

Perspectives of Language-Major Students at a Higher Education Institution on the Activities of Foreign Language Clubs in Improving Their Speaking Skills



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ABSTRACT: Beyond classroom learning, extracurricular activities also hold significant weight in strengthening students' knowledge and abilities. For language majors, extracurricular involvement, particularly in university clubs, can significantly enhance their language skills through practice. A quantitative research method was employed using a questionnaire distributed to a university's English and Chinese language majors. The findings emphasized the importance of language clubs in supporting students' development in speaking English and Chinese. Informed by relevant theory and survey data, the research team observed that these clubs operate effectively, offering many benefits such as improved reaction time for language learners, increased motivation for studying the language, opportunities for practical application, and a boost in both initiative and confidence during communication. Utilizing student feedback, the authors delve into a discussion on the role and effectiveness of language clubs for participants. This discussion then paves the way for recommendations to further enhance the effectiveness of these clubs in the future.

KEYWORDS: foreign language clubs, English major students, Chinese major students, improving speaking skills

I. INTRODUCTION

In today's era of globalization, fluency in foreign languages is akin to holding the key to unlocking doors of international communication. English and Chinese are two widely spoken languages that have been incorporated into the curriculum of Vietnamese universities for many years. Besides, the world is constantly adopting various methods to enhance foreign language communication skills. For language majors, finding an environment to practice their language skills is paramount. Beyond the acquisition of knowledge and the development of essential skills within the university classroom, students require opportunities to practice and enhance various soft skills beyond regular class hours. The primary purpose of extracurricular programs is to provide students with avenues to explore their talents and interests. Today, at universities, students have the opportunities to interact, learn, and share learning experiences in various clubs and student organizations both within and outside the university setting. English and Chinese language clubs are established to cater to the needs of language majors in honing their communication, presentation, and teamwork skills.

The research team, composed of members from the organizing committees of the English and Chinese language clubs at Tra Vinh University, conducted this study to gather feedback from English and Chinese language majors regarding the clubs' activities. In line with the organizing committee's guidelines, typical club meetings encompass a variety of activities, including answering individual questions, engaging in group work, presenting on assigned topics, sharing learning experiences, solving puzzles, participating in group games, and engaging in other activities aimed at developing foreign language communication, presentation, and public speaking skills. Driven by the desire to preserve and enhance the clubs' strengths while addressing their shortcomings, this study delves into the perspectives of English and Chinese language majors on the activities offered by these two clubs.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Overview of research

The significance of listening and speaking skills in communication is emphasized by various scholars. Adler et al. (2001) posit that 75% of communication time is devoted to listening and speaking, highlighting their crucial role in determining an individual's communicative competence. Similarly, UR (1999) identifies speaking as the most critical skill among the four language skills, as it enables individuals to express their thoughts and emotions effectively. Brown (2004) further elaborates on listening and speaking as interactive processes for information reception and processing to maintain social relationships. Speaking, in particular, is deemed essential for effective daily communication.

Perspectives of Language-Major Students at a Higher Education Institution on the Activities of Foreign Language Clubs in Improving Their Speaking Skills

Malu and Smedley (2016) advocate for the establishment of community-based foreign language clubs to expose students to everyday communicative language, supporting and enhancing their proficiency. Casey (2008) asserts that positive learning activities can be implemented and organized in educational clubs outside the classroom, catering to students' interests. Maulidiyah et al. (2020) propose supplemental teaching programs, such as speaking clubs, as an alternative approach to encourage active student participation in speaking practice. Moreover, Suparman and Widari (2017) identify participation in academic club models as one of the most effective strategies for developing listening and speaking skills in foreign languages.

The benefits of clubs for students are further highlighted by Freeman (2017), who emphasizes the diverse activities available to club members based on the club's objectives. Baihaqi (2016) investigated the impact of speaking clubs on students' speaking ability, finding that participation enhanced their proficiency and elicited positive feedback from participants. A result from an article by Aida Yulianasari and Wendi Kusriandi (2018) stated that English club as an English extracurricular program has a positive impact on participants' speaking skills because it can give chances to students to speak in more flexible conditions with their peers. Besides, Hamad Amin and Najim (2020) found that English majors agreed that the English Club provided a valuable learning experience and an excellent opportunity to improve their communication skills. Additionally, Nafisa (2010) emphasizes the effectiveness of speaking clubs in boosting students' confidence and fostering their interest in communication. In conclusion, foreign language club models in universities aim to support academic achievement and enhance students' foreign language communication skills through practical scenarios.

B. Research objectives

This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of foreign language clubs in improving English and Chinese speaking skills for language majors at a university. Through analyzing the role and effectiveness of foreign language clubs based on theory and data collected from the survey, the study will identify the main activities and characteristics that contribute to improving students' speaking skills, provides valuable insights into the role and effectiveness of foreign language clubs in supporting language learning and development and makes recommendations to improve the effectiveness of foreign language clubs in the future.

C. Research questions and research methods

Recognizing the significance of foreign language clubs in developing communication skills for language majors, we conducted this study to address the following research question:

From the students' perspectives, how effective are foreign language club activities in developing speaking skills for language majors?

This study employed a quantitative research method using a survey questionnaire comprising 15 questions designed on the Google Forms platform. The questionnaire utilized multiple-choice questions, rating scale questions, Likert scale questions, and open-ended questions. The study involved 89 language majors who had previously participated in the English and Chinese language clubs, with no age or gender restrictions. The research subjects voluntarily participated in the survey.

The questionnaire was sent to students via a Google Form link within a 7-day timeframe. The study was limited to 89 participants; therefore, the potential impacts of these foreign language clubs on other students, such as non-language majors, were beyond the scope of the research. Upon data collection, the researcher synthesized and analyzed the data based on the Google Forms response statistics.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

After receiving the survey results from 89 students majoring in English and Chinese languages, we conducted statistical analysis and provided insights into the effectiveness of foreign language club activities in enhancing the speaking skills of foreign language majors based on the following analysis.

A. Benefits of Foreign Language Clubs in Developing Foreign Language Speaking Skills

I. Most Popular Activities in Foreign Language Clubs Chosen by Participants

Activity	Frequency	Percentage	Reasons
Answering individual questions	26	29,2	Both fun and educational
Working in groups	42	47,2	More enjoyable than working individually, gaining a lot of useful knowledge, developing communication skills, making new friends, exchanging personal opinions, collaborating with teammates,

Perspectives of Language-Major Students at a Higher Education Institution on the Activities of Foreign Language Clubs in Improving Their Speaking Skills

			developing oneself, helping each other, supplementing teamwork skills necessary for study and work
Presenting by topics	27	30,3	Expand vocabulary on that topic, help become more confident, develop teamwork and creativity skills
Sharing learning experiences	33	37,1	Can empathize, learn from experiences and effective foreign language learning methods from other friends, help present more fluently, improve speaking skills, have solutions to real-life learning problems
Doing quizzes	32	36	Interesting, engaging, not boring when learning knowledge, being able to practice speaking, stimulating brainwork, brainstorming ideas, improving stringing skills, analyzing factors related to puzzles to find answers
Doing team-building games	31	34,8	Fun, less stressful, brings a feeling of comfort, fun, learning many skills, developing communication skills, getting to know many new friends, having a spirit of solidarity, using foreign languages in a dynamic, fun environment
Other idea: Activity to list vocabulary by topic	1	1,1	Be able to list one or more words you already know to reinforce what you have learned
All activities	4	4,5	Helps improve speaking skills

(Source: Results from the authors' questionnaire)

Based on the responses to the third question and the following open-ended question in Table 1, the majority of students (47.2%) found group work activities in the clubs to be the most enjoyable. Most students tend to prefer this activity because they feel that working in groups is more fun than working individually, allows them to accumulate a lot of useful knowledge, develop communication skills, make new friends, exchange personal opinions, collaborate with teammates, develop themselves, help each other, and supplement teamwork skills that are essential for study and work.

Experience-sharing activities (37.1%), quiz solving (36%), and team-building games (34.8%) are also popular among students who participate in the club. Most students tend to prefer these activities because they have the opportunity to experience fun learning games and learn many skills, especially communication skills. In addition, students can learn from the experiences and effective foreign language learning methods of other friends, which helps them present more fluently, improves their speaking skills, and provides solutions to real-life learning problems. Students said they liked these activities "Because these activities help me speak more fluently and gain more experience to improve my speaking skills," "Team games help me practice communication skills, collaborate with other students, and use foreign languages in a dynamic, fun environment." In addition, these activities help to bring a feeling of fun and relaxation, reducing stress and fatigue after hours of study. By participating in these activities, students can also get to know many new friends and improve their team spirit. Some students found these activities to be "Enriching, engaging, not boring when learning knowledge."

In addition, in reality, students often feel afraid to use foreign languages in their studies because they are afraid of making mistakes. However, a student mentioned that "these activities make me feel happy and less stressed." Therefore, when participating in team games, students can overcome this limitation because the club environment is very dynamic, fun and does not create pressure. It has been suggested that "these activities not only help students improve their communication skills but also make them more confident, in addition to developing teamwork and creativity skills, etc."

In addition to the positive feedback from students about the most popular activities in the club, among the options that the authors set out, the response with the lowest percentage was the "answering individual questions" activity with 26 out of 89 votes. While this may not be a very low number, it does to some extent show that students are still hesitant and shy when forced to come up with their answers or express their opinions in front of a crowd. This could be the reason why students show such great enthusiasm for "group work" activities. If students are given an environment to collaborate with group members, they can exchange personal opinions, interact with classmates, help each other, and supplement teamwork skills that are essential for study and work. One student said, "I can work in groups when playing puzzles, through instructions in foreign languages from my classmates, and then

Perspectives of Language-Major Students at a Higher Education Institution on the Activities of Foreign Language Clubs in Improving Their Speaking Skills

apply foreign language communication in real life." Based on the survey results, teachers can consider organizing more group activities in the classroom so that students can interact with each other and confidently develop their abilities.

II. Benefits of Club Activities for Student Skill Development

Activity	Frequency	Percentage	Benefits
Answering individual questions	55	61.8	Develop foreign language communication skills
Working in groups	51	57.3	
Presenting by topics	57	64.0	
Sharing learning experiences	56	62.9	
Doing quizzes	46	51.7	
Doing team-building games	36	40.4	
Others	1	1.1	
Answering individual questions	42	47.2	Enhance public speaking skills
Working in groups	41	46.1	
Presenting by topics	77	86.5	
Sharing learning experiences	54	60.7	
Doing quizzes	33	37.1	
Doing team-building games	23	25.8	
Others	0	0.0	
Answering individual questions	55	61.8	Develop oratory skills
Working in groups	44	49.4	
Presenting by topics	55	61.8	
Sharing learning experiences	46	51.7	
Doing quizzes	41	46.1	
Doing team-building games	32	36.0	
Others	1	1.1	

(Source: Results from the authors' questionnaire)

According to survey data from questions 4, 5, and 6 regarding which foreign language club activities contribute to the development of communication, presentation, and public speaking skills, the authors compiled the responses into Table 2. The results indicate that a majority of students believe that presenting by topics are the most supportive factor for students in developing their foreign language communication skills (64%) and are the most effective activity for improving public speaking skills (86.5%). The activity of answering individual questions at the clubs received an equally high response rate to the aforementioned activity in terms of helping students develop their public speaking skills (61.8%).

Based on these findings, it is evident that while themed presentations may not be the most popular activity among students when participating in the club, it is the activity that students acknowledge as providing the most support in developing the skills necessary for them. Therefore, during the teaching process, instructors can design more similar activities to provide students with opportunities to present, boost their confidence, and enhance their skills when participating in activities beyond the classroom setting.

B. Effectiveness of Foreign Language Club Activities

III. The Role of Activities in Foreign Language Clubs in Improving Speaking Skills

Activity	Scale	Frequency	Percentage
Activities related to group work	Completely not important	1	1.1
	Not important	1	1.1
	Normal	7	7.9
	Important	34	38.2
	Very important	46	51.7

Perspectives of Language-Major Students at a Higher Education Institution on the Activities of Foreign Language Clubs in Improving Their Speaking Skills

Presentation activities	Completely not important	0	0
	Not important	0	0
	Normal	5	5.6
	Important	49	55.1
	Very important	35	39.3
Games are integrated into club activities	Completely not important	0	0
	Not important	1	1.1
	Normal	11	12.4
	Important	29	32.6
	Very important	48	53.9

(Source: Results from the authors' questionnaire)

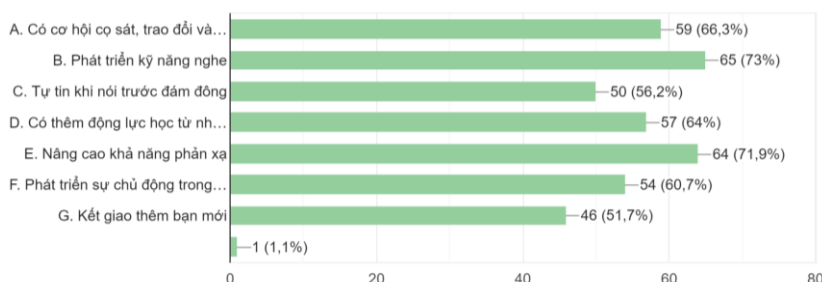
According to the results of the student opinion scale for questions 7, 8, and 9, which are summarized in Table 3, activities related to group work, presentation activities, and participating in games integrated into club activities are largely rated as important and very important in helping students improve their foreign language speaking skills. This suggests that students are aware of the importance of these activities in developing other professional skills. This is a positive sign for the club organizers and foreign language teachers at the school. However, despite the positive evaluations of the activities, there is still a small percentage of students who do not fully recognize their benefits. This could be due to factors such as unappealing organization methods, poor interaction between group members, or students not fully dedicating their time and effort to participating in the activities.

To address this situation, foreign language clubs can improve their organization methods, and create new and more creative and interesting activities to attract students' attention and active participation. In addition, improving teamwork and presentation skills should also be emphasized through specialized training sessions, workshops, and regular practice activities. Furthermore, the role of teachers and club advisors in guiding and supporting students, creating a friendly and open learning environment where students can confidently express themselves and learn from each other, cannot be overlooked. At the same time, strengthening evaluation activities and feedback from students after each term of activity will help the club to understand students' aspirations and opinions, and from there, make appropriate adjustments to improve the quality of activities.

IV. Benefits of Joining Foreign Language Clubs

Câu 10: Sau khi tham gia CLB ngoại ngữ, bạn đã gặt hái được những thành quả gì? What achievements have you gained after joining the foreign language clubs?

89 câu trả lời



(Source: Results from the authors' questionnaire)

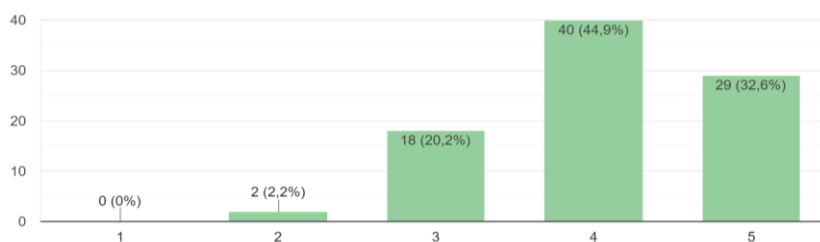
The options for question 10 were selected through the observations of the researchers in the foreign language clubs, then participants were asked to choose the achievements they have gained. Option A mentions the possibility of having the opportunities to apply, exchange, and practice the knowledge learned. Option B suggests the benefit of developing listening skills. Option C underscores the focus on building students' confidence in expressing themselves effectively in front of others. Option D highlights the supportive and motivating environment fostered within the club. Option E emphasizes the development of reflexive language skills, enabling students to react and respond naturally in real-time conversations. Option F highlights the encouragement of self-directed language practice, empowering students to take ownership of their learning and actively seek opportunities to use the language. Finally, option G (having chances to make new friends) was also chosen from one of the outstanding students' comments as an option for students to choose from to see how high the selection rate is.

Perspectives of Language-Major Students at a Higher Education Institution on the Activities of Foreign Language Clubs in Improving Their Speaking Skills

In response to this question, the results are quite impressive with 73% reported developing stronger listening and speaking skills, while 71.9% noted an improvement in their ability to react and respond spontaneously in the language. Additionally, 66.3% of participants gained valuable opportunities to practice and exchange knowledge learned in the club setting. Furthermore, 64% of students reported increased motivation to learn from their fellow club members, and 60.7% felt a boost in their initiative to actively practice the language. Confidence also saw a rise, with 56.2% of participants feeling more confident presenting in front of others. Finally, 51.7% reported making new friends through their involvement in the club. Overall, looking at these results, we can see that over 50% of students reported positive outcomes across various language and soft skill development areas after participating in the foreign language club.

V. Level of Improvement in Speaking Skills after Joining Foreign Language Clubs

Câu 11: Năng lực nói của bạn sau khi tham gia CLB ngoại ngữ được cải thiện như thế nào? (Mức độ thấp nhất là 1, mức độ cao nhất là 5) How has you...ast improvement and 5 is the most improvement)
89 câu trả lời



(Source: Results from the authors' questionnaire)

Regarding question 11 which asks the participants how their foreign language speaking ability improved after joining the foreign language clubs by rating on a scale of 1 to 5, from the least improvement to the most improvement, the results further supported those findings, with 77.5% of respondents indicating a significant improvement in their speaking abilities after joining the club. This strongly suggests that the clubs' activities are demonstrably effective in supporting students' growth in both language fluency and essential soft skills. The survey results serve not only as a reflection of student satisfaction but also as a powerful testament to the crucial role foreign language clubs play within the learning environment. However, there are still 2 out of 89 students who have not seen an improvement in their speaking ability after participating in foreign language clubs. This can come from many reasons both from the learners themselves and the quality of activities in foreign language clubs. Therefore, lecturers and organizers of foreign language clubs need to regularly collect participants' opinions to improve the content and activity programs of English and Chinese clubs at the university

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As discussed in the theoretical background section, the research goal of the article is to survey the opinions of language students about the activities of foreign language clubs in improving speaking skills at an institution. University education. Based on the results obtained and the discussion in section 3, the researcher draws the following important conclusions.

First, students are aware that the foreign language club is a place to help build a healthy, dynamic environment for exchange, learning, and practice, encouraging students to practice speaking and group activities. Regarding the clubs' performance up to now, the majority of students affirm that the foreign language club is doing a very good job in helping students develop their communication skills in foreign languages. The outstanding benefits that foreign language clubs bring are providing a comfortable and friendly language practice environment, a means to help develop reflective abilities in communication, and enhance public presentation skills. In addition, this is a useful playground for students to not only practice foreign language skills but also an environment for students to improve their collective working skills, creativity, confidence in personal interaction and make friends with many new members. From regular meetings with other experienced members, students can develop their creative, independent, and flexible thinking skills to adapt to future working environments, including mastering English is a huge advantage, in meeting the human resource needs of society.

After analyzing the survey results, in addition to positive feedback from students, we found that the frequency of student club participation up to now is still quite low, ranging from 5-10 times. This reflects that the club's promotion and propaganda work has not yet achieved the expected effectiveness. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen promotion work to make the clubs more known. The board of directors can design eye-catching posters and share club information on social networks and mass media to attract students. Through feedback from students, singing and entertainment activities, watching movies as well as the appearance of guests

Perspectives of Language-Major Students at a Higher Education Institution on the Activities of Foreign Language Clubs in Improving Their Speaking Skills

who are lecturers and native collaborators will also contribute to the attractiveness of the clubs. The club organization time also needs to be scheduled and widely announced so that students can conveniently arrange to participate.

Through the 4 questions 12, 13, 14, and 15 in the survey, the researcher can draw some suggestions from the participants themselves to improve the performance of foreign language clubs during this upcoming period. Regarding the frequency of organizing clubs, the ideal time for club exchange activities is 1-2 times a week (with about 57.4% of students agreeing) and a reasonable duration for each session is 45 minutes to 1 hour. The most common reason for this choice is that students have the opportunity to regularly practice and improve their foreign language speaking skills, do not have to wait too long leading to reduced interest in joining clubs, and can balance between study time, part-time work and extracurricular activities. On the other hand, with the above time, the organizing committee can be able to learn from previous groups, have time to adjust the activity content to be more suitable, ensuring quality and creativity in both organization and implementation of activity content. It is important to receive student feedback on the desired frequency of activities. This helps clubs better understand the wishes and difficulties of students, thereby making appropriate adjustments, improving the quality of activities and better meeting the needs of participants.

When assuming the role of organizing committee for clubs, 89 students participating in the survey gave some suggestions to improve activities to make clubs more attractive. A typical suggestion related to the organization of clubs is to invite more native speakers so that students have the opportunity to interact with different English and Chinese pronunciations. In addition, many students believe that the amount of time spent on theoretical activities should be reduced and the amount of time spent on practical activities, presentations, rhetoric, and sharing of learning experiences should be increased. Clubs should also consider expanding affiliated activities with other organizations and businesses to create more opportunities for practice and skill development for students. Combining study and practice, theory and practice might help students not only master knowledge but also confidently apply it in practice. In addition, the activities that most participants want to add to the program content are cultural activities and group games in the form of television programs such as Ring the Golden Bell, Magic Hat, Fast like Lightning, etc.

In addition, for the activities of foreign language clubs to be more successful, the school also needs to ensure the quality of facilities and equipment such as classrooms, speakers, microphones, projectors, and Internet connection speed, etc. The clubs' organizing committee need to organize training sessions for club members on game organization, management of participating members, and methods of applying technology to the design of club activities. Organizing free academic competitions for students is also a good idea to help clubs grow more and more, serving the needs of practicing foreign language speaking skills of language majors at Tra Vinh University.

This research article mainly focuses on surveying the opinions of students majoring in English language and Chinese language at Tra Vinh University. In the future, the author plans to expand the research to students studying English and Chinese as non-majors and people learning English and Chinese as foreign languages to make the scope of the research more comprehensive. Hopefully, this research article can be a valuable reference source for domestic and foreign scholars.

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Perspectives of Language-Major Students at a Higher Education Institution on the Activities of Foreign Language Clubs in Improving Their Speaking Skills

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