

# FACTORS INFLUENCING THE INTERACTION OF THIRD-YEAR ENGLISH MAJORS IN SPEAKING CLASSES AT HANOI OPEN UNIVERSITY

*Le Phuong Thao\**, *Giang Van Vu\**  
*Email: lephuongthao@hou.edu.vn*

Received: 04/09/2023

Revised: 14/03/2024

Accepted: 28/03/2024

DOI: 10.59266/houjs.2024.377

**Abstract:** *This study investigates external and internal factors affecting students' interaction in English-speaking classes to develop effective strategies to improve their interaction. The study was conducted among sixteen classes at the Faculty of English at Hanoi Open University, with 86 students in total. Questionnaires and interviews were employed as data collection instruments for the study. The results showed that there are still a large number of 'passive' students who are not willing to speak and participate in class activities for different reasons, both coming from external and internal ones. These factors mainly include "self-confidence", "motivation, and interest", "prior relationships", "classroom environment," "lecturers' teaching styles", and "technological devices". Accordingly, different techniques and teaching methods were recommended to promote students' interaction during speaking lessons, including "pair work," "asking-answering questions," "debate sessions or discussion," and "interactive multimedia learning." The study results are expected to help both students and lecturers identify influential factors and explore more effective strategies or teaching methods to enhance students' participation in English-speaking classes.*

**Keywords:** *classroom interaction, students' interaction, speaking classes, participation in class activities, interpersonal interaction.*

## I. Introduction

Teaching spoken language skills is not an easy task in teaching and learning, and interaction is necessary to achieve a successful oral language lesson. A lesson can be ineffective for teachers and learners without active engagement or student participation. A dull and passive class atmosphere fails to inspire students, leaving them unmotivated to gain knowledge. At the same time, interaction enhances speaking

skills, where students actively communicate with each other. This not only supports students in honing communication abilities but also fosters the development of various practical life skills that are beneficial outside the class and in the future.

## II. Literature review

### 2.1. Classroom interaction

To define the term "interaction", Garrison (1993) refers to interaction as

---

\* Hanoi Open University

“sustained, two-way communication among two or more persons to explain and challenging perspectives”. Given this, Gilbert and Moore (1998) give a broader definition of interaction, which is interpersonal communication among two or more people within a learning context for task/instructional completion or social relationship building. In an educational setting, classroom interaction is defined as the interaction between the teacher and learners. To support this, Weller (1988) also states that interaction is a means for teachers and learners to receive feedback and for adjustments to be made based on information and activities in which the participants are involved. Besides, it entails any form of students’ oral participation in class, including one-to-one, one-to-many, and some-to-some (Smyth, 2005).

Indeed, interaction plays a very important role in speaking classes. There is a fact that no classes deny the need for interaction among students or between students and teachers. Specifically, Simpson

and Galbo (1986) state that student-teacher interaction is seen as the force behind learning. To support this, Tsui (1998) also supposes that interaction encourages them to express their opinions, answer questions, and carry out tasks and activities, in turn allowing them not only to learn about the language but also how to use it. Additionally, Allwright (1984) considers classroom interaction in FL (Foreign Language) to be “inherent in the very notion of classroom pedagogy itself”. This view is similar to arguments given by Ellis (1999) and Maloof and Boyd (2000), who believe that the quality of interactive patterns of classroom participation goes hand-in-hand with learning outcomes.

## 2.2. Interpersonal interaction

According to Gurtman (2009) in one principle of interpersonal theory, the most significant aspects of human interaction with others can be expressed by two dimensions. The interpersonal meaning of words is presented in the Interpersonal Circle (IPC) created by Kiesler (1996).

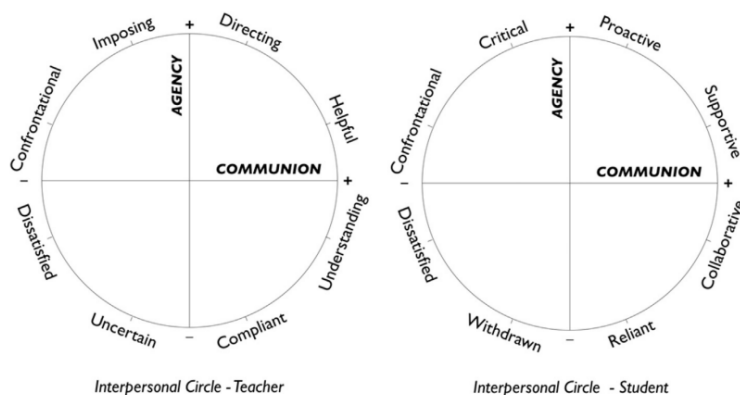


Figure 1. The Interpersonal Circle for Teachers (left, IPC-T) and Students (right, IPC-S) (H.J.M. Pennings et al., 2018)

Furthermore, the second key principle of interpersonal theory is Interpersonal Complementarity. It refers to how the interactional behavior of pairs of people may be suitable together and influence each other (Sadler et al., 2010). The integrative model of complementarity is illustrated in Figure 2 below (Sadler &

Woody, 2003).

Among students, interpersonal skills are relatively important. Learning occurs only after the interactions a student engages with other classmates (Berge, 1999). Moreover, Johnson (1981) believes peer relationships affect educational aspirations

and achievement. To support this view, the research conducted by Guo et al. (2018) also pointed out that the interaction between students is inextricably connected to the individual learners' satisfaction with learning. Besides, Jacobs et al. (2016) researched the benefits of interpersonal interaction between students. They concluded that it increased higher-level cognitive processing, heightened levels of participation, enhanced self-confidence, and improved performance on assessments.

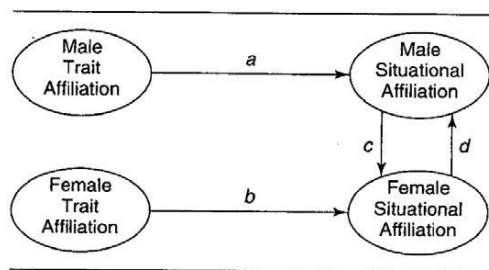


Figure 2. Integrative Model of Complementarity (Sadler and Woody, 2003)

### 2.3. Research Questions

The study aims to answer three research questions:

1. How do the third-year English majors interact in oral language classes at Hanoi Open University?
2. What are the key factors influencing the interaction of third-year English majors in speaking classes at the Faculty of English at Hanoi Open University?
3. What strategies effectively promote the interaction of third-year English majors in speaking classes at the Faculty of English at Hanoi Open University?

## III. Methods

### 3.1. Research Context and Participants

The research was conducted at the Faculty of English, Hanoi Open University, Vietnam. The participants

in the study are 70 third-year students from different classes with different backgrounds. They have studied four levels of speaking, equivalent to two years of training. Besides, one student from each class (K28A01 to K28A16) was chosen randomly to attend the interview, so there were 16 interviewees in total.

### 3.2. Design of the Study

The research combines both the quantitative and qualitative approaches to achieve the purpose. Quantitatively, a descriptive research design was selected for the study because it allows a systematic and accurate account of a certain population (Dulock, 1993). Qualitatively, phenomenological research design was employed to explore participants' lived experiences and perceptions in speaking classes (van Manen, 1997).

### 3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

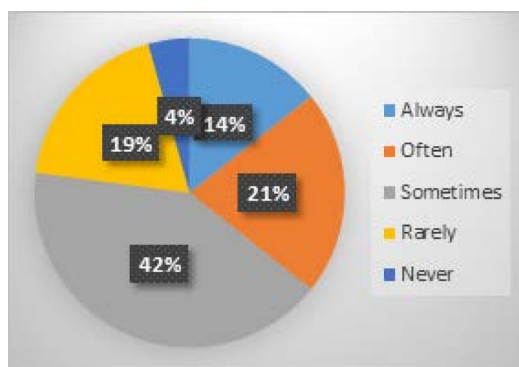
To collect data and answer three research questions, an online questionnaire was created on Google Forms - one of the most widely-used data collection tools. The questionnaire was designed with three main parts. The first part focuses on the current situation of students' interaction in speaking classes. The second part investigates key factors influencing their interaction, including external and internal ones. The third part aims to find effective strategies to improve classroom interaction during speaking classes. Most of the questions are Likert-scale type. There are also some open-ended questions to collect more detailed information about the participants' opinions. Regarding the data analysis method, the data was subjected to computer analysis, converted into percentages, and illustrated in the form of graphs and tables to make the data presentation analytical and comprehensive.

With qualitative data, in-depth interviews were employed, involving structured questionnaires, which served as a guide for the researcher during interviews.

#### IV. Findings and Discussion

##### *4.1. The current situation of students interacting with one another in English-speaking classes*

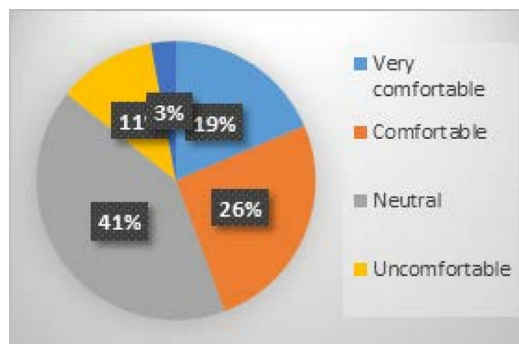
The results showed the positive attitudes of students towards the importance of classroom interaction. Nevertheless, although all students are aware of how significant it is, the number of 'passive' students outweighs that of 'positive' ones. Figure 3 presents the frequency of their participation in class activities, and Figure 4 shows the level of comfort expressed by students when participating in interactive activities.



*Figure 3. The percentage of how often students actively participate in discussions during oral language classes (N=70)*

As can be seen from both figures, most of the respondents engage in class activities, and only 4% of the participants hardly participate. In Figure 3, nearly half of respondents considered themselves to sometimes engage in discussions (approximately 42%), while 21% of

students often participate. This number is nearly the same as those who rarely participate (approximately 19%). In Figure 4, about 26% of surveyed students supposed that they felt comfortable in all class discussions. Meanwhile, 41% of students feel neutral, and 11% feel uncomfortable.



*Figure 4. Level of comfort expressed by students when participating in interactive activities (N=70)*

These numbers clearly show that there are still several active students in the class. One student stated, *"The more students stand up and answer the questions, the more likely students are to get higher scores. That's why I sit in the second row of the class so that when I raise my hands, the lecturer can see me and call me"*. At the same time, the situation of "passivity" among students still exists in a large number. *"I am quite shy when standing up and looking at the class; that's why I rarely participate in class activities"*, one respondent mentioned. Therefore, students see different feelings more clearly when they engage in discussions. One surveyed student highlighted by noting that *"I felt quite good with all activities before, but also quite stressed when having little time to prepare and face the topics which are too difficult to express"*. These feelings may similarly happen to many other students during speaking lessons.

## 4.2. Key factors influencing students' interaction in English-speaking classes

### 4.2.1. Internal factors

To investigate key internal factors affecting the interaction among students, six factors were suggested, including Self-confidence, Language proficiency, Motivation and interest, Anxiety or nervousness, Previous speaking experience, and Prior relationships. The findings showed that all students recognize these six factors, which are indicated in Figure 5 below.

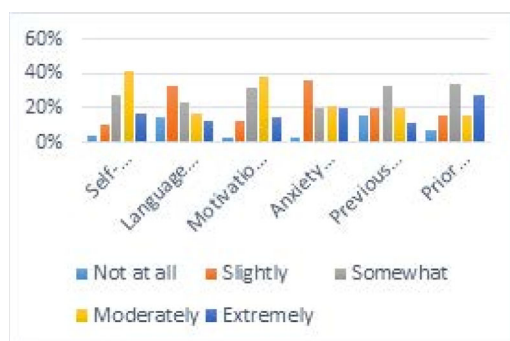


Figure 5. Percentage of students' responses about internal factors influencing the interaction among students in oral language classes

As can be seen from the chart, self-confidence is agreed most to be moderately influential in interaction among students (over 40%). This figure is followed by the factor of motivation and interest, with about 38 students showing their agreement. Meanwhile, nearly 35% of students agree that previous speaking experience and prior relationships influence their interaction in speaking classes. The least influential factors are anxiety or nervousness and language proficiency, constituting approximately 35% and 33%, respectively.

Most of the students are affected by their self-confidence. This problem was confirmed in the interviews with students,

one of whom shared that *"The main challenge I have may be confidence; when I have to speak with a high-level person, I feel a bit afraid."* It is explained that when teaming up with a fluent English partner, students tend to feel unconfident as they must try a lot to keep up with their peers, making them feel afraid. Meanwhile, when they work in a team with those who are lower level, they feel a bit bored and even frustrated when their partner is unable to cooperate or discuss enthusiastically.

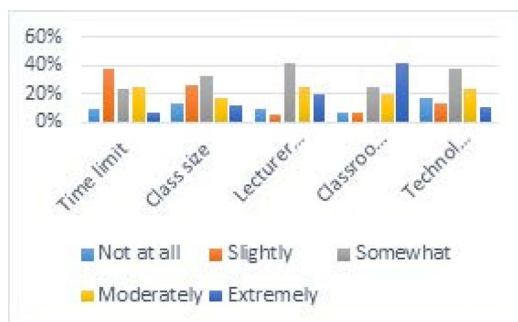
Followed by self-confidence is motivation and interest. This factor encourages students to actively participate in class discussions, of which intrinsic motivation plays a vital role in making students willing to engage themselves. The explanation is that students with highly intrinsic motivation are motivated by their interest and enjoyment, not by extrinsic ones such as grades or rewards, so the desire to learn and communicate comes from themselves, not by requirement.

Prior relationships also influence the way students interact with their peers in speaking classes. Students who have positive prior relationships with others may feel more relaxed, leading to increased communication and interaction. They are willing to express their ideas and open to listening to others' perspectives. On the other hand, students who used to have disagreements or conflicts in the past may interact more cautiously. One student highlighted this problem by sharing in the interview that: *"I had a pair discussion with a person I didn't like last time. It made me feel very uncomfortable during our conversation"*.

### 4.2.2. External factors

Apart from internal factors, five external factors were recommended, including Time limit, Class size, Lecturers' teaching styles, Classroom environment, and Technological devices.

Figure 6 below illustrates part 2 of the questionnaire results.



*Figure 6. Percentage of students' responses about external factors influencing the interaction among students in oral language classes*

The column chart shows that classroom environment is agreed most to be a factor influencing students' interaction to the greatest extent, with over 40% of students agreeing with this. Meanwhile, the least influential factor is the time limit, with about 42% of students agreeing that this factor does not affect students' interaction at all.

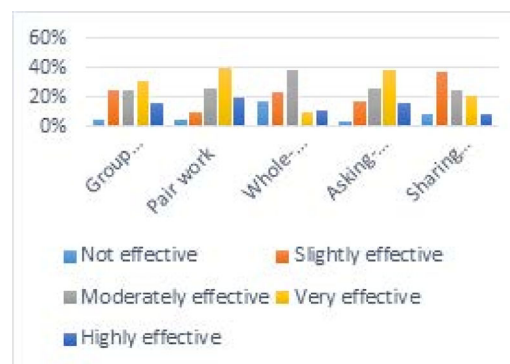
The explanation for classroom environment is that the classroom's overall climate affects the learning atmosphere. A positive and encouraging climate stimulates a sense of cooperation and community, affecting students to actively engage and interact with their peers.

Regarding lecturers' teaching style, one explanation is how a lecturer presents information. Dynamic and interactive teaching can attract students' attention and encourage them to engage more actively in discussions. To highlight this, one student stated, *"I don't think a lesson will be interesting if the teacher isn't active at first. So as long as the lecturers want to raise the class's enthusiasm, it's easier"*.

Technological devices are also a notable influence on students' interaction. Today, students can have access to digital learning platforms where they can get

support or cooperate with others, allowing them to deliver messages and documents easily and conveniently in a team. Thanks to this, students can access the virtual world, which helps them support their presentation with illustrious pictures, videos, or music. At the same time, technological devices also have some negative influences on students when there are many sources of entertainment available on their smartphones. Students tend to be tempted to take a phone to go online and relax instead of engaging in discussions. Several students agree that technological devices are very influential in the class. One respondent admitted in the interview that: *"For me, smartphones affect me the most since I always use them when I'm free and not cared for by the lecturer"*.

#### **4.3. Effective strategies to promote students' interaction in English-speaking classes**



*Figure 7. Percentage of students' responses about the effectiveness of different strategies to promote students' interaction*

The results indicate the rate at which five common techniques influence students' interaction and other strategies to promote it. Role-playing activities, debate sessions or discussions, interactive multimedia learning, peer-led discussions, and teacher-led discussions. Figure 7 and Figure 8 below shows clearly the effectiveness of those strategies.



The bar chart indicates that pair work and asking-answering questions are two noticeable strategies agreed by most students to be very effective in improving class interaction, with 40% and 39% showing their agreement, respectively. This figure is followed by that of group discussions, which is agreed upon by more than 30%. Besides, about 40% of students evaluated whole-class discussions to be moderately effective. Sharing personal experiences, however, is believed to be slightly effective.



Figure 8. Percentage of students' responses about the effectiveness of different methods or strategies to promote students' interaction

As is observed from the chart, peer-led discussions are agreed to be a moderately effective activity in promoting student interaction (roughly 45%). Besides, most students find interactive multimedia learning and debate sessions or discussions very effective and highly effective respectively, the former is agreed by nearly 35%, and the latter is agreed by over 30%. In contrast, 34% of students evaluated role-playing activities to be slightly effective.

Of five commonly used techniques, pair work is believed to be the most effective technique in promoting student interaction. The explanation for this is that it increases the level of participation, where their voices are heard more effectively. This technique is also highlighted by one student noting that: *"Students tend to follow their friends.*

*If some people are active in the class, the class is more active and all students are going to interact more".* Moreover, pair work increases the amount of talking time for all students, which was validated by Moon (2000). It is quite beneficial since some students in this study suppose that not having enough time partly influences their interaction with other classmates.

Asking and answering questions is also a good technique to be employed. In speaking classes, students are made to talk with other peers and the lecturer by asking or answering questions. This allows them to discuss their ideas, share their perspectives, and learn from one another. Also, the challenge of answering questions can stimulate students to actively engage in the learning process. It triggers students' curiosity and desire to find out the correct answers, creating a positive learning atmosphere.

With other recommended teaching methods and strategies, debate sessions or discussions are very effective strategies when students can be actively involved in the conversation, giving different opinions to reinforce their arguments. In debates and discussions, students have to pay attention to peers' arguments, ask relevant and wise questions, and answer thoughtfully. This element is very crucial for interactive communication.

Furthermore, interactive multimedia is very effective and can be taken advantage of. It enables them to have more responsibility and better control over their learning process (Khoo, 1994). Various platforms allow students to take control of their speed when completing a task online. This reduces the stress level, in turn making them feel more relaxed to interact with each other.

## V. Conclusion

The study was conducted to identify key factors affecting students' interaction

in English-speaking classes and effective strategies to promote their interaction at the Faculty of English, Hanoi Open University. The study has gained the expected results with the use of both a questionnaire and an interview to find out different factors affecting students' interaction in speaking classes as well as teaching methods or strategies to improve their interaction effectively. Specifically, the findings indicated that there are various factors spotted that exert an immense influence on the interaction among students during speaking lessons, of which classroom environment and self-confidence are both notable. Furthermore, the level of effectiveness among these strategies is evaluated to find out the best strategies. This is very important since interaction could boost their ability and academic performance both inside and outside class.

In short, research results seem to be in line with what has been concluded in previous studies, even though such investigated factors rely a lot on the educational settings. Therefore, both teachers and learners should identify factors influencing classroom interaction and thereby increase the quality of teaching and learning, yielding a productive lesson.

### References

- [1]. Allwright, R. L. (1984). The importance of interaction in classroom language learning. *Applied linguistics*, 5(2), 156-171.
- [2]. Berge, Z. L. (1999). Interaction in post-secondary web-based learning. *Educational technology*, 39(1), 5-11.
- [3]. Dulock, H. L. (1993). Research design: Descriptive research. *Journal of Pediatric Oncology Nursing*, 10(4), 154-157.
- [4]. Ellis, R. (1999). *Learning a second language through interaction* (Vol. 17). John Benjamins Publishing.
- [5]. Garrison, D. R. (1993). Quality and theory in distance education: Theoretical considerations. In D. Keegan (Ed.), *Theoretical principles of distance education*. New York: Routledge
- [6]. Gilbert, L., & Moore, D. R. (1998). Building interactivity into Web courses: Tools for social and instructional interaction. *Educational Technology*, 38(3), 29-35.
- [7]. Guo, T., Gong, Y., Shi, S., & Luan, Z. (2018, November). Reasons that Affect the Interaction Among Students in Virtual Learning Environment. In *IOP Conference Series: Materials Science and Engineering* (Vol. 439, No. 3, p. 032051). IOP Publishing.
- [8]. Gurtman, M. B. (2009). Exploring personality with the interpersonal circumplex. *Social and personality psychology compass*, 3(4), 601-619.
- [9]. Jacobs, G. M., Renandya, W. A., Power, M., Jacobs, G. M., Renandya, W. A., & Power, M. (2016). Student-student interaction. *Simple, powerful strategies for student-centered learning*, 11-18.
- [10]. Johnson, D. W. (1981). Student-student interaction: The neglected variable in education. *Educational researcher*, 10(1), 5-10.
- [11]. Kiesler, D. J. (1996). From communications to interpersonal theory: A personal odyssey. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 66(2), 267-282.
- [12]. Maloof, V.M., & Boyd, M. (2000). Student-proposed intertextual links to facilitate students. *Second and foreign language learning through classroom interaction*, 163-182.
- [13]. Pennings, H. J., Brekelmans, M., Sadler, P., Claessens, L. C., van der Want, A. C., & van Tartwijk, J. (2018). Interpersonal adaptation in teacher-student interaction. *Learning and Instruction*, 55, 41-57.
- [14]. Sadler, P., & Woody, E. (2003). Is who you are who you're talking to? Interpersonal style and complementarity in mixed-sex interactions. *Journal of Personality and*



- Social Psychology*, 84, 80-96.
- [15]. Sadler, P., Ethier, N., & Woody, E. (2010). Interpersonal complementarity. In L. M. Horowitz, & S. Strack (Eds.), *Handbook of interpersonal psychology: Theory, research, assessment, and therapeutic interventions* (pp. 123-142). NY: Wiley.
- [16]. Simpson, R. J., & Galbo, J. J. (1986). Interaction and learning: Theorizing on the art of teaching. *Interchange*, 17(4), 37-51. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01807015>
- [17]. Smyth, R. (2005). Broadband Videoconferencing as a Tool for Learner-Centered Distance Learning in Higher Education. *British Journal of Educational Technology* 36, 5: 805-820.
- [18]. Tsui, A. B. (1998). The 'Unobservable' in classroom interaction. *The Language Teacher*.
- [19]. Van Manen, M. (1997). Phenomenological pedagogy and the question of meaning. *Phenomenology & education discourse*, 41-68.
- [20]. Weller, H. G. (1988). Interactivity in microcomputer-based instruction: Its essential components and how it can be enhanced. *Educational Technology*, 28(2), 23-27.

## NHỮNG YẾU TỐ ẢNH HƯỞNG ĐẾN SỰ TƯƠNG TÁC CỦA SINH VIÊN NĂM THỨ BA CHUYÊN NGÀNH TIẾNG ANH TRONG GIỜ HỌC NÓI TẠI TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC MỞ HÀ NỘI

*Lê Phương Thảo<sup>†</sup>, Giang Văn Vũ<sup>†</sup>*

**Tóm tắt:** Nghiên cứu này điều tra các yếu tố bên ngoài và bên trong ảnh hưởng đến sự tương tác của sinh viên trong các lớp học nói tiếng Anh để phát triển các chiến lược hiệu quả nhằm cải thiện sự tương tác. Nghiên cứu được thực hiện tại Khoa tiếng Anh, trường Đại học Mở Hà Nội, với tổng cộng 86 sinh viên tham gia. Phiếu khảo sát và phỏng vấn được sử dụng làm công cụ thu thập dữ liệu cho nghiên cứu. Kết quả cho thấy vẫn có số lượng lớn các sinh viên 'thụ động' không sẵn lòng nói và tham gia vào các hoạt động lớp học vì các lý khác nhau, đến từ cả yếu tố ngoại vi và nội tại. Các yếu tố này chủ yếu bao gồm: "sự tự tin", "động lực và sự thích thú", "mối quan hệ trước đó", "môi trường lớp học", "phong cách giảng dạy của giảng viên", và "thiết bị công nghệ". Do đó, các kỹ thuật và phương pháp giảng dạy khác nhau đã được đề xuất để thúc đẩy sự tương tác của sinh viên trong các buổi học kỹ năng nói, bao gồm "làm việc theo cặp", "đặt câu hỏi và trả lời", "tranh luận và thảo luận", và "học đa phương tiện tương tác". Kết quả của nghiên cứu được hy vọng sẽ giúp cả sinh viên và giảng viên xác định các yếu tố ảnh hưởng và tìm hiểu các chiến lược hoặc phương pháp giảng dạy hiệu quả hơn để tăng cường sự tham gia của sinh viên trong các lớp học kỹ năng nói tiếng Anh.

**Từ khóa:** sự tương tác lớp học, tương tác sinh viên, các lớp học nói, sự tham gia vào các hoạt động lớp học, tương tác giữa các nhân.

---

<sup>†</sup> Trường Đại học Mở Hà Nội