
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Using Simulation Activities in English Speaking Practice for Secondary School Students

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to discover whether using simulation activities for 10th graders at a gifted high school in Vietnam and implementing such tasks in English speaking practice is beneficial to the students. A series of additional simulation activities were designed on the basis of the English 10 Textbook used in that school. A group of 30 students took part in an 8-week intervention in which they were required to complete 2 speaking activities each week and take a survey questionnaire before and after the treatment. In addition, the questionnaire was sent to the students to gain some insights about their opinions towards the materials. The findings of the post survey indicated that the students' speaking skills had improved significantly after they used the simulation activities. According to the results of the questionnaires, the materials provided were adequate and suited for 10th graders who want to improve their speaking skills. This study also revealed that these supplemental materials appeal to 10th graders' interests in improving their speaking performances. As a result, it is proposed that more frequent utilization of simulation activities should be provided in speaking instruction to improve the speaking performance of 10th graders.

KEYWORDS

Simulation activities, English speaking performance, English speaking practice, secondary school

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1. Introduction

In the commercial and educational world of today, communication skills are regarded as one of the critical abilities that undergraduate students must acquire in order to get job possibilities in the public sector and private sectors. Most businesses are worried about how well their staff members can speak in front of a group, handle meetings, and for personal reasons. One of the reasons why businesses are hesitant to hire job seekers is a lack of communication skills. Apprehension is one of the challenges that prevent students from learning to speak English (Fung & Min, 2016). Despite several steps taken to improve the usage of English, learning English as a Second Language (ESL), particularly speaking abilities, still remains crucial (Fung & Min, 2016; Yunus & Kaur, 2014). Because they are worried about making mistakes when speaking in English, they are nervous and lack confidence (Fung & Min, 2016). When people connect with one another, it is common for a lack of communication skills to be caused by fear, worry, and low confidence. It is necessary to improve learners' confidence to use the language in enjoyable and stimulating ways in order to get over this phobia (Toledo & Hoit, 2016)

Education and training have been a global challenge, with countries around the world making a lot of efforts to innovate not only the contents in the curriculum but also the teaching methods with many different models and techniques in order to improve the activeness in teaching and learning entirely. They also aim at orienting learners towards active learning instead of passive learning habits as they were in the past. It is a fact that if these countries want to accomplish their educational purposes, it is necessary to renovate synchronously the related elements in which teaching and learning media is important.

Foreign languages have been essential for the needs of socio-economic development, integration, and international cooperation, in addition to the explosion of information technology. Therefore, learning foreign languages has become absolutely necessary, especially since English is spoken all over the world. It might be said that English serves as a gateway to information and offers each person countless chances to grow personally. Students will not improve their English, nevertheless, and will find it difficult to adjust to modern society's rapid changes if they just rely on classroom activities.

One of the most important abilities that undergraduate students should learn is communication. The ability to effectively communicate in social and professional settings, such as meetings, public speaking, and individual and group discussions, is impacted by anxiety and dread. A person's goal and attitude toward participating in communication situations are influenced by these feelings. Because they are terrified of making mistakes, the students find it embarrassing to talk in front of their friends and professors. Fear and a lack of confidence are two factors that prevent language learners from speaking in the target language (Fung & Min, 2016). There are several factors that make students uneasy and less motivated to talk in English. Initially, due to the emphasis on exams in the educational system, Viet Nam's teachers and students are exam-focused (Christopher, 2016; Lee, 2016). Lee (2016) claims that the absence of originality in the Vietnamese educational system makes students feel depressed and bored. It is intended that this research would aid students in strengthening their oral communication abilities and eventually offer English language teachers instructions and exercises that will help ESL students gain more confidence in speaking English. Examining the impact of simulation methods on engineering students at Thai Nguyen gifted high school is the main goal of this study. The study specifically investigates how the students feel about using this method and how simulation helps the students improve their oral ESL communication abilities.

Regarding the backgrounds above, the researchers conducted a study entitled "**Using Simulation Activities in English speaking practice for secondary school students.**"

The study aims to develop an effective strategy for improving speaking skills through the use of simulation activities among 30 students at Thai Nguyen High School for the Gifted. Eventually, it also finds out the answers to the following research questions:

1. *What is the current situation of speaking practice in English class at Thai Nguyen High School for the Gifted?*
2. *What is the student's response to the implementation of simulation in classroom action research in teaching speaking?*

2. Literature Review

According to Bygate, speaking is "the use of language for communication in the spoken mode, under real-time conditions, with the aim of exchanging meaning" (Bygate, 1987, p. 1). This definition highlights the interactive nature of spoken language and emphasizes the importance of context and audience in language production.

Bygate's definition of speaking has been influential in the field of SLA, as it provides a framework for understanding the complex processes involved in spoken language production and the various factors that can influence the effectiveness of communication in real-time situations.

Many second or foreign-language learners place a high focus on developing their English-speaking abilities. Due to this, students frequently assess their achievement in language acquisition and the success of their English course based on how much they believe their spoken language fluency has increased. Although there has been considerable methodological discussion on the most effective way to teach oral skills, it is clear that oral skills have not been neglected in EFL/ESL courses (as seen by the abundance of conversation and other speaking course books on the market). There are many different approaches used by teachers and textbooks, from direct approaches that concentrate on particular aspects of oral interaction (such as turn-taking, topic management, and questioning strategies) to indirect approaches that foster oral interaction through group work, task work, and other techniques.

In the modern, globalized world, effective communication is essential for success in all endeavors. The use of language in communication is common. Perfect communication between individuals is not possible without the usage of a language. Furthermore, without utilizing the right language to communicate, people cannot accomplish their purposes, objectives, and goals. Hence, a language is required to communicate with people who live all over the world. English is used to communicate with people who live in many world areas, states, countries, and continents because it is widely spoken and regarded as an international language. The most significant skill to develop when learning a second or foreign language is speaking. Speaking is considered to be the most crucial of the four essential language abilities for learning a foreign or second language. Speaking is the skill that students will be evaluated on most in real-world circumstances, according to Brown and Yuke (1983). Despite its significance,

teaching speaking skills have been devalued, and the majority of EFL/ESL teachers still teach speaking skills by having students memorize dialogues or practice drills. Nonetheless, English teachers must teach ELLs the necessary skills so that they can enhance their speaking abilities and function well in real-life circumstances. The modern world requires that learners possess communication skills. While employability relies more on communication than technology, oral skills are virtually ignored in the current EFL/ESL teaching environment. Phonological, morphological, semantic, and syntactic parts of language have been given very little importance, which has made it difficult for ELLs to master speaking skills among English language learners. Reading and writing abilities have received greater attention so far. After discovering the significance of oral communication abilities, more focus is now placed on helping learners improve their speaking abilities for them to succeed in their academic endeavors and their chosen fields once they have completed their education. Additionally, English is the language of success in obtaining work chances and achieving one's personal goals.

Speaking activities are essential in EFL classrooms as they provide opportunities for language learners to practice and improve their communication skills. Speaking activities are essential in EFL classrooms as they provide opportunities for students to practice and improve their communication skills. Some speaking activities, including role-plays, debates, information gap activities, storytelling, and simulations, are just a few examples of effective speaking activities in EFL classrooms that can help students develop their speaking and listening skills. EFL teachers can incorporate these activities into their lessons to make learning more engaging and effective.

According to Haris (1979:81), there are five factors to take into account while evaluating pupils' performance. They are vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, structure, and grammar. Every element has a score. Five levels of scoring are used to determine how well pupils perform when speaking. Finocchiaro (1983:9) clarifies the four elements of a speaking test's grading in another way. They are fluency, grammar, structure, vocabulary, and pronunciation. The pupils' capacity to perform well in speaking is demonstrated by scoring four levels. The researcher in this study makes use of the scoring criteria Haris proposed for the speaking test (1979:81). Because the components of the speaking test in this instance are more thorough and detailed, it will be employed as an indicator of the research's instruments. The criteria of a speaking rubric, according to Harris (1979:81), include pronunciation, structure, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Additionally, each component has a rating or scoring. There are five different levels of scoring. Each level explains exactly how well the pupils can communicate.

According to Brown, " Simulations generally have more complex structures and offer larger groups(of 6 to 20) where the entire group is working through an academic situation as a social unit, with the idea of working on certain specific challenges"(1994; p.180). Oxford (1995; p.1103) also states that " Simulation is the deliberate product of precise situations that may arise in reality." According to Vernon et., " Simulation is the replication of genuine scripts that have been prepared to be as analogous to the factual event or process as possible"(2003; p. 248). Ely(2003; p. 380) also states that " Simulation is a special order of real objects. Through simulation, which is a streamlined, functional version of a real-life setting, students can experience a variety of roles and events.

Simulation activities (SAs) in teaching English refer to exercises and activities that simulate real-life situations or scenarios to provide students with opportunities to practice using English in context. These activities aim to create an immersive and engaging language learning environment that promotes communication and interaction among students. Simulation activities in teaching English can be a powerful tool for language educators to promote communication and interaction among students, enhance their language learning experience, and help them develop the skills they need to succeed in real-life situations.

When participants engage in a game or simulation in class, the students take on roles and take part in the decision-making. The game's goal and the regulations that govern it are made very plain. Vernon et al. (2003; p.381) list the following as characteristics of a simulation:

1. A small, fixed group of participants attempting to accomplish a task.
2. Guidelines that specify what is acceptable player behavior.
3. A fundamental timetable and arrangement of the events
4. A time limit.

According to Jones (1982, pp. 4-5), simulations must include these three components: Participants are given roles and instructed to fully accept them both mentally and behaviorally as if they were the actual people in those roles. This is known as a reality of function (a); (b) simulated environment (a realistic setting created to promote role-acceptance by utilizing a variety of realia). (c)

Organization (the whole action is built around a set of problems or tasks—not invented by the participants but rather evolved as the action progresses).

Three suggestions are made for employing simulations by Vernon (2003: 383):

1. Raising consciousness. Simulations can be used to help students understand the subject they are learning. Of course, raising awareness is an effective goal.
2. Establishing goals before using simulation. Teachers must also create a method for determining whether or not the students succeed in achieving that goal.
3. Including the pupils. A few teachers have succeeded in creating their simulations; they typically involve the students in the creation

3. Methodology

The data was collected using a mixed type of questionnaire which are close-ended questions, open-ended questions, multiple choice questions and Likert scale questions that students have to complete individually. The purpose of the questionnaire is to indicate their feedback on the effectiveness of traditional speaking methods versus simulation activities.

The questionnaires were distributed to the participants in the first week and when they finished the 8-week intervention. After that, the researcher would gather statistics and start analyzing the collected data before presenting the information in the form of charts and tables. In addition, the responses of the students on the questionnaire were calculated and analyzed based on the range of the Likert scale, which was developed by Sözen (2019), as shown in the Table below.

Mean level	Value	Range
4.21 – 5.00	5	Strongly agree
3.41 – 4.20	4	Agree
2.61 – 3.40	3	Neither/Nor agree
1.81 – 2.60	2	Disagree
1.00 – 1.80	1	Strongly disagree

Table 1. *Scoring range of the Likert-scale of the survey (Sözen, 2019)*

The data analysis of the current research program includes quantitative data analysis. Quantitative data collected from the questionnaire in the form of a Likert scale is transferred into Excel for analysis. The collected statistics were entered into Excel and used to evaluate the students' perception of the implementation

4. Results and Discussion

When collecting the survey's results, the results figured that discussion in pairs/groups and presentation were the most activities used in speaking lessons. Interviewing, Singing, Repeating the sentences after the teachers, and Role -play were sometimes used in speaking lessons. Most participants revealed that they liked singing English songs the most for practicing speaking because they can remember vocabulary and structures easier and longer with catchy melodies, but sadly this activity was not frequently used. Some others indicated that they found a presenting poster activity more effective than other activities as it could help them be more confident when speaking English in front of many people and remember the vocabulary long, but the improvement was not that much. Furthermore, The topics for speaking were usually based on the unit in class and sometimes took topics outside the textbook. More importantly, the actual percent of speaking activities lasted about 15 to 25 minutes in each lesson, so the students did not fully practice speaking during the activities. For example, in the presentation activity, the class would be divided into groups, and each group assigned 1 to 2 students to present, so this was also the drawback of the actual speaking activities.

Additionally, the survey pointed out that about 80 percent of participants did not choose the correct definition of simulation activities. This meant that those students had never joined in any simulation activities to practice speaking English before. The rest of the participants knew SAs, but they had just participated in SAs in speaking lessons once or twice before, or they just even heard about SAs and had never joined.

Statement	Mean	Level of agreement
1. Presenting on the topic during English speaking lesson helps you speak English more confidently	2.93	Neither/Nor agree
2. Discussing on topic during English speaking lessons helps you speak English more confidently	4.0	Agree
3. Using simulation activities during English speaking lessons raises your excitement in class	3.33	Neither/Nor agree
4. Using presentation activities during English speaking lessons raises your excitement in class	1.86	Disagree
5. Using discussing activities during English speaking lessons raises your excitement in class	3.43	Agree

Table 2. Findings from pre-questionnaire

The data shown in the table above revealed that students mostly agree with discussing activities with a mean 4.0 and 3.43 in terms of raising excitement and speaking more confidently. Whereas presenting activities received only mean scores of 2.93 and 1.86 in statements 1 and 4. This result indicated that the respondents might find discussing activities more engaging and effective in increasing excitement during English speaking lessons as compared to presentation activities. For statement 3 about simulation activities, the participants gave a neutral opinion as most of them did not know about this method before.

The findings from the below table suggest that the use of simulation activities in English speaking lessons can have positive effects on various aspects of English speaking skills, particularly in terms of increasing excitement in the classroom, improving vocabulary acquisition and retention, and decreasing fear of speaking English.

Statement	Mean	Level of agreement
1. Using simulation in speaking lessons helps me to improve vocabulary by topic	4.40	Agree
2. Using simulation activities during English speaking lessons can raise excitement in class	4.96	Strongly agree
3. Using simulation in speaking lessons helps lessons to work more effectively	4.53	Strongly agree
4. Using simulation in speaking lessons helps me to pronounce English more correctly	4.33	Agree
5. Using simulation in speaking lessons helps me to improve English speaking reflexes by topic	3.93	Agree
6. Using simulation activities during English speaking lessons helps me to remember longer the vocabulary by topic	4.56	Strongly agree
7. Using simulation in speaking lessons helped me to decrease the fear of speaking English	3.53	Agree
8. Using simulation in speaking lessons helped me to speak English more fluently	2.9	Neither/Nor agree
9. Using simulation in speaking lessons helps me to improve intonation in sentences when speaking English	3.8	Agree
10. Using the simulation method to help me be more active in speaking English with topics	4.2	Strongly agree

Table 2. Findings from post-questionnaire

The highest level of agreement was observed for Statement 2, with a mean score of 4.96, indicating that the respondents strongly agree that simulation activities can raise excitement in the classroom during English speaking lessons. This suggests that simulation activities may be an effective method to engage and motivate students to learn English speaking. The results highlight the potential

of simulation activities as a teaching strategy in English speaking lessons but also indicate the need for further research to explore their effectiveness in different contexts and with different student populations.

With regards to the student's responses towards SAs, all 30 students responded that they had many significant changes in their speaking ability and felt more confident when speaking English in speaking lessons since they were involved in SAs. In other words, they developed their English lexical resources by topic and improved their pronunciation as well as better intonation thanks to the use of SAs. More importantly, the participants expressed that they were more interested in practicing speaking English than in the past, which helped them to decrease their fear of speaking English. They also found the SAs was an effective method which gave them the motivation to practice speaking English, a subject that used to be boring and had lots of fears, according to them. Hence, all 30 participants responded that they wanted the teacher to implement SAs for speaking lessons more frequently rather than the previous method. Compared to other methods and activities, SAs successfully has a positive impact on the ability to speak English of participants.

The first impact could be seen in language use: the participants declared there was an improvement in their pronunciation (intonation included) and the use of vocabulary.

*I had so much improvement in my speaking skill, especially SAs **significantly helped** my **pronunciation and intonation**, and I felt more comfortable when speaking English. (S1)*

*[...] I found that I could learn lots of things from SAs. Importantly, my **lexical resources** with different topics were **improved a lot**, and my fears of speaking English also decreased as my **pronunciation and intonation** were much better than before. (S5)*

The participants also reported that SAs notably motivated them to participate more in speaking lessons as they felt that their role was important in the conversations

*I was inspired to be more enthusiastic about practicing speaking English with SAs, and I felt a **sense of belonging** which I had never had in a speaking lesson before when participating in SAs. I found my **important role** in the activities, and that **motivated me to join** more so I could have the chance to express my opinion on different topics. (S2)*

*In my speaking lesson, the teacher frequently used some traditional speaking activities such as presentation, discussion, and interviewing. I found those activities quite boring as they didn't motivate all students to join, and there wasn't as much excitement as SAs. But with SAs, **all students are required to join** and practice speaking as each **student takes their own responsibility in the conversation**; therefore, I would like to **recommend using SAs more frequently** in speaking lessons to increase the effectiveness. (S7)*

The findings of this study demonstrate that the current activities in speaking lessons do not motivate students to speak English that much, as the learners often feel bored and not belonging to the activities. They do not improve much in their pronunciation, intonation, and fluency. Whereas the implementation of SAs has offered a wide range of benefits to secondary students. As shown in the questionnaires, the students who truly participated in the project have a positive attitude towards SAs. They are more confident and feel their speaking skill significantly improved in terms of pronunciation, intonation, and fluency and gain notable lexical resources. Therefore, they wish to participate more in SAs in speaking lessons. More importantly, they have more motivation and interest in practicing speaking English which is considered to be a difficult skill, and a lot of fears when being assigned to speaking English from their perspective. Regarding their characteristics, SAs helped them be more motivated and confident about their speaking skill as they truly belong to SAs frequently. In Particular, the participants became more excited about speaking lessons, a crucial characteristic of having a successful speaking lesson, since they joined SAs twice a week.

Moving on to speaking proficiency developed via the use of SAs, the students enhanced a variety of improvements in terms of pronunciation, intonation, and fluency. Furthermore, SAs can help the participants gain their vocabulary and phrases with different topics. Based on the data collected from the survey, most of the respondents rarely, even never, applied SAs to their speaking English practice. In fact, most of the participants revealed that their initial speaking proficiency was not at a high level as they just expressed ideas and opinions in short sentences and not fluently. They were aware that the purpose of learning a foreign language is to use that language to communicate with other people. However, their speaking proficiency did not see much improvement. Before the implementation of SAs, they had to learn by heart sentences to express ideas or present; with 8- weeks of intervention of SAs, they could generate ideas and opinions more fluently as they were given lists of new words and phrases with different topics before joining the SAs. So SAs absolutely helped them to remember new words and structures easier and longer as they reviewed the knowledge they learnt immediately. Moreover, after each SAs session, they would receive feedback, comments and suggestions from the researcher about intonation and pronunciation for better speaking skills. Similarly, Lee, H., & Yoon, S. (2019) also acknowledged that simulation-based language teaching had a positive effect on both speaking proficiency and attitudes. Therefore, it is essential to propose a method to boost their speaking proficiency.

Via the use of SAs, the students also changed their attitude towards practicing speaking English. In other words, SAs encourage students to speak English regularly without the fear of making mistakes. Furthermore, through the implementation of SAs, students have more motivation to practice speaking English than in the current activities in class. This finding is in parallel with several studies. Khojasteh, L., & Takrimi, A. (2018) acknowledged that simulation activities had a positive effect on students' speaking ability and their motivation to speak English. Similarly, J. & Kim K. J. (2016) also reached the conclusion that simulation activities had a positive effect on students' speaking ability, motivation, and engagement in the learning process.

5. Conclusion

The use of simulation activities in language learning has shown promising results in improving speaking skills and confidence and reducing anxiety levels among non-native speakers of English. This proposed study aims to contribute to the existing literature by investigating the effectiveness of simulation activities in a controlled research setting. The findings of this study will provide valuable insights into the best practices for designing and implementing simulation activities for language learning, which can be useful for language teachers and curriculum designers.

This study investigates the impacts of simulation activities on 10th graders' speaking skills at Thai Nguyen Gifted High School. The study followed the quasi-experimental research model, with 30 students of class Geography 10 forming an experimental group. Data for analysis were collected through a survey with some types of the questionnaire and was designed for the purpose of comparing the results gained by the control and experimental groups before and after the research periods. Based on this kind of information, the researcher expected to find any significant outcomes from students' feedback which may imply the impacts of simulation activities on the improvement of their speaking skills.

Findings from the data collected showed simulation activities were effective in helping students improve their English speaking in general. After the research period, students participating in the study found that the use of simulation activities made their pronunciation and their vocabulary range better.

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