APPLICATION OF TECHNOLOGY IN TEACHING AND LEARNING SPEAKING SKILLS ONLINE FOR THE FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS AT THE FACULTY OF ENGLISH, HANOI OPEN UNIVERSITY

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Abstract: Applying teaching technologies in the context of teaching and learning English speaking skills online has become a major concern of educators to expand students' background knowledge, enlarge vocabulary, improve pronunciation and develop communication skills. The article aimed at identifying the difficulties faced by the first-year students at the Faculty of English, Hanoi Open University (FOE, HOU) when learning English speaking skills online. The authors of the article conducted a survey to find out the current situation of teaching English speaking skills online of the first-year students at FOE, HOU. On the basis of analyzing the causes of inadequacies in the process of teaching English speaking skills online, the authors make some recommendations on the application of technology to improve the effectiveness of teaching English speaking for the first-year students of FOE, HOU, aiming to equip them with English capacities to find good jobs and develop careers in the globalized world.

Keywords: technology application, solutions to improve speaking skills, first-year students, Faculty of English, Hanoi Open University

I. Introduction

The application of technology in foreign language teaching is an inevitable trend in the era of the integrated world. It can be said that online teaching and learning in general and online English teaching and learning, in particular, gives lecturers and students opportunities to access an open, endless, diverse and rich source of knowledge. The flexible application of technology in teaching and learning English online helps students practise pronunciation skills and develop English communication skills at work and in real life. This promotes interaction among students, and between students and the professional world. This also equips students with a solid foreign language foundation, helps them develop their careers and reaches out on the path of international integration.

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During the teaching process, teachers can integrate multimedia such as images, videos, and conversations on information technology platforms to design unique, interactive and highly creative lectures to enhance students' thinking as well as comprehensively develop students' language capacities. Besides, online interaction helps students improve their speaking skills. Students can make friends to exchange through the virtual learning environment and practise listening and speaking. In particular, students can practise and correct pronunciation by recording their own voices, evaluating, editing and practising to improve language capacities.

However, teaching English speaking skills online to improve students' communication capacities is a big challenge for universities. The practice has proven that the most significant difficulty for students is the lack of motivation and confidence when speaking English. Besides, many students are not really interested in online speaking lessons. This is reflected in the learning attitudes of students who are still passive, not actively exploring and applying appropriate learning methods to improve the effectiveness of learning speaking skills online. In order to develop English communication capacities online, students need to practise listening skills and improve pronunciation skills to improve their English speaking skills.

To improve the quality of teaching English speaking skills online for the first-year students of FOE, HOU; the authors conducted a survey on the real situation of teaching English speaking skills online of the first-year students of FOE, HOU to answer the following research questions:

(i) What are the difficulties faced by the first-year students of FOE, HOU when learning English speaking skills online?; (ii) What are the solutions for the first-year students of FOE, HOU to learn English speaking skills online effectively?

II. Literature review

2.1. Application of Technology in Digital Education in Revolution 4.0 – A Decisive factor for quality improvement of online education

In the era of technology revolution 4.0, digital education is a method of working and learning applying technology. Universities around the world and Vietnam increasingly deploy digital education. Digital education brings about technology skills, pedagogical activities, and an understanding of relevant curriculum design to digital learners. In fact, digital education provides teachers and learners with flexible and diverse working and learning opportunities. This helps them participate actively and effectively in the teaching and learning processes to improve learners' capacities in a digital context.

In fact, the application of technology in education in general and in higher education, in particular, provides educators with a dynamic and proactive teaching and learning environment (Arnseth and Hatlevik, 2010). Online teaching methods or online teaching support are widely used to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Carey (2020) divides instructional technology into three groups. The first group is the **Learning Resources** include *educational software, online resources* and *resource picture and sound*. The second group is **Teaching Learning Organizations that** deal with *software* and *technology tools* for

classroom instruction. The third group is the **Communications**, including the *system e-mail* and *Website* referring communication aspects.

The New Media Consortium (2005) believes that the achievements of technology support the education sector through the effective application of *the Extended Learning* method in online education. In which, online teaching and learning give lecturers and students opportunities to access new communication tools. According to Cheng (2012), these new communication tools allow the teaching and learning process to go beyond the limits of the classroom setting on communication; create an environment for students to participate in discussions, collaborate, exchange ideas and develop critical thinking. In addition, the rapid penetration of *Wireless Networks* allows students to use their mobile devices to participate in courses flexibly (Jung, 2006). Moreover, the *Smart Search* tool enables students to search, sort and retrieve data more efficiently (Dang & Nguyen, 2014). In particular, simulation *of educational games* effectively motivates students, encourages communication, and trains critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Jung, 2006).

2.2. Application of technology in teaching and learning foreign languages

It can be said that technology with diverse and rich integrated tools are really an effective means for language teaching (Dang, 2013). According to Davies & Hewer (2012), locator and retrieval tools can assist teachers in searching online for available learning materials through accessing different types of digital resources such as e-books, photos, audio and video to support their preparation and

teaching. Word processors can help teachers design different interactive activities for language practice. Furthermore, presentation software allows teachers to create engaging materials that arouse students' interest in learning (Rendall & Davies, 2012). In addition, audio and video editing tools help instructors record and make changes to audio and video files, such as adjusting speech and creating audio/video effects (Dang, 2013).

Integrating technology in online foreign language teaching in general and in the process of teaching and learning English speaking skills online, in particular, is an inevitable trend in the globalized world for sustainable development. Speaking English is an interactive process of meaning-building related to the production, reception, and information processing (Hughes, 2002). Speaking English is defined as a complex skill that includes *Comprehension, Grammar, Vocabulary, Fluency and Pronunciation* (Thornbury, 2005). Therefore, in order to master English speaking skills, students first need to have a certain vocabulary to express their ideas, thoughts and feelings. Grammar plays an essential role in helping students speak logical, context-appropriate sentences. In addition, fluency can be defined as the ability to speak fluently and accurately, making it easier for listeners and speakers to communicate and understand each other (Quach, 2014). In addition, students need to master pronunciation knowledge in aspects such as stress, rhythm and intonation to avoid misunderstanding between speakers and listeners. It can be said that phonetic knowledge plays an important role in improving communication efficiency (Rahman, 2010).

To achieve the goal of online foreign language teaching, teachers need

to choose appropriate foreign language teaching methods with the application of technology.

Applying technology in a Behavioral approach

Applying technology according to Behavior theory, technology provides learners with learning materials through which they can acquire knowledge. Online learning websites or teaching software must be designed according to themes and pre-arranged structures based on a certain amount of knowledge (Lightbrown & Spada, 2006). Besides language competence and pedagogy, teachers need to be able to use technology to design a behavior-oriented lesson, ensuring the following basic elements: Vocabulary presentation, language and grammatical structure appropriate to the learner's level; provide adequate exercises for learners to practise; give positive feedback on learners' learning results, of learners towards the subject (Porter, 2004).

Applying technology in the cognitive-constructive direction

The form of learning to discover, receive and process information (discovery learning, reception learning, and information processing model) is typical of the method of applying cognitive principles in lectures on the basis of technology. Cognitive-constructive foreign language learning websites and software allow learners to discover the subject's topics in real life on their own. Designing lectures in this direction on the basis of technology helps learners build their own outlines to decode information, store and remember information, develop new knowledge and critical thinking. To be able to apply technology in language teaching effectively, teachers should have the knowledge and capacity of

teaching software and learn a foreign language appropriate-level *know* (know ledge), *understanding* (comprehension), and *apply* (application).

Cognitive approach to technology application

Applying technology in the cognitive direction allows learners to learn the information provided in the process of knowledge acquisition. Lectures are designed in the direction of cognitive knowledge based on technology to create a learning environment similar to real-life, helping learners broaden their horizons and apply knowledge in the classroom into practice.

Applying technology in the socio-cultural direction

Through the application of technology, teachers can combine linguistic means, symbols and images to design an online foreign language lesson in a socio-cultural direction to help learners develop their language skills to develop their information processing capabilities. This creates a diverse learning environment with a variety of skills training exercises. On that basis, learners will form the habit of self-assessing their learning process and find a learning method to interact with the target language to be able to communicate effectively in the culture of the language.

In digital education, learning and working on the technology platform in the socio-cultural direction helps learners form creative and capable communication ideas and organize their own learning activities following their capacities.

III. Research Methods

The present research made an investigation on the situation of teaching

and learning English speaking skills online by using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative method was used to calculate the difficulties faced by the first-year students of FOE, HOU when learning English speaking skill online. The qualitative method was used to generate causes leading to the difficulties faced by the first-year students of FOE, HOU when learning English skill online.

The participation of the study are 12 lecturers and 210 first-year students at FOE, HOU.

The instruments of the study are two questionnaires for lecturers and students, which are based on language teaching methods with the application of technology. The first set of questions in each questionnaire is designed to collect information about the difficulties faced by teachers of FOE, HOU when applying technology to teach English speaking skills online for first-year students. The second set of questions is designed to identify the difficulties faced by the first-year students of FOE, HOU when learning English speaking skills online. After the questionnaire was administered, all data on the difficulties of speaking online were collected, tabulated, interpreted and statically analyzed. A MS Excel sheet was used to process the data and then the data were analyzed with the help of Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) to classify into types of the difficulties and patterns of frequency levels. The study results are used as a basis for the authors to propose recommendations to improve the quality of teaching and learning English speaking skills online for the first-year students of FOE, HOU.

IV. Findings and discussion

4.1. The real situation of teaching and learning English speaking skills online of the first-year students of the Faculty of English, Hanoi Open University

In the period of globalization, especially in the context of the current outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, online teaching is an inevitable trend. In recent years, the Faculty of English, Hanoi Open University has always focused on applying information technology in teaching English online, in line with the innovation of teaching and learning methods in the direction of real competency training. The first-year students of FOE, HOU study the *Skills for Success 3* practical textbook by authors Miles & Kristin (2019), published by Oxford University. The class time is 2 credits and the self-study time is 4 credits. After completing the course, students will have mastered the basic knowledge of speaking skills, including presenting and defending opinions, making short presentations, summarizing the main content just presented, giving a favorable opinion, expressing feelings, etc.

In the process of teaching English speaking skills online, lecturers of FOE, HOU have actively applied assisted technology in lesson design, teaching organization, and interaction with students. This equips them with the basic knowledge of English communication, summarizes the content presented and expressed in each specific situation. However, students have not been able to practise much due to the large class size. Instructors can only correct errors and guide certain individuals required to practise samples. In addition, the limited time for practising activities in class may focus mainly on the correction

of errors such as vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, but not on effective communication.

4.2. Research results

The results of a survey for the lecturers and students about the current status of technology application in teaching English speaking skills online for the first-year students of FOE, HOU has shown that the use of assisted technology in teaching and learning English speaking skills online has generally achieved certain successes in terms of exploiting learning resources, teaching organization and means of communication. The results are as follows:

For the group of questions about the application of software and technology in teaching tools, the survey results show that lecturers have relatively well applied teaching technology tools to organize teaching. Nearly three-quarters of the lecturers who participated in the survey said that the lecturers had applied technology well in the process of teaching English speaking skills online to the first-year students of FOE, HOU (70% rating *Very Good* and *Good* compared to 20% rating *Average* and 10% rating *Bad)*. Nearly nine-tenths of the students surveyed think that lecturers have applied technology very well to develop online English speaking skills (88% rated *Very Good* and *Good* compared to 12% rating *average)*. None of the lecturers and students participating in the survey had the opinion that the lecturers applied teaching technology tools to organize teaching at the *poor* level.

For the group of questions about the frequency of using learning resources, the survey results show that lecturers used images and videos frequently in designing online English speaking lessons for the

first-year students at FOE, HOU. Nearly four-fifths (78%) of the respondents rated *Always,* andmorethanone-fifth (22%) of the respondents rated *Regularly.* The students who participated in the survey rated the teachers' frequent use of learning resources very high: More than nine in tens (91%) of the students rated the teachers *Always* and almost one in tenth (9%) students' assessment of teachers *Regularly* use images and videos to design online English speaking lessons for students.

For the group of questions about the frequency of using the electronic mail system and the website, the survey results show that the lecturers have applied the *email system and the website* relatively well *t*o communicate and interact with students. More than four-fifths (83%) of the teachers rated *Always* and nearly one-fifth (17%) rate *Regular*. In addition, nearly nine-tenths of students (87%) think that the lecturers *Always,* and more than one in tenth (13%) think that the lecturers *often* interact with the students through the email system and the website.

In addition to those successes, the application of technology to support teaching English speaking online for first-year students of FOE, HOU also encounters certain difficulties, affecting the training quality and effectiveness.

For content using learning resources to design online English speaking lessons for students, copyright regulations are the biggest barrier leading to incompatibility between learning resources and actual lectures by instructors. More than two-thirds of the lecturers (71%) who participated in the survey said that the proprietary system restricts lecturers' access to lectures, tests, and project results

to design lessons that are suitable for their teaching goals. Another difficulty some teachers (29%) face when using learning resources during online English speaking lessons is that the ability to use technology has not kept pace with the requirements of the technology. The lectures' abilities of using online teaching tools lead to low effectiveness of online education.

For the content that uses teaching technology and software to organize teaching English speaking skills online, nearly half of the surveyed lecturers (46%) said that technology tools and software teaching are not suitable for teaching and learning English speaking skills online. More than a third of the lecturers (38%) have the opinion that testing, assessment and supervision are not really suitable. Nearly a fifth of the lecturer (16%) said that the students do not effectively learn English speaking skills online.

For the content that uses email systems, websites to communicate with students, nearly three-quarters of the surveyed lecturers (72%) think that it is difficult for the lecturers to control the content of the open learning resource; more than one-fifth of lecturers (21%) consider themselves at risk of violating intellectual property regulations and nearly one-tenth of the lecturers (7%) have difficulty in ensuring the security of personal information in cyberspace.

Regarding the content of the difficulties faced by the first-year students, Hanoi Open University often face when learning English speaking skills online, nearly half of the lecturers and students (42%) think that the student's self-confidence, motivation when communicating; more than a third of the lecturers and students (36%) think that the

facilities conditions do not meet the online learning environment; more than one in ten of the lecturers and students (12%) said that students' abilities to access and exploit open educational materials are still not high; one-tenth of the teachers and students (10%) said that students lack time to practise speaking English in class.

For the content of technology application with foreign language teaching methods, more than three-quarters of the teachers (76%) participating in the survey affirmed that teachers apply technology to all activities of teaching foreign languages: *Behavioral, cognitive, cognitive-constructivist and cultural-social orientations*; nearly one in seventh of the lecturers (14%) think that they apply teaching technology tools in the cognitive-constructive direction, and one-tenth of the lecturers (10%) have the opinion that they apply technology in the same way, applying Socio-cultural approach to teaching English speaking skills online to the first-year students of FOE, HOU.

4.3. Suggestions to improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning English speaking skills online for the first-year students of the Faculty of English, Hanoi Open University

For content using learning resources to design online English speaking lessons

In order to improve content using learning resources to design online English speaking lessons for the first-year students of FOE, HOU needs to synchronously build open educational resources, invest in facilities, and foster human resources.

First, HOU needs to have a policy of building and developing open educational resources in foreign language training in general and in English training to help

staff, lecturers inside and outside the university understand the benefits of using open educational resources in education and training.

Second, HOU needs to invest and build a modern technology infrastructure to ensure the requirements of English teaching, especially online English speaking skills, to create a practical learning environment and multidimensional interaction. This is an important foundation for students to acquire knowledge and practise effective communication.

Third, HOU needs to organize training courses to build open educational resources in English training online and apply technology tools in English language training for managers, educators, and lecturers. In the first stage, HOU needs to assign a fundamental training unit to build open educational resources and replicate it for the rest of the training units within the university in the following stages.

For the content that uses teaching technology and software to organize teaching English speaking skills online

First, FOE, HOU needs to have a strategy to build a network of professional groups, including teaching English pronunciation groups, enlarging English vocabulary groups, developing English communication skills groups etc. These groups are ideal places for the teachers and students to exchange ideas and interests. On that basis, students can confidently demonstrate their English capacities. Besides, FOE also needs a team of qualified technicians to support teachers and students in teaching and learning English online.

Second, FOE, HOU should actively consult HOU to establish a system of

regulations on the culture of collaboration, sharing and use of textbooks, lectures, and research projects with other lecturers and scientists on the application of online English teaching technology tools with the spirit of using open educational resources in online English training of units throughout the university.

Third, FOE, HOU should focus on building a virtual learning environment based on the two-way interactive learning method, focusing on interaction in teaching and learning. Students will have a chance to be familiar with learning groups to have high interaction and expand relationships with other students. As a result, students will develop an open mind, increase their capacities to analyze and solve problems.

For the content that uses email systems, websites to communicate with students

First, in the teaching process, lecturers need to increase interaction with students through the network, email system to promptly grasp the students' sense of learning, learning methods and difficulties. Regularly assigning assignments and tasks to students and assessing students' performances of those tasks will support students effectively in their study process.

Second, teachers need to actively innovate teaching methods to develop learners' communication ability through the application of teaching technology tools to develop students' speaking skills. Through authentic conversations, teachers need to guide students to use language to achieve real communication goals to improve teaching and learning effectiveness.

Third, teachers need to use cognitive approaches with images and videos in online

speaking lessons to encourage students to build authentic conversations actively. On that basis, students can self-assess and self-adjust their learning methods to develop their English speaking skills.

Fourth, teachers need to use a digital approach to equip students with the most basic knowledge about online language learning platforms, follow classroom communication principles, and apply software to develop language competence. On that basis, instructors can assist students in using diverse interactive dialogue models to perform immersive and collaborative conversational tasks. This is an environment for students to think creatively and interact actively on the basis of acquired knowledge to develop their language abilities.

Fifth, teachers need to apply the method of teaching English speaking skills online with the project-based learning model. This method supports students to maximize their coordination skills of language abilities such as pronunciation, vocabulary, discourse and teamwork. On that basis, students will form and develop emotional, social, and communication management indicators.

For the content of enhancing students' English speaking speaking skill online

First, students need to actively participate in online English speaking classes because this is an opportunity to help students form digital literacy. Participating in these classes, students will be equipped with knowledge of English pronunciation, vocabulary, and communication on the basis of personalized learning paths to help stimulate students' excitement in the learning process, which improves students' skills effectively.

Second, students need to form and strengthen their English communication skills by practising standard pronunciation, applying vocabulary and grammar, and mastering real-life communication situations. This learning method helps students develop skills and review knowledge by creating an English speaking environment. On that basis, students can think of using English in the digital space, correcting errors, supplementing knowledge, practicing and communicating effectively.

Third, students need to seriously implement the online English speaking fundamentals and master software and learning technology tools. Using software in the process of learning English speaking skills online will help students form critical thinking and develop the necessary English competencies to meet integration requirements.

Fourth, students need to increase interaction with lecturers, students and the professional world through the network and email system to create an open space to share, connect and practise speaking English skills. This interaction forms a creative and lively learning environment that encourages students to actively present their views and knowledge on topics related to real life.

V. Conclusion

Applying practical teaching technology tools in teaching English in general and teaching English speaking skills online, in particular, requires teachers to have knowledge of digital devices and application methods and to use software technology in teaching foreign languages. To improve the quality and effectiveness of teaching English speaking skills online to the first-year

students; teachers need to actively apply teaching technology tools in combination with foreign language teaching in lesson design, teaching organization, and communication with students. Besides, to learn English speaking skills online effectively, students need to have a certain knowledge of the application of information technology in learning foreign languages. Students also need to actively improve their abilities to use assisted technology to develop English communication skills, meeting the requirements of the global era.

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