

Involving dynamically in speaking activities in classroom amongst young learners at Petrovietnam Manpower Training College, Viet Nam

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Abstract: Teaching a foreign language is to encourage learners to use it to communicate effectively. Therefore, how to help students engage in speaking activities in class as well as increase their ability to speak English confidently is a critical thinking question for all English teachers. We all need to seriously consider various factors affecting foreign language speaking ability to help young learners succeed in their learning process. The paper found some new ways to help young learners take part in speaking activities in classroom confidently.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The rapid socio-economic development has a great effect on the development of education. "Today English is no longer the property of the English-speaking countries but it is an international or global language" (Richards, 2002, p. 4). In recent years, English is considered as a communicative media to closely connect people all over the world. Thanks to this, speaking skill is crucial important in English teaching and learning (Nunan, 2001a; McCarthy, 1998; as cited in Aliakbari & Jamalvandi, 2010). Consequently, English teachers are required to have considerable renovations in ways of teaching to be able to enhance their learners' speaking skill.

This paper has found a phenomenon that in Vietnamese foreign language classes, young learners are often shy and ashamed, and they are unwilling to take part in speaking activities confidently. They are afraid of losing face if they make mistakes when speaking. In other words, they fear that their teachers and classmates will evaluate them negatively (Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2009). There are some factors that affect young learners' bad behaviors such as unsuitable teaching methods and techniques for speaking lessons, students' low motivation and uninspiring topics.

As an English teacher with seven-year teaching experience at Petrovietnam Manpower Training College, a vocational college where has supplied human resources for most companies in the oil and gas industry, I realized that most of my students who are young learners have come from the Northern area in Vietnam. They have only studied three-year English training program. Some students even used to work in the military forces before going to the college. They almost forgot the knowledge they learned before. My students all meet difficulties in speaking skill. They are not eager to participate in the speaking activities in class. They find difficult and unconfident to speak English. They do not involve actively in speaking learning lessons. They feel bored and frightened when they are asked to practice or role-play in a conversation. In fact, I and my students have spent periods of speaking teaching and learning sluggishly. That is why I am interested in the topic: Young learners' engagement in speaking activities in class.

The main goal of teaching a foreign language is to encourage learners to use it to communicate effectively. Therefore, how to help students engage in speaking activities in class as well as increase their ability to speak English confidently is a critically thinking question for all English teachers. We all need to seriously consider various factors affecting foreign language speaking ability to help young learners succeed in their learning process.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

From my seven-year teaching experience, I realized that motivation is one of the most important and decisive factors that contribute to the learners' language learning success. Qin (2003) said that learning motivation influences the success or failure in second language learning, and helps the learners become autonomous and confident in overcoming learning difficulty (Qin, 2003, as cited in Li & Pan, 2009). The

interesting topic of motivation was continued to consider and investigate in the article “*Motivation factors in language learning*” written by Ebata (2008). The research discussed the topic on factors that have a closely connection with motivation in detail and logically. The researcher stated that motivation is a vital factor in language learning process of learners because it creates the driving force which helps learners engage actively in their leaning activities in the classroom to acquire the target language as well as develop their communicative ability in a foreign language. Wang (2009) also highlighted the impact of motivational factors on learning speaking. After data was collected and analyzed, the researcher concluded that the factors that most influence students’ motivation were intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation such as students’ enjoyment and interest, teacher’s role, group interaction. In fact, it was proved definitely and truly in the study carried out by Li and Pan (2009). The study is well-organized, clearly and systematically. The study has a good introduction with the researchers’ emphasis on the important role of motivation in learners’ language learning process. Based on the result of the research, the writers asserted that motivation is thought to be a very important reason which determines the learners’ learning outcome. Thus motivation is very closely related to the learners’ achievement in language learning (Gardner & Lambert, 1972, as cited in Engin, 2009). Motivation makes the learners involve in the tasks which they have to try their best to perform well in class to achieve the success in their language learning. Motivation makes a foreign language teaching and learning extremely easier and more pleasant.

Factors affecting to the young learners’ involvement in speaking activities in classroom

The researcher of this paper finds appropriate research articles which have an overall view on the key issues with useful findings to answer the research questions.

The first article is the study conducted by Tanveer (2007) with the topic “*Investigation of the factors that cause language anxiety for ESL/EFL learners in learning speaking skills and the influence it casts on communication in the target language*”. There are many factors affecting to young learners’ engagement in speaking activities in class. One of them is the anxiety. The research is well- organized. It discussed the causes of anxiety in the foreign language learning systematically. After data was collected and analyzed, Tanveer (2007) concluded that students often got anxiety in oral communication. In the research, ESL/EFL learners said that they felt anxious and nervous when they spoke English in front of other people. They thought that they were not good at speaking. Therefore, they were unwilling to participate in oral communication in class enthusiastically. They wanted to end the class as soon as possible. The result of the research showed that activities relating to speaking in English such as group discussion or presentation of a topic were their great challenges of communicative ability. Tanveer (2007) claimed that first of all, young learners worried about the negative evaluation from the teacher and classmates. Other reason was the feeling of lack of confidence in speaking.

The author gave the reader a clear and deep understanding of factors that create the anxiety and demotivate their involvement in English speaking activities. Tanveer’s research has impressions on the reader. The study of article related closely to the first research question because to find out the best solutions to help young learners engage actively in speaking activities in class, an essential requirement from an English teacher is to understand deeply what factors cause a problem to young learners’ speaking ability. From that the researcher should employ suitable strategies to encourage learners in speaking activities in class.

A topic of anxiety in the foreign language learning is interested by Ayatollah and Ali (2010) in the article “*The effects of anxiety and gender on students’ speaking performance*”. According to the result of data analysis, the researchers stressed that the factor of anxiety had a significant effect on students’ speaking ability. Based on the result, the researchers help EFL teachers recognize that the anxiety is thought as a serious problem to students’ speaking ability. Ayatollah and Ali (2010) recommended that teachers should try to overcome the problem by using suitable teaching methods in speaking lessons. Some information in the study is very close to the research topic and useful for research plan. This supports the answer for two research questions that help teachers explore the ways to engage young learners in English speaking skill effectively and enhance their ability to speak English confidently in class, experienced teachers should adopt motivational strategies to reduce learners’ anxiety at the lowest level.

Motivational strategies that help students overcome foreign language speaking anxiety in the English classroom

The study was accomplished by Tsiplakides and Keramida (2009) in the article “*Helping students overcome foreign language speaking anxiety in the English classroom: theoretical issues and practical recommendations*”. In the research, the writers attempted to consider and investigate the negative correlation between second language anxiety and achievement in foreign language teaching and learning. Based on collected and analyzed data, conclusion was that anxious foreign language students are less willing to participate in learning activities and have lower performance than non-anxious students. Tsiplakides and Keramida’s research provided teachers with strategies for reducing foreign language speaking anxiety of the students in

classroom. With the results from the study, the writers discovered the answer for the first research question in this paper. The researchers found that in order to increase students' involvement in speaking activities in classroom, teachers should establish an autonomous-supportive classroom atmosphere and build up friendly teacher-students relationships. In comparison with the context of teaching technical worker classes at vocational colleges in general and at Petrovietnam vocational college in particular, this helps young learners feel confident about their ability to speak English and get involved in communicative activities voluntarily. The study is very useful and appropriate for teachers to find out good solutions to apply in ESL classrooms.

Using creative teaching methods as motivational strategies to involve young learners in communicative activities and enhance their speaking ability in classroom

With the study in the article "*The using of pictures to improve the students' speaking ability*", Miolo (2004) explored the benefit of using pictures in teaching English-speaking class to get students involved in oral activities in classroom. She found that pictures were very effective and useful visual aids in making the students active and creative to speak English. The results of her research showed that using the pictures in teaching speaking skill might be an effective and creative way to overcome the difficulties in learning and practicing English of students because the students engaged in communicative activities with pictures better than non-pictures. Miolo's study provides the answer to the inquiries in this paper. The article helps ESL/EFL teachers recognize that to engage young learners in using English to speak in classroom, teachers should increase using pictures in teaching speaking frequently.

Using role-play to encourage students' speaking ability in classroom is the topic of the study carried out by Liu (2010). Based on the result of the research, she found that there were no obvious changes of using oral English test method but there were great changes of arousing the students' motivation of English speaking by using role-play activity. Liu(2010) claimed that using the activity of role-play is more effective in fostering the college students in speaking English than using oral English test. In the research, she stressed on using role-play as an effective media of teaching speaking in ESL/EFL classrooms which raises the students' motivation in learning English. This is a useful study for the reader as well as for all English teachers. The article supports the answer for the second research question in the paper. Clearly, role-play is one of teaching methods that can be applied appropriately in communicative classrooms in Vietnam to motivate students in speaking English.

Aliakbari and Jamalvandi (2010) investigated the effect of the activity of role play on increasing learners' speaking ability. The conclusion came from the comparison of the two groups' result. The results showed that the experimental group performed speaking ability better than the control group. Thanks to the result, the researchers found that using role-play as a motivational strategy in teaching speaking in English classrooms can enhance the learners' oral ability. Therefore, the writer recommended that this activity should be applied widely in communicative classrooms in English to enhance learners' oral skill. The study with valuable findings helps the reader and all English teachers find out the most suitable techniques or strategies that can be applied in a foreign language teaching to encourage students in learning speaking English. Thanks to this, the article gives a satisfactory answer to the second research question.

The research of Khameis (2007) was carried out in a classroom of twenty Grade Five Arabic-speaking girls where English is taught as a foreign language. The study aimed at investigating creative strategies to develop students' speaking skill. The results of observations, questionnaires and interviews showed that there was a great effect of using interesting strategies on students' motivation to speak and participation in learning activities in class. The researcher found that songs, stories and games were useful because they created a comfortable and enjoyable atmosphere that "lower students' stress and give learners opportunities to engage in real communication" (Khameis, 2007, p.112). She recommended that teachers of language to young learners should use a variety of creative strategies that increase students' confidence and encourage them to participate in speaking tasks in classroom. Clearly, the article is useful and informative for all English teachers. It provided teachers with effective strategies which can be applied widely and appropriately in language teaching and learning context in Vietnam in general and in teaching speaking English at the vocational colleges in particular to get students involved in speaking activities and increase their speaking ability in classroom. Thanks to this, the article brings a clear answer for the research question in this paper.

The research which was accomplished by Abdulla (2007) in the article "Enhancing Oral Communication Skills by using Pairwork Strategies" investigated ways of enhancing oral communication skills by using pair work activities with young learners in an English language classroom in the United Arab Emirates. By conducting this study, the researcher found that "using these tasks is an effective strategy to provide chances for students to learn the language in a meaningful way" (p.24). Based on the results of observations and interviews, Abdulla (2007) asserted that there was a significant impact on engaging young learners' involvement in communicative tasks in classroom. Abdulla (2007) stated that "the students felt confident and got the chance to learn from each other's experience and knowledge about the language as they interacted meaningfully through the language" (p.25). After conducting the study, the researcher highly recommended that "pairwork is

a valuable method to implement in EFL classroom” (p.20). Nunan (2003) stated that “pair work activities can be used to increase the amount of time that learners get to speak in the target language during lessons” (p.20, as cited in Abdulla, 2007). Research findings of the article help teachers have more choices of motivational strategies that can be used in language teaching and learning, especially in teaching speaking English as a second language. Consequently, it is one of effective solutions to the problems that are investigated and examined in this paper.

Identification of the gaps in the research

The valuable information from eight research papers has provided good advice for all language teachers with the most suitable solutions that can be used in communication classrooms to attract the young learners’ attention to communicative tasks enthusiastically as well as to increase using English to speak in classroom significantly. The articles investigate the causes that create anxiety for language learners, explore effective strategies to help young learners overcome the difficulties that they have to face in learning a foreign language, examine and apply new teaching methods as motivational strategies in language teaching and learning in general and in teaching speaking skill in particular. However, there are some important issues affecting young learners’ enthusiastic engagement in communicative tasks in classroom that make the researcher of this paper think carefully. Firstly, it is the teaching materials. The researcher wonders that the speaking-teaching materials are interesting, authentic and suitable for language teaching and learning context in Vietnam in general as well as for students at vocational colleges in particular. Secondly, after reading eight research articles, the researcher of the paper raises a question that how to combine and apply appropriately and effectively motivational strategies and creative teaching methods in teaching speaking skill for young learners to get them involved in communicative activities in classroom. In fact, the theories of motivational strategies or teaching methods in teaching speaking skill which are introduced in the articles may familiar with all EFL teachers. However, how to use them effectively to bring enormous benefit for language learners to get the success learning outcome is a big problem for the researcher and all teachers in Vietnam. I would like to have examination and investigation on these questions to find out the answers in the future research.

Implications for language learning and teaching

Every teacher will have various teaching and learning environments. However, as a foreign language teacher with seven years of experience, I think that the most common purpose of all teachers is to create the most favorable conditions and opportunities for learners to use English to communicate effectively. Turner and Patrick (2004) said that "teachers do not choose students; therefore they must strive to motivate and educate students who differ every way" (p.1782). However, it is not easy for EFL teachers in general and English teachers at Petrovietnam Vocational College in particular to combine and apply effectively and correctly the motivational strategies that are recommended in the articles in language teaching and learning. Thanks to this, with this study, the researcher hopes that if it is successful in the future, it will be a beneficial resource of references for all teachers who teach foreign languages in language teaching and learning context in Vietnam. Especially, it will provide all English teachers at Petrovietnam Vocational College with valuable ideas which can improve the difficult problems of encouraging students in communicative tasks in classroom that they are facing and struggling to overcome day by day. Thus this study will help teachers find out the most suitable strategies to engage young learners in English speaking activities and enhance their communicative ability in classroom.

III. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the articles discussed and analyzed issues relating to motivational strategies that teachers should use to help young learners overcome foreign language speaking anxiety and engage them in participating in communicative activities in English classrooms. The articles that were conducted by Tanveer (2007) and Ayatollah and Ali (2010) investigated the factors causing anxiety in learning a foreign language. The article written by Tsiplakides and Keramida (2009) offered the teachers some strategies to help language learners feel confident themselves and increase students’ speaking ability. Miolo (2004) with her research explored the benefit of using pictures in teaching English-speaking classes to get students involved in oral activities in classroom. Liu (2010) carried out her study with the main aim at using role-play to encourage students’ speaking ability in classrooms. Aliakbari and Jamalvandi (2010) also investigated the effect of the activity of role play on increasing learners’ speaking ability. The research’s results of Khameis (2007) showed that there was a great effect of using interesting strategies such as songs, games, stories on students’ motivation to speak and participation in learning activities in class. Abdulla (2007) carried out the research into ways of enhancing young learners’ speaking skill by using pair work activities in English language classrooms. The information from the articles is useful and practical for all EFL teachers. However, to apply it effectively to get the considerable success in language teaching and learning context in Vietnam, especially in teaching English at

Petrovietnam Vocational College will be significant challenges for the researcher of the paper and all teachers. This is a reason why I am very enthusiastic to investigate this problem in my future research.

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