

## Current Situation of Studying the English Course of Non-Specialist Students (A1) At A University in North of Vietnam



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**ABSTRACT:** "Speaking" is considered the most challenging skill among the four skills. Even though students have studied English for 7-10 years in high school, they can mostly only "read" and cannot "speak" this language. Therefore, research was conducted on 100 non-major students of a university to find out what strategies students use to learn speaking skills. From the fact that the solutions will be proposed to help non-majors have genuinely appropriate and effective learning methods to improve their English speaking skills further.

**KEYWORDS:** A1 level, strategy, speaking skills, non-major students

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. Overview of research status of domestic and foreign topics

Recording the research status (NC) in the past time, there have been a number of NCs related to speaking skills (SN) in TA in Vietnam and in the world. While researching this financial issue, the researcher found several related articles, such as 'Students' learning strategies to develop speaking ability' by Sofyan and the author group (2015), which showed that students use many different strategies to learn speaking skills. On the edge of that, NCs have shown that the better students are at speaking skills, the more strategies they have to know; the collected data proves that students have used these strategies very creatively; on the contrary, students who are weak at speaking skills use inappropriate learning strategies (CL) and bring slight effectiveness. They mainly rely on (1) looking up the dictionary (memory), (2) asking friends (social), (3) practicing pronunciation (cognition), (4) using the mother tongue (compensatory strategy), and (5) memorizing sentence patterns (memory). In another study on "Efforts to Learn Speaking: Strategies for Students with Weak Speaking Skills," Rizadly and a group of authors (2016) stated that although learners apply strategies to learn speaking skills, they do not know how to choose the right strategy for themselves, so they have not improved their language ability. In addition, the article "Some strategies to improve speaking skills for non-English major students" by author Mai (2017) concluded that Speaking is an essential skill in learning a foreign language because this skill will directly affect the learner's ability to use the language.

#### 1.2. Objectives of the topic

The topic was conducted to survey the current situation of non-English major students learning English speaking skills at the A1 level. From there, propose solutions to help students develop suitable and effective learning methods to improve their English speaking skills further.

#### Specific objectives:

1. Survey the current situation of learning English speaking skills at the A1 level of students
2. Analyze the survey results to evaluate the current situation of students learning English speaking skills at the A1 level.
3. Based on the analysis results, propose some solutions to help overcome difficulties and improve the learning of speaking skills in TA for students at level A1.

#### 1.3. Research questions

Strategies for learning skills

### 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1. Speaking skills

There are many different views and definitions of speaking skills. In general, "Speaking" is the ability to express verbally, which is demonstrated through oral language to convey information and express thoughts and feelings accurately, vividly, and convincingly. Mart (2012) believes that "speaking skills are the ability to use words to express opinions, thoughts, situations, and feelings of a

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person to others or themselves." Thus, "speaking" can be seen as a process of arranging words so that they have meaning to express or describe a particular issue. In the process of communication, the speaker needs to know how to systematize the ideas of the author and group, arrange the order of sentences according to the order of the spoken language genre along with accurate pronunciation, clear and coherent so that the listener can understand the message that the speaker wants to mention. Speaking skills are often influenced by pronunciation, articulation, and pronunciation.

### **2.2. Learning strategies for English speaking skills**

According to Lewis (2008), each learner has strategies for learning a language. These strategies vary depending on the thinking and ability of each person so that they can help learners master that language most simply and easily. Learning strategies are methods, approaches, or processes that learners use to promote mastering the language they are learning (Macaro, 2001). According to linguistic theory, there are many different learning strategies and methods for learners to choose from that are most suitable for them in learning and using a language (Gani et al., 2015). Therefore, choosing the right learning method/strategy will help learners save time and learn faster. Alternatively, learning strategy is the key factor determining the success or failure of learning a language.

### **2.3. Classification of language learning strategies**

There are different views on how to classify language learning strategies. The history of linguistic research shows that language learning strategies have been classified by many different researchers, such as Rubin (1987), Oxford (1990), and Malley & Chamot (1990). These two researchers divided language learning strategies into three types: metacognitive, cognitive, and social. According to Malley and Chamot (1990), metacognitive strategies are strategies applied to plan learning and processes related to learning, monitor learning and understanding, and evaluate after completing a specific lesson activity. Cognitive strategies involve using vocabulary learning techniques such as memorization of new words, translation, analogy, etc. And finally, social strategies. These strategies are related to daily transactions and activities in society.

## **3. RESEARCH METHOD**

### **3.1. Research Approach**

The research was conducted using quantitative methods to survey the strategies/methods students used to learn speaking skills in English. The questionnaire to collect data for this research was designed based on SILL (The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning) version 7.0, developed by Oxford (1990). This tool consists of 50 questions to assess learning strategies for foreign languages (EFL). However, to suit the research objectives of the topic, the researcher reconstructed a questionnaire consisting of 30 questions used as a tool to assess the strategies that students used to learn speaking skills in English based on the following criteria: (a) Memorization strategies, (b) Cognitive strategies (c) Compensation strategies (d) Metacognitive strategies, (e) Emotional strategies, & (f) Social strategies.

### **3.2. Research tools**

The research tool is a questionnaire written in Vietnamese with 30 closed questions to collect quantitative data. The interviewed students will answer by checking the Yes/No column next to the question. The survey data collected from the students' responses will answer the research question on the topic. They will help provide appropriate suggestions/solutions to improve students' speaking skills.

### **3.3. Research implementation process**

To ensure the reliability of the collected data, the data collection process was conducted after the A1 classes had settled into a stable routine from the fourth week. The questionnaire was distributed to the students after the researcher clearly and thoroughly explained the research objectives of the topic. Students were asked to read the questionnaire carefully and ensure they understood each question before answering. Students will clarify the question's meaning if they are still confused or unable to understand it.

## **4. RESEARCH RESULTS**

### **4.1. Strategies used by students to learn speaking skills in TA at A1 level**

#### **4.1.1. Memory strategies**

The memory strategies used by students ranged from 30-77%, and the lowest was strategy number 1: 30% (Connecting the sound/rhyme of a TA word with a picture/image to remember that word). Thus, students are not very interested in ways/tricks to memorize vocabulary. Furthermore, the data also showed that strategies from 2 to 4: memorizing new words (40%), memorizing sentence structures (42%), and memorizing sample sentences (45%) were not focused on by students. At the same time, the memory strategy also showed that only 50% of students reviewed the old lesson thoroughly. In class, students were quite interested in the teacher's lectures (75%). In addition, learning TA based on dictionaries (accounting for 77%) significantly impacts students' speaking ability.

Thus, A1 level students with low TA levels and weak speaking ability do not know how to choose appropriate and effective learning strategies to learn this skill.

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### 4.1.2. Cognitive strategies

Cognitive strategies reach 30-40%; The rate of students who want to practice speaking TA with friends is 30%. This shows that students do not have the self-awareness to practice speaking skills for themselves. There are also other reasons to explain this problem, such as students not finding suitable people to practice speaking TA; feeling afraid of weak speaking TA ability can also create barriers for them. In addition, the overload of studying specialized subjects and the stress of time gives students few opportunities to practice speaking skills. Most importantly, students do not have the need/passion for learning this skill, so they do not care and invest appropriately to improve it. Through the survey, it can be seen that only 35% of students practice by speaking simple sentences and using standard, easy-to-understand words in the speaking process to achieve their communication/communication purposes; 40% of students think that "speaking TA very slowly" is the way for listeners to understand the message they want to convey. Therefore, this can also be called the students' strategy in practicing speaking skills. Students want to speak slowly to avoid mistakes in vocabulary and grammar. This can also be how learners think it reduces psychological pressure (fear) when speaking TA.

### 4.1.3. Compensation strategies

Amir (2018) pointed out that learners use compensation strategies to improve their fluency in speaking TA. Therefore, this strategy has been used a lot by students, with a high rate of 80-85%. The strategy of "Using some Vietnamese words in speaking TA" when the speaker lacks equivalent TA words and using body language reached 80%; 82% of the respondents said that they "Used gestures to express their opinions," According to Nur (2018) and co-authors, learners often try to use gestures/gestures or signs when encountering words they do not know. To improve their TA speaking skills, 85% of students tend to put words together to form sentences without considering the meaning of the words, grammar context, etc. Since the survey subjects are A1 students, they manage by themselves by "guessing to understand the meaning of new/unknown words" at 87%.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The survey results of the strategies for learning TA speaking skills of 100 A1 level students of a university show that the memorization strategy is used from 30-77%, the cognitive strategy from 30-40%, the compensation strategy from 80-87%, the self-motivation strategy is used from 25-32%, the metacognitive strategy from 10-40%, and the compensation strategy from 81-90%. The two strategies with high application rates are the compensation and social strategies. Thus, students apply strategies to learn speaking skills, but this application is unsuccessful because it depends on feelings and does not help learners achieve high efficiency. Learners mainly rely on compensation strategies to improve their language ability.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Through a survey of the current status of A1 level English speaking skills of non-major university students, we can come to the following conclusions. Although students have been familiar with this foreign language since grade 3 or grade 6, their speaking skills are still very weak because they have not determined the strategies to learn speaking that are suitable for themselves. The data shows that students use strategies during the learning process, but their application is inappropriate; it still depends on their feelings, ranging from 10-90%. To contribute to improving their speaking skills, students often focus mainly on using compensation strategies and social strategies (80-90%) rather than using memory, cognitive, self-motivation, and metacognitive strategies. Thus, the strategies currently used by most students to learn are ineffective, so students' speaking skills have not been improved and enhanced. Therefore, lecturers in charge of A1-level English courses must orient, integrate, and guide students with speaking strategies appropriate to their level and ability. Guiding students in choosing speaking strategies that are suitable for themselves will be a turning point/solution to help them improve their language ability.

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