DIFFICULTIES IN SPEAKING ENGLISH ENCOUNTERED BY VIETNAMESE SECOND-DEGREE ENGLISH-MAJORED STUDENTS: A CASE OF THOSE AT THU DAU MOT UNIVERSITY

Tran Thanh Du*, Khau Hoang Kim Thu

Thu Dau Mot University,
Tran Van On Street, Phu Hoa Ward, Thu Dau Mot City, Binh Duong Province, Vietnam

Abstract: English is becoming increasingly crucial in this era of globalization and worldwide integration. Fluency in this language helps people obtain better job opportunities and develop themselves in a variety of ways. However, acquiring English is difficult for Vietnamese people who use it as a foreign language, and speaking is one of the most challenging skills to acquire for many language learners, especially for those who are pursuing a second degree in English. For the purpose of discovering and analyzing the difficulties in learning speaking skills faced by second-degree English-majored students at Thu Dau Mot University (TDMU), a mixed-method study of both quantitative and qualitative designs was carried out. The sample included 152 students and 5 lecturers in charge of the speaking courses for these students. With the data collected through the questionnaire survey, the interview, and the observation, the result reveals dominant difficulties commonly encountered by these students with reference to the limitation of vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, students' personal psychology, and the habit of thinking in Vietnamese while speaking English. The findings of the study are applicable to the process of teaching and learning English speaking skills among second-degree language learners in Vietnamese context.

Keywords: English speaking skills, difficulties, second-degree English-majored students

1. Introduction

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Although English speaking skill is an important attribute of coexistence in the contemporary global context, there are difficulties in using it in oral aspects. Many learners claim that they have spent years studying English yet are still unable to speak it properly and understandably (Bueno, Madrid & Mclaren, 2006). Learners have to spend much time thinking and preparing what they would like to speak when they answer the questions, give their opinions or express their feelings. It seems to be difficult for language speakers to speak and communicate without having adequate vocabulary and understanding grammatical rules.

Indeed, speaking English is not an easy task as speakers have to deal with many aspects of the language like pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, background knowledge and comprehension at the same time. Adults, on the other hand, find learning a foreign language more challenging than children due to their lower memory and flexibility. Krashen, et al. (1982) argue

---

* Corresponding author.

  Email address: dutt@tdmu.edu.vn

that acquirers who begin learning a second language in early childhood through natural exposure achieve higher proficiency than those beginning as adults. Adults' tendency to over-analyze hinders their ability to pick up a foreign language's subtle nuances, and straining harder and harder will not result in better outcomes. As it is stated by Richard & Rerandya (2008), adult learners do not seem to have the same innate language-specific endowment or propensity as children for acquiring fluency and naturalness in spoken language. As the previous learning process mainly was focused on specialized training, it can be noted that the English level of Vietnamese adults is still rather low. Adults' English speaking skills are primarily developed through practical jobs or other supplemental education programs. Despite their efforts, many adults still have difficulty speaking English, which is mostly due to issues with their expressiveness, pronunciation, and confidence.

As speaking is not an easy process, students will have to encounter difficulties that come from subjective as well as objective factors. Despite the growing amount of research supporting the exploration of difficulties in speaking English for improving the foreign language competence for Vietnamese students, there are still doubts and differences among the research results with regard to distinguished research subjects.

1.2. Aims of the Study

From the above-mentioned reasons, the study is conducted for the purposes of: (1) *identifying difficulties in speaking English encountered by second-degree English-majored students at TDMU*; and (2) *suggesting solutions to develop English speaking skills for these students.* These purposes then serve to fulfill the broader and more general objective that is to improve the teaching and learning of English speaking skills among second-degree language students at TDMU.

1.3. Research Questions

In accordance with the purposes of the study, the study was specifically designed to look for answers to the following guiding questions: (*1) What are difficulties in speaking English encountered by second-degree English-majored students at TDMU?; (2) What solutions should be taken to develop English speaking skills for second-degree English-majored students at TDMU?*

1.4. Significance of the Study

The study presents an overview in this area by highlighting the difficulties in speaking English encountered by second-degree English-majored students at TDMU and arguing the reasons for these difficulties. The study then gives recommendations for enhancing the English teaching and learning process, particularly in speaking skills, to help second-degree language students overcome their current obstacles.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Background

2.1.1. Definitions of Speaking

Speaking can be defined in various ways. Among the widely-accepted definitions are the ability to use oral language to explore ideas, intentions, thoughts, and feelings to other people to make the message clearly delivered and well understood by the hearer (Nunan, 1995); the reciprocally active process of building up meaning that involves producing, receiving, and

processing information (Burns & Joyce, 1997); the active use of language to express meaning so that other people can make sense of them (Cameron, 2001).

Speaking is the process of combining background and linguistic knowledge to create an oral message (Chastain, 1988). This process is influenced by cognitive factors as well as linguistic expertise. Speaking is also the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, in a variety of contexts (Chaney & Burk, 2001). It is the ability to speak fluently and presupposes not only knowledge of language features but also the ability to process information and language on the spot (Harmer, 2007). Speaking is concerned not only with oral output but also with how the sub-skills are linked and assist the speaking action. Vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar are among these sub-skills.

Speaking is a high complex mental activity which varies from other activities because it requires much higher effort from the part of the central nervous system (Bygate, 1998). It is one of the most difficult skills language learners have to face (Bueno, Madrid, & Mclaren, 2006). Even those who learn the language for so many years find it difficult to speak in real time situations when it is demanded. Speaking is more difficult and complex than other language skills as it is not merely producing sounds of the words but combining them to make meaningful messages (Iqbal, 2012).

Speaking can be generally understood from these studies as the act of creating sounds that enable speakers to transmit their thoughts, feelings, and intents, which is a necessary component of communication. Of the four language skills, speaking is the most critical since it identifies someone as skilled or unskilled at utilizing a language (Bueno, Madrid & Mclaren, 2006). As a productive skill of the language (Siahaan, 2008; Bygate, 2001), speaking is a person's ability to generate sounds that have meaning and can be understood by other people in order to facilitate effective communication. Speaking is undoubtedly the skill to communicate effectively to provide or receive information and knowledge from others.

2.1.2. Factors Affecting Speaking Skills

There are numerous factors affecting speaking skills. These factors can be grouped into two broad categories: internal factors and external factors.

a) Internal Factors

The term "internal factors" refers to those pertaining to the learners themselves. The first internal factor is concerned with **linguistic components**, such as phonology, syntax, vocabulary, and semantics. Of these components, phonology is a particularly challenging area in language learning among EFL students. The second internal factor is related to **affective ones**. Oxford (1990) believes that one of the most critical components in language learning is the students' affective side. A variety of affective characteristics that have been linked to second language acquisition include emotions, self-esteem, empathy, anxiety, attitude, and motivation (Krashen, 1988). The last factor is **topical knowledge** which is defined by Bachman & Palmer (1996) as the knowledge structure in long-term memory. Topical knowledge can be obtained from schools, books and even from the process of accumulation and exposure to life. It enables students to apply language with respect to the world in which they live. Topical knowledge has a great impact on the learners' speaking performance (Bachman & Palmer, 1996).

b) External Factors

The first external factor affecting speaking skills is linked to **performance conditions**. These conditions include time pressure, planning, the quality of performance, and the amount of

support (Nation & Newton, 2009). Learners carry out a speaking activity under different conditions, thus these conditions impact their speaking performance. In spontaneous communication, planning is not possible and consequently a highly developed and subconscious use of strategies is required for successful speaking. In other instances that do not require an immediate response, speakers may be under less severe time pressure and can exercise relevant speaking strategies at a more conscious level. They can have adequate time for planning, executing, evaluating, and editing before speaking. Another external factor is related to **feedback during speaking activities**. The decisions that the teachers make about how to react to students' performance will depend upon the stages of the lesson, the activities, the types of mistakes made and the particular student who is making that mistake (Harmer, 1991). If the teachers correct whenever there is a problem, the conversational flow as well as the purpose of the speaking activity will be destroyed. Baker and Westrup (2003) backed up the above assertion, stating that if the students are corrected all the time, they can find this very demotivating and become reluctant to speak. These authors suggest that teachers should always correct the students' mistakes positively and with encouragement.

2.2. Previous Studies

English-speaking problems as well as difficulties that hindered English-majored students in speaking have been considered controversial issues in the studies of English language teaching and learning. However, the topics of these studies are not completely the same and the participants may be from different backgrounds of educational levels. The following related studies may give the supporting shreds of evidence for this research.

In 2014, Al-Jamal & Al-Jamal conducted the research "An investigation of the difficulties faced by EFL undergraduates in speaking skills" to describe difficulties that EFL undergraduates may encounter in an EFL setting. In the study, both qualitative and quantitative methods were adopted, using the tools of a questionnaire and interviews. The participants included 566 EFL students (247 males and 319 females), out of which 64 students were interviewed. The results of the study showed a "low" speaking proficiency level among EFL undergraduates along with negligible instruction of the speaking skill at the university. More highlighted difficulties identified in this study are due L1 interference, large classes, and lack of time.

The research conducted by Feni (2014) on "Difficulties of learning speaking faced by the second semester students of the English Department at University of Muhammadiyah Malang" was intended to investigate the students' difficulties in learning speaking. The research design of this study was descriptive qualitative research because the writer only explained the current conditions that happened, using the tools of a questionnaire and interviews. The sample of the study included 63 out of 252 second-semester students from 10 classes. According to the study's findings, students struggled with several aspects of their English speaking skills, including difficulties in speaking with the correct structure or grammar, difficulties in vocabulary, and difficulties in the students' habit of using the mother tongue, all of which had an impact on the students' pronunciation, intonation, and accuracy in learning to speak English.

The research "Speaking difficulties encountered by Young EFL learners" by Hosni (2014) was carried out as a case study to investigate strategies for dealing with difficulties that students in basic education schools in Oman encountered in speaking, using the tools of observations, interviews, and curriculum analysis. The sample of the study included 4 English teachers and 3 classes from one cycle 2 basic education school in Oman. The result showed that the main speaking difficulties encountered by these students are due to linguistic difficulties, mother tongue use, and inhibition to speak.

Natalia (2015) conducted a research entitled "An analysis of students' problems in speaking English daily language program at Husnul Khotimah Islamic Boarding School". The principal objective of the study is to find the students' difficulties, the reasons, and the strategies to deal with the problems in speaking English. The study's result showed that students of the school encountered many problems in learning to speak English due to both their internal and external factors. The external factors related to the environment do not support them to implement English in classroom communication. Among psychological problems, lacking motivation is also considered a factor affecting these students' difficulties in speaking English.

Another research was done by Nakhalah (2016) entitled "Problems and difficulties of speaking that encounter English language students at Al Quds Open University" with the aim to explore the speaking difficulties encountered by English language students at Al Quds Open University. The study conducted an experimental survey with the tools of observations and interviews, and the participants being 14 randomly selected students. The results indicated some difficulties in the speaking of the students due to various reasons such as fear of mistakes, shyness, anxiety, and lack of confidence.

In a study entitled "A study of speaking class anxiety of the second semester students in English Education Department at Univeritas Islam Negeri Aladdin Makasar", Kurniawati (2017) applied a quantitative method to describe the level of students' speaking anxiety in their speaking class. The results showed that the majority of students had a medium level of nervousness in their speaking process. These students tended to have indecisive perception regarding their feelings when they are asked to express their ideas in English language.

Mufidah (2017) conducted the study entitled "Factors affecting the speaking difficulties of the tenth grade Hotel Accommodation students at Vocational High School". The study used a qualitative method to investigate the factors causing the students' difficulties in speaking English. The result of the study indicated that there were various factors contributing to students' difficulty in the speaking process such as affective factors, social factors, instructor factors, facilities factors, and linguistic factors.

In Vietnam, Vo, Pham, and Ho (2018) carried out a research entitled "Challenges to speaking skills encountered by English-majored students: A story of one Vietnamese university in the Mekong Delta" to investigate challenges of speaking skills faced by English majored freshmen at Can Tho University. The findings of the study indicated that English first-year students faced both internal and external challenges, with the latter ones being related to the limitations of English practicing environment and extracurricular activities. To develop their speaking skills, these students are suggested to join English clubs both inside and outside their campus.

The other study was carried out by Trinh (2019) entitled "A study on difficulties in English speaking skills of the non-major students at Hai Phong Private University". The study used a mixed method which aimed to find out the obstacles encountered by the students during their speaking process. The findings of the study showed that quite a number of students (45%) thought that they had difficulties with time to practice. Pronunciation and grammar are elements that exert an influence on an individual's speaking abilities.

Despite the growing amount of research supporting the exploration of difficulties in speaking English for improving the foreign language competence, there are still doubts and differences among the research results with regard to distinguished research subjects. As every study has its own limitations, the previous studies do not give a comprehensive analysis of factors contributing to speaking barriers in different educational contexts in Viet Nam. In the current

study, the researcher investigates various factors causing difficulties in speaking faced by adult English-majored students at TDMU. From the survey results, these students can not only realize their obstacles but also adopt suitable strategies to develop their skills.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Setting

The research was conducted at TDMU, which is a public university of Binh Duong province, in Vietnam. In June 2009, TDMU was officially established on the upgrading of Binh Duong College of Pedagogy. Through years of establishment and development, the university has been formed as and developed into an institution of multi-major and multi-field education, focusing on application-oriented development and current advanced international standards.

TDMU's Faculty of Foreign Languages was founded in 2010 with two majors: English language and Chinese language (full-time mode or second-degree mode). With an educational philosophy centered on effective teaching and learning through communication and experiential activities, the English Language program prepares its bachelors with the necessary knowledge, professional skills, political characteristics, ethics, professional behavior, and good health to work effectively in their fields of study, meeting the requirements of society in the process of international integration (TDMU, 2000).

The second-degree bachelor's program in English language of TDMU includes approximately 2 years of training. The majority of these students are government officers from government agencies and employees of companies in Binh Duong province and the surrounding region.

3.2. Research Participants

Participants of the research survey are divided into two groups.

The first group includes 152 students taking the course for the second bachelor degree in English language at TDMU in the academic year 2020-2021. These students are homogeneous in terms of their learning conditions and share the same cultural background. According to data from the University's Training Department, these students have an average age of 34.8 (range from 23-55 years of age) which is much older than the average age of full-time students. They all have a bachelor's degree or higher in their field and consider English as their foreign language.

The second group includes 5 fulltime lecturers who are working at TDMU's Faculty of Foreign Languages. They are English lecturers with more than ten years of experience. The oldest of them has worked for 28 years and the youngest for 11 years. As these lecturers have taught at least one subject in above second-degree classes, they almost have a scientific and objective basis for evaluating these students' speaking abilities.

3.3. Research Design

In order to find out the answers to the research questions, both quantitative and qualitative research designs were used with the data collected from the tools of questionnaires, interviews and classroom observations. While questionnaires were used to obtain numerical data, interviews and observations were employed to obtain qualitative data.

The content of the questionnaire focused on the participants' difficulties in speaking English. Participants were requested to provide some background information in order to help the author identify some characteristics of second-degree English-majored students at TDMU

and the current level of their speaking skills as well. These learners' perspectives on the difficulties they encountered while speaking English were gathered through the use of follow-up questions. These difficulties were divided into three categories: linguistic difficulties, psychological difficulties, and background knowledge. Additionally, the attitudes of respondents towards some English-speaking skill-enhancement activities available to adult students are investigated. 152 sheets of answers from 152 participants to be surveyed were collected.

The interviews were conducted with the participation of 5 lecturers from the Faculty of Foreign Languages and 10 students randomly-selected from the second-degree English-majored students at TDMU. The open-ended questions in the interview were designed based on research objectives in order to identify second-degree students' difficulties in speaking English deeply.

Three lessons of second-degree English-majored classes at TDMU were observed. Class observations were conducted to see how students actually performed and what difficulties they encountered throughout speaking sessions. Several categories were being observed, including (1) Students' activity before lesson, (2) Students' participation during the lesson, (3) students' speaking ability, and (4) Lecturers' teaching method. The objective of observation is to recognize the current strengths and weaknesses of teaching and learning English speaking, thereby making recommendations for this study.

From mixed data collected, the researcher could obtain reliable information from the respondents to answer the questions of the research.

3.4. Data Collection and Analysis

The data in this study were synthesized and analyzed through the Microsoft Excel 2013 application. The authors chose this tool for data analysis in this study, firstly because of its popularity. Most computers today come with the Excel application pre-installed. Secondly, importing data into Excel for statistical analysis is more straightforward than other specialized statistical software. Finally, Excel now has a comprehensive set of statistical analysis tools, ranging from basic to advanced, to suit all of the requirements of this research.

For most qualitative data, the authors classified, counted, calculated and presented them in the form of tables or charts to describe and discuss. Some other qualitative data needed to use Descriptive statistics, ANOVA: Single Factor Test and Likert scale method for analysis. The Excel application helps the author conduct descriptive statistics and ANOVA test, while Likert scale method is performed according to the formula:

$$Gap\ width = \frac{Series\ width}{Number\ of\ the\ group}$$

The meanings of the values are shown in Table 1 and 2 below:

Table 1

Gap Widths of 5-Points Likert Scale

Items	Item descriptions	Score ranges
1	Strongly disagree	1.00 - 1.80
2	Disagree	1.81 - 2.60
3	Neutral	2.61 - 3.40
4	Agree	3.41 - 4.20

Items	Item descriptions	Score ranges
5	Strongly agree	4.21 - 5.00
Gap width = 4/5 = 0,8		

Table 2

Gap Widths of 6-Points Likert Scale

Items	Item descriptions	Score ranges
1	Never	1.00 - 1.82
2	Rarely	1.83 - 2.65
3	Sometimes	2.66 - 3.48
4	Often	3.49 - 4.31
5	Usually	4.32 - 5.14
6	Always	5.15 - 6.00
Gap width = 5/6 = 0,833		

Once analyzed, the data were interpreted and discussed in light of the research objectives. To analyze the qualitative data gathered from the interviews, the researcher listened to the recordings and transcribed all of the interviewee's words. After being provided with full transcriptions, interview data were then organized according to the research objectives. The author also identified and coded pertinent themes. Data from class observations were also qualitatively analyzed in detail using descriptive analysis, including every students' speaking activities that occurred in the class. Both of the interview's and observations' findings were then presented in a narrative form.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1. Results

4.1.1. The Results From the Questionnaire

4.1.1.1. English Speaking Difficulties

On the basis of the theoretical background as presented, difficulties encountered by TDMU second-degree English-majored students in speaking English were identified including those related to linguistics, psychology, and background knowledge.

a) Linguistic difficulties

Linguistic difficulties are demonstrated from statement 1 to 9, in which statement 1 and 2 deal with vocabulary difficulties, statement 3 to 5 relate to grammar difficulties, and statement 6 to 9 concern difficulties in pronouncing English words. Table 3 shows the survey findings compiled using descriptive statistics (confidence level = 95%).

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of Linguistic Difficulties

(1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly agree)

No.	Linguistic difficulties	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Insufficient vocabulary	**4.31**	0.82
2	Mispronouncing words	**4.25**	0.79
3	Thinking in Vietnamese and then translate into English	**4.16**	0.85
4	Using wrong words	**4.03**	0.88
5	Using wrong tenses	**3.64**	0.97
6	Giving wrong word stresses	3.31	0.78
7	Giving wrong intonation patterns	3.30	0.75
8	Using wrong sentence structures	3.10	0.82
9	Lack of connected speech	2.74	0.75
	Overall	**3.65**	**0.83**

The descriptive statistics shown in Table 3 reveals the overall means of linguistic factors is rather high (M = 3.65, SD = 0.83). This proves that the participants encounter quite numerous difficulties in linguistic aspects in speaking English. The problems recognized by second-degree students at TDMU as their difficulties in speaking English (Overall M > 3.41 in Likert scale), ranked from high to low are: Insufficient vocabulary (M = 4.31, SD = 0.82), Mispronouncing words (M = 4.25, SD = 0.79), Habit of thinking in Vietnamese and then translate into English (M = 4.16, SD = 0.85), Using wrong words (M = 4.03, SD = 0.88), and Using wrong tenses (M = 3.64, SD = 0.97). There are four types of linguistic difficulties that adult students have "neutral" opinion, which means between agree and disagree (M > 2.61 in the Likert scale), ranked from high to low are: Giving wrong word stresses (M = 3.31, SD = 0.78), Giving wrong intonation patterns (M = 3.30, SD = 0.75), Using wrong sentence structures (M = 3.10, SD = 0.82), and Lack of connected speech (M = 2.74, SD = 0.75). From the above analysis, it is clear to see that linguistic problems all create challenges for these students, to varying degrees. Among these problems, lack of vocabulary is the most difficult one; and lack of connected speech is the least one in speaking English from second-degree students' perspective.

b) Psychological Difficulties

Among these survey items, statements 10 to 12 are in relevance to inhibition problems, statement 13 to motivation, and statements 14 to 16 to confidence. Table 4 shows the survey findings, which were compiled using descriptive statistics (confidence level = 95%).

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics of Psychological Difficulties

(1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Neutral; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly agree)

| No.	Psychological difficulties	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Nervousness	**3.72**	1.01
2	Fear of making mistakes	**3.57**	1.02
3	Fear of losing face	**3.45**	1.06
4	Being overpowered by better students	3.42	0.96
5	Worrying about being misunderstood	3.21	1.04
6	Lack of confidence	**3.00**	1.15
7	Lack of motivation	2.95	1.07
	Overall	**3.33**	**1.04**

The descriptive statistics in Table 4 present the total mean score of seven items of psychological difficulties encountered by the participants in English speaking is (M = 3.33, SD = 1.04). It can be concluded that the TDMU second-degree English-majored students have psychology-related difficulties in English speaking with the average level (Overall M > 2.61 in Likert scale). Ranking the psychological difficulties affecting speaking English from high to low, we have: Nervousness (M = 3.72, SD = 1.01), Fear of making mistakes (M = 3.57, SD = 1.02), Fear of losing face (M = 3.45, SD = 1.06), and Being overpowered by better students (M = 3.42, SD = 0.96). The remaining three problems which are Lack of motivation (M = 2.95, SD = 1.07), Lack of confidence (M = 3.00, SD = 1.15), and Worrying about being misunderstood (M = 3.21, SD = 1.04) are at a "neutral" level. It means the majority of TDMU adult students do not acknowledge having difficulties in these aspects.

c) Background Knowledge

The survey results concerning students' background knowledge problems which are demonstrated by the Statement 17 - "*Insufficient ideas*" are presented in the chart below.

Chart 1

Insufficient Ideas
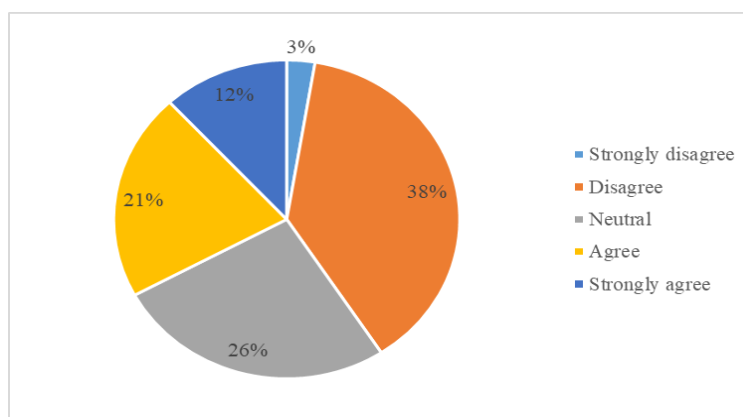
It can be seen from the chart that the number of the respondents who oppose this concept is the highest, which accounts for 38% (n=58). 3% of the comments expressed strong opposition, 26% the respondents are "neutral", while the percentages of students who agree and strongly agree are 21% and 12% respectively. To explain the phenomenon why many opinions do not think that "lack of ideas" is a difficulty in students' English speaking, the factor concerning background knowledge must be considered. Because the second-degree English-majored students have to finish at least one bachelor's program along with experiences of many years working, they can be expected to have a wide knowledge base. As a result, they are almost affected by a lack of speaking ideas. This argument is strengthened via the means of descriptive statistics as the value of the mean (M = 3.01) indicates that "insufficient ideas" is really not a problem for most of these students. However, a considerable number of students hold the belief that their current grammatical and lexical abilities are insufficient to convey their thoughts vocally, compelling them to substitute an alternative expression.

Table 5

The Impact of Each Type of Difficulties in Comparison

Anova: Single Factor

SUMMARY

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance		
Linguistic difficulties	152	583	3.83	0.12		
Psychological difficulties	152	506	3.33	0.16		
Background knowledge	152	458	3.01	1.18		

ANOVA

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	52.0632888	2	26.0316444	53.32163266	1.601E-21	3.015630968
Within Groups	221.1547983	453	0.488200438			
Overall	**273.2180871**	**455**				

To determine whether any of the differences between the means of linguistic, psychological and background knowledge difficulties were statistically significant, Anova: Single Factor test was conducted. The results from Table 5 reveal that the mean score of linguistic difficulties (M = 3.83) is higher than that of psychological difficulties (M = 3.33), and also higher than that of background knowledge difficulties (M = 3.01). Anova: Single Factor test is conducted to determine if there is a significant difference between the means of the three groups. As a result, we have F (53.32) > F crit (3.01), and P-value (1.601E-21) < alpha (0.05), leading to the conclusion that the differences between the means of linguistic, psychological and background knowledge problem are statistically significant corresponding to the significance level alpha = 0.05. These results suggest that TDMU second-degree students' speaking skills are more affected by linguistic factors than psychological ones and background knowledge.

4.1.1.2. Personal Strategies to Develop Speaking Skills

The main question for the respondents in this section was "*How often do you do the following to develop your English speaking skills?*". On the basis of the theory presented in the theoretical background, the survey gives some suggestions on solutions to improve TDMU second-degree students' speaking skills. Table 6 shows the survey findings, which were also

compiled using descriptive statistics (confidence level = 95%).

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics of Students' Current Strategies to Develop Speaking Skills
(1=Never; 2=Rarely; 3=Sometimes; 4=Often; 5=Usually; 6=Always)

No.	Solutions	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Studying vocabulary and expressions	4.17	1.20
2	Hanging out with people who want to practice speaking	3.83	1.15
3	Practicing speaking exercises in textbook	3.52	1.07
4	Practicing singing English songs	3.45	1.22
5	Practicing thinking in English	3.18	1.51
6	Talking directly with foreigners	3.08	1.49
7	Chatting with foreigners via social networks	2.79	1.25
8	Travelling abroad	2.75	1.21
9	Joining English clubs	2.49	1.01
10	Practicing speaking via apps or websites	2.44	0.99
11	Joining specialized courses in English speaking and reflex	2.32	0.91
	Overall	**3.09**	**1.18**

The mean score for the frequency with which students perform solutions to improve their speaking abilities is presented in Table 6. The small standard deviation (SD = 1.18) implies most of the respondents had the same opinion again. The dispersion is higher than those in the difficulty factor questions, proving that each learner has different opportunities to participate in activities that improve their English speaking skills.

As can be seen from the table, the solutions that students frequently conduct, ranked from low to high frequencies are *Joining specialized courses in English speaking and reflex* (M = 2.32, SD = 0.91), *Practicing speaking via apps or websites* (M = 2.44, SD = 0.99), *Joining English clubs* (M = 2.49, SD = 1.01), *Travelling abroad* (M = 2.75, SD = 1.21), *Chatting with foreigners via social networks* (M = 2.79, SD = 1.25), *Talking directly with foreigners* (M = 3.08, SD = 1.49), *Practicing thinking in English* (M = 3.18, SD = 1.51), *Practicing singing English songs* (M = 3.45, SD = 1.22), *Practicing speaking exercises in textbook* (M = 3.52, SD = 1.07), *Hanging out with people who want to practice speaking* (M = 3.83, SD = 1.15), and *Studying vocabulary and expressions* (M = 4.17, SD = 1.2).

4.1.2. The Results From the Interviews

For the student interview, 10 of 152 second-degree English-majored students were randomly selected to answer the two questions. The first section was held on October 15th, 2021 with 7 students from Course K202, and the second section was held on October 17th, 2021 with 3 students from Course K203. The participants were coded from 'S1' to "S10".

For the teacher interview, the author requested permission to consult with 5 lecturers from TDMU's Faculty of Foreign Languages. These lecturers regarded teaching English as their primary responsibility. They enjoyed teaching and were always looking for the best methods to assist the students in their language learning. Due to these personal characteristics, the data

obtained from teacher interviews were really valuable. The interview was conducted on November 20th, 2021. The participants were also coded, from "T1" to "T5". The content of the interview centered around the English speaking skills among adult students at TDMU. The interviews were conducted in Vietnamese to ensure that the participants could fully express their opinions. The interview contents were then translated into English by the research group on the principle of accuracy, objectivity and respect for personal ideas and contributions.

　　　　The results of the interview to both groups were aggregated in two principal issues: *(1) Difficulties in speaking English encountered by TDMU second-degree English-majored students; and (2) Strategies to develop English speaking skills for second-degree English-majored students at TDMU.* Based on the qualitative data collected, the frequency of these difficulties appearing in the participants' opinions are summarized in Table 7.

Table 7

The Frequency of Types of Difficulties

No.	Difficulties	Numbers of responses
1	Mispronouncing words	8
2	Insufficient vocabulary	7
3	Poor reflexes	5
4	Using wrong sentence structures	3
5	Having the habit of thinking in Vietnamese and then translating into English	3
6	Nervousness	2
7	Lack of confidence	2
8	Giving wrong word stresses	1
9	Using wrong tenses	1
10	Shyness	1
11	Stress	1
12	Feeling ashamed	1
13	Feeling panicked	1
14	Fear of being judged	1
15	Fear of being laughed at by others	1
16	Fear of being misunderstood	1
17	Fear of losing face	1
18	Lack of motivation	1
19	Insufficient ideas	1
20	Being unable to keep up with the speed of conversation	1

　　　　Table 7 shows that the majority of the difficulties cited by the author in the survey were repeated in the interviewees' statements, with the difficulty of lack of vocabulary and improper

pronunciation being the most commonly mentioned problems. This result supports the arguments made in the previous section. Here are some extracts from students' responses:

> "I believe my biggest challenge is that I **do not have enough vocabulary** to express myself when speaking, even though I can write English quite well. Maybe it's because the speed of conversation is so fast that I can't remember the words I've learned. The second issue is that my English **pronunciation is bad**..." (S1)

> "I'm having trouble since I **do not have enough words** to convey what I want to say, despite having a lot of ideas. I had to alter my thoughts and expressions to match the amount of vocabulary I had..." (S5)

> "My main problem is that my **pronunciation is incorrect**, so listeners are unable to grasp what I am trying to say. This could be the result of the bad habit from high school..." (S7)

There were also other difficulties in speaking English noted from the interview. They were primarily related to psychological obstacles such as shyness, stress, feeling ashamed or panicked, fear of being judged or laughed at by others. Another point worth noting was that two more general difficulties, which were "poor reflexes" and "unable to keep up with the pace of the conversation", were also identified. These difficulties can be classified as composite ones due to the fact that they are closely related to various factors such as linguistic factors, psychological factors, background knowledge, as well as listening skills and response abilities.

The responses from both the students and the lecturers in the interviews also imply certain explanations for students' problems in speaking English. The objective causes for these problems include lack of an environment to speak English, poor memory with reference to age, and occasionally uninteresting topics in class. The subjective causes include lack of a suitable and proper learning method, being unaware of their strengths and weaknesses, lack of time to practice due to work and family responsibilities, incorrect pronunciation from high school and local accent influences.

The results of the student interviews indicate that, in addition to the activities mentioned in the questionnaire results, there are no other ideas on ways to develop speaking skills mentioned by these students, which demonstrates that TDMU adult students have not really paid sufficient attention to English speaking skill-enhancement activities. These students also proposed some suggestions for the university to improve the efficacy of English language study, including the following: (1) The training program's time of teaching English listening and speaking reflexes should be increased; (2) The faculty should organize extracurricular activities to create an environment for students to practice English communication; (3) More native lecturers should be involved in the implementation of the course in order to arouse students' interest and help them enhance their English communication skills and pronunciation.

4.1.3. The Results From Class Observation

Class observation was conducted in May, 2021 to see how students actually performed and what difficulties they encountered throughout speaking sessions. From careful and considerate observation of the authors, the study came up with remarkable results:

a) Students' Participation

Most students started the class with a lack of enthusiasm. After the warm-up activities from the lecturers, the students seemed more excited and paid more attention to the lesson. Discussion and presentation, combined with responding questions from the teacher, were the three types of speaking activities observed in the three sessions. In the activities requesting to work in pairs or groups, not all the students were excited to speak English. Some enthusiastically

participated, while others talked little or not at all. Additionally, in the absence of teacher observation, these students favoured discussing in Vietnamese. In the presentation activities, while a group of students was giving a presentation, the other students in the class did not listen attentively. Instead, they chatted with their classmates or prepare their own presentations. Students who spoke well tended to express their thoughts and interact with lecturers. This caused the students who had difficulties speaking to feel more pressured and anxious to talk.

In general, these adult students had a strong tendency to work in groups with their close classmates. Despite having quite good diplomatic skills, these students rarely engaged in in-class activities with people they did not have a close relationship with.

b) Students' Speaking Abilities

It was obvious that the English speaking level among students was uneven. This difference was quite independent of gender. A variety of speaking abilities were present among male and female students. However, younger students frequently reacted more quickly than older ones in communication.

Students could not speak English fluently in most of their tasks. They often resorted to hesitation devices and thought carefully about what to say. Regarding linguistic-related difficulties, these students almost used vocabulary at elementary lower levels when speaking. They tended to use the words they already knew over and over again. The present simple tense with simple sentence structures was used in most contexts. Some students tended to write in details what they wanted to say on their notes and then read it aloud. This was especially true during presentations, when most students read the sentences shown on the slides. Many errors in students' pronunciation were also noted by the research group. A few students mispronounced in their speaking due to the influence of their local accent. Regarding psychology-related difficulties, students looked quite nervous when they spoke in front of the class. They sometimes did not know what to say and needed the lecturer's suggestions to continue their talks.

It is clear from the observation results that, despite lecturers' great effort, students still have certain difficulties speaking English. Fortunately, the difficulties that have been noted from the observation are quite in line with the results from the questionnaire survey and interviews.

4.2. Discussions of the Results

The current study was conducted to identify difficulties in speaking English encountered by second-degree English-majored students at TDMU. Through both qualitative and quantitative data analysis, the study indicates that students face a significant number of difficulties speaking English, which are due to a variety of factors.

Generally, there are various factors affecting students' speaking performance. On the part of the students themselves, these factors include linguistic components, affective factors, or background knowledge. The results of the current study reveal that the most common type of difficulties in speaking English faced by TDMU adult English-majored students is related to linguistic factors. These language barriers include (1) insufficient vocabulary, (2) mispronouncing words, (3) habit of thinking in Vietnamese and then translating into English, (4) using wrong words, and (5) using wrong tenses. The study also reveals psychological-related difficulties encountered by these students, which are: (1) nervousness, (2) fear of making mistakes, (7) fear of losing face, and (8) being overpowered by better students. These results are quite consistent with those from previous studies mentioned in the literature review.

Among linguistic factors, vocabulary is believed to be at the top of the list contributing

to students' problems in their speaking English. Other speaking difficulties are also noted through the interview. These difficulties are primarily related to psychological obstacles such as shyness, stress, feeling ashamed or panicked, fear of being judged or laughed at by others. Another point worth noting is that the interview results also reveal two more general difficulties, which are "poor reflexes" and "unable to keep up with the pace of the conversation". These difficulties can be classified as composite ones because these two problems can be caused by various factors, including linguistic factors, psychological factors, students' background knowledge, as well as their listening skills and response abilities.

Different from other studies which investigate different speaking-related factors separately, the current one provides a more comprehensive understanding of factors affecting speaking skills, putting more emphasis on linguistic and psychological factors, which are causing most of the problems in speaking English among adult language learners. It is interesting to note that due to their experiences, TDMU second-degree English-majored students' speaking skills are more affected by linguistic factors than psychological ones and background knowledge.

From the survey results, the reasons why students encounter these difficulties are also revealed. The first reason is due to the differences between the two language systems. These differences can be found in various aspects, including word choice, grammar, and pronunciation. The second reason has to do with students' learning strategies, as these students have been influenced by the traditional learning style from their high schools, which focuses on learning grammar and writing essays without providing opportunities for them to practice listening and speaking reflexes. The third cause comes from limitations in the learning environment, such as the lack of opportunities to interact with English-speaking people, insufficient time to practice apart from school hours, and the like.

Results from the questionnaire also reveal TDMU second-degree English-majored students' belief that expanding their vocabulary as much as possible is the best approach to improve their English speaking abilities, and they almost attempt to do so more frequently than other strategies. This finding is quite in line with the results collected from other instruments as mentioned above, which indicates that expanding vocabulary is the optimal goal. Going out with others who want to practice speaking is another simple solution because practicing speaking English is believed to be an ever-increasing among Vietnamese people in the present time. Additionally, enrolling in the same course makes it easy for them to make friends and practice speaking English together outside class hours. Practicing speaking exercises in textbooks or singing English songs are also basic practices that do not require a lot of time or money. The exercises in the textbook often focus on helping students improve their vocabulary and grammar skills, whereas singing in English will assist them in improving their pronunciation. As the strategy of practicing thinking in English does not appear to have been considered or applied by a large number of students, lecturers are required to pay attention and encourage students to practice it more frequently in order to develop communication fluency. The strategies of communicating directly or indirectly with foreigners (via social media) also appear to be of little appeal, as few students have adequate time to establish friends with unfamiliar people, particularly foreigners. They are, however, more likely to take advantage of the international connections offered in their workplace. Another solution that students rarely take is practicing speaking via apps or websites (ELSA, Cake, TalkEnglish, Italki, etc.). Although this is one of the effective ways to increase pronunciation and communication reflexes, this learning method is still relatively new to many Vietnamese, particularly adult students who lack the proficiency with technology compared to younger ones. Additionally, traveling abroad is also a problematic solution due to the expense, even though the real experience in English-speaking countries is

well worth it. Finally, engaging in a foreign language course at English centers or joining English speaking clubs appears to be inappropriate for the second-degree students at TDMU because their time budget does not enable them to work and study in many places at the same time.

From the research results and lecturers' perspective, the following suggestions are put forward:

For students, it is important to build an effective and appropriate learning method to speak English. The most effective way to learn to speak is to practice constantly, so they should practice speaking English outside of class more frequently. News, TV shows, magazines, English movies, and songs are all excellent resources for expanding vocabulary, phrases, and expressions depending on individual daily routines. Observation and imitation of native-speaker speech will help students improve several aspects of pronunciation, grammar, sentence structure and build confidence and reflex. When speaking English with friends or foreigners in daily life or workplace, students should practice thinking in English. Avoiding worrying about making mistakes when speaking will also help communication more smoothly.

For lecturers, they should provide clear instructions and sufficient assistance for their students to find out an effective way of learning English speaking for themselves. During class, lecturers should work cooperatively and harmoniously with their students to help them overcome their apprehensions and inhibitions, thereby encouraging them to speak more freely. Besides, lecturers should provide their students with more opportunities to speak English in class by engaging them in a variety of activities that demand them to speak. Lecturers should also know when and how to correct students' mistakes so that they are less inhibited in speaking activities and the conversation is not interrupted. Encouraging students to switch speaking partners is an excellent strategy for training students' listening and speaking reflexes.

For the faculty and the university, there should be a reasonable limit on the number of students in a class to ensure that they can adequately care for all students. It is also to improve facilities and modernize equipment to give students a sense of comfort and enthusiasm when they come to class.

5. Conclusion

This study was conducted to identify difficulties in speaking English encountered by second-degree English-majored students at TDMU. From both qualitative and quantitative data, the study reveals a significant number of difficulties in speaking English encountered by these students, which can be due to a variety of factors. The results of the study also reveal that the most common type of difficulty in speaking English faced by TDMU second-degree English-majored students is related to linguistic factors. These language barriers include insufficient vocabulary, mispronouncing words, habit of thinking in Vietnamese and then translating into English, using inappropriate words, and using wrong tenses. With reference to psychological-related difficulties encountered by these students, such factors as nervousness, fear of making mistakes, fear of losing face, and being overpowered by better students were also noted. The study also puts forward recommendations that may be beneficial to both the lecturers and the students in teaching and learning English speaking skills at TDMU in particular and in Vietnamese contexts in general. To help students overcome these difficulties and improve the situation, these recommendations should extend to all of those who are involved in the course including the lecturers, the students and other university members who are in charge of academic affairs related to the course as well.

References

Al-Jamal, D. A., & Al-Jamal, G. A. (2014). An investigation of the difficulties faced by EFL undergraduates in speaking skills. *English Language Teaching, 7*(1). http://doi:10.5539/elt.v7n1p19

Bachman, L., & Palmer, A. S. (1996). *Language testing in practice*. Oxford University Press.

Baker, J., & Westrup, H. (2003). *Essential speaking skills: A handbook for English language teachers*. Continuum.

Bueno, A., Madrid, D., & McLaren, N. (2006). *TEFL in secondary education*. Editorial Universidad de Granada.

Burns, A., & Joyce, H. (1997). *Focus on speaking*. National Center for English Language Teaching and Research.

Bygate, M. (1998). Theoretical perspectives on speaking. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 18*(1), 20-42.

Bygate, M. (2001). Effects of task repetition on the structure and control of language. In M. Bygate, P. Skehan and M. Swain (Eds.). *Researching pedagogic tasks: Second language learning, teaching and testing*. Longman.

Cameron, L. (2001). *Teaching languages to young learners*. University Press.

Chaney, A. L., & Burk, T. L. (2001). *Teaching oral communication in grades K-8*. Allyn and Bacon.

Chastain, K. (1988). *Developing second language skills: Theory to practice* (3rd ed.). Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Feni, G. P. (2014). *The difficulties of learning speaking faced by the second semester students of the English Department at University of Muhammadiyah Malang* [Bachelor thesis in English education]. University of Muhammadiyah Malang.

Harmer, J. (1991). *The practice of English language teaching* (3rd ed.). London and New York.

Harmer, J. (2007). *The practice of English language teaching* (3rd ed.). Pearson Longman.

Hosni, S. A. (2014). Speaking difficulties encountered by young EFL learners. *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature, 2*(6), 22-30.

Iqbal, J. (2012). *Four language skills*. http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/-teaching/es

Krashen, S. D., Long, M. H., & Scarcella, R. C. (1982). *Child-adult differences in second language acquisition*. Newbury House Publishers.

Krashen, S. D. (1988). *Second language acquisition and second language learning*. Prentice-Hall.

Kurniawati (2017). *A study of speaking class anxiety of the second semester students in English Education Department at Univeritas Islam Negeri Aladdin Makasar* [M. A. thesis]. Alauddin State Islamic University Of Makassar.

Mufidah (2017). *Factors affecting the speaking difficulties of the tenth grade Hotel Accommodation students at Vocational High School* [Bachelor thesis]. Islamic State University.

Nakhalah, A. M. M. A. (2016). Problems and difficulties of speaking that encounter English language students at Al Quds Open University. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention, 5*(12), 96-101.

Natalia (2015). *An analysis of students' problems in speaking English daily language program at Husnul Khotimah Islamic Boarding School* [M.A. thesis]. Syekh Nurjati State Islamic Institute.

Nation, I. S. P., & Newton, J. (2009). Teaching ESL/EFL listening and speaking. *ESL and Applied Linguistics Professional Series*. Routledge Taylor and Francis Group.

Nunan, D. (1995). *Language teaching methodology: A textbook for teachers*. Phoenix Ltd.

Oxford, R. L. (1990). *Language learning strategies: What every teacher should know*. Newbury House Publishers.

Richard & Rerandya (2008). *Methodology in language teaching - An anthology of current practice*. Cambridge University Press.

Siahaan, S. (2008). *Issues in linguistics*. Graha Ilmu.

Thu Dau Mot University (2000), *Description of English language curriculumn* (for 2-year Bachelor course).

Trinh, T. P. H. (2019). *A study on difficulties in English speaking skills of the non-major students at Hai Phong Private University* [Bachelor thesis]. Hai Phong Private University.

Vo, P. Q., Pham, T. M. N., & Ho, T. N. (2018). Challenges to speaking skills encountered by English-majored students: A story of one Vietnamese university in the Mekong Delta. *CTU Journal of Innovation and Sustainable Development, 54*(5), 38-44. https://doi.org/10.22144/ctu.jen.2018.022

KHÓ KHĂN TRONG VIỆC NÓI TIẾNG ANH
CỦA SINH VIÊN VĂN BẰNG 2 CHUYÊN NGÀNH
NGÔN NGỮ ANH TẠI TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC THỦ DẦU MỘT

Trần Thanh Dũ, Khấu Hoàng Kim Thư

Trường Đại học Thủ Dầu Một,
Trần Văn Ơn, Phú Hòa, TP. Thủ Dầu Một, tỉnh Bình Dương, Việt Nam

Tóm tắt: Tiếng Anh ngày càng trở nên quan trọng trong thời đại toàn cầu hóa và hội nhập quốc tế. Việc thông thạo ngôn ngữ này giúp mọi người có được nhiều cơ hội việc làm tốt hơn và phát triển bản thân ở nhiều phương diện. Tuy nhiên, việc tiếp thu tiếng Anh là điều khó khăn đối với người Việt sử dụng nó như một ngoại ngữ, và nói là một trong những kỹ năng khó đạt được nhất đối với nhiều người học ngoại ngữ, nhất là đối với sinh viên văn bằng 2. Với mục đích khám phá và phân tích những khó khăn trong việc học kỹ năng nói của sinh viên văn bằng 2 chuyên ngành Ngôn ngữ Anh tại Trường Đại học Thủ Dầu Một (TDMU), một nghiên cứu theo phương pháp hỗn hợp, kết hợp cả thiết kế định lượng và định tính, được tiến hành. Mẫu nghiên cứu gồm 152 sinh viên và 5 giảng viên phụ trách các khóa học nói tại Trường. Với số liệu thu thập được thông qua khảo sát bằng bảng câu hỏi, phỏng vấn và quan sát, kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy những khó khăn chủ yếu mà những sinh viên này thường gặp phải liên quan đến hạn chế về từ vựng, ngữ pháp, phát âm, tâm lý cá nhân và cả thói quen suy nghĩ bằng tiếng Việt khi nói tiếng Anh. Những phát hiện từ nghiên cứu có thể áp dụng vào quá trình dạy và học kỹ năng nói tiếng Anh của sinh viên văn bằng 2 chuyên ngành Ngôn ngữ Anh trong bối cảnh Việt Nam.

Từ khóa: kỹ năng nói tiếng Anh, khó khăn, sinh viên văn bằng 2 ngành Ngôn ngữ Anh