

CRITICAL STRATEGY IN GROUPS IN TEACHING SPEAKING SKILLS FOR THE SECOND ENGLISH-MAJOR STUDENT YEAR AT THANH HOA UNIVERSITY OF CULTURE, SPORTS, AND TOURISM

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Article History

Received : 23/05/2022

Accepted : 25/05/2022

Published : 27/05/2022

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Abstract

This research was conducted to see the applicability of Critical strategy in teaching Speaking skill for the second English-major student at Thanh Hoa University of Culture, Sports and Tourism. So as to gather more accurate data, both quantitative and qualitative methods were used. Quantitative data were gathered through two survey questionnaires administered to the students and the teachers, and qualitative data were collected via class observations. These methods helped the researcher get more in-depth data for the analysis. The data were collected from the data analysis revealed that CS enhanced English speaking skills of students. According to the teachers and the students, the application of CS in group work into the teaching of speaking skills to the second-year students of TUCST is feasible though this strategy also has several difficulties when implementing.

Keywords: *applicability, critical strategy, group work, speaking skill, English-major students*

Introduction

It is recognized that in recent years, in the field of second language acquisition (SLA), researchers have been more interested in studying the learning process than the learning product and in the development of communicative competence than that linguistic competence (Chen, 1990). For this tendency, the present study is intended to investigate the applicability of critical strategy in groups in the speaking lessons for English-major students at Thanh Hoa University of Culture, Sports, and Tourism (TUCST) based on the following reasons:

Firstly, there is an urgent need to improve students' communicative competence in addition to lexical and grammatical knowledge. In fact, we are living in the twenty-first century with the dominance of English all over the world in such important areas as aviation, business, commerce, technology, science, international relations, and diplomacy. In accordance with the open policies to integrate into the world community, a large number of companies from different countries investing in several fields in Vietnam. Therefore, the necessity for English has been increasing very rapidly, in particular, English speaking skills have become a common requirement for jobs, and are considered to be a "ladder"

to a successful career. Being aware of that, in the past years, the teaching staff of English at TUCST has been trying hard to define suitable methods and to compile appropriate materials for language teaching and learning in which speaking skills are treated as the most important of the four language skills but has not been successful in producing sufficient, fluent foreign-language speakers. One of the main reasons is the lack of frequent practice from students. To enhance students' speaking skills development, teachers need to create more opportunities for the students to practice and learn from their own strengths and weaknesses as well as their peers' weaknesses and strengths. Among suggested solutions, Critical Strategy (CS) in groups can be of great help because it is the interaction in the classroom among students to express their opinions on the topics. Moreover, through these activities students will learn the way to co-operate in a group or team that is very important in the real world and positive social relations in the community.

Secondly, opponent strategy in groups is one of the teaching techniques designed in the communicative approach which emerges as the latest development because of its superiority. In the view of this approach, the learner is considered the center of the learning process, and the teacher serves as a facilitator, allowing

students to be in charge of their own learning. Breen, M. and Candlin, C.N. (1980) stated that learners should be active in groups as well as in classroom activities to enhance their interactive learning to be communicatively competent. However, there is a fact that not all learners are participants in the speaking lessons because of shyness, lacking motivation or poor knowledge of pronunciation and vocabulary. Thus, in order to involve all learners in-class activities, it is the teachers' business to design and apply techniques to increase students' participation in-class activities and makes them more active. CS in groups is one of the feasible methods to motivate students to participate heartily in speaking activities in the class.

Finally, the paper is implemented to investigate the effectiveness of applying this technique and from that discover its strong and weak points to set up the most relevant ones in terms of contents. The results obtained based on the theoretical background and the present use of it at TUCST would help students to raise their speaking skills as well as improve teachers' teaching methodologies in relation to the process of renovation for teaching at TUCST currently.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In English study, speaking can be considered a major component or an inseparable part of any language learning process. Therefore, speaking has been the object of numerous studies. Richard and Rodgers (1986:165) define speaking as *"the range of exercise types and activities with a communication approach is unlimited, provided that such exercises and activities enable learners to attain the communicative objectives of the curriculum, engage learners in communication and require the use of such communicative processes as information sharing, negotiation of meaning, and interaction"*. They think that teachers who take account of communication as the goal of foreign language teaching can select, organize, and design oral tasks or activities related to negotiation and exchange of feedback among students in the classroom more communicatively and effectively.

In the past several years, although there has existed a variety of approaches for language teaching, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is always a popular approach and has strongly influenced teaching methodology in Vietnam, especially in teaching speaking skills to advanced students. CLT marks the beginning of a major innovation within language teaching which is widely accepted nowadays. It emphasizes that the goal of language learning is to develop communicative competence that consists of grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence (Canale and Swaine, 1980). In a classroom environment, CLT is a suitable solution. Classroom oral communication practice helps teachers understand the constraints of speaking activities designed in the line of CA and make them more aware of the complexity of speaking practice in the classroom to plan out appropriate strategies.

A teaching strategy is a conscious plan comprising a wide range of selected skills and techniques, which is targeted at the achievement of an objective. Thus a critical teaching strategy is a one for the classroom that is used to increase motivation and retention, help

students develop a positive image of themselves and others, provide a vehicle for critical thinking and problem-solving, and to encourage collaborative social skills. In other words, encouraging students to have critical thinking in the learning process is the goal of this strategy.

In a seminal study on critical thinking and education in 1941, Edward Glaser defines critical thinking as the ability to think critically that involves three things: (i) an attitude of being disposed to consider in a thoughtful way the problems and subjects that come within the range of one's experiences, (ii) knowledge of the methods of logical inquiry and reasoning, and (iii) some skills in applying those methods. Thus, it is said that critical thinking is the mode of thinking about any subjects, contents, or problems in which learners improve the quality of their thinking in learning how to analyze the logical structure of texts clearly and rationally in reflective and independent thinking.

It is obvious that critical strategy (CS) enhances students' language skills, engages in reflective and independent thinking, and is able to think clearly and rationally. Thinking clearly and systematically in analyzing an issue can improve the way learners express their ideas and their comprehension abilities. Therefore, the critical strategies relevant to learners' level will develop their language skills, especially spoken language.

Teaching critical strategies used in the speaking Lessons

CS employing a number of specific techniques can enhance the effectiveness of classroom communication, which are oral presentation, group discussion, and seminars.

Oral presentation

Emden & Becker (2004: 1) state that the *"ability to speak well enough to interest, influence or persuade other people is a major asset for whatever they want to do in the future and it may change them in ways that they did not expect"*. Their idea is true as oral presentation skills can bring about distinct advantages in teaching speaking: (i) It helps students develop the skills of spoken interaction through which teacher can discover whether communication takes place; (ii) It helps teachers obtain feedback about the students' improvements related to the aspects of spoken language and intervene with appropriate remedies. Also, students can get feedback on their performance immediately which is particularly good for them to find out a more effective speaking learning strategy; (iii) It helps students have critical thinking about everything, and produce a well-organized oral report, which accordingly will help to develop their language proficiency.

In this technique, students are divided into different groups of 3- 4 students to cover a topic or task given that is required thorough preparation at home before they actually report to the class. When this process takes place, each member of the group will take turns to make oral presentations related to a two-minute talk on different parts of the topic and all class members will be active listeners. As such, the activity may go on in form of a discussion and the teacher will act as an observer and a 'referee' at the same time because she may intervene when practical help is needed to reach a final agreement on the topic discussed.

Group discussion

Group work is commonly the choice of teachers because large classes do not allow them to create enough opportunities for all learners to participate in classroom communicative activities at the same time. According to Brown (1994), group work offers various advantages: (i) It generates interactive language; (ii) It offers an embracing effective climate; (iii) It promotes learners' responsibility and autonomy; (iv) It is a step toward individualizing instruction.

Besides, it is agreed that group work also contains some certain disadvantages such as the teacher is no longer in control of the class; students will use their mother tongue; students' errors will be reinforced in small groups; teachers can not monitor all groups once; and some learners may prefer to work alone (Brown, 1994). However, according to Brown, group work can be conducted successfully if the teacher takes into consideration various factors like the way to group students, abilities, personal characteristics, etc. She also has to make sure that every student has got chance to speak and does not interfere much with their talk. Moreover, an appropriate task including games, role-play and simulation, drama, project, interview brainstorming, information gap, jigsaw, problem-solving, decision making, and opinion exchange whose topics refer to daily life is also very important to promote successful group discussion.

In a group discussion, the class is divided into small groups of 3-4 students to work together and all the groups work at the same time. Students are left free to interact among themselves with a minimum dose of intervention from the teacher. While students are working in groups, the teacher may move around listening, giving help when it is really necessary. Then groups can interact to exchange information and ideas, come to a discussion and some general consensus made by the big group, and finally, the teacher sums up the discussion.

Group discussion as a communicative activity should be used to encourage meaningful interaction among students and motivate them to express their opinions and attitudes through a persuasive argument or convincing, evidence in the target language.

Seminars

It is believed that seminars can be used very effectively in language teaching in general, and in teaching speaking in particular. According to Furneaux et al (1991, quoted in Jordan, 1997:196), there are four main types of the seminar with some overlap among them: (i) student group work: eg. a problem-solving exercise; (ii) the lesson: nominated students go over prepared answers to case studies; (iii) discussion: eg. of materials previously read by the whole group; (iv) presentation: e.g. class members reporting on reading they had done.

Seminar skills expose to a variety of language functions as strategies: disagreeing, agreeing, persuading, starting a criticism, giving an example, asking questions, interrupting, and so on, which require an extensive practice of communicative skills.

In speaking practice with a seminar in the classroom, students are asked to prepare brief papers related to a list of issues suggested by a teacher at home depending on the time available for the activity. They are also freed to join any groups they choose, but they have to make oral presentations and then involve in extensive interaction through discussions, questions, answers, etc. The role of the teacher is a facilitator or a guide who provides materials or suggests reference sources to help students find out information and data for the topic chosen. The assessment for students' presentations is based on knowledge of subject content, capacity for analysis, synthesis, their own opinions in English, and creative thinking through a well-ordered presentation and ability to express. The success of the seminar depends on several factors, but the contents of the topics chosen, which decide the degree of students' participation and interest, are more important above.

The seminar is the most complex form of CS. It not only requires a high level of students' spoken skills and their language knowledge but also requires more time for preparation than the other strategies. However, it may be very effective to help students have fluent and logical speaking skills.

METHODOLOGY

The subjects chosen for the study were from two sources: 40-second English-major students and 8 English teachers teaching at TUCST. Forty students were randomly selected to go in for the research and to participate in the survey questionnaire. In the case, 'Cluster random sampling', which meant that instead of randomly selecting the individuals, the researcher randomly selected groups for the observation. In this way, hopefully, the participants chosen could be representatives of the rest of the population. Eight teachers (80% of the population) who have been teaching speaking skills for at least four years were invited to take part in the survey questionnaire. It was hoped that their experience would be useful for this study.

So as to gather more accurate data, both quantitative and qualitative methods were used. Quantitative data were gathered through two survey questionnaires administered both to the students and the teachers, and qualitative data were collected via class observations. These methods helped the researcher get more in-depth data for the analysis.

In this study, two questionnaires were delivered to forty students and eight teachers. The questionnaire for the students was designed in four parts: Part one comprised the first five questions (questions 1,2,3,4 for the closed questions and question 5 for the multiple-choice) that the author desired to explore the students' beliefs and opinions on the critical strategy in groups in the speaking lessons. Questions 6,7,8 (the closed questions) were aimed at gathering data on the responses of students' preferences for the techniques and the topics that their teachers used. Questions 9 and 10 were designed with the multiple-choice to find out the difficulties the students encountered in the speaking process in groups. The final part of the questionnaire was made to learn about the students' suggestions for the application of CS.

The questionnaire for the teachers consisted of four points. To begin with, their beliefs and attitudes towards the application of CS in groups in the speaking lessons were gathered through answers to the first four closed questions. Next, the present use of CS in groups in the speaking lessons was surveyed with four questions (5,6,7,8) including the closed question and the multiple-choice. Third, the students' difficulties and the teachers' challenges in applying CS in groups were found through question 9. Finally, the rest of the question (10) was aimed at investigating the teachers' suggestions to make the critical strategy possible.

Four class observations were carried out in the fourth term. Each observation consisted of 3 stages: before the lesson, during the lesson, and after the lesson. In the before-lesson stage, the researcher focused on making contact with the teacher to know the teacher's teaching points. During the during-lesson stage, the observations were aimed at the techniques and the activities used

by the teacher and the student's interaction in the class. In the after-lesson stage, the researcher concentrated on discussing and exchanging ideas with the observed teachers

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Two questionnaires referring to the teacher and students' opinions on CS application in groups were delivered to 8 teachers who have been teaching English and 40 English-major students who have been learning there. 48 replies were collected back statistically.

The teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards CS application in groups

Question 1: The teachers' ideas of CS

Teachers' ideas of CS	No	%
is student-centered and only used for teaching speaking not for the other skills.	3	37.5
is student-centered and used for four skills.	5	75
mainly focuses on developing critical thinking for students.	8	100
enhances students to think clearly and systematically in analyzing an issue.	8	100
always emphasizes fluency over accuracy	3	37.5
works on both fluency and accuracy at the same time	5	75
creates a lot of opportunities for students to communicate	8	100
creates a secure, non-threatening atmosphere in the classroom	8	100
is often used in pair work, and group works.	8	100
reduces teacher's work.	2	25
uses authentic materials.	8	100
often emphasizes language function over forms	8	100

Table 1: Teachers' ideas on CS

The data in table 1 showed that most teachers had a good knowledge of CS. A majority of teachers (75%) believed that CS could be applied for four skills and work on both fluency and accuracy at the same time (75%). A minority of teachers (37.5%) thought that CS was only used for speaking skills and reduced teachers' work (25%). The teachers' misunderstanding of CS was not considerable. Therefore, it might be said that the teachers' understanding of the technique positively affected CS application in the speaking lessons.

Question 2: The role of CS in group work to the students' speaking skills development

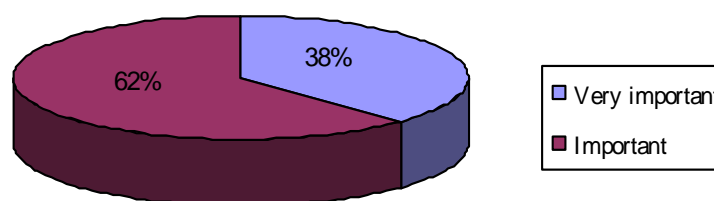


Chart 1: Teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards the role of CS in group work to the students' speaking skills development

As can be seen from chart 1, a majority of teachers (62%) were aware of the importance of CS in group work to the students' speaking skills development, the other 38% even found it very important. Therefore, it was easy to find that no one underestimated the importance of CS in groups to their teaching process.

Question 3: The correspondence of the topics in the current coursebook to CS application in group work

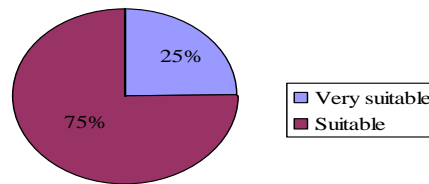


Chart 2: The teachers' beliefs and attitudes on the topics in the current coursebook to CS application in group work

Chart 2 revealed that (75%) of the teachers in the survey agreed on the correspondence of the topics in the current coursebook with CS application in groups while (25%) of them found it very suitable. That meant the speaking course book was carefully chosen and suitable to the second-year students' level as well as the teaching approach of TUCST.

Question 4: The correspondence of the students' English proficiency to CS application in group work

The correspondence of the students' English proficiency to CS application in group work	No	%
4. How feasible do you think the second-year students' English proficiency is to CS application in group work?		
A. Very feasible.	0	0
B. Feasible.	8	100
C. Not Feasible.	0	0
D. Not feasible at all.	0	0

Table 2: The teachers' beliefs and attitudes toward the students' English proficiency to CS application in group work.

Table 2 showed us the results of the teachers' beliefs on the students' English proficiency for their CS application. It can easily be seen that there was firm agreement among 8 teachers on that. This result reflected the teachers' positive attitudes to CS application.

The teachers' situation of applying CS in group work

Question 5: The frequency of applying CS in group work.

The frequency of applying CS in group work	No	%
5. How often do you use CS in group work in the speaking lessons?		
A. Very often.	2	25
B. Often.	5	62.5
C. Not very often.	1	12.5
D. Never.	0	0

Table 3: The teachers' frequency of applying CS in group work

It can be drawn out from table 3 that a significant majority of the teachers (62.5%) in the survey often used the CS application in groups, and 2 out of 8 teachers (25%) even employed it very often. Only one teacher (12.5%) employed it sometimes. Obviously, most of the teachers were aware of the importance of CS in groups to the students' speaking skills development, so no teacher was reported to apply this technique scarcely

Questions 6,7 and 8: The teachers' techniques in the speaking lessons

Classroom activities	No of responses	Percentage
Opinion exchange	5	62.5
Games	6	75
Drama	8	100
Project	4	50

Problem-solving	8	100
Interviewing brainstorming	2	25
Information gap	1	12.5
Decision making	1	12.5
Short survey	5	62.5

Table 4: Types of techniques and activities used by the teachers (question 8)

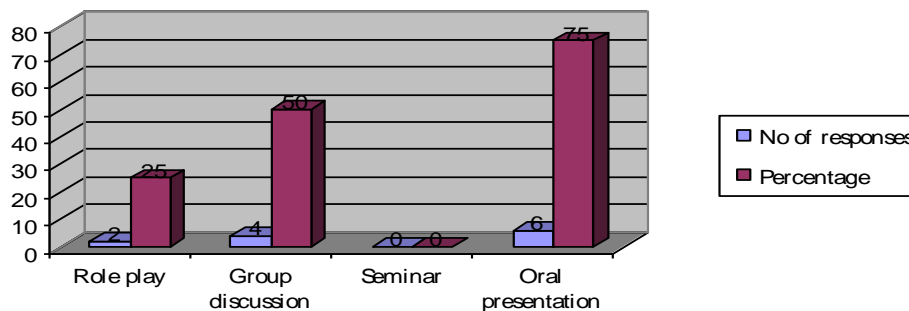


Chart 3: The teachers' techniques used most (questions 6 and 7)

The results implied that the most frequently-used techniques among the teachers were oral presentation (75%) and group discussion (50%). With respect to the activities used in the classroom, a variety of activities like opinion exchange, games, drama, projects, problem-solving and short survey were chosen with the high agreement from the teachers (see table 4) while problem-solving and drama were employed most (100%). That revealed the effectiveness of these activities in the speaking lessons.

The teachers' challenges when applying CS in group work. (question 9)

The difficulties affirmed by teachers	No	%
<i>1. The difficulties on the part of teachers</i>		
Misconception about CS.	0	0
Negative attitudes to CS application	0	0
Deficiency in strategic and sociolinguistic competence in English.	2	25
Limited time for teaching speaking	8	100
<i>2. The difficulties for the students</i>		
Irrelevant English proficiency in CS application.	0	0
Students' anxiety when preparing the contents of the topics or the tasks given by the teacher.	5	62.5
Students' anxiety when presenting a particular topic	8	100
Students' passive learning styles	0	0
Use Vietnamese in group work	6	75
Resistance to class participation	5	62.5
Low interest in the topics in coursebooks	3	37.5

Table 5: The difficulties affirmed by teachers

As far as the difficulties on the part of teachers were concerned, all the teachers (100%) claimed that limited time caused the difficulties to their application of CS in group work. The fact was that teachers had certain difficulties with strategic and sociolinguistic competence in English to help students have the successful strategies of presentation or information exchange or negotiation with the others in discussion.

As for the difficulties on the part of students, the whole teachers (100%) alleged that students' anxiety when presenting a particular topic was one primary hindrance to CS application. In addition, the other three major hindrances perceived by a majority of the teachers in this survey questionnaire were students' anxiety when preparing the contents of the topics or the tasks given by the teacher (62.5%), the use of Vietnamese in group discussion (75%) and resistance to participating in classroom communicative activities (62.5%). Finally, 37.5% of teachers stated that the students' low interest in the topics was also a challenge for CS application in the speaking lessons.

The teachers' suggestions to make CS application possible. (question 10)

Solutions suggested by teachers	No	%
<i>1. The suggestions for the difficulties of teachers</i>		
Organize seminars with the help of experienced teachers or organize micro-teachings or peer observations to avoid misunderstanding in the application of CS.	0	0
Self-study through magazines, newspapers, or materials on the internet, etc to improve the knowledge of CS as well as strategic and sociolinguistic competence in English	2	25
Allotted time for each group, and for every activity to a particular topic	8	100
<i>2. The suggestions for the difficulties of students</i>		
Adapt the coursebook relevant to students' English proficiency	0	0
Provide materials or suggest reference sources referring to the contents of the topic or provide students with the strategies for a successful oral presentation.	8	100
Suggest interesting topics for communication	5	62.5
Use authentic materials (songs, films, games, television, etc)	5	62.5
Create a variety of communicative activities	5	62.5
Build a cooperative atmosphere in the class and in each individual	8	100
Make students change their attitude toward mistakes	3	37.5
Make teachers' roles and students' roles clear to prevent students from depending so much on the teachers	1	12.5
Base assessment and evaluation on goals and objectives which are clear to students	8	100
Carry out the ongoing assessment (i.e. give students marks, grades for class participation, or in-class work).	8	100
Carry out small and funny punishments for students who do not participate or use Vietnamese	8	100
Adapt the topics in the current course books to the students' interest	3	37.5

Table 6: Solutions suggested by teachers

With respect to the teachers' challenges, all of the teachers (100%) suggested that allotted time for each group, and for every activity to a particular topic was very necessary. Furthermore, 25% of the teachers mentioned self-study through magazines, newspapers, or materials on the internet, etc to improve the knowledge of CS as well as strategic and sociolinguistic competence in English to help students succeed in the speaking lessons.

With regard to the students' difficulties, the survey found a variety of different suggestions. To students' anxiety when preparing or when presenting the contents of the topics or the tasks given, 100% of the teachers agreed that providing materials or suggesting reference sources related to the contents of the topic or providing students with the strategies for a successful oral presentation helped them overcome these difficulties. To the use of Vietnamese in group work or resistance to participating in classroom speaking activities, all of the teachers (100%) suggested the useful solutions like ongoing assessment and 'funny' punishments for students who do not participate or use Vietnamese by requiring them to sing an English song or dance following the melody of the song or tell an English story, or if not they could get the bad marks.

The students' beliefs and attitudes towards CS in group work

Question 1 and 2: The students' beliefs about their English proficiency

The students' beliefs about their English proficiency	No	%
1. How long have you learned English?		
A. 2 years.	0	0
B. 5 years.	6	15
C. 7 years.	30	75
D. Above 7 years.	4	10
2. How often do you communicate with a foreigner in English?		
A. Very often.	0	0
B. Often.	15	37.5
C. Sometimes.	20	50
D. Rarely.	5	12.5
E. Never.	0	0

Table 7: The students' beliefs about their English proficiency

As for the student's English proficiency, the given data in table 7 implied that most of them (75%) have learned English for 7 years in secondary and high school and the other 10% even have learned English for more than 7 years while only 4 out of the total students have learned English for 5 years. This meant that they have mastered many English grammar patterns.

In respect of the frequency of communicating with foreigners in English, 15 out of 40 students often did that. Half of them confirmed that they sometimes communicated with foreigners in English, whereas 12.5% of the informants were rarely. It was said to be advantageous for teachers to improve the students' speaking skills by creating a variety of communicative activities related to the real contexts of life.

Question 3: The role of speaking skills in learning English

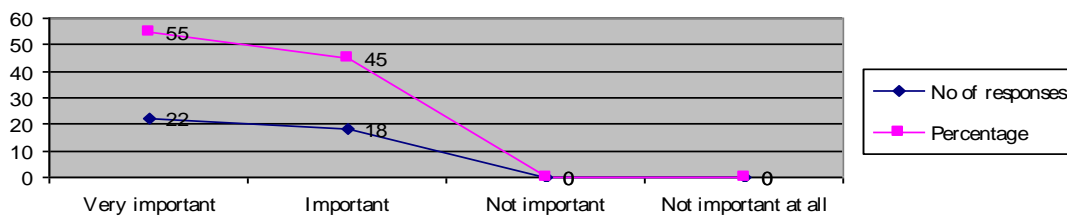


Chart 4: The students' beliefs and attitudes towards speaking skills

Answering the importance of speaking skills as shown in chart 4, 22 students (55%) agreed that speaking skills were very important. 18 other students (45%) had a positive attitude toward speaking skills. Nobody undervalued the role of speaking skills in learning English. According to the results, students' attitude to English speaking skills seemed to be good.

Question 4: The role of CS in group work toward the students' speaking skills improvement

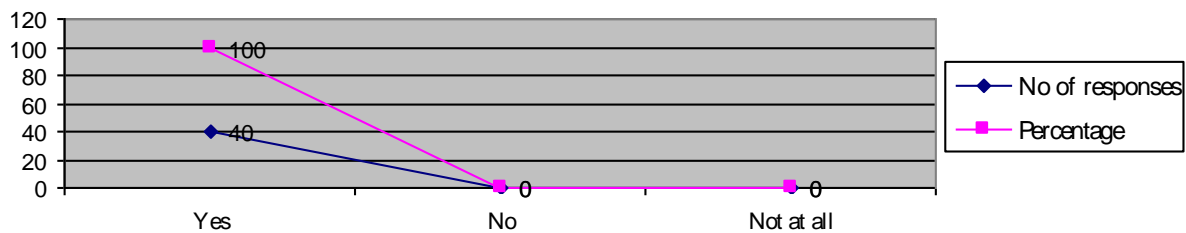


Chart 5: The students' beliefs and attitudes towards CS in group work

It is easy to realize in chart 5 that the whole students (100%) were conscious of the sheer important role of CS in group work for improving their speaking skills. The reason for the high agreement may be the fact that this strategy was very helpful for students to develop their critical thinking on a topic or a task given. This meant all the second-year students of English were totally aware of the importance of CS in their future work because these skills could develop their confidence, flexibility, logical thinking, speaking skills, and organization skills, which accordingly might bring about a better career prospect.

Question 5: The profits gained from CS in group work

The students' profits gained from CS in group work	No	%
I learned more English language skills than I would have learned in a regular way	40	100
I think CS in group work has enhanced my communicative skills	30	75
I think CS in group work has improved my presentation skills	35	87.5
I have become a better problem-solver	22	55
I got valuable experiences from working in groups	25	62.5
I feel more confident in speaking English	36	90

Table 8: The students' profits gained from CS in group work

It can be drawn out from the above table that a significant majority of the respondents found that CS in groups was beneficial for their speaking skills. All the students (100%) thought that they learned more English language skills than they learned in a regular way. 30 out of 40 students (75%) believed that CS in group work enhanced their communicative skills as well as improved their presentation skills (87.5%) while other 55% said that they became better problem-solver. As mentioned before, CS in group work helped students learn about the ways to cooperate with others. Therefore, 62.5 % of the students looked at CS in group work as a good tool to get valuable experiences. More particularly, 90% of the students felt more confident in speaking English.

The students' preferences for working on CS in group work

Question 6 and 7: The students' preferences for techniques of CS in group work

Questions 6 and 7 dealt with the author's intention of investigating the students' preferences for the techniques used by the teachers and of the way the students like to work on CS in groups. As for the former, the data in table 9 illustrated that 62.5% of the students found the teachers' techniques useful to them. 37.5% of the informants even believed that they were very useful.

The students' preferences for the techniques the teachers used	No	%
6. How do you find the techniques the teacher used?		
A. Very useful.	15	37.5
B. Useful.	25	62.5
C. Not useful.	0	0
D. Not useful at all.	0	0
7. In the following techniques, what would you like to do best?		
A. Oral presentation.	14	35
B. Group discussion.	17	42.5
C. Seminar.	2	5
D. Role-play.	7	17.5

Table 9: The students' preferences for the techniques the teachers used

As for the latter, the data given in table 9 indicated that 17 out of 40 students (42.5%) preferred working in group discussions. It was true since group discussion helped students have more chances to work with the others. As a result, they could share their experiences, peer-coach each other, and enhance the participation of all the group members to complete the project. 35% of the informants were interested in an oral presentation. Oral presentations in groups not only helped students get valuable experience in group work or teamwork but also helped them learn more about practical communicative skills like the strategies of disagreeing, agreeing, persuading, starting a criticism, giving an example,

asking questions, interrupting, etc. However, 17.5% chose a role to play for their preferences since they thought it was much easier for them to complete the tasks on time and reached an agreement easily between two members. A small number of students (5%) were fond of working in the seminar.

Question 8: *The students' preferences for speaking topics.*

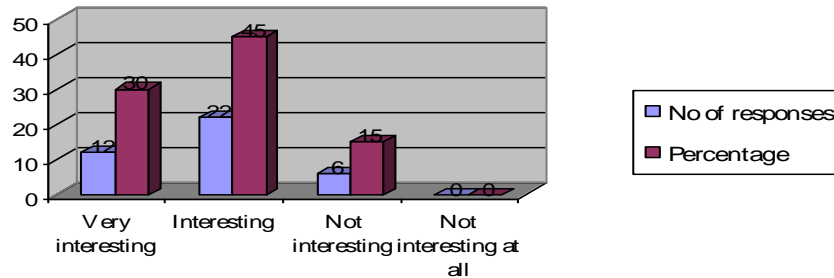


Chart 6: *The students' preferences for speaking topics*

In the students' opinions (22 out of 40 students), as can be seen in chart 6, the topics used by teachers were interesting while 12 out of 40 informants found them very interesting. In the informal discussion between the researcher and the students, most of the students said that they liked the topics their teachers used since they were close to students' life and practice. The rest of the students (15%) did not like speaking topics.

The students' affirmation of difficulties

Question 9: *Difficulties encountered in preparing the contents of the topic or the tasks given by the teacher*

As to the question of the difficulties the students met when preparing the contents of the topics or the tasks given by teachers, it could be seen from table 10 that nearly all of the students found difficulties in searching for relevant materials among available materials (87.5%) and selecting adequate information (80%). Selecting visual aids was also the difficulty chosen by 55% of the students. The other difficulties came from selecting adequate vocabulary and lack of time to rehearse (37.5%). However, this constraint was considered to be an easy aspect for the students to overcome because they had time for their rehearsal at home. 5 out of 40 students (12.5%) complained that they often met the difficulties in dividing the workload among group members, which of course was not a great challenge for the majority.

The students' difficulties in preparing the contents of the topics or the tasks	No	%
Dividing workload among group members	5	12.5
Selecting an appropriate topic among a wide range of topics	0	0
Searching for relevant materials among available materials	35	87.5
Selecting adequate information	32	80
Selecting adequate vocabulary	15	37.5
Organizing selected information	10	25
Selecting visual aids	22	55
Lack of time to rehearse	15	37.5

Table 10: *The students' difficulties in preparing the contents of the topics or the tasks*

Question 10: *Difficulties encountered in delivering presentations*

It can be said that making an oral presentation in English was not something new to the second-year majors, but most of them seemed to have problems with delivering presentations. This difficulty mainly came from their low confidence (65%) and bad voice quality (87.5%), such as mispronunciation, monotonous voice, and poor pronunciation. Furthermore, lack of skills and limited time to make oral presentations were highlighted by about 60% of the informants. The students also had problems with handling difficult questions from the audience (62.5%), with appropriate use of vocabulary (45%), and with controlling their nerves, such as fear of speaking in public (75%) and fear of looking foolish (37.5%). Besides, remembering what they wanted to say (45%) and lack of concentration (30%) were also difficulties. The causes of forgetting the contents of the oral presentation might be their nerves and low confidence. The teachers' evaluation, in the extent of difficulty perceived by the students (62.5%), caused a great challenge for them. Some students (12.5%) complained that they had problems using PowerPoint due to

their limited experience with using PowerPoint for their presentations but, the researcher thought that this will be improved soon because of the help from teammates or classmates.

The students' difficulties in delivering presentations	No	%
Technical problems	5	12.5
Lack of confidence	26	65
Fear of looking foolish	15	37.5
Fear of speaking in public	30	75
Difficulties with grammar	0	0
Difficulties with vocabulary	18	45
Difficulties with pronunciation	35	87.5
Lack presentation skills	22	55
Forgetting the contents of the presentation	18	45
Lack of concentration	12	30
Limited time to present	24	60
Fear of teacher evaluations	25	62.5
Fear of peer evaluations	0	0
Worry about questions to be asked	25	62.5

Table 11: The students' difficulties in delivering presentations

The students' suggestions for the difficulties

Question 11: The students' suggestions for their difficulties

The students' suggestions for their difficulties	No	%
A. Read a lot to enrich their vocabulary, structure, and social knowledge.	40	100
B. Be well-prepared for their oral presentations	40	100
C. Learn from their presentations.	40	100

Table 12: The students' suggestions for their difficulties

As students and teachers perceived, the second-year majors' English proficiency level was not good enough. That was the reason why in response to the survey questionnaire, all the students (100%) believed that they had to improve their knowledge of English by reading a lot, especially they had to be well-prepared for their oral presentation, for example, spending more time memorizing the speech, rehearsing the speech at home to avoid mistakes in vocabulary, grammar or pronunciation and predicting questions. Also, the students thought that they needed to learn from their presentations and from their peers. The reasons were that they might have more experience, they would not make the same mistakes again and they would be able to make better presentations next time.

Question 12 and 13: The students' suggestions for teachers

The students' suggestions for teachers	No	%
<i>1. For preparing the contents of the topics or the tasks</i>		
A. Provide materials or suggest reference sources	35	87.5
B. Highlight the key contents of the topics or the tasks	15	37.5
C. The time for preparing should be longer.	0	0
<i>2. For delivering presentation</i>		

A. Provide the strategies for successful oral presentation.	40	100
B. Provide the strategies for responses	40	100
C. Provide the strategies for negotiation	40	100
D. Provide the strategies for interrupting	40	100

Table 13: The students' suggestions for teachers

According to most of the students, it was important for the teachers to help them have confidence in both preparing and delivering presentations. Firstly, they thought the teachers should provide materials or suggest reference sources (87.5%) and highlight the key contents of the topics or the tasks (37.5%) in the preparing process for their presentations. Secondly, all of them expected that teachers should focus on the strategies for oral presentations, i.e. giving them models of language, and model presentation including necessary vocabulary and functional language for an effective presentation or introducing the organization, format, and criteria of a presentation in English. Also, the students believed that the strategies for responses, negotiation, and interrupting were very important to them. Therefore, 100% of the informants chose them for help from teachers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The teachers' and students' beliefs and attitudes towards CS application in group work.

The findings from the questionnaires indicated that nearly all the teachers and the students had positive attitudes towards CS application in groups. CS in groups, according to them, was very important to improve speaking skills and feasible for the second-year students including their English proficiency and the topics in the coursebook. It seemed that CS in groups gave many chances for students to access to different communicative activities, helped them get the valuable experience in working with the others, and enhanced students to think clearly and systematically in analyzing an issue, etc.

The teachers' situation of applying CS in group work in the speaking lessons.

The situation of applying CS in groups identified from the teachers' and students' survey questionnaire is as follows:

The frequency of applying CS in group work

The research results showed that a significant majority of the teachers in the survey often used the CS application in groups, and even employed it very often. Only a small number of the teachers said to employ it sometimes. This meant that no teachers undervalued the role of CS in groups towards students' speaking skills improvement.

The teachers' techniques and activities used most

For the techniques used best, most teachers responded that oral presentation and group discussion were their favorite ones. The reason for this situation, as being explained by them, these techniques brought about the effectiveness of CS application in group work.

The most frequently-used activities among the teachers were opinion exchange, games, drama, projects, problem-solving, and short-survey. The fact was that a majority of the teachers were accustomed to applying them since they helped the teachers to create a practical communicative environment for their students.

The students' preferences for working on CS in group work

As can be seen from the study, students' preferences for the techniques as well as the kind of activities used by the teachers were positive. Sharing the same opinions with the teachers, they showed their interest in group discussion, oral presentation, and role play. A majority of the students found these techniques useful to their speaking skills development.

The challenges when applying CS in teaching speaking skills.

Teachers' challenges

The biggest difficulty for the teachers when applying CS in group work was the limited time period, so more time was needed for activity preparation, presentation, and discussion. It could be said that teachers' experience in class management and controlling time was the important factor that decided the success of the teaching of speaking skills with CS in group work.

Students' difficulties

The general impression of this study was a wide variety of constraints was affirmed by the students. The difficulties when preparing the contents of the topic or the tasks given by the teachers mainly came from searching for relevant materials among available materials, selecting adequate information, and selecting visual aids. The rest of the difficulties, as be found in the survey, were not great challenges since they could be solved soon in groups.

The students' difficulties in delivering presentations referred to the lack of confidence and presentation skills, and anxiety management were the key challenge for students when learning to speak on CS in groups. The rest were not considerable.

The modifications to difficulties on the part of teachers

The teachers' challenges when applying CS in group work were provided with solutions that dealt with limited time for teaching speaking. The data gathered in the teachers' survey questionnaire pointed out the findings that the teachers should control time for each group, and for every activity, for instance, allotted time for every group and for each member of the group to speak. This will make changes for all the groups to express their ideas and for every student to speak in a speaking lesson.

The modifications to difficulties on the part of students

The solutions or modifications to the difficulties on the part of students were derived from both teachers' and students' survey

questionnaires. The results of major findings helped the author give some suggestions on the following items:

Teachers should provide materials or suggest reference sources related to the contents of the topics given to students

The fact showed that most of the students met difficulties in choosing appropriate materials and information for the topics or the tasks given. This anxiety made them lack confidence and prevented them from an effective presentation. That was a reason why providing materials or suggesting reference sources for students was very necessary.

Teachers should provide students with the strategies for successful oral presentation

It was true that the activities designed in line with CS in group work often ended with a presentation either from all members of the group or from a representative of the group. Thus, providing students with the strategies for successful oral presentation was considered to be one useful solution to help them have confidence in expressing their ideas and negotiating with the others in the discussion after the presentation.

Teachers should build up a cooperative atmosphere in the classroom.

This solution made students feel relaxed and free to express their ideas without being afraid of looking foolish to their peers. Moreover, it made a chance for students to gain valuable experience in developing cooperative skills and enhancing the participation of all students.

Teachers should base assessment and evaluation on goals and objectives which are clear to students

Teachers should carry out an ongoing assessment or 'funny' punishment

Speaking activities in groups possessed a lot of advantages for large classes, but it also existed disadvantages, for instance, strong students often monitored the class while weak students usually expressed low interest in the communicative activities in the classroom. To overcome this constraint, teachers' ongoing assessment and 'funny' punishment were very effective because they motivated students to participate in the classroom activities.

Teachers should encourage students' self-learning

It was not deniable that students' self-learning played an important role in their speaking skills development. In a speaking lesson with CS in groups, students had to do a lot not only at home but also in the class. In order to have a particular end, they had to read a lot to get valuable information, practice speaking with appropriate pronunciation, and automatically learn from their mistakes as well as from their peers in the absence of the teachers. That increased their self-confidence in them, which, to a certain extent, was closely associated with heightening their motivation for learning.

CONCLUSION

The application of CS in group work into the teaching of speaking skills to the second-year students of TUCST is feasible. Most of the teachers and the students surveyed hold positive beliefs and attitudes towards CS in groups. They are aware of the importance

of CS in group work towards speaking skills, but the fact reveals that they often have several difficulties when dealing with this technique.

It is much hoped that the study will be of interest not only to English teachers of TUCST but also to any language teachers who share the problem and interests in applying CS in group work in teaching and learning speaking skills and in the ongoing process of renovation for teaching English at the University.

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