

GROUP-WORK ACTIVITIES FOR NON-ENGLISH MAJORED STUDENTS TO PROMOTE SPEAKING SKILLS IN EFL CLASSROOMS AT DONG NAI TECHNOLOGY UNIVERSITY

Trịnh Vũ Thanh Tuyền⁽¹⁾, Lê Thị Hồng Tuyền⁽¹⁾
Nguyễn Anh Thu⁽¹⁾, Trần Nhật Trường⁽¹⁾

(1) Dong Nai Technology University

Corresponding author: trinhvuthanhtuyen@dmu.edu.vn

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Abstract

English language proficiency is crucial for academic and professional success, with effective communication skills playing a pivotal role. Collaborative teaching methods, particularly group work, can significantly enhance students' creativity, evaluation, synthesis, analysis, and comparison, as well as problem-solving, essential for developing collaborative abilities. Furthermore, non-English major students often struggle to develop their speaking skills due to limited practice opportunities. This study addresses this challenge by implementing group-work activities in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. A mixed-methods approach was used to gather data including quantitative data collected through a questionnaire administered to 71 non-major students at Dong Nai Technology University and qualitative data came from semi-structured interviews. The results showed that group work significantly improved students' fluency, coherence, and confidence. Students reported increased motivation and engagement in speaking activities. These findings suggest that group-work activities effectively enhance speaking skills for non-English major students.

Keywords: collaborative abilities, EFL classroom, group-work activities, non-English students, speaking skills, teaching in groups

1. Introduction

Language is crucial to the communication between people. To communicate with people across the globe, we now utilize the English language greatly. Today, the integration of languages is considered to be an emergency. The significance of English in the economy of a country is increasing, as more evidence shows that it is the language that is most frequently used for business and communication across the globe (Mahboob, 2011). As the capacity to speak English fluently becomes more important in the context of education and globalization, it's important to give students from different fields the ability to communicate effectively.

According to Aydoğan and Akbarov (2014), English comprises four primary skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Additionally, it encompasses vocabulary and pronunciation skills. Among these, speaking is particularly crucial, as it serves as an effective means of communication. However, mastering this skill poses significant challenges for learners. Many students struggle to articulate their thoughts in English and often feel shy about communicating in the language, despite years of continuous study (Woodrow, 2006). Researchers like Khamkhien (2010) and Martine (2003) have conducted preliminary assessments on the effectiveness of group activities in teaching speaking skills. While their studies address the level and frequency of participation, they do not thoroughly

examine the factors influencing these activities. This study examines the effectiveness of integrating group work activities to improve the English-speaking skills of non-English major students at Dong Nai Technology University (DNTU). This study contributes to the development of an appropriate framework that can adapt to the special educational environment of DNTU. Group-work activities are extremely suitable for students' characteristics. The researcher hopes that teachers should organize more and more group-work activities for students so that they have more opportunities to improve their English skills in general and speaking skills in particular. By addressing the specific needs of non-English majors, the study seeks to create a supportive and inclusive learning environment that enables students to excel in English communication in broader contexts about their future educational and career endeavors. The results of this study can inform pedagogical practice and guide curriculum improvements to meet the growing demands of English education at the university level.

2. Literature review

2.1. Definition of speaking

According to Nunan (2003), speaking is a “productive oral skill” that consists of “producing systematic verbal utterances to convey meaning,” and it can be “directly and empirically observed” (Brown, 2001). In other words, speaking is the employment of language in communication. Baker & Westrup (2003), on the other hand, define speaking as using language for real communicative purposes.

Speaking is arguably the most challenging skill for language learners. Many students express frustration that, despite years of studying English, they still struggle to speak it clearly and understandably (Bueno, Madrid, & McLaren, 2006). Addressing this challenge requires a focused effort to develop speaking skills through consistent practice and supportive teaching methods.

Harmer (2007) highlights that human communication is a complex process involving both speaking and listening. Effective communication requires speakers to convey information and achieve their communicative goals, making simultaneous listening and speaking essential.

To develop speaking skills, learners need ample practice through listening and repetition. Teachers can help by providing structures and encouraging repetition, which can reduce shyness. Using short questions and dialogues in the classroom can further enhance students' speaking abilities (Bashir, Azeem, & Dogar, 2011).

2.2. Assessing speaking skills

Burns (1998) divides approaches to teaching speaking into two main categories, namely “direct/controlled” and “indirect/transfer.” “Direct/controlled” approaches focus on “structural accuracy” and “language forms,” whereas “indirect/transfer” approaches emphasize language “fluency” and “functional language use.” However, Burns (1998) points out that both these two types of approaches are basically “dichotomous” as they separate speaking from “authentic interactions” with the focus only on learning “language form” (in the former category) or “language use” (in the latter category). As a result, Goh & Burns (2012) developed a holistic approach to teaching speaking to minimize these limitations. This holistic approach will be the normal procedure of teaching speaking in the researcher’s class. There are seven stages in this approach: focus learners’ attention on speaking, provide input and/or guide planning, conduct speaking tasks, focus on language/discourse/skills/strategies, repeat speaking tasks, direct learners’ reflection on learning, and facilitate feedback on learning. Brown & Lee (2015) list six criteria when assessing students’ speaking skills which are pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, grammar, discourse features, and task (or task achievement). On the other hand, Goh & Burns (2012) refer to the speaking marking criteria of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). There are four criteria for speaking assessment scales, namely grammar and vocabulary, discourse management, pronunciation, and interactive communication. Furthermore, traditionally, students’ speaking performance is assessed manually by the teachers or examiners. However, with the advent of technology, some artificial intelligence-implemented applications and websites have also been employed to assess students’ speaking skills; some of which are Chivox, Smalltalk2.me, and Lingt.2.1.

2.3. Group-work learning

Martine (2003) stated that, “A group is a community of people united together based on one or more common signs related to their common performance and communication.” Group-work has been extensively studied and defined in various research papers. Additionally, Ibnian (2012) highlights that group work is a motivating method that develops communication and encourages active learning in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. This teaching technique aims to enhance students' speaking abilities. Many studies have been carried out to illustrate the positive effects of using group-work in an EFL setting. Likewise, Phan (2018) claimed that group-work activities give learners more chances to speak the target language and help them learn from other group members. Moreover, using small group discussion tactics builds up students' oral competence and enhances students' participation. Students can learn new skills while working in a group since each group has members with different skills and abilities, especially communication skills.

2.4. Definition of group-work activities

In broad terms, group-work comprises any learning tasks or activities that require students to work in pairs or groups/teams of three or more members. Concerning the procedure, the 5D model should be applied: Direct (the teacher directs students on how to go about the group work), Discuss (students discuss among themselves), Develop (students develop the content for presentation), Deliver (students deliver the Hung & Mai, *International Journal of Instruction*, April 2020), and Document of the teacher documents the feedback (John, 2017). Alfares (2017) states that group-work benefits language learners in the learning process from cognitive, emotional, and motivational aspects. Group-work activities are helpful for students because of their independence thanks to the encouragement from learners to learners. What is more, Taqi and AlNouh (2014) consider that students did not have any improvement based on group work, and also John's study (2017) finds that the use of group work was accepted well by Class A but not by Class B in speaking skills.

As a consequence, rather than just watching and letting students work by themselves during group activities, teachers (Brown, 2001) should monitor students' progress by moving around the classroom, pausing briefly beside each pair/group, listening to them, and noting any language error or communication problems to facilitate their practice as well as help them manage disagreements. Additionally, it is useful for teachers to use a small notebook or a piece of paper on which he or she can jot down any common mistakes. Some of them can be corrected immediately but some common problems should be reminded for the whole class after finishing the activity. Rospinah, Ampa, and Nappu (2021) conclude in their study that most students participate in group work because it helps them improve their fluency and accuracy when speaking.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Survey purpose

As Mulasari (2015) asserts, speaking encompasses the deployment of acquired language by a speaker to generate a message through oral expression in interpersonal discussions. Overall, based on the aforementioned explanations, one can conceptualize speaking as the act of articulating opinions, perspectives, and emotions to others through verbal or expressive means to inform, persuade, clarify, and convey knowledge, which can be acquired through various pedagogical approaches. In essence, this research holds implications for language instructors and non-language major students enrolled in EFL classrooms, particularly in the realm of speaking instruction and acquisition.

3.2. Research site and sample

The research site was conducted at Dong Nai Technology University where there are thousands of students majoring in different fields and the majority of them come from EFL classes. The respondents of the study were 71 second-year students. These students comprised of 33 male and 38 female students aged around 19 or above.

3.3. Methodology

This study employs a mixed-method approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods. Creswell (2012) suggests that a mixed-methods study enhances the understanding of research challenges. By using this approach, researchers can more accurately assess the effectiveness of group work activities in promoting speaking skills in EFL classrooms.

The aim is to offer a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the research questions.

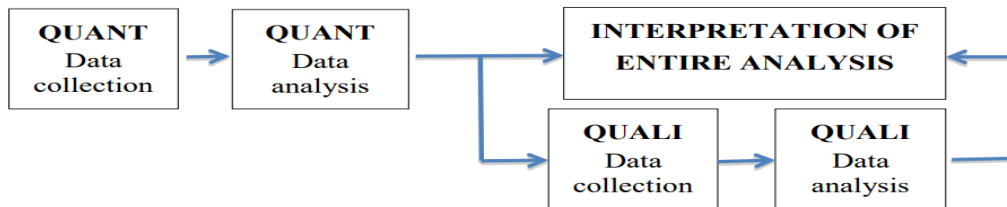


Figure 1. The sequential of research design

4. Results and Discussions

4.1. *Research question 1:* The extent of non-English major students’ use towards group-work activities to promote speaking skills in EFL classes at Dong Nai University of Technology.

4.1.1. *Results from the student questionnaire*

TABLE 4.1. The extent of using group-work activities to promote speaking skills of non-English-major students.

	Statement	Responses	N	Marginal%
1	Using group-work activities in EFL class enhanced my English speaking skills in my speaking classes	SDA	2	2.9%
		DA	0	0%
		N	9	12.7%
		A	44	62%
		SA	16	22.5%
2	Using group-work activities can improve speaking skills compared to other learning activities in EFL classes.	SDA	22	2.8%
		DA	0	0%
		N	11	15.5%
		A	42	59.2%
		SA	16	22.5%
3	Using group-work activities positively affected your vocabulary and grammar usage in spoken English	SDA	2	2.8%
		DA	0	0%
		N	11	25.4%
		A	40	56.3%
		SA	18	15.5%
4	Using group-work activities effectively encourages me to speak English in English language learning.	SDA	2	2.8%
		DA	3	4.2%
		N	16	22.5%
		A	38	53.5%
		SA	12	18.9%
10	Participating in group-work activities aids in enhancing my English pronunciation and intonation.	SDA	1	1.4%
		DA	0	0%
		N	13	18.3%
		A	41	57.7%
		SA	16	22.5%

The statistical results in Table 4.1 show that most of the students supported the use group-work activities in EFL class. First, a significant majority (84.7%) of respondents perceive group-work activities as beneficial for enhancing their English speaking skills. Among them, 62% strongly agree (SA), while 22.5% somewhat agree (A). Only a small percentage (2.9%) disagreed to some extent (SDA), and none disagreed at all (DA).

The high agreement rates suggest that implementing group-work activities effectively promotes speaking skills among non-English-major students. This suggests a general consensus among students regarding the effectiveness of group-work activities in this context.

The next idea is that using group-work activities can improve speaking skills compared to other learning activities in EFL classes. In the table above, it was proved that there were (59.2%) agree and (22.5%) strongly agree that group-work activities are more beneficial for improving speaking skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes. Only a small percentage (15.5%) was neutral on the matter, while none disagreed.

This high level of agreement could indicate that participants value the interactive and communicative nature of group work in language learning environments, where they have opportunities for real-life conversation practice and peer feedback. However, it's also essential to consider potential limitations or challenges associated with group work, such as imbalanced participation, differing language proficiency levels among group members, or cultural differences affecting communication dynamics.

Besides the idea above, it was seen that most of the participants (56.3%) agree or (15.5%) strongly agree that group-work activities positively impacted their vocabulary and grammar usage in spoken English. However, a notable percentage (25.4%) remain neutral and (2.8%) strongly disagree with this statement, indicating a degree of uncertainty or variability in individual experiences.

Concerning using group-work activities effectively encouraging me to speak English in English language learning, about (53.5%) of the participants agree and (16.9%) strongly agree that group-work activities effectively encourage them to speak in English. However, there is a notable percentage (22.5%) who remain neutral on this statement, with only a small minority (7%) indicating (4.2%) disagree and (2.8%) strong disagreement.

The last idea concerning preference, the data shows that a significant majority of respondents (80.2%) agree or strongly agree that participating in group-work activities aids in enhancing their English pronunciation and intonation. Specifically, 57.7% agree (A) and 22.5% strongly agree (SA) with this statement. Interestingly, there are no respondents who disagree with this statement (DA), indicating a strong consensus among the surveyed individuals. However, a portion of respondents (18.3%) remains neutral (N) on the matter, suggesting a need for further investigation into the effectiveness or experiences related to pronunciation and intonation improvement through group-work activities.

The overall responses indicate a strong positive impact of group-work activities on the speaking skills of non-English-major students. In a word, based on the table above, the percentage of the extent of students using group-work activities in classes is approximately 82% (agree) for enhancing speaking skills. A substantial majority of students recognize the enhancement of their speaking skills through group-work activities. Group-work activities are preferred over other learning activities for improving speaking skills. These activities support improvements in vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and intonation. Therefore, with the surveyed percentage, the extent of using group-work activities to the extent of speaking skills of students both inside and outside class is acceptable and has a positive sign.

TABLE 4.2. Students' evaluation of the effectiveness of the use of group-work activities in the classroom

The group-work activity I find most effective in improving my speaking skills is:	N	Marginal (%)
Role-play	14	19.7%
Debate	11	15.5%
Jigsaw activity	7	9.9%
Problem-solving task	17	23.9%
Discuss circle	11	15.5%
Brainstorming sessions	7	9.9%
Project-based learning	4	5.6%

First, Role-playing emerges as a highly favored activity, garnering 19.7% (14) participation. Its popularity suggests its effectiveness in engaging students and facilitating learning. Role-play enables students to immerse themselves in various scenarios, fostering empathy and understanding by

experiencing different perspectives firsthand. Debates, selected by 15.5% (11) of participants, offer an avenue for students to hone critical thinking and public speaking skills. The active engagement required in debates encourages students to research and articulate their arguments effectively. Moreover, debates facilitate the exploration of diverse viewpoints on complex topics, promoting a deeper understanding of issues and enhancing students' ability to engage in constructive dialogue.

With the lowest participation rate at 9.9% (7), the jigsaw activity indicates potential underutilization or unfamiliarity among participants. However, its benefits in promoting collaborative learning and ensuring equitable participation are well-documented. By dividing tasks among group members and fostering mutual dependence, the jigsaw method cultivates teamwork and peer teaching, contributing to a supportive and inclusive learning environment.

The highest participation rate of 23.9% (17) underscores the value placed on problem-solving tasks. These tasks are instrumental in developing analytical and critical thinking skills essential for navigating real-world challenges. By presenting students with authentic problems to solve, educators facilitate the application of theoretical knowledge in practical contexts, fostering independence and resilience in learners.

Both discussion circles and brainstorming sessions, each selected by 15.5% (7) of participants, play crucial roles in facilitating open communication and idea generation. Discussion circles provide a structured platform for students to express their thoughts and engage in respectful discourse. Similarly, brainstorming sessions stimulate creativity and innovation by encouraging the exploration of unconventional ideas without fear of judgment, fostering a culture of collaboration and exploration.

Project-based learning, selected by 5.6% (4) of participants, deserves attention for its potential to foster deeper learning experiences. While its participation rate is relatively low, project-based learning offers opportunities for students to apply knowledge and skills in real-world contexts, promoting autonomy, collaboration, and problem-solving. By engaging in hands-on projects, students develop a deeper understanding of content and gain valuable skills relevant to future endeavors.

The analysis reveals a diverse array of educational activities, each with its unique benefits and challenges. While certain activities such as role-play and problem-solving tasks enjoy widespread popularity, others like the jigsaw activity and project-based learning may require further exploration and integration into educational practices.

The motivation for using group-work activities to promote speaking skills in EFL classes:

TABLE 4.3. The motivation for using group-work activities to promote speaking skills in EFL classes.

5	I feel more confident in my English speaking abilities after participating in the group-work activities.	SDA	1	1.4%
		DA	3	4.2%
		N	23	32.4%
		A	27	38%
		SA	17	23.9%
6	The group-work activities provide opportunities for me to practice speaking English with my peers.	SDA	2	2.8%
		DA	0	0%
		N	22	31%
		A	39	54.9%
		SA	8	11.3%
7	I find it easy to collaborate with my peers during the group-work activities.	SDA	4	5.6%
		DA	1	1.4%
		N	16	22.5%
		A	30	42.3%
		SA	20	28.2%
8	The group-work activities motivate me to actively participate in class discussions.	SDA	4	5.6%
		DA	3	4.2%
		N	22	31%
		A	33	46.5%
		SA	9	12.7%

9	During group-work activities, we can enhance our English-speaking ability by pointing out and correcting each other mistakes.	SDA	1	1.4%
		DA	2	2.8%
		N	12	16.9%
		A	41	57.7%
		SA	15	21.1%

First, the student's motivation towards using English speaking abilities after participating in group-work activities for learning purposes confidently was 23.9% strongly agree and 38% agree, indicating a substantial positive impact on confidence levels. However, it's worth noting that 32.4% of respondents remain neutral on this statement, suggesting that group-work activities may not have had a noticeable effect on their confidence in English speaking abilities. Additionally, a small percentage (4.2%) either disagree or strongly disagree with the statement.

The next concern with the thoughts that the group-work activities offer opportunities for practicing spoken English with peers. About agree (54.9%) and (11.3%) strongly agree, (31%) neutral, and strongly disagree (2.8%) responses may indicate that some students are unsure or have mixed feelings about this aspect. Group work indeed facilitates language practice through interactions with classmates. Engaging in discussions, debates, and collaborative tasks allows students to improve their speaking skills by actively using English in a social context.

Based on the table above, in the next statement, it appears that a significant portion of the respondents (70.5%) find it easy to collaborate with their peers during group-work activities in an EFL class.

The next concerns with the thoughts that the group-work activities motivate us to actively participate in class discussions. About 5.6% and 4.2 % of participants strongly disagree and disagree with this statement. While a notable portion of respondents agree (46.5%) or strongly agree (12.7%) that group-work activities motivate them to participate actively in class discussions, there is also a considerable percentage who are neutral (31%) on the matter.

The last tendency could also be seen in the answer by which only 1.4% strongly disagree and (2.8%) disagree they felt difficult to correct mistakes when speaking English in teamwork activities because of lack of knowledge. However, agree or strongly agree that during group-work activities, they can enhance their English speaking ability by pointing out and correcting each other's mistakes. Among them, 57.7% agree (A) 21.1% strongly agree (SA), and (16.9%) who are neutral. Overall, the data suggests a positive perception of the role of error correction in improving English speaking ability during group-work activities.

The data indicates that group-work activities have a generally positive impact on students' motivation and confidence in using English-speaking abilities in an EFL classroom setting. A significant majority of students reported increased confidence and active participation in class discussions due to these activities. Specifically, 61.9% of students felt more confident in their speaking abilities, and 66.2% recognized the opportunities for practicing spoken English with peers. Moreover, 70.5% of respondents found it easy to collaborate with peers, and 59.2% felt motivated to participate actively in class discussions. The role of error correction during group work was also positively perceived, with 78.8% agreeing that it enhanced their speaking abilities. However, there remains a notable minority of students who are neutral or unsure about the benefits of group-work activities, suggesting the need for further refinement of these activities to better address the needs of all students. Overall, the findings support the effectiveness of group-work activities in promoting English-speaking skills among EFL students at DNTU.

4.1.2. Results from the student interview

Students' class participation in learning English through using group-work activities to promote the speaking skills of non-English-major students

Each student identified a different group-work activity as the most effective for improving their speaking skills: S1 said that "Role-play provides practical, contextual practice and helps build confidence and communication skills". S2 approved that "Debates develop critical thinking, public

speaking skills, and fluency”. S3 told that “Jigsaw Activity this will encourage equal participation and enhance speaking proficiency in a supportive environment”. S4 asserted that “Problem-Solving Tasks help require communication, negotiation, and collaboration, promoting clear expression and teamwork”. Additionally, S5 said that “the Discussion Circle will encourage active participation and equal opportunity to share thoughts and opinions”. The diversity in preferred activities suggests that different formats cater to varying aspects of speaking skills, such as confidence, fluency, critical thinking, and collaborative skills. Role-play and debates are more dynamic and competitive, fostering engagement and real-world communication, whereas jigsaw and discussion circles ensure inclusivity and equal participation.

In terms of challenges the students might face in through ELF classroom, the students declared their opinions about disadvantages: S1 complained about Unequal Participation, but she addressed this by setting clear expectations, assigning roles, promoting accountability, and fostering inclusivity. S2 and S3 reflected that “Communication Barriers and Conflict Resolution”. However, they overcome this by encouraging clarity, simplicity, active listening, and paraphrasing. At the same time, they were also managed by respecting different perspectives, practicing empathy, and maintaining open communication. S4 expressed that “time management is improved by setting clear goals, adjusting strategies, and ensuring balanced workload distribution”. S5 recognized that “task understanding helps enhance by breaking tasks into smaller parts, encouraging open discussion, and assigning roles based on strengths”. Common issues like unequal participation, communication barriers, and conflict resolution highlight the need for structured and inclusive group dynamics. Effective time management and task understanding are crucial for smooth group functioning, with emphasis on clear communication and role definition.

All students agreed that group-work activities are highly effective in improving speaking skills compared to other activities. They highlighted benefits such as authentic communication opportunities, peer feedback, and the development of practical and soft skills. The unanimous positive rating underscores the value of group-work activities in EFL classes. These activities provide real-life speaking practice and foster a dynamic learning environment, crucial for language acquisition.

Students noted factors contributing to their comfort in group discussions: S1 was being well-prepared and confident in their speaking abilities. S3 expressed that a setting where peers support each other, listen actively, and value diverse perspectives.

In addition, three students (S2, S4, S5) agreed that “participate in group-work activities every week, facilitated by teachers who prioritize speaking practice in their classes”. Regular participation in group-work activities is essential for continuous improvement in speaking skills. Teachers play a crucial role in integrating these activities into the curriculum, ensuring consistent practice and engagement.

In short, the interview results indicate that group-work activities are pivotal in enhancing speaking skills for non-English-major students. While different activities cater to various learning needs and preferences, the overall effectiveness of these methods is evident. Addressing common challenges through structured strategies and fostering a supportive classroom environment are key to maximizing the benefits of group-work activities. Regular and varied group tasks, guided by proactive teachers, contribute significantly to the students' language development and confidence in speaking English.

4.1.3. Discussion of Research question 1

The data revealed that the majority of participants demonstrated strong support for using these collaborative methods to improve their English language proficiency. As detailed in Table 4.1, a substantial percentage of students agreed or strongly agreed that group-work activities were easy to engage with and effective for improving their speaking skills, with 288.7% agreeing and 99.9% strongly agreeing. This overwhelming majority—totaling approximately two-thirds of the participants—suggests that students found these activities not only accessible but also beneficial for their learning process. The ease of participation in group-work activities allowed students to complete tasks more efficiently and facilitated a more engaging and interactive learning experience.

Similarly, the findings indicated minimal difficulties faced by students when using group-work activities for learning, underscoring their practicality and effectiveness in the EFL context.

Furthermore, Table 4.2 highlighted the high level of motivation among students using group-work activities, with 239.4% agreeing and 97.2% strongly agreeing. This strong endorsement underscores that group-work activities significantly boosted students' motivation and their ability to learn English. The positive reception of group-work activities can be attributed to the supportive and interactive environment they create, which is crucial for developing speaking proficiency. Students enjoyed participating in these activities, perceiving them as an effective and independent learning medium.

Group-work activities provide numerous benefits in learning English speaking skills, especially for non-major students. They foster a supportive environment that encourages practice and interaction, both of which are essential for developing speaking proficiency. The findings of this study resonate with conclusions from various researchers. For example, Slavin (2011) highlighted the effectiveness of group-work in enhancing learning outcomes and cultivating collaborative skills among students. This study shows that group-work activities significantly improved students' speaking skills by offering more opportunities to share opinions and exchange ideas, leading to more accurate compositions. This finding supports previous studies, Such (2021) and Sundgren & Jaldemark (2020) indicate that collaborative writing requires EFL students to mediate their language use and collaborate with peers to resolve language-related doubts.

In terms of grammar and vocabulary, students were able to find solutions by looking up vocabulary or using translation software without relying solely on their teacher. This aligns with a study by Pham et al. (2020), which indicated that group-work activities benefit teachers by producing more accurate texts as students provide feedback to each other, not just receiving it from the teacher. Furthermore, working in groups allows students to achieve a sense of group pride and find the process both enjoyable and practical.

Overall, the extent to which group-work activities are used to promote speaking skills in EFL classes at Dong Nai University of Technology is likely influenced by a combination of pedagogical practices, institutional policies, and student experiences. By considering these factors holistically, educators and administrators can make informed decisions about the integration of group-work into the EFL curriculum and ensure that students have ample opportunities to improve their speaking proficiency.

4.2. Research question 2: Some suggested solutions to improve speaking skills in EFL classes at Dong Nai University of Technology

4.2.1 Peer Feedback and Reflection

A study by Topping (2009) underscores the positive impact of peer assessment on both individual and group performance. Providing structured guidelines for feedback and reflection promotes self-awareness and helps students develop essential teamwork and communication skills. Additionally, peer assessment is not without its drawbacks. Existing literature points out concerns regarding the accuracy of peer-assigned grades compared to those given by tutors, the competency and proficiency of students in conducting assessments, and the lack of training for students performing peer assessments (Cheng & Warren, 1997; Gatfield, 1999; Smith et al., 2002). Despite these challenges, group work facilitates the use of peer assessment as it allows students to more easily identify and evaluate their peers' contributions within smaller groups rather than larger cohorts.

This study focuses on evaluating the entire learning journey of students engaged in group tasks. Group work is increasingly being employed in higher education through in-class discussions, group tasks, or assignments that require collaboration outside the classroom, culminating in reports or presentations (Akindayomi, 2015; Elliott & Reynolds, 2014; Adelopo et al., 2017). Falchikov (2005) notes that assigning group work is a popular teaching strategy, especially beneficial in student-centered classrooms, as it encourages active learning and collaboration. Fellenz (2006) adds that group work provides an excellent platform for experiential learning and helps manage large student numbers more effectively. Adelopo et al. (2017) further support this by emphasizing the need for

clear explanations of objectives and processes before students engage in reflective activities, highlighting the positive impact of group diversity on the quality of group reflection.

4.2.2 Structured Group Roles and Responsibilities

According to research by Chang and Brickman (2018), assigning specific tasks or roles to students during group work is recommended to promote individual accountability and allow instructors to monitor contributions effectively (Chapman and Van Auken, 2001; Davies, 2009). Group work pedagogies, such as POGIL (Moog and Spencer, 2008) and SCALE-UP (Beichner et al., 2007), advocate for role assignments to encourage critical discussion and prevent students from dominating the conversation or avoiding conflict by quickly agreeing on answers (Heller and Hollabaugh, 1992). Role assignment has been demonstrated to lead to greater learning gains (Bailey et al., 2005) and increased student satisfaction (Brown, 2010). However, effective supervision is necessary to ensure that students engage in the cognitive processes of listening and recalling, which are essential for a robust exchange of ideas and enhanced learning (O'Donnell, 2006).

4.2.3 Group Discussion

According to Duc and Hanh (2022), discussion is a type of speaking activity that allows students to express their ideas in front of their peers. When the goal is enlightenment, members systematically define, analyze, and exchange information. In problem-solving discussions, members define, analyze, and evaluate possible solutions, and strive to reach a high-quality decision to which all or most members are committed.

Brown (2001) lists conversation as a useful method for teaching languages. Additionally, Kayi (2006) highlights that encouraging speaking in the classroom through conversation is a successful teaching strategy. According to Ornstein (2000), putting students in small groups increases their interest in what they are studying and makes it easier for teachers to keep an eye on their development. Students' social skills and collaboration are also promoted by this method.

4.2.4 Group Size

The dynamics of group size are vital to the success of group projects. A small group, according to Beebe and Masterson (2003), is defined as three or more individuals, and groups of two, or dyads, are typically discouraged from participating in group projects because of their low capacity for innovation and variety of thought (Csernica et al., 2002); however, Csernica et al. (2002) contend that groups with three or four members would be more appropriate. Bigger organizations sometimes restrict individual engagement, which keeps certain individuals from actively participating.

Smaller groups work well for assignments that must be completed quickly, such as group projects done in class. The group size should decrease with the amount of time available (Cooper, 1990; Johnson, Johnson & Smith, 1991). Working in groups is especially beneficial in large classrooms. Group projects inspired students to attend more often and fostered a more personal environment in large classes, as shown by Wright and Lawson (2005). This increased interest in the course and the subject matter, which encouraged active learning in an extensive classroom setting.

4.2.5. Role-Playing and Simulations

Engaging students in role-playing activities and simulations can provide them with a safe environment to practice speaking and using language in context. A research conducted by Ahmada and Munawaro (2022) "Through role-play, the teacher can encourage their students to experiment and innovate with the language, based on their imagination and creativity. It creates a joyful atmosphere for them to speak without fear of embarrassment when they make mistakes. This will improve their self-esteem to speak English". The first is an activity called role-playing that takes place in the actual lives of the students. As an illustration, consider the responsibilities that instructors and students play in the classroom. The second exercise involves students participating in role-playing scenarios that occur in everyday life, albeit they may not have firsthand experience. An instance of this would be a student providing visitors with directions to a location. Next comes a role-playing exercise that the students have never attempted before, although it is simple to participate in since the teacher provides several oblique instances to provide further context.

5. Conclusions

The study on the use of group-work activities to promote speaking skills among non-English-majored students in EFL classrooms at Dong Nai Technology University yielded several key findings. Firstly, there is a strong consensus among participants regarding the effectiveness of group-work activities in enhancing English speaking proficiency. The majority of respondents perceive group work as beneficial for improving speaking skills, vocabulary and grammar usage, confidence levels, and motivation to participate in class discussions. Additionally, student interviews provided valuable insights into the specific group-work activities preferred by students and the challenges they encounter during collaborative tasks.

Overall, the study concludes that integrating diverse and interactive group-work activities is essential for fostering speaking skills and creating a dynamic learning environment in EFL classrooms, particularly for non-English-majored students.

** Pedagogical Implications*

Several pedagogical implications for EFL teachers at Dong Nai Technology University come from the study's findings:

- a. Help students feel more motivated in learning English by guiding and advising them on efficient learning strategies (lesson planning, vocabulary acquisition, situational application, accurate pronunciation, usage of structure, word arrangement, and concept organization). Focus more on the motivation, attitudes, and learning techniques of your students. Assist them in accurately assessing how important it is for them to speak English in the future so they may decide what kind of learning strategies they will use, how motivated they are, and how much of a need for these abilities they have.
- b. If the criteria are too high for weak students, they will lose confidence and interest, and if they are too low for decent and good students, they will get bored and lose the motivation to strive for improvement; Encourage students to refrain from taking notes to commit to memory during speaking practice sessions and to use Vietnamese only when necessary.
- c. To develop a variety of speaking activities during speaking classes, teachers should design a wide range of activities that are appropriate for each group of students and have varying degrees of difficulty. Even if the lecture is the same, the groups' levels differ, thus distinct activities must be created for each group of students. Include a range of cooperative learning exercises, including role-play, debate, jigsaw activities, and problem-solving tasks to cater to different learning preferences and enhance speaking skills effectively. Do not put pressure on weak or lazy students to study, instead motivate and encourage students to study voluntarily.
- d. There is a fair reward and punishment regime so that students have a basis for self-assessment of their level of effort and progress, creating determination for students to study. Instructors can give extra points, points for participating in creating lessons for groups or individuals and accumulating a score of 40% at the end of the semester, or give small gifts after each activity to encourage them to be respectful and motivated. and help students put in more effort during speaking time.
- e. Foster an environment where students are encouraged to express their thoughts and ideas in English with fluency and confidence, placing less emphasis on perfect grammar. By prioritizing communication over correctness, students can develop a natural inclination towards speaking English and cultivate a genuine love for the language. In order to help students overcome psychological barriers of fear and lack of confidence, teachers must be the ones who directly guide learners to participate in communication activities. During the teaching process, teachers need to regularly use English, pay attention to and create favorable conditions for learners, especially students. Weak students who lack confidence practice more. Lecturers can use one of the following techniques such as picture descriptions, language games, question and answer, role-play, interview, talk show, or discussion, to help students practice and develop communication skills. During the teaching process, lecturers also need to integrate cultural and social elements of indigenous people in their lectures to minimize misunderstandings or culture shock.

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