would never use English in daily conversation because they were laughed at by those who were talking to them in English, and they were afraid of sharing these issues with others who could be capable of assisting them in improving English significantly. They told me about the challenges which put a strain on their English study performed on a regular daily basis. First, they are not confident in using English in daily conversations with their relatives and friends because they are afraid of making mistakes and being laughed at. Second of all, they also gave me some facts related to their psychological issues, they do not have innate confidence to speak English, but the truth is that confidence isn't an innate trait; it's a quality gained through experience and practice.

The aforementioned researchers investigated many factors that are the main contributors to EFL learners' inability to speak English. Furthermore, there is a lack of research studies relating to university students with competence in speaking English. The primary purpose of the research is to explore the problems while speaking English as Lac Hong University's undergraduate students. It was designed to investigate and analyze the most commonly faced difficulties in
terms of using English for speaking. Last but not least, the study aimed to present some recommendations for the concerned Lac Hong University students to cultivate and improve their ability to speak English.

Research Questions

To fulfill the purpose of the study, the survey seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent do the factors of education affect the fluency in speaking skills of AV113 students at Lac Hong university?
2. To what extent do the factors of education affect the coherence & cohesion in speaking skills of AV113 students at Lac Hong university?

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

The core purpose of this research is to concentrate on dreadful factors which have influenced the improvement of fluency, coherence, and cohesion in speaking skills, and I decided to conduct this research at the University of Lac Hong with the students studying at the Faculty of English Language.

Design of the Study

I chose the quantitative and qualitative methods for this study, the quantitative data was illustrated with the tables in proportion, and the other was conducted with observation in the classroom.

Data collection & analysis

The comprehensive sampling techniques were run by the researcher for this study at Lac Hong University. More specifically, a comprehensive sampling method was carried out to collect the data from students by giving them a list of related questions in the questionnaire, so collecting viable feedback and opinion from participants' thoughts played a pivotal role in this research. In terms of collecting valuable information for the research, I composed and distributed questionnaires to all participants in this study, and I also observed many activities in their classrooms. When I received valuable data from the approaches mentioned above, I analyzed and tabulated quantitatively by using proportion, and the data from classroom observation would be used to analyze qualitatively.

Results/Findings and discussion

The data which were collected through questionnaires and classroom observation of AV113 students would be depicted by proportion in the following tables below:

Research Question 1: To what extent do the factors of education affect the fluency in speaking skills of AV113 students at Lac Hong university?
Table 1: Students' response to major factors affecting they're practicing fluency in English speaking at home.

| No. | Questions                                                                 | Variables                  | Number of responses | Proportion  |
|-----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| 1   | What are the major problems affecting your English speaking practice at home? | Lack of partner           | 11                  | 36.66 %     |
|     |                                                                           | Lack of time               | 8                   | 26.66 %     |
|     |                                                                           | Lack of excellent study environment | 11                  | 36.66 %     |
| Total|                                                                           |                            | 30                  | 100%        |

It is firmly noticeable that having a lack of a partner to practice speaking and having a lack of an excellent study environment were the main problems which students encountered when they studied at home, followed by 11 (36.66%) and 11 (36.66%). Besides that, the figure for having a lack of time for practicing speaking at home was just approximately 27%. This represented having a lack of partners & excellent study environment were key factors affecting the ability of oral fluency in English speaking of AV113 students.

Table 2: Students respond to how often they practice speaking skills by following methods such as reading books, watching movies, and writing paragraphs.

| No. | Questions                                                                 | Variables | Number of responses | Proportion |
|-----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------|------------|
| 1   | How often do you practice speaking skills by following methods such as reading books, watching movies, and writing paragraphs? | Always    | 12                  | 40 %       |
|     |                                                                           | Sometimes | 8                   | 26.66 %    |
|     |                                                                           | Never     | 10                  | 33.33 %    |
| Total|                                                                           |           | 30                  | 100%       |

As the information depicted in the above table, 12 (40%) and 10 (33.33%) students always answered and never, respectively. Plus, eight students who spent lack of time for those activities was just around 26.66%. Indeed, these figures led to the imbalance between helpful activities for English speaking practice, and it also wreaked havoc on the student's oral fluency improvement.
Research Question 2: To what extent do education factors affect the coherence and cohesion in speaking skills of AV113 students at Lac Hong university?

Table 3: Students' response on whether lack of valuable feedback from their lecturers in class.

| No. | Questions                                                                 | Variables | Number of responses | Proportion |
|-----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------|------------|
| 1   | scarcity of immediate feedback from the instructors in class.             | Agree     | 17                  | 56.66 %    |
|     |                                                                           | Disagree  | 13                  | 43.33 %    |
| Total|                                                                           |           | 30                  | 100%       |

There was no doubt that 17 students in AV113 class (56.66%) absolutely contented with having a lack of feedback from their lecturers at school, whilst others disagreed with its phenomenon (43.33%). This illustrates that most students lack valuable feedback & correction from their instructors to cultivate coherence & cohesion in English speaking skills right in their classroom.

*The result from classroom observation*

Attending the class of AV113 as an observatory, I saw many students lacking confidence in conversing with other classmates during the lesson, and they did not actively participate in the group to discuss given topics. Moreover, they tended to concentrate on many activities such as using the phone, chatting, and having snacks during the lesson, and these activities mentioned above led to a lack of concentration in developing their speaking skill. These factors have been affecting students' competence in speaking English tremendously.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, it is indisputable that dreadful factors affecting tremendously the ability to speak English of AV113 students at Lac Hong University stem from having a lack of partners to practice English speaking. This obstacle has been attributed to the loss of motivation to study. It not only makes students lose their concentration on practicing English speaking, but it also makes them indifferent to either schedule or making a suitable plan for the English speaking practice. On top of that, a shortage of qualified study environments for learning English at school & home is also a contributor to this phenomenon, followed by the scarcity of feedback from their instructors & active learning activities for English speaking skills.

Based on the collected findings, the researcher has been listing a range of remedies that could be able to address severe factors affecting the competence of speaking English of Lac Hong University's students. First of all, students must plan & schedule a suitable timetable for cultivating English speaking skills at home through active learning activities such as reading
the book, watching the movie, and attending English clubs, and this process will be beneficial for EFL learners to build an active learning environment in practice English speaking. Second of all, students must set a goal in the future in order to generate motivation and aspiration to concentrate totally on practicing English speaking & achieving many goals in their study path, and this also shies away them from derailing their entire future. Last but not least, either instructors or tutors should give students feedback and correct their mistakes while having English conversations instantly.

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Biodata
Long Huynh Le has been working for several English centers in Viet Nam as an ESL teacher, such as VUS, and Wall Street English Vietnam, and he is currently running his own business by managing English private classes for all ages. His research interests include TESOL, sociolinguistics, and psycholinguistics.