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Effects of Learning Strategies and Motivation on Enhancing Non-English Majors' English -Speaking Skills at University of Finance - Marketing

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Abstract

This study examines the importance of fluent and effective English-speaking skills, a key goal for many language learners seeking to engage in meaningful communication. The research focuses on students' perceptions of developing these skills through technology, based on focus group interviews with ten undergraduate students at UFM. The qualitative findings highlight various learning strategies employed by students to improve their English-speaking abilities, including creating recordings, making self-talk videos, watching American films, viewing YouTube content, and interacting with peers online. The analysis also identifies motivational factors and challenges influencing students' independent efforts to enhance their speaking proficiency.

Keywords: English speaking skills, learning strategies, motivation, self-study

1. Introduction

English plays a pivotal role in business, science, and society in today's globalized world. The rise of globalization, combined with the economic and cultural influence of English-speaking nations such as the United Kingdom and the United States, has established English as a primary language for international communication and heightened the aspiration to communicate effectively in English.

Furthermore, advancements in computer technology, particularly the Internet and the widespread use of social media, have provided enhanced tools and opportunities for learning English more efficiently. Consequently, using English to communicate with individuals from diverse countries, whether for professional or personal purposes, has become an increasingly common and essential aspect of global interaction.

In the classroom setting, English speaking skills have garnered significant attention as one of the core components of language learning. Achieving fluency in speaking is often considered the most sought-after ability, with many students demonstrating motivation to develop this skill through personalized techniques and strategies. This study aims to provide insights into students' perspectives on effective English-speaking skills and to enhance awareness among both teachers and students about the importance of learning strategies and instructional approaches. Specifically, the research seeks to examine the learning strategies commonly employed by UFM (University of Finance and Marketing located in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam) students to improve their English-speaking abilities, the factors that motivate them to achieve their goals, and the challenges they face in self-directed learning. The study also explores how students utilize technological tools—such as networks, social media platforms, applications, and computers—to support their efforts in mastering English speaking skills.

The findings of this study are valuable for students seeking to improve their English-speaking skills and for teachers aiming to gain deeper insights into the factors that motivate students to learn English and the challenges they encounter in developing speaking proficiency. These insights can help educators design strategies to foster students' autonomy and implement effective teaching methods that enhance learners' focus on achieving their language learning goals.

2. Theoretical Framework

Research on improving learners' speaking skills has primarily concentrated on three key areas: learning strategies, motivation

and factors influencing the development of speaking proficiency.

2.1 Language Learning Strategies (LLS)

In the context of language education, several definitions of LLS have been proposed by prominent scholars. Tarone (1983)^[17] described learning strategies as efforts to develop both linguistic and sociolinguistic competence in the target language, integrating these elements into one's interlanguage system. Rubin (1987)^[14] further characterized these strategies as tools that directly influence the learner's construction and development of their language system. Oxford (1993)^[10] defines LLS as specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques that students intentionally use to enhance their progress in developing second language (L2) skills. These strategies support the processes of internalizing, storing, retrieving, and using the new language effectively. Additionally, LLS serve as tools that enable self-directed learning, which is essential for building communicative competence.

Over time, the conceptualization of language learning strategies LLS has evolved significantly. Earlier definitions emphasized the outcomes, such as linguistic or sociolinguistic competence, whereas more recent perspectives place greater importance on the processes and specific characteristics of LLS. Additionally, LLS are now clearly distinguished from learning styles, which Reid (1995)^[13] defines as a learner's natural, habitual, and preferred ways of absorbing, processing, and retaining new information and skills. Despite this distinction, there is a clear connection between an individual's learning style and their preferred or typical use of language learning strategies.

LLS can be grouped into six primary categories: cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, memory-related strategies, compensatory strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies (Oxford, 2001)^[12]. Although the term "language learning strategies" is not always used consistently, Oxford (1996)^[11] identified several common characteristics widely accepted in the field. First, LLS are initiated by learners themselves as deliberate steps in the learning process. Second, they promote language learning and contribute to the development of language skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Third, LLS can be either observable, such as specific behaviors, techniques, or actions, or internal and unobservable, such as thoughts and mental processes. Lastly, these strategies involve managing information and memory, including knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, and other linguistic elements.

2.2 Relationship between language learning strategies and students' English proficiency

A primary objective of communicative language teaching approaches is to help learners develop communicative competence in the target language, and LLS play a key role in achieving this goal. Following the recognition by Canale and Swain (1980) of communication strategies as a significant component of strategic competence, considerable research has explored the role of communication strategies in language teaching.

It is important to distinguish between communication strategies and LLS. Bialystok (1990)^[2] explains that communication strategies are consciously and intentionally used by speakers to address challenges in communicating in

a foreign language. In contrast, LLS encompass a broader range of strategies employed by learners to facilitate language acquisition, with communication strategies representing just one subset of LLS.

Understanding LLS is essential for educators aiming to enhance their students' communicative competence and language learning skills. Oxford (1996)^[11] emphasizes that LLS serve as tools for active, self-directed engagement, which is critical for developing communicative competence. Moreover, research indicates that teaching students to use LLS can significantly improve their language learning outcomes. Skehan (1989)^[16] observes that while effective LLS are often used by successful learners, their presence alone does not guarantee success, as other factors may influence learning outcomes.

2.3 Factors facilitate the development of learners' speaking skills.

2.3.1 Learners' self-study

Effective communication requires specific skills that can only be developed through consistent practice. Hrochová (2012)^[7] argues that many of these procedural skills are difficult to cultivate solely through in-class instruction. Consequently, learners who take responsibility for their own learning are better positioned to practice and master the target language more effectively.

The literature highlights several approaches to fostering learner autonomy. Gardner and Miller (1999) identify these under terms such as self-directed learning, self-instruction, independent learning, and self-access learning. Although proponents of these approaches may emphasize their differences, Gardner and Miller note that they share more similarities than distinctions.

Learner autonomy has recently garnered significant attention in both theoretical and practical aspects of language education. Developing students' ability for self-directed learning is widely recognized as a crucial objective in language education. This competence provides a solid foundation for students to acquire knowledge and access necessary information throughout their future, whether after graduation or over their lifetime. Furthermore, fostering autonomy encourages learners to take greater responsibility for their own learning, which enhances motivation, drives achievement, and ultimately enables them to become independent learners.

Holec (1981)^[6] defines an autonomous learner as someone who takes full responsibility for their own learning. This involves managing the learning process in five main areas: setting objectives, determining content and progression, choosing suitable methods and techniques, monitoring the learning process, and evaluating the outcomes. Learners who can effectively take control of these aspects and complete this cycle are considered autonomous. Learner autonomy, therefore, focuses on the process by which learning is carried out, setting it apart from other approaches, such as e-learning, which emphasize different learning frameworks.

An autonomous learner is characterized by a range of attributes and skills, including self-awareness, curiosity, motivation, flexibility, confidence, and persistence (Benson, 2011)^[1]. Such a learner demonstrates independence from external assistance while also being capable of interdependence within the learning process.

Littlewood (1999)^[8] identifies two forms of autonomy: proactive and reactive. Proactive autonomy occurs when

learners actively engage in the learning process, taking responsibility for tasks such as setting objectives, choosing methods and techniques, and conducting evaluations. In contrast, reactive autonomy does not generate its own direction but allows learners to independently organize resources and actions to achieve a given goal once a direction has been established. The relationship between self-study time and academic achievement has been widely studied. Frederick and Wahlberg (1980)^[5] concluded in their review that time spent on learning is positively associated with achievement. However, they also noted that this relationship is influenced by factors such as the quality of instruction and the learner's ability.

Benson (2011)^[1] identifies six approaches to fostering learner autonomy: resource-based, technology-based, learner-based, teacher-based, classroom-based, and curriculum-based. Resource-based approaches focus on students' independent interaction with learning materials, allowing them to exercise control over their learning plans, select resources, and evaluate their progress. These approaches are closely tied to technology-based methods, as they often involve self-access centers equipped with modern tools, including Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC). Technology-based approaches emphasize the use of the Internet and other digital tools to enhance learning experiences.

Learner-based approaches prioritize behavioral and psychological shifts that empower students to take greater control of their learning, making them more effective learners. The goal is to encourage learners to reflect on their learning processes and materials through activities such as discussions about available resources and strategies. Classroom-based, curriculum-based, and teacher-based approaches center on creating collaborative and supportive environments where learners can make decisions about their own learning. These approaches enable learners to actively participate in shaping their educational experiences (Benson, 2011)^[1].

Among these methods, technology-based approaches appear particularly promising. One reason is the rapid advancement of digital technologies, which are poised to transform language education. Additionally, the integration of technology has become a requirement in many educational systems, with language instruction often leading these innovations. Most importantly, technology aligns with learners' everyday experiences, as tools like computers and the Internet are integral to their lives. By guiding students to use these technologies effectively, educators can not only foster greater learner autonomy but also enhance the overall efficiency of the language learning process.

2.3.2 Motivation

An important factor to consider in fostering learner autonomy is the underlying incentive that drives a learner to consistently engage in the processes required for success. This incentive is motivation, which plays a critical role in learning English. Motivation refers to the internal and external factors that initiate, guide, and sustain goal-oriented behavior. It encompasses the interaction of conscious and unconscious influences that maintain an individual's interest and commitment to a task or activity.

Learners with intrinsic motivation engage in activities for the inherent satisfaction, interest, or enjoyment they provide. In

contrast, extrinsically motivated learners participate for external rewards or practical benefits, such as passing an exam. Ryan and Deci (2000)^[15] identify four types of motivation: extrinsic, intrinsic, social, and achievement motivation.

Willingness to learn is also an essential component, as learners must be motivated to take responsibility for their learning. Dam (1995)^[4] emphasizes that autonomy requires not only ability but also the learner's willingness to engage in the process. Learner autonomy has been theorized from several perspectives. From a technical standpoint, it involves the skills required to control learning and achieve goals. Psychologically, it relies on characteristics such as motivation. Politically, it involves the learner's control over decisions, and from a socio-cultural perspective, it includes the ability to learn from interactions with knowledgeable others.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

The participants of this study were ten UFM students enrolled in the English 2 course within the Advanced Programme, comprising five males and five females. They were first- and second-year students aged 19 to 20, representing a variety of academic majors. All participants exhibited strong English-speaking skills and confidence in classroom communication. Two main reasons guided the selection of these participants. Firstly, their inclusion offered convenience for data collection, as they were all enrolled in the same English 2 course taught by the researcher. Secondly, their English-speaking proficiency was a key factor, as the researcher had observed their strong speaking abilities and excellent performance in class throughout the teaching process.

3.2 Data collection and analysis

Data collection was conducted using a semi-structured interview guide, which is a framework of questions or topics designed to be explored by the interviewer. The interview guide included central questions as well as additional related questions to ensure comprehensive exploration of the subject (Morgan, 2002)^[9]. Group discussions were held with the invited student participants in a classroom setting, prioritizing topics that aligned with their interests. Group discussions, like other research methods, have their advantages and limitations; they allow participants to express their opinions openly and confidently through informal conversation. (The questions were included in Appendix) The interviews were conducted in English, and participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. The purpose of the research was explained to them, and permission was requested to record the interviews. Audio recording was preferred over handwritten notes, as the latter could lead to missed key points and less reliable data. Recording enabled the researcher to focus on the content of the interview and verbal prompts during the discussion, facilitating the creation of a "verbatim transcript" for analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008)^[3].

The recordings were systematically reviewed and compared to identify patterns relevant to the research questions. For analysis, the ten participants were coded from S1 to S10, with the male students coded as S1–S5 and the female students as S6–S10.

4. Results and Discussion

The analysis of the interview transcripts identified four key themes aligned with the objectives of the research.

4.1 Strategies students use to improve their English-speaking skills.

The data analysis revealed the significant role of practice in developing English speaking skills, encapsulated in the concept of "practice makes perfect." Most participants emphasized the importance of actively seeking opportunities to practice speaking with friends, classmates, relatives, teachers, and native speakers. One female participant (S6) stated, "...practicing speaking a lot is the best way to improve English speaking ability, so I spend time speaking English with my classmates, my teachers, and sometimes native speakers whenever I have opportunities."

Another commonly mentioned strategy was speaking alone in front of a mirror, which was utilized by several participants (S3, S5, and S10). For instance, one participant (S10) shared that her former English teacher had encouraged her to practice speaking alone in front of a mirror. Initially, she found this method amusing and described feeling "like a crazy girl" at times. However, she noted that it allowed her to practice without feeling shy and contributed to improving her speaking skills.

Listening to English music, radios, and watching Hollywood movies or YouTube videos also emerged as critical strategies. All participants agreed that these activities significantly enhanced their speaking abilities. They reported regularly engaging with English songs and American movies to improve pronunciation, vocabulary, and overall speaking proficiency.

The participants widely acknowledged the importance of listening to and watching English programs as effective strategies for improving speaking skills. Several students shared their experiences and insights on the topic. For example, one participant (S1) mentioned, "I often listen to English songs and watch American movies." Another (S9) explained, "I often listen to BBC news and watch Hollywood movies. Although I couldn't understand everything at first, I tried listening daily, and now I can comprehend about 70% of the content. Other participants emphasized the value of these practices for gaining experience in speaking English. One student (S4) noted, "I think experiences of speaking good English include listening to and watching English news on the radio and TV." Another (S2) highlighted the benefits of foreign movies, particularly American ones, stating, "If we watch foreign movies, especially American, we can improve our speaking by learning how they use slang and speak English naturally."

Watching YouTube videos was also mentioned as a valuable tool. One participant (S3) remarked, "I think listening to and watching English programs, especially YouTube videos, are very important not only for speaking but also for gaining knowledge." Participants S6 and S8 agreed, with S8 adding, "It is undeniably true that to speak well, you should listen well." Additionally, S2 emphasized the importance of practicing speaking without fear of mistakes, saying, "I take chances to speak as much as possible without caring about mistakes. I speak when I hear something interesting from movies." These perspectives underscore the role of active listening and watching in developing natural and confident English-speaking skills.

Several participants highlighted the importance of taking

risks as a key strategy to overcome barriers to expressing ideas in English. One participant (S6) shared her initial hesitation and fear of making mistakes, which prevented her from speaking in her English class. This fear of being laughed at kept her silent, hindering any progress in her speaking skills. Eventually, she decided to take risks by speaking English with her classmates and others, using the knowledge she had gained in class. Similarly, another participant (S1) described risk-taking as an effective method for improving speaking skills and encouraged students to take risks and speak English with confidence. Participant S5 supported this view, noting, "I always try to speak English. I do not worry too much about mistakes, especially with grammar and pronunciation."

In addition to risk-taking, participants emphasized the importance of reading and imitation as supportive strategies for improving speaking skills. One participant (S2) suggested that reading can help generate ideas for speaking, explaining, "Reading books also improves your speaking. When you read, you get ideas to speak. In the past, I couldn't speak English because I didn't know what to say." Another participant (S4) stressed the role of imitation, learning correct pronunciation by listening to native speakers in films and songs. Similarly, S6 highlighted that reading helped her build a strong vocabulary, enabling her to express ideas more effectively when speaking. These perspectives underscore the value of integrating risk-taking with activities such as reading and imitation to enhance English speaking proficiency.

The data revealed that chatting with friends online through technology tools such as Skype, Viber, Zalo, Telegram, or Facebook Messenger is another significant strategy for improving speaking skills. One participant (S9) shared, "One strategy to improve speaking is chatting. I make friends with foreigners from India and Malaysia using Paltalk and chat with them on the internet every day." Similarly, S6 supported this view, noting that she used Skype to communicate with her international friends from countries such as Indonesia, Singapore, and the United States. She further explained that chatting not only improved her speaking skills but also helped her recognize differences in accents. She remarked, "Asian accents are different from American accents and British ones."

In summary, social media tools, particularly Facebook Messenger, were widely utilized as effective platforms for communication and enhancing speaking skills.

4.2 Motivation played a crucial role in improving speaking skills

The data analysis revealed that most participants in the study identified extrinsic factors as key drivers in generating and maintaining their motivation to improve their speaking skills. The extrinsic motivating factors mentioned, ranked by frequency, included the following:

1. Future job opportunities
2. Test and exam scores
3. Admiration from teachers, relatives, and friends
4. Scholarships
5. Communication abilities
6. Understanding English songs and movies
7. Traveling or living abroad
8. Building friendships with proficient English speakers

In contrast, intrinsic motivation was mentioned by only one participant (S6), who stated, "I like learning English and

improving my speaking skills by reading and watching movies because it enables me to understand native speakers and their culture". This highlights the dominance of external motivators among the participants, while intrinsic motivation played a role for only a small minority.

In addition to the previously mentioned factors, participants highlighted several additional strategies for maintaining motivation in improving their speaking skills. Two participants (S6 and S9) emphasized the importance of positive thinking and commitment, explaining that believing in their speaking abilities and staying committed to their goals helped them remain motivated.

Teachers and class activities were also identified as significant contributors to the development of students' speaking skills. Participants noted that the interaction between teachers and students, particularly encouragement from teachers, played a vital role in enhancing their speaking abilities. They suggested that teachers should enforce an "English only" policy in the classroom and discourage the use of Vietnamese by setting clear rules and implementing consequences for speaking in the native language.

Regarding classroom activities, participants found that group work, pair work, presentations, role plays, group discussions, and debates were particularly effective in fostering speaking skill development. These activities provided opportunities for practice and engagement, which were crucial for improving their English-speaking competence.

4.3. Self-study contributes to speaking skill improvement.

The data revealed that motivation plays a significant role in shaping students' determination for self-study. Some students emphasized participating in learning activities driven by intrinsic motivation, such as pure interest, enjoyment, and satisfaction. In contrast, others were extrinsically motivated by practical goals, such as achieving high scores in exams. For instance, one participant (S2) noted, "I try to practice speaking with foreign friends on social media to get a high score in oral examinations," while another (S6) stated, "I watch movies and listen to English music to build vocabulary and pass tests."

Autonomous learning was also identified as an essential aspect of their educational journey for several reasons. First, students recognized that autonomy helps them become more effective and independent learners (S4, S6, S7, S9). Second, they pointed out that the time allocated for speaking activities in class is insufficient, which motivates them to utilize multimedia resources outside the classroom to practice independently. Lastly, they acknowledged self-study as a critical and necessary skill for university students aiming to achieve intrinsic motivation and long-term academic success.

4.4. Difficulties to pursue the goals of speaking skill development.

The findings revealed that participants encountered various challenges in engaging in English conversations and improving their speaking skills. The most commonly reported difficulties were related to vocabulary and pronunciation, followed by issues with grammar, interference from their first language (L1) when speaking in their second language (L2), speaking anxiety, slow thinking processes, lack of ideas, and discouragement from peers and others.

Eight participants specifically highlighted vocabulary as a significant challenge, particularly in choosing the correct words to express their ideas. For example, one participant

(S1) stated, "My serious problem is word choice... I'm looking for suitable words that my mind really wants to say, but I cannot remember any words." Similarly, another participant (S7) remarked, "Though I have ideas in Vietnamese, it's hard to express them in English because of the words."

Pronunciation difficulties were another major concern, as many students found certain English sounds challenging to articulate. One participant (S8) noted, "To me, the difficulty in speaking is some sounds in English. I cannot pronounce them appropriately, and it's hard for me to twist my tongue to be native-like."

Other reported challenges included grammatical errors, the influence of L1 on L2, nervousness while speaking, and discouragement from peers. For instance, one student (S3) shared, "When I try to speak English with my friends, they laugh at me because I say something wrong in grammar. They discourage me, and I feel too nervous." Another participant (S2) added, "Speaking when I'm nervous is very difficult for me to overcome." L1 interference also created obstacles, as noted by S7: "I often think about what I want to say in Vietnamese first, and then I translate it into English in my mind before expressing it."

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

These challenges underline the complexity of developing English speaking skills and highlight areas where additional support and targeted strategies are needed. This study explored the language learning strategies employed by students at UFM and examined the role of motivation in shaping these strategies. The findings offer several practical implications for both learners and teachers.

For students, it is crucial to develop the ability to use a diverse range of language learning strategies and to apply them flexibly based on their learning needs. Many students rely on limited and rigid strategies, which may hinder their progress. Therefore, reflecting on their learning process and regularly evaluating the effectiveness of their chosen strategies in improving language proficiency is essential.

For teachers, integrating language learning strategy training into classroom instruction is equally important. Teachers should explain the benefits and effectiveness of various strategies, helping students understand how to apply them appropriately. With guidance and knowledge of how to select and implement effective strategies, all students have the potential to become successful learners and achieve their language learning goals.

The second implication emphasizes that the application of language learning strategies should be approached as a long-term instructional process. There is no immediate correlation between the use of learning strategies and an improvement in speaking competence over a short period. Achieving proficiency in speaking requires consistent effort from students and patient, sustained instruction from teachers. Teachers must guide students in the use of learning strategies over time, while students need to continuously apply these strategies to see meaningful progress.

Moreover, enhancing students' motivation to improve their English-speaking competence is crucial. Teachers can foster motivation by providing practical tasks and reinforcing the use of learning strategies, such as encouraging collaboration with classmates and instructors. These activities can strengthen students' determination and effort to master speaking skills.

Students should also be encouraged to apply learning strategies beyond the classroom, integrating them into real-life contexts. To further stimulate motivation, learners can be advised to seek opportunities for conversations with native speakers and rewarded for successful performances in speaking activities. These approaches help create an engaging and supportive environment, fostering both motivation and the development of English-speaking competence.

Motivation plays a crucial role in explaining why learners engage in language learning, with different types offering various perspectives. Extrinsic motivation refers to external factors, such as learning English to earn a reward, obtain a degree, or avoid punishment for not learning. Intrinsic motivation arises from an internal interest, where the learner finds joy and satisfaction in the learning process itself. Social motivation focuses on pleasing important people in the learner's life, such as family or friends. Achievement motivation emphasizes the desire to compete and excel compared to others.

To ensure sustained progress in learning a foreign language, particularly as the initial excitement or curiosity fades, it is essential for students to maintain strong motivation, regardless of its type. Teachers can help by fostering an understanding of the importance of motivation and guiding students to cultivate it, while students themselves must take steps to self-educate and reinforce their own motivational drive.

Motivation strength depends on factors such as the intensity of the learner's desire or need, the value of the goal, and their personal expectations. Once students recognize the critical importance of mastering English in today's rapidly globalizing world, maintaining strong motivation becomes achievable, even in the face of subjective and objective challenges that may arise during the learning process.

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Appendix

The following are key questions to interview the students.

1. What specific strategies do you use to enhance your English-speaking skills? Do you find technology-based methods more effective than traditional ones? Why?
2. Can you share some examples of how you use technology (e.g., apps, social media, or online platforms) to practice speaking English?
3. Which strategies recommended by your teachers have been most helpful in improving your speaking skills? Are there any strategies you found challenging to implement?
4. What types of activities (e.g., group discussions, role-plays, or presentations) in class have been most beneficial for your speaking skill development?
5. What motivates you most to improve your English-speaking skills (e.g., career goals, personal interest, or social reasons)?
6. How do you maintain motivation when progress feels slow or when you encounter obstacles?
7. What challenges do you face while practicing English speaking independently, and how do you overcome them?
8. How do you evaluate your progress in speaking skills? Do you track improvements through tests, feedback, or self-assessment?
9. In your opinion, what specific actions can teachers take to better support students in developing their English-speaking skills?
10. Outside of the classroom, what opportunities or activities (e.g., speaking with native speakers, joining clubs) have helped you practice and improve your English-speaking ability?