

Appropriate classroom activities for effective teaching of business English speaking skill necessary for Vietnamese businessmen

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Abstract. The accession into the World Trade Organization assisting Vietnam in integrating further into the global trading system since 2006 has required Vietnamese learners who major in Business English to acquire effective language skills in this area to succeed in either the increasingly demanding domestic market or the international commerce. Hence, the study aims at investigating necessary BE speaking sub skills for Vietnamese businessmen through a survey questionnaire answered by selected sales personnel in import-export companies in Hanoi. Another questionnaire was conducted to explore the perceptions of the teachers in universities majoring in BE of appropriate classroom speaking activities for teaching of the necessary sub skills. Finally, teacher's journal, students' interview and questionnaire were used in an action research that is applied to a sample of students to explore the effectiveness of the classroom activities. The quantitative and qualitative data in this final phase revealed that all the activities the teacher practised with the students developed different areas of speaking as a language skill. This study hopes to be useful for improving BE programs, so that these programs will be able to provide lessons' match to the real situations and can serve students' career objectives in the most possibly effective way.

Keywords: Classroom activities, Business English, BE, speaking skill, sub skills, businessmen.

1. Introduction

In Vietnam, the accession into the World Trade Organization (WTO) assisting the country in integrating further into the global trading system since 2006 has brought up more potential international business deals than ever before. These opportunities have strengthened the motivation and also set out the urgent requirements for Vietnamese businessmen to acquire a good command of Business English to

interact in real-life workplace. "English has emerged as the world's prominent linking language in international business communication and individuals from around the world are learning English in order to fulfill this linking role" (Babcocks, 2001, p. 377). Therefore, Vietnamese learners who major in BE require effective language skills in this area if they want to be successful in either the increasingly dynamic and demanding domestic job market or the international business and commerce.

In the field of English language teaching, BE is also the fastest growing area of English

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for Specific Purposes (Mark et al, p. 232). There is an increasing demand for business English courses, teachers and materials all over the world. As a result, business English is taught at the university level for preparing students before entering the business world. The mastery of BE speaking skill is a priority for many second or foreign language learners (Richards, 1990, p. 67). However, in decades of offering ESP courses in Vietnam, only few research studies have been conducted in Vietnamese context. Among those, there is too little research available to help to define, and to strengthen course focus as well as activities organization. It is hoped that this study will be able to fill a few gaps and lead to further research in the area. Hence, the rationale for choosing to investigate this issue lies in the necessity of teaching and learning of BE for real communication; and also in the importance of applying appropriately the “how” in teaching BE speaking skill through classroom activities. The research questions that the present study seeks to answer are: *What sub-skills in BE speaking are necessary for Vietnamese businessmen; What kind of classroom speaking activities are appropriate for teaching these sub skill; And how effective the speaking activities are in helping students develop BE speaking skill.*

The methodology employed is a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods. In order to answer the three questions, the study was conducted in three phases. Phase 1 aimed to answer question 1 and served as the needs analysis component that feeds into the questionnaire survey in the next phase. Phase 2 was a teacher survey for information to answer question 2. Phase 3 was



an action research to investigate the effectiveness of the classroom activities to develop students' BE speaking skill and thus, answer question 3.

To explore the sub-skills of BE speaking often used by Vietnamese businessmen, phase 1 used a survey questionnaire among selected sales personnel in import-export companies in Hanoi who have chances of more frequent communication with foreigners in English and who are required to be competent in BE communication. The results of this phase showed that the often used BE speaking sub-skills were exchanging information, telephoning and bargaining.

To investigate the classroom speaking activities that are appropriate for teaching of the sub skills identified in phase 1, in phase 2, another survey questionnaire was conducted on perceptions of the first and second year teachers of Departments of BE in four universities majoring in business in Vietnam including National Economics University, Foreign Trade University, Trade University, and Business and Administration University. Appropriate activities selected for the next phase will be those chosen by more than 65% of the subjects (Burns et al., 2003) including: activity discussion, guessing game, role play, and information gap for teaching exchanging information; activity card game, jigsaw puzzle and role play for teaching telephoning; and activity using noticing the gap, information gap, and simulation for teaching bargaining.

Then, in phase 3, an action research was applied to a sample of students at intermediate level of the second year at the Department of Business English, National Economics University to explore the effectiveness of the suggested classroom activities. The data collection tools in this phase included both quantitative and qualitative data such as teacher's journal, students' interview and questionnaire. The data revealed that all the activities the teacher practised with the students were useful and contributive and they

developed different areas of speaking as a language skill.

Specifically, in the lesson of exchanging information, information gap activity helps students have an excellent interaction and pronunciation, while role play improves student's grammar and pronunciation. Both guessing game and rating activity are good for their fluency with excellent use of discourse markers. For effective teaching of telephoning, all of the investigated activities- card game, jigsaw puzzle and role play develop students' grammar, wider range of vocabulary and therefore pronunciation of new words. However, jigsaw puzzle is obviously more successful in improving students' fluency. All the activities for teaching bargaining-information gap, using noticing-the-gap, and simulation are appropriate for students' development in grammar and vocabulary with new and useful terms. Nevertheless, noticing-the-gap, and simulation are excellent in helping their fluency and interactive communication.

During the whole process of conducting the research, some crucial implications explored by the researcher include:

For effective teaching of exchanging information

To engage students' attention in speaking classes, and motivate them to be active, it is advisable to arrange students to have group discussion and instruct them clearly the rules and requirements of the discussion. For this activity, teacher should encourage students to build up a collection of proverbs and sayings to stimulate socializing and to be more persuasive in presenting and rebutting arguments to discuss information (Thornbury, 2005). During the process of organizing the communication games such as guessing game, I have learned the necessity for clear and unambiguous instructions before the game. My instructions in the later games were becoming more and more easily interpreted as a result. In addition, I have learnt that before the speaking activities, even when the students are second year and

intermediate in English, the teacher should provide them with the in-put language according to the BE speaking sub skill so that they can have a variety of word choice in their talk and also develop their terms.

For effective teaching of telephoning

Vivid and inspiring activities should be applied because students need to use their imagination when they can't see others on the phone and also because telephoning have highly standard etiquettes which are quite dry (Hadfield, 1990). Thus activities with visual tools can arouse students' interests and also provide them support with emerging language skills. Visual tools used in activities such as card game or jigsaw puzzle provide concrete cues and information so students can participate more independently, without needing to rely on prompts and cues from others.

In addition, I have learned that the activity role play in telephoning needs to have some special facility arrangements because the main difficulty of telephoning skills lies in communicating without visual contact. As a result, if the students don't have the opportunity of using real telephone or different telephone lines, the teacher need to put students' chairs back to back and practice speaking on the phone. By that way students will only hear the other person's voice which will approximate a telephone situation.

For effective teaching of bargaining

It is recommended that, technology can enhance negotiation learning because it allows analysis and retrieval of raw data on negotiation experience, minimising students' defensiveness and resistance to improvement (Pilbeam et al., 1992). It is necessary to use videotaping, for example, to assist review, reflection and assessment or use discussion boards and other techniques to assist reflection and class discussion. Hence, using video extracts from movies to illustrate negotiation techniques in activity noticing the gap is effective for stimulating students to participate and getting their attention.

Besides, it is advisable to use simulations to consolidate learning. Simulations help integrate negotiation theory and hard skills. Besides, they are a useful way to unfreeze past practice while also teaching new skills for dealing with people in difficult situations (Fisher, 1981). To teach bargaining effectively requires a teaching strategy which combines simulations with other games, cases and readings. Another suggestion for using simulations is to encourage constant reflection to draw out bargaining lessons. Students should be encouraged to reflect on how they might have handled the real-life situation differently in light of what they learned from the simulation. Thus teachers should leave at least as long for debrief of roles assigned as for the simulation itself.

Hopefully, this investigation is useful for improving BE programs, so that these programs will be able to provide lessons' match to the real situations and can serve students' career objectives in the most possibly effective way.

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Những hoạt động trên lớp thích hợp để dạy hiệu quả kỹ năng nói tiếng Anh thương mại cần thiết cho các thương gia Việt Nam

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Từ năm 2006, việc gia nhập vào WTO đã giúp Việt Nam hội nhập nhanh chóng vào hệ thống thương mại toàn cầu, đòi hỏi sinh viên chuyên ngành tiếng Anh thương mại (TATM) cần có các kỹ năng giao tiếp TATM tốt để thành công trong nước và quốc tế. Do đó, nghiên cứu này được thực hiện nhằm mục đích điều tra những kỹ năng nói TATM cần thiết cho doanh nhân Việt Nam. Ngoài ra quan điểm của các giảng viên ở các trường đại học chuyên ngành TATM về việc hoạt động trên lớp nào thích hợp để dạy các kỹ năng nói cần thiết cũng được nghiên cứu. Cuối cùng, một nghiên cứu hành động được thực hiện để đánh giá tính hiệu quả của các hoạt động trên lớp này. Các dữ liệu định lượng và định tính cho thấy rằng tất cả các hoạt động của giảng viên áp dụng trong phần này phát triển các kỹ năng ngôn ngữ khác nhau của sinh viên. Nghiên cứu này hy vọng giúp ích cho chương trình TATM trong việc cung cấp những bài học phù hợp với thực tế và có thể phục vụ các mục tiêu nghề nghiệp của sinh viên một cách hiệu quả nhất có thể.