

## **The Effectiveness of Outdoor Learning on First year English majored Students' Speaking skill at Dong Nai Technology University**



**Cam Lien**

Faculty of Foreign Languages, Dong Nai Technology University, Vietnam

**ABSTRACT:** Cultivating students' speaking ability is considered as one of the most important objectives of the English teaching process. In order to develop English communication skill, students need an appropriate learning environment. Indeed, applying outdoor learning is an effective way to improve language proficiency. Therefore, this study was conducted to 1) identify whether or not outdoor learning can increase students' speaking ability, and 2) clarify students' attitudes towards the application of outdoor learning in English teaching. The research employed both qualitative and quantitative methods. The participants were 45 first year English majored students from Faculty of Foreign Languages at Dong Nai Technology University in Vietnam. The results of the study showed that outdoor learning brought a lot of benefits in improving students' speaking fluency. Moreover, the use of outdoor activities increased students' opportunity to speak the target language by creating a positive learning atmosphere which enable students to interact in English naturally. The effectiveness can be proved by the increase of students' motivation to learn English and master speaking skill. In fact, the students showed favorable attitudes to the implementation of outdoor learning. From the results, it can be concluded that with the assistance of appropriate outdoor activities, especially communicative activities, students could acquire the language much better.

**KEYWORDS:** English language, outdoor learning, outdoor learning activities, speaking skill, teaching and learning

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

In the era of international integration, English is one of the most important tools to shape the abilities and qualities of the young generation. At present, the goal of English courses is to develop students' speaking skill. Therefore, mastering speaking skill is claimed as the success of foreign language teaching. As a matter of fact, learning speaking skill is challenging and time-consuming as well. According to Zang (2009), in English learning process, speaking is the hardest skill to learn for most students. It is undeniable that communicating in English is never an easy thing for Vietnamese students because they have a tendency of using their native language.

The rising problem faced by most students at Dong Nai Technology University is the lack of communicating skill in English. This is because students rarely have the opportunity to speak English in real contexts due to the acquaintance of studying English with the traditional methods that focus more on delivering grammar structures and new vocabulary. Information from observation of speaking class first year English majored students showed that the students tend to stay quiet, and by the time, they got bored due to familiar indoor activities. The students also felt reluctant to speak up when they were given a chance by the teacher. As a result, there must be a completely different approach to be the guidelines for all students who attempt to achieve better speaking skill, and there are no other ways to improve English speaking skill better than engaging students into a positive teaching and learning environment that can promote students' enthusiasm, initiative, self-discipline, creativity, passion as well as self-study capacity. A positive teaching and learning environment is absolutely necessary, especially in the English classrooms where the dynamic teacher-student interaction is used (Guo, 2011).

Based on English teaching and learning reality, every teacher must use effective teaching strategies to help students enhance their speaking fluency. Noticeably, learning environment has an impact on how well students learn. Thus, teachers should create outdoor activities that offers students' opportunities to speak English freely in an motivating learning environment. According to Bas (2008), outdoor learning activities meet students' needs and interest and provide a wide range of authentic materials.

From the reasons mentioned above, the topic of using outdoor learning on teaching first year English majored students' speaking skill at Dong Nai Technology University is clarified so that outdoor learning will be used in order to improve students' speaking proficiency. The research aims to evaluate the impacts of using outdoor learning activities on students' speaking ability

## **The Effectiveness of Outdoor Learning on First year English majored Students' Speaking skill at Dong Nai Technology University**

and identify students' attitudes to the application of outdoor learning in teaching English speaking skill. The research results reveal that outdoor learning brought many advantages in enhancing students' speaking fluency; it also increased students' confidence. The students generally showed positive attitudes towards outdoor learning strategy.

### **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Traditionally, almost language classes are taught indoors, but classroom-based environment is not the only choice. In fact, an indoor learning environment is insufficient to meet the students' learning needs. The implementation of outdoor learning can provide students various learning locations to practice language skills. According to Asama, Anwar & Muhamad (2016), outdoor learning can be understood as outdoor education. Likewise, Vera (2012) states that outdoor learning is a form of study outside the classroom that can be organized at school or somewhere else.

In the light of outdoor education, language teachers can expand students' learning environment in comparison to traditional classroom teaching. Regardless of whether the material is appropriate or not, students also need outdoor learning activities because they will help refresh students and allow them to benefit from what they learn in real-world situations. In fact, outdoor learning activities consist of many kinds of teaching and learning activities that can be held outside the classroom (Beames et al., 2011). Similarly, Asama, Anwar & Muhamad (2016) revealed that outdoor activities are any types of activities designed as a method for teaching English outside of the classroom.

In terms of benefits, Gill (2009) pointed out that students can improve their independence, resistance and excitement when studying with outdoor learning activities. Furthermore, outdoor learning activities enhance students' ability to communicate and exchange knowledge with others (Arifani, 2016). It is a fact that outdoor learning activities encourage learners to share things without worrying about restrictions in the classroom. They also foster more intimate relationships which enable people to talk in a more enthusiastic and relaxing way. Learning outdoors provides more refreshment by virtue of their surrounding atmosphere. Additionally, they are thought to keep the brain in a good condition (Pearson, 2004). Outdoor learning activities are therefore firmly believed to motivate students to learn.

Motivation has an equally significant impact on how well students learn. In other words, students' achievement is influenced by their level of motivation, whether it high or low. Lack of motivation may shape students' attitudes in a way which is detrimental to language learning and language performance. It is impossible to learn without motivation. Students complete any task and meet learning objectives thanks to their motivation. Motivation is thus considered to improve learning performance (Brown, 2004). The role of the teacher in students' motivation to learn is essential without which students find it challenging to complete their tasks. For teachers, motivation is also useful in achieving goals. A teacher might motivate her students with a personal approach or any entertaining activity. Lack of motivation can be a hindrance to learning English because it results in distraction which can minimize learning effectiveness. In an English-speaking class, students may get mentally discouraged or unwilling to speak up even though they have a certain level of speaking competence.

Additionally, outdoor learning offers authentic content found in activities which require a real-world use of language. Many researchers of language teaching and pedagogy believe that applying authentic materials is able to enhance learners' communicative ability (Guariento & Morely, 2001). There are additional benefits to learning success. Outdoor environment has the ability to foster meaningful learning by allowing students to move between the abstract and concrete as well as turn experience into knowledge through reflective and communicative activities. It gives learners the fundamentals and guidelines for interacting in everyday situations. As a result, outdoor learning activities are appropriate for teaching the four skills of English language, especially speaking skill.

Vitaly important, outdoor learning activities encourages students to move out of the classroom and into the world and helps to bridge the gap between language study and language use. Outdoor learning activities enable teachers and students to go beyond the limitations imposed in conventional English curriculum. Students' learning environment could be broaden as a result of involving them in beneficial outdoor learning activities. According to Fägerstam and Blom (2013), a large number of students claimed that learning outside was so much fun. Besides, open air environment made students feel more concentrated and attentive. Obviously, meaningful outdoor environment offer students opportunities to take part in English learning activities which are likely to spark students' interests as well as increase their motivation to learn.

### **III. METHODOLOGY**

In this study, both quantitative and qualitative methods were applied to investigate the effectiveness of outdoor learning on teaching English speaking skill as well as students' attitude towards outdoor learning.

#### **Participants**

Participants of the study were first year English majored students at Dong Nai Technology University, Vietnam. Totally, there are 45 students took part in the experiment. All the lessons are designed and collected from books or internet.

# The Effectiveness of Outdoor Learning on First year English majored Students' Speaking skill at Dong Nai Technology University

## Instruments

The methods of data collection are questionnaire and interview. A questionnaire was designed to collect data from 45 students. This questionnaire had the partakers respond to each item in a four-point Likert scale which descend the meaning respectively from strongly agree, agree, disagree to strongly disagree. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 5 students chosen randomly to unveil students' opinion and reinforce the results from questionnaire.

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### A. Results of questionnaire

First, the participants responded to the idea that outdoor activities encourage students to communicate with others. Most of the students' responses were agreement, particularly 62% of students agreed and 27% of them strongly agreed with the question. The bar chart below indicated that only 11% of the students' responses were in disagreement (disagree at 7% and strong disagreement at 4%). Apparently, outdoor learning helped the students speak and exchange information in team to complete the tasks outside the classroom. Thus, the application of outdoor learning have influenced students' speaking competence gradually.

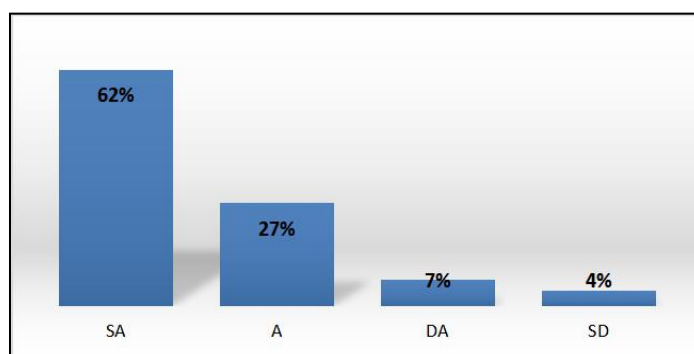


Chart 1. Students' opinion about outdoor learning encourages students to communicate with others

Also, from the below pie chart, it illustrates the high proportion of the students agreed (38%) and strongly agreed (55%) with the second question "outdoor learning activities provide more opportunities for speaking practice". However, there are still a few students showed their disagreement at 7% and none of them showed strong disagreement.

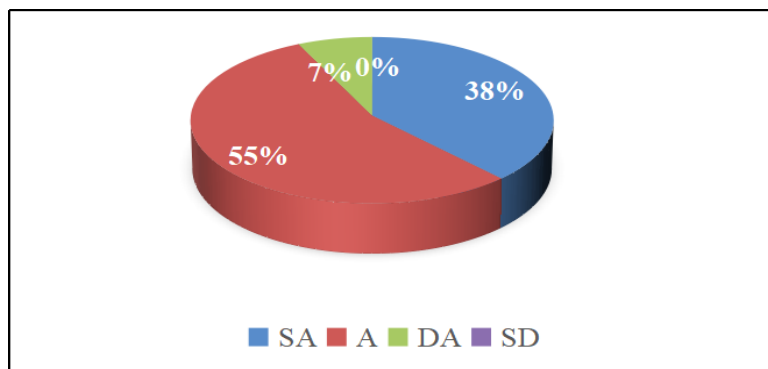


Chart 2. Students' opinions about outdoor learning activities provide more opportunities for speaking practice

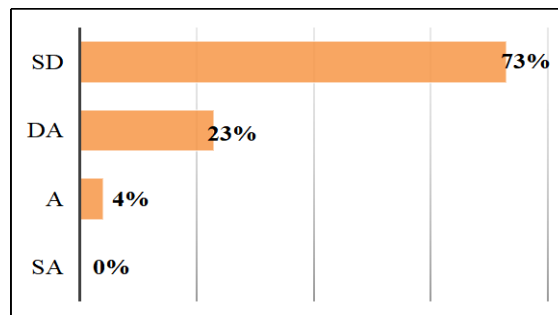
Moreover, the following table was about the effectiveness of outdoor learning activities in improving students' speaking skill. We can see that most of the items showed 'agree' with the high percentage. First, 44% of students strongly agree and 49% of students agree that students were engaged to communicate with their classmates in real life contexts. Only 7% of responses showed disagreement and there was no response of strong disagreement. Specially, 100% of students (47% strongly agree and 53% agree) admitted that outdoor learning activities made them more confident about themselves. When the large number of students realized the advantages of out of classroom activities, it was not surprising that nearly 90% of them agreed that those activities boost their motivation to speak in English. Last but not least, the results indicated that 82% of students (38% strongly agree and 44% agree) agree that they become active learners via outdoor activities. To sum up, the figures point out that outdoor learning brought the benefits to most students which influence directly their speaking ability.

# The Effectiveness of Outdoor Learning on First year English majored Students' Speaking skill at Dong Nai Technology University

**Table 1. Students' opinions about effectiveness of outdoor learning activities in improving speaking skill**

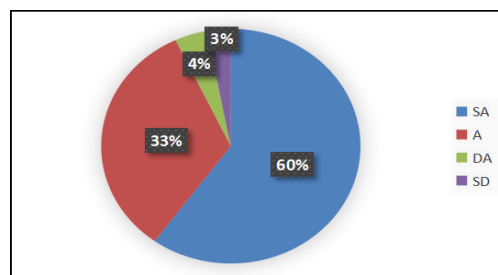
Outdoor learning activities ....	Sa	A	Da	Sd
Engage students to communicate in real life contexts	44%	49%	7%	0%
Make students more confident to speak in english	47%	53%	0%	0%
Boost students' motivation to speak in english	42%	47%	9%	2%
Help students to become active speakers	38%	44%	11%	7%

In relation to the time consumption when learning outdoors, almost students expressed their disagreement with the claim that learning with outdoor activities is time consuming at 96% (23% disagree and 73% strongly disagree). This high rate of disagreement indicated that students realized how important outdoor learning was to their language learning success.



**Chart 3. Students' opinions about time consumption**

As for the students' attitude to the implementation of outdoor learning activities in teaching English, the below pie chart showed that a large proportion of the students liked outdoor learning activities at 60% strong agreement and 33% of agreement. The number of students doesn't like outdoor activities just occupied 7% totally. It can be concluded that most students had a positive outlook to the application of outdoor learning activities.



**Chart 4. Students' attitude toward outdoor learning activities**

## B. Results of Interview

In terms of benefits, most of the interviewee saw that outdoor activities are important in improving English speaking skill. Firstly, the students expressed that working outdoors helped them to enhance their speaking ability because they had more opportunities to practice speaking English through working with other members. They recognized that outdoor learning activities gave them opportunity to express their opinions. Also, they were satisfied with face-to-face interaction and exchanging ideas with others. As four students remarked:

My friends and I could use English to communicate when we work together on a project, We used English to exchange ideas or ask questions. So I think outdoor activities improved my English speaking skill. [S2]

## The Effectiveness of Outdoor Learning on First year English majored Students' Speaking skill at Dong Nai Technology University

When participating in outdoor activities, I could perform the given task in English in front of the public. [S4]

I could learn new words and even recalled many words, phrases and structures and use them to practice speaking via out door learning activities [S1]

I could improve my pronunciation. It was useful for me to communicate well in English. [S5]

In relation to attitudes, five students expressed very positive feelings about using outdoor learning activities. The common reaction was interviewees' fondness.

I enjoyed the way you organize the outdoor show. [S3]

I liked learning outdoors. I liked the unstressed learning environment. [S2]

The students also reacted to the activities applied positively because these activities helped them raise their confidence, enhance speaking skills and created an active learning atmosphere that motivated them; they felt more interested in the lessons. They liked being exposed to real-life situations and competition. Two students said:

I loved outdoor activities. I had a lot of fun when practicing speaking with my friends. [S1]

I liked the game shows. It was so exciting. [S5]

In short, the findings of this study illustrate that there is a difference in the students' speaking ability when learning outdoors. The result is in accordance with Arifani (2016) who believed that outdoor learning activities develop students' ability to speak and share knowledge with others. The results obtained after the experiment indicated that outdoor learning activities improved students' English speaking skill. Furthermore, outdoor learning has expanded the scope of foreign language learning by creating a dynamic, comfortable, and creative English learning environment out of classroom. In addition, the results of this research indicate that using outdoor learning activities provide authentic materials which led to success in language and culture learning. Also, the study show that outdoor learning offer students encouraging learning experiences, which motivate students to learn better.

### CONCLUSIONS

Learning outdoors isn't just about increasing students' interest in their subject, but can also involve in the development of new vocabulary, creative thinking, and self-confidence as well. Most importantly, outdoor learning activities offer much more opportunities for students to practice speaking English in real life situations. Therefore, they can learn new things and improve speaking competence in the target language fluently. Although outdoor learning can be challenging, its impacts on students learning outcomes especially speaking ability are undeniable. In addition, the implementation of outdoor learning activities will highly motivate students in learning English if teachers choose relevant activities. Clearly, to supply the better effects on language acquisition for students, teachers should be flexible to apply appropriate outdoor learning activities into their teaching.

### REFERENCES

- 1) Asama, C. H, Anwar, C, & Muhanmad, R. N. (2016). EFL Learners' Perception toward an Outdoor Learning Program. *International Journal of Education & Literacy Studies*. 4(2). 74-80.
- 2) Arifani, Y. (2016). The Implementation of Team-Based Discovery Learning to Improve Students' Ability in Writing Research Proposal. *International Education Studies*. 9(2), 111-119.
- 3) Bas, G. (2008). Implementation of multiple intelligences supported project-based learning in EFL/ESL classrooms. Retrieved from <http://www3.telus.net/linguisticsissues/mi>
- 4) Beames, S., Atencio, M. & Ross, H. (2009) Taking excellence outdoors. *Scottish Educational review*, 41(2), 32-41.
- 5) Brown, H. Douglas. (2004). *Language Assessment Principles and Classroom Practices*. San Francisco: Longman.
- 6) Gill, T, (2009). No Fear: Growing up in a risk-averse society, London, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.
- 7) Guariento, W., & Morley, J. (2001). Text and task authenticity in the EFL classroom. *ELT Journal*, 55(4), 347-353.
- 8) Guo, S. (2011). Impact of an Out-of-class Activity on Students' English Awareness, Vocabulary, and Autonomy. *Language Education in Asia*, 2(2), 246-256.
- 9) Pearson, N. (2004). The Idiosyncrasies of Out-of-Class Language Learning. *Proceeding of the independent Learning Conference*. New Zealand.
- 10) Fägerstam, E. & Blom, J. (2013). Learning biology and mathematics outdoors: Effects and attitudes in a Swedish high school context. 13(1). 56-75.
- 11) Vera, A. (2012). *Metode mengajar anak di luar kelas (Outdoor Study)*. Yogyakarta: Diva Press.
- 12) Zhang, S. (2009). The role of input, interaction, and output in the development of oral fluency. *English Language Teaching*, 2(4), 91-100



There is an Open Access article, distributed under the term of the Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0)

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits remixing, adapting and building upon the work for non-commercial use, provided the original work is properly cited.