Difficulties in teaching English speaking skills to the tenth form students at Van Canh high school \ Những khó khăn trong việc dạy kĩ năng nói cho học sinh lớp 10 trường THPT Vân Canh. M.A Thesis Linguistics: / NguyễnThị Thúy

This minor thesis aimed at investigating the difficulties that students and English teachers at Van Canh High School have encountered in speaking lessons. The causes of those difficulties were also investigated in order to find the solutions to solve these problems.

The results showed that the participants have encountered many difficulties in English speaking lessons such as; lack of motivation, lack of time, anxiety or lack of confidence, lack of vocabularies, structures, lack of opportunities to use English in real life, low linguistic competence and low communicative competence, lack of facilities. The reasons for these difficulties were mostly come from the teachers; the students and the school context.

On the basis of the findings, some recommendations were made for the improvement of quality of teaching and learning English at Van Canh High School. The study is, thus, significant in helping Van Canh English teachers and students to deal with common problems they are facing.

PART A

INTRODUCTION

1. Rationale

One of the main tasks assigned to foreign language teaching at school is that of training students to be communicatively competent. Speaking is "the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, in a variety of contexts" (Chaney, 1998: 13). In any second language teaching and learning, speaking is always believed to be the most vital skill. Learning a target language makes no sense if you cannot communicate in it successfully. For many years, teaching speaking has been undervalued and English teachers have continued to teach speaking just as a repetition of drills or memorization of dialogues. However, with the rapid progress of globalization, English speaking skill is thought to be the key to one's success in his career. The goal of teaching speaking should improve students' communicative skills, because, only in that way, students can express themselves and learn how to follow the social and cultural rules appropriate in each communicative circumstance. Classroom activities that develop learners' ability to express themselves through speech would therefore seem an important component of a language course.

However, due to some objective and subjective reasons, teaching and learning English in general and teaching and learning speaking in particular does not come up to the study goals. A great deal of researches has shown that students are often hesitant and anxious about speaking the target language in class. Despite teachers' efforts to provide students with opportunities to develop their communicative skills, how to teach and learn speaking skills effectively is still a challenging question to both teachers and students to many high schools in Vietnam.

At Van Canh High School, the situation is the same. For most students, they find speaking especially important yet challenging one. What can we, as teachers, do to help

our learners overcome their problems and take advantage of opportunities to practice speaking?

For me, as a teacher, mastering methodology is very important. Especially, I am interested in teaching speaking skills. But how to conduct an effective speaking lesson is very difficult. Therefore, I hope that the study will help to facilitate my teaching.

All the above mentioned reasons have inspired the writer to conduct a research titled "Difficulties in teaching English speaking skills to the tenth form students at Van Canh High School."

2. Aims and significance of the study

This study is aimed at finding out the difficulties in teaching and learning English speaking skills that 10th form students and English teachers at Van Canh High School have encountered. Also it is expected to investigate the causes of those difficulties. Through this some solutions to solve these problems will be suggested.

The study is carried out with the hope to be of some help to improve the effectiveness of English learning and teaching at van Canh High School.

3. Scope of the study

The study only focuses on the difficulties that 10th form students and English teachers at Van Canh High school have encountered in speaking skills.

4. Research questions

(1). What are the difficulties encountered by the English teachers and the 10th form students in teaching and learning English speaking skills at Van Canh High School?

(2). What are the causes of those difficulties and how to solve them?

5. Research methods

In order to meet the aims of the study, quantitative method was used. Two survey questionnaires were used to collect data for the study.

- The first survey questionnaire was carried out on 107 tenth form students from 3 classes at Van Canh High School.

- The second one is carried out on 9 English teachers of Van Canh High School.

All comments, remarks, recommendations, assumptions and conclusions provided in the study based on the analysis of the statistics from the survey questionnaires conducted with the 10th form students and English teachers of Van Canh High School.

6. Design of study

This study consists of 3 parts:

Part A: Introduction presents the rationale, the aims, scope, the method and design of the study. The research questions are also mentioned in this part.

Part B: The study consists of 3 chapters:

Chapter 1: Literature Review reviews the theory about CLT and speaking skills.

Chapter 2: The study – The study setting is presented in this chapter. Data collection and analysis are also presented in this chapter

Chapter 3: Findings focuses on the difficulties facing the English teachers at Van Canh High School and their students in teaching English speaking skills.

Part C: Conclusion summarizes all the key issues of the study and suggests some techniques for the English teachers to teach speaking skills more effectively. The limitations of the study and some suggestions for further study are also mentioned in this part.

PART B

THE STUDY

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. Communicative approach to language teaching

1.1.1. What is meant by communication?

1.1.2. Communicative language teaching

1.1.2.1. Nature of communicative language teaching

1.1.2.2. The techniques of communicative language teaching

1.2. Overview of speaking activities

1.2.1. What is meant by speaking skills?

1.2.2. Theories of teaching speaking skills

1.2.2.1. Functions of spoken language

1.2.2.2. The role of speaking skills in communication approach

1.2.3. Characteristics of a successful speaking activity

1.2.4. Principles in teaching speaking in CLT

1.2.5. Problems with speaking activities

1.2.6. Factors affecting English speaking skills

1.2.6.1. Aptitude

1.2.6.2. Motivation

1.2.6.3. Learning strategies

1.2.6.4. Anxiety

CHAPTER 2: THE STUDY

2.1. Context of the study

2.1.1. An overview of the research site

Van Canh High School, which has been operated since 1985, is located in a mountainous district in Binh Dinh province, where there are no good opportunities for studying English. Therefore, the teaching of English in general, and the teaching speaking English in particular has encountered with a great deal of difficulties. There are only 958 students divided into 24 classes: 10 tenth-grade classes, 8 eleventh-grade classes and 6 twelve-grade classes. English is now a compulsory subject in Van Canh High School.

2.1.2. Description of the students at Van Canh High School

The majority of students are aged from fifteen to nineteen from poor farming families and some of them are ethnic minority. Most of them live very far from school. All of them have learnt English at secondary school for four years. Some of them had also learnt English at primary school. Comparing with the students in the past, now they are more aware of the importance of learning English, more intelligent, more active and more motivated in learning English. However, their speaking skills are not quite good. Only a few students wish to take university entrance exams in English, which means few students have real interest in learning English. In other words, not much attention is paid to English by the majority of the students. The learning of speaking is far worse. As the students grow older, they become more reluctant to speak the target language. To answer the teacher's questions, the students usually use Vietnamese when they do not know the words in English or when they wish to ask questions but cannot express themselves with confident in English. It means they do not try to use English as much as possible.

2.1.3. Description of the teachers at Van Canh High School

If students are the most important factor in the learning process, teachers are the most important factor in the teaching process. There are 9 teachers of English language aged from 24 to 38. All of them have obtained B.A and have been trained at Qui Nhon

University. They are energetic and willing to devote their time and energy to teaching. However, they are inexperienced and are not well-trained so they have to face with many difficulties.

2.1.4. Description of physical setting

In Van Canh High School, English teaching and learning activities are mostly carried out inside the classrooms which are designed for lecture lessons with the only classroom equipment such as: a blackboard, and desks. The only type of teaching aid that the English group has is some cassette recorders. In term of class size, the number of students in an English class is quite large, from 45 to 50. This large number causes a great deal of difficulties for the teaching and learning.

The materials for reference and self-study are not available for teachers and students. In the school library, there are only some English books but they are not really helpful for teachers and students. The problem is not very bad for the teachers since they can go out to find their own references but it is very difficult for the students to do so themselves.

In the field of language teaching, the computer network technology offers language teacher a significant advantage. However, at Van Canh High School, where I have been working as an English teacher, there is only one computer-furnished room for all subjects.

2.2. Methodology

2.2.1. Participants

In total, 107 tenth form students at Van Canh High School and 9 English teachers participated in this study. The students are chosen randomly from 3 classes of 10th form; consist of 63 female and 44 male students at the age from 16 to 17. All of them come from the rural areas. They have learnt English for at least 4 years. The teachers are aged from 24 to 38. All of them are B.A and none of them have been to English speaking countries. The youngest has been teaching for one year and the oldest has been teaching for 15 years.

2.2.2. Research instruments

In order to get the data for the study, the researcher used two questionnaires: one for the teachers and the other for the students. The students' questionnaire has twelve questions written in both languages English and Vietnamese in order to help the students avoid misunderstanding. The questionnaire for the teachers has thirteen questions. Some of them are multiple choice questions but some of them were designed to elicit the

participants' ideas. The main purpose of the questionnaires is used for exploiting teacher's and students' difficulties, their experience, and their attitude toward English speaking skills.

2.2.3. Data analysis

Data analysis is the process by which the researcher interprets the data collected from the survey questionnaires. They were analyzed quantitatively and presented in tables and charts.

2.3. Presentation of statistical results

2.3.1. Results and discussions from the questionnaires for the students

The data collected by means of questionnaire for the students at Van Canh High School are analyzed and discussed on the following categories:

● *Students' English background*

● *Students' motivation for learning English*

● *Students' attitudes towards learning English speaking skills*

● *Students' opinions on the speaking topics in the textbooks*

● *Frequency of students' speaking participation*

● *Opportunities to use English outside classroom*

● *Students' self-improvement of speaking skills*

● *Students' attitude towards the teachers' techniques of teaching speaking skills*

● *Students' difficulties in speaking lessons*

●*Factors affecting Van Canh students' participating in English classroom activities*

● *Students' expectation from the teachers*

2.3.2. Results and discussions from the questionnaires for the teachers

●*Teachers' attitude towards speaking skills*

● *Teachers' opinions on the speaking topics in the textbooks*

●*Teachers' techniques of teaching speaking skills*

●*Teachers' difficulties in teaching English speaking skills*

●*Teachers' solutions to the problems*

● *Teachers' suggestions to overcome the difficulties*

CHAPTER 3: FINDINGS

In the previous chapter, the teachers' and students' difficulties in teaching and learning English speaking skills at Van Canh High School and the causes of those difficulties were investigated. According to the data analysis of questionnaires for both teachers and students at Van Canh High School, we can see that both teachers and students are deeply aware of the importance of speaking skills. However, the results are not satisfied. It is because of many difficulties they have been encountered. The researcher generally grouped them into the following aspects:

- Difficulties from the students
- Difficulties from the teachers
- Other difficulties

3.1. Difficulties from the students

3.1.1. Lack of motivation

3.1.2. Anxiety or lack of confidence

3.1.3. Lack of vocabularies, structures

3.1.4. Lack of opportunities to use English in real life

3.1.5. Low linguistic competence and low communicative competence

3.1.6. Using mother tongue problem

3.1.7. Pronunciation problems

3.2. Difficulties from the teachers

3.3. Other difficulties

3.3.1. Large class size

3.3.2. Time constraint

3.3.3. Lack of reference materials

3.3.4. Lack of facilities

PART C

CONCLUSION

1. Summary of the study

Teaching speaking is a very important part of foreign language learning. The ability to communicate in a second language clearly and efficiently contributes to the success of the learner in school and success later in every phase of life. Therefore, it is essential that language teachers pay great attention to teaching speaking rather than leading students to pure memorization, providing a rich environment where meaningful communication takes place is desired. With this aim, various speaking activities such as those listed above can contribute a great deal to students in developing basic interactive skills necessary for life. These activities make students more active in the learning process and at the same time make their learning more meaningful and fun for them.

2. Suggestions

Within the scope of this study, the author does not have the ambition to find the solutions to all the problems. The researcher would like to put forwards some recommendations to reduce some problems that students and teachers in Van Canh High School have encountered in English speaking skills in order to improve the teaching and learning at Van Canh High school.

2.1. Motivate students to participate in the speaking skills lessons

Language learning is most effective when students' interest, motivation and attitudes are taken into consideration. Motivation and attitudes may not be obvious in a class. But interest, coming mainly from how the teacher conducts the class, focuses the students' attention or can mean that they put their heads on the desk and become passive.

2.1.1. Create a warm class atmosphere

An environment in which students feel comfortable and accepted is also one where all students feel that their participation is valued and that it is likely to lead to success. Be sure all the activities teachers arrange in the classroom should also be to encourage what

students can do instead of frustrating them by what they cannot do. Teacher should provide a relaxing environment so the students could be self-motivated to come up and speak before the whole class openly from their hearts. So there was real communication between teacher-students, students-students. They had individual and personal interests.

2.1.2. Vary the teaching techniques

A reason for students' silence may simply be that the class activities are boring or are pitched at the wrong level. As a result, they do quickly and then just sit in silence or worse talking noisily in their mother tongue. So maybe you need to take a closer look at the type of speaking activities you are using and see if they really capture students' interest and create a real need for communication. In a balanced activities approach, the teacher uses a variety of activities from these different categories of input and output. Learners at all proficiency levels, including beginners, benefit from this variety; it is more motivating, and it is also more likely to result in effective language learning.

2.1.3. Provide more interesting topics to motivate students' participation

Topics related to their own experiences made the class lively. The data collected from the questionnaires for the students and teachers at Van Canh High School showed that the majority of the participants agreed that the speaking topics in the textbook are interesting and suitable. But a minority of them said some of the topics are not related into real life and quite boring. In this case, the teacher can adapt the topics in the textbook to make them more suitable and more interesting or familiar to the students. Moreover, the teacher's questions should elicit new knowledge, new responses, and thoughtful efforts from students.

2.1.4. Encourage students to participate in the speaking activities

The teacher should have a prize at the end of the week for the student who has most consistently spoken English in class, or create a forfeit for the student who has most frequently spoken his or her native language. You can track with "penalty" jar. Every time a student tries to conduct an activity in a language other than English, they have to put a ticket in the jar. At the end of the week count up the tickets and the lowest score wins.

Another way to get students motivated to speak more is to allocate a percentage of their final grade to speaking skills and let the students know they are being assessed continually on their speaking practice in class throughout the term.

The ways of correcting the mistakes are also affected to students' motivation. It is advisable for the teachers to give students suitable ways of mistake correction. Try not to be angry with them when they made mistakes. Moreover, interrupting to correct during their speeches should be avoided. Giving positive feedback also helps to encourage and relax shy students to speak more. Self and peer correction are effective ways to encourage students to participate in the speaking activities.

2.1.5. *Equip teaching facilities*

Educators should be aware that the 21st century is a century of technology. Thus, advantages belong to those who can make use of technology. To improve the quality of teaching and learning English speaking skills, an adequate attention should be paid to the aspect of classroom facilities. As mentioned above, teachers should be aware of the fast development of technology and discover the latest application of CALL in their teaching contexts.

2.2. Help students to be confident

The teachers can help to reduce students' fears by maintaining a friendly atmosphere in the class and providing opportunities for students to practice alone or with one other student and then before increasingly larger groups. Thus, students can practice speaking in front of their peers who face the same situation. Students can practice presenting information, answering questions and holding group discussions.

Games can also be used to minimize students' fear. As students think it is only a game so they will participate in the speaking activities naturally. (See Appendix 3)

2.3. Help students overcome pronunciation problems

Speaking lessons often tie in pronunciation and grammar, which are necessary for effective oral communication, so that your students will need some preparation before the speaking tasks and do not correct students' pronunciation mistakes very often while they are speaking. Correction should not distract student from his or her speech.

2.4. Overcome time constraint problem

To deal with the problem of time constraint, teachers should reduce their talking time to save time for students to practice. Otherwise, the teachers should give the students the vocabularies that are needed in the practicing task. In doing this, teachers could both save time and help the students whose problem is about vocabulary lack. The teachers should

also adapt the speaking tasks to make sure the tasks are suitable for your students. (See the Appendix 3).

2.5. Improve students' linguistic competence

The student's speaking is usually slow and painful because they just did not hear enough English. They seem to be learning English with their eyes. They read textbooks. They study word lists. They watch the teachers write the grammar rules with examples on the blackboard. That is why most of them are able to read English, but cannot speak it. That is why they have great difficulties in understanding English when it is spoken to them. So the teachers should use English more often. If that, students must listen to English to understand English. In order to encourage your students to speak in English, simply you yourself should speak English as much as possible in class.

2.6. Overcome the using of mother tongue problem

If the language is pitched too high they may revert to their own language, likewise if the task is too easy they may get bored and revert to their own language. Also, be aware of the fact that some students especially beginners, will often use their mother tongue as an emotional support at first, translating everything word for word to check they have understood the task before attempting to speak. In the case of these students simply be patient as most likely once their confidence grows in using English their dependence on using their mother tongue will begin to disappear. Another way to discourage students speaking in their mother tongue is to walk around the classroom monitoring their participation and giving support and help to students as they need it. If they do not like working with certain students or there is some other problem, you can help them to solve.

2.7. Create opportunities for students to use English in real life

Students could be encouraged to attend parties, and/or join English speaking clubs, to allow for authentic language use. Because only they use the language in real life they will remember the language deeply and use it naturally. As there are not any chances for the students to practice the language in real life, so Van Canh High School teachers should consult the school head master to hold English speaking club every week or every month for students to have chance to practice and share the studying strategies. Ask the students to organize English speaking groups outside the classroom to exchange experience.

3. Limitations of the study

There is an obvious limitation that this length of time is not enough for the researcher to investigate all of the difficulties that the students and teachers at Van Canh High School are encountered.

4. Suggestions for further study

This research is limited on the difficulties that the students and teachers at Van Canh High School are facing in speaking lessons only. Some further researches should be taken as follows:

+ A study on the tips which help to successfully organize speaking activities in Van Canh High school.

+ A study on the effective techniques and activities to motivate Van Canh High School students to participate in speaking lessons.

+ How to develop Van Canh High School students speaking skills.

The author hopes that the further studies will overcome all the exist limitations of this study, and help to improve the quality of the teaching and learning English at Van Canh High School in order to meet the aim of teaching a foreign language today.