

An Investigation of Perceived Difficulties In Speaking Skills of English Major (Second Degree) Students

Dinh Ngoc Long, Nguyen Dang Nguyen*



Use your smartphone to scan this QR code and download this article

ABSTRACT

According to Nunan (2015), speaking is the most important language skill to master and is often used to gauge language proficiency in general. The study aimed to identify causal factors affecting speaking as a basis for suggesting ways to help students improve their speaking performance. Using a mixed method approach involving a questionnaire and individual interviews, the study discovered what 60 second-degree students – working adults with limited learning time and exposure to English, considered the greatest barriers to improving their speaking skills. The questionnaire revealed that issues with grammar, vocabulary, and anxiety were what the students believed to be problem areas, while the interviews revealed further problems with cross-cultural communication and other factors. The results of this study are expected to be useful to other teachers and students of English while opening new directions for research in language teaching in the future.

Key words: Speaking Skills, Second Language Acquisition, Perceived Difficulties, Second-degree English Learners

1 INTRODUCTION

2 According to Nunan (2015)¹, speaking is the most
 3 important language skill to master while Brown and
 4 Yule (1983)² stated that proficiency in a foreign lan-
 5 guage is often determined by how a learner can com-
 6 municate in real-life situations. This idea is also sup-
 7 ported by students, who have often regarded speaking
 8 as the most important skill out of the 4 commonly per-
 9 ceived skills (Listening, Reading, Writing, and Speak-
 10 ing) (Richards; 2002)³. Despite playing such a cru-
 11 cial role, speaking English and acquiring Speaking
 12 skills remained a challenging task for most EFL learn-
 13 ers. However, there has not been much research
 14 specifically targeting older students, who might suffer
 15 severely in terms of language acquisition compared to
 16 their younger peers and need support (Brown, 2019;
 17 Koosha et al, 2011; Hartshorne, 2018). Baharudin
 18 (2013)⁴⁻⁶ identified that anxiety was the greatest chal-
 19 lenge that older learners faced. These fears can range
 20 from fear of not finishing work on time, fear of iso-
 21 lation among classmates to fear of being overshadow-
 22 ed by younger, brighter students. Other issues dis-
 23 covered in the same case studies included lack of free
 24 time, lack of finance, outside responsibilities, as well
 25 as the ability to simply digest what is being taught.
 26 While it is evident that the issues that older learners
 27 face are abundant and tangled in a complex web, with-
 28 out further investigation into what students them-
 29 selves perceive to be roadblocks in their language

learning, it would be exceedingly difficult to dispel
 their misconceptions about their own shortcomings
 and propose solutions for improvement.
 As such, this study aims to investigate what the
 second-degree (an evening program for adults) stu-
 dents of the Faculty of English Linguistics and Liter-
 ature – HCMUSSH VNUHCM perceive to be prob-
 lems in their acquisition of speaking skills to propose
 an appropriate course for improvement for their fu-
 ture studies. To achieve this aim, the study attempted
 to answer the following research questions:
 1. What do second-degree English majors consider to
 be problems in learning speaking skills?
 2. What do second-degree English majors consider to
 be problems in applying speaking skills?
 On a practical level, this essay will provide insight into
 the difficulties and challenges that second-degree stu-
 dents face in their studies and directly help students
 recognize and come to terms with their shortcomings
 to chart the correct path forward. This awareness will
 not only help them improve their speaking skills but
 other areas of English which might also be held back
 by the same difficulties. For teachers and other re-
 searchers, this study will provide valuable knowledge
 to help further optimize teaching methods and open
 future venues for research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

University of Social Sciences and Humanities - VNUHCM

Correspondence

Nguyen Dang Nguyen, University of Social Sciences and Humanities - VNUHCM

Email: nguyendangnguyen@hcmussh.edu.vn

History

- Received:
- Accepted:
- Published Online:

DOI :



Copyright

© VNUHCM Press. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license.



Cite this article : Long D N, Nguyen N D. An Investigation of Perceived Difficulties In Speaking Skills of English Major (Second Degree) Students. *Sci. Tech. Dev. J.* 2025; 26(SI):1-8.

57 Speaking

58 Speaking has often been defined as the act of com- 108
 59 municating ideas using spoken language, though dif- 109
 60 ferent scholars and experts have added their nuance 110
 61 to it. Harmer (2007)⁷ stated that speaking is the 111
 62 ability to communicate using language features and 112
 63 the ability to process and respond to information in 113
 64 a given situation. Speaking is not just the sponta- 114
 65 neous production and reception of spoken informa- 115
 66 tion; it has its system of rules and patterns that are 116
 67 distinct from those used in written language. Fulcher 117
 68 (2016)⁸ wrote that speaking involves using language 118
 69 to communicate and interact with one another. This 119
 70 means that speaking is interactive by nature, and as 120
 71 such should be considered a back-and-forth process 121
 72 between involved parties rather than a simple pro- 122
 73 duction of knowledge. However, according to Hasni 123
 74 (2014), oral language use is often employed by only 124
 75 teachers rather than being an interactive activity. 125
 76 In Vietnam, competence in speaking has often been 126
 77 linked to language competence in general, yet perfor- 127
 78 mance seems to have stagnated over the years. This 128
 79 point was proven by data on IELTS test-taker perfor- 129
 80 mance released by IDP in 2022 (can be freely accessed 130
 81 at https://ielts.org/researchers/our-research/test-statistics#Test_performance), in which Vietnamese test- 131
 82 takers only scored an average of 5.6 for their Speak- 132
 83 ing section – the lowest of 4 skills and joint 3rd lowest 133
 84 of all countries listed, on par with Nepalese and Fil- 134
 85 ipino test-takers, and only slightly higher than Thai 135
 86 and Saudi Arabian test-takers. While it is true that 136
 87 the results of one international test do not portray the 137
 88 full picture of English language learning in Vietnam, 138
 89 it should at the very least ring some alarm bells as to 139
 90 how English language learning is perceived and exe- 140
 91 cuted. 141
 92

93 Problems in learning speaking skills

94 Shen (2019)⁹ divided problems in learning speaking 142
 95 skills into two main categories: linguistic factors and 143
 96 affective or psychological factors, built on the founda- 144
 97 tion of other literature in the past. 145
 98 For linguistic factors, Harris (1969)¹⁰ claimed that 146
 99 there were five aspects to pay attention to when teach- 147
 100 ing speaking skills: pronunciation, vocabulary, gram- 148
 101 mar, fluency, and comprehension. For the latter, Ur 149
 102 (2018)¹¹ claimed that four factors could negatively af- 150
 103 fect the learning of speaking skills: inhibition, lack of 151
 104 motivation to participate, use of mother tongue, and 152
 105 lack of ideas. 153
 106 Much research has been done in investigating prob- 154
 107 lems that EFL and ESL learners face when learning 155

speaking skills. Nazara (2011)¹² found that shyness 108
 and fear of criticism were the greatest roadblocks to 109
 the development of speaking skills. Huynh (2020)¹³ 110
 discovered that students faced great difficulty in terms 111
 of pronunciation and anxiety. Rizki (2020)¹⁴ arrived 112
 at a similar conclusion in their study at Universitas 113
 Riau, with students rating pronunciation and anx- 114
 iety as the most destructive obstacles in their lan- 115
 guage learning in general, not just speaking. Even 116
 among more experienced learners, speaking English 117
 remained a challenge, as evident by Sawir's study of 118
 twelve international students learning in Australia in 119
 2005¹⁵. 120

However, all of these papers have been focused on 121
 young/very young learners or first-degree university 122
 students between the age of 18 – 22, while older learn- 123
 ers have been largely neglected. Age has always been 124
 regarded as one of the major limiting factors in lan- 125
 guage learning (if not learning in general), with the 126
 critical period theory stating that there was a large ad- 127
 vantage for younger learners and that our ability to 128
 learn only got worse with time. However, Hartshorne 129
 (2018)⁶ discovered that while there was indeed a 130
 degradation of learning ability towards later stages 131
 in life, the critical period does not end after child- 132
 hood and can be delayed with continuous practice. 133
 Even for individuals who missed developmental mile- 134
 stones, some recovery can still be made from a lingu- 135
 stic perspective, such as the stories of Viktor d'Aveyron 136
 and Genie – individuals who never had a chance to 137
 study languages until later in life. In contrast, Brown 138
 (2019) acknowledged that adults have a distinct ad- 139
 vantage when it comes to attention span, life experi- 140
 ence, vocational interest, and self-confidence. 141

All of the aforementioned factors mean that just be- 142
 cause older students have to face more difficulty while 143
 having less time and resource for studying, it does not 144
 mean that educators are allowed to abandon them. 145
 Instead, by exploring the difficulties they are facing 146
 and acknowledging their strength, educators can cre- 147
 ate a better learning environment to help struggling 148
 students perform at their best. 149

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Sixty students from 2 classes in the full-time sec- 152
 ond degree (or evening classes for adults) Bachelor 153
 of English Linguistics and Literature programme at 154
 a public university were chosen to participate in the 155
 current study. They have been made fully aware of 156
 the purpose of the study and that participation would 157
 not count towards their assessment, nor would any 158

159 of their private information be disclosed. These stu-
 160 dents were between the ages of 20-45 and were taking
 161 the course “Academic Writing C1” as part of the pro-
 162 gramme. In terms of general language proficiency, al-
 163 though there were some variations, most of them were
 164 at the B2-C1 level in the CEFR. The reason these stu-
 165 dents were specifically chosen was because they would
 166 have needed to finish their previous B1 and B2 courses
 167 and should therefore have had enough time to recog-
 168 nize their limitations and would be more open to dis-
 169 cussing them.

170 **Research design**

171 The study employed a mixed approach, with the
 172 quantitative side being a questionnaire for descrip-
 173 tive statistics and the qualitative side being a semi-
 174 structured interview with some of the participants.

175 The questionnaire was modeled after the findings of
 176 Harris (1974), Ur (2018)¹¹ and the research designs
 177 of Rizki (2020), Riadil (2019), and Huynh (2011)¹⁶,
 178 though a 4-point Likert scale was used instead of the
 179 original 5-point scale. The 4 options are: 1 = strongly
 180 disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = agree; 4 = strongly agree.
 181 This change was to prevent participants from default-
 182 ing to the middle option and force them to think about
 183 the answer. Multiple studies in the past have con-
 184 firmed that Asian participants tended to avoid choos-
 185 ing either extreme and often chose the middle op-
 186 tion (Chun, Campbell, & Yoo, 1974; Crask, Fox &
 187 Kim, 1987)^{17,18}. By removing the middle option alto-
 188 gether, participants would be encouraged to reflect on
 189 their learning experiences while the researcher would
 190 be able to gather more conclusive data, thus giving
 191 the study more pedagogical and theoretical value. To
 192 compensate for this change, the time allowed for the
 193 questionnaire was lengthened and the researcher ac-
 194 tively moved around the classroom to answer any
 195 question the participants could have about the ques-
 196 tionnaire. In addition, the number of closed ques-
 197 tions has been reduced to just fifteen to help par-
 198 ticipants maintain concentration and interest in the
 199 study, while participants were encouraged to think
 200 more about the open-ended question (16) and to fur-
 201 ther discuss their fears and challenges in the follow-up
 202 interview. The alignment of questions in the ques-
 203 tionnaire and the areas specified in the aforemen-
 204 tioned literature is as below:

205 The questionnaire was piloted by other students in the
 206 same program. The final version of the questionnaire
 207 incorporated comments and criticisms of the origi-
 208 nal draft, which were that some questions were too
 209 lengthy, the division between sections was not clear,

Table 1: Alignment of questionnaire items with identified problems

Area	Questions
Grammar	1, 2
Vocabulary	3, 4
Comprehension	5, 6
Pronunciation	8, 9
Fluency	7, 10
Anxiety	11, 12, 13, 14, 15

210 and some of the questions were too difficult to un-
 211 derstand. In addition, the questions were changed
 212 to have the same sentence structure “*I find it difficult*
 213 *to..*” to provide extra consistency and emphasize the
 214 issues being addressed. The final version of the ques-
 215 tionnaire achieved a Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.755 for
 216 consistency.

217 The finished questionnaire was administered in per-
 218 son to allow the researcher to answer any questions
 219 from participants. Indeed, some of the participants
 220 did pose questions such as whether they needed to
 221 provide personal information, as well as how long the
 222 response to the open-ended question should be.
 223 While this in-person proactive approach can be more
 224 time-consuming during the data analysis phase (com-
 225 pared to using online platforms that can analyze data
 226 automatically such as Qualtrics or Google Form), it
 227 was necessary to allow the researcher to be support-
 228 ive and encouraging to the participants, which is the
 229 main spirit of the study.

230 The collected answers were manually transferred to
 231 SPSS to be calculated for descriptive statistics and will
 232 be further explained in the chapters below.

233 The follow-up interview was a simple, one-on-one
 234 interview with fifteen randomly chosen participants
 235 from those who took part in the questionnaire. These
 236 participants were asked to share their experience
 237 learning speaking skills and how the problems they
 238 had affected them. Due to the personal nature of
 239 the interview, the interview was only semi-structured,
 240 with emphasis given to exploring the individual prob-
 241 lems of each participant. This also served the expl-
 242 oratory side of the study by focusing less on prob-
 243 lems identified in other studies and exploring those
 244 not identified yet.

245 The following interview question served as the back-
 246 bone of the interview, and follow-up questions were
 247 posed to get deeper answers, depending on the par-
 248 ticipants’ responses:
 249

249 *What problems affected your acquisition and usage of*
 250 *speaking skills?*

251 Example of follow-up questions:

252 *Can you explain that problem in further detail?*

253 *How severely does that issue affect your ability to learn*
 254 *and use what you learned?*

255 The interview was conducted after the questionnaire
 256 and lasted 10-15 minutes for each person depend-
 257 ing on the number of problems each participant had,
 258 with the researcher taking note of answers and ask-
 259 ing for clarification when needed. The participants
 260 were made fully aware that the interview would not
 261 be recorded to encourage them to be more open and
 262 unabashed about their experience.

263 The data for each interview question was coded into
 264 general categories based on the common properties
 265 that emerged from the answers, especially noting
 266 unique answers that could offer a more unique per-
 267 spective into existing or previously unknown issues.

268

269 RESULTS

270 Questionnaire results

271 Due to the consistent structure between items, the ta-
 272 ble below will show a shortened version of the ques-
 273 tions rather than the full sentence. Since the items are
 274 on a 4-point scale, the middle point will be between
 275 2 and 3 (2.50), questions that score higher than that
 276 will lean towards agreement, and those below that will
 277 lean towards disagreement.

278 As can be seen from the table, grammar was the area
 279 that posed the most trouble for participants, with a
 280 score of 3.53 for grammar control and 3.50 for apply-
 281 ing learned grammar, indicating very strong agree-
 282 ment. Vocabulary was also deemed a barrier to their
 283 ability to learn speaking skills, as indicated by a score
 284 of 3.42 for finding words to explain ideas and 2.98
 285 for applying learned vocabulary. In addition, one of
 286 the responses to the open question (number 16) was
 287 that the participant did not know the right word to
 288 express their idea. Comprehension seemed to be an-
 289 other problem area, at a score of 3.18 for express-
 290 ing ideas and 3.03 for forming ideas, indicating gen-
 291 eral agreement. Pronunciation, however, seemed to
 292 rank low among the areas covered in the question-
 293 naire, with a score of 2.23 for pronouncing individ-
 294 ual sounds and 2.17 for speech patterns, such as in-
 295 tonation and linking sounds. Fluency posed a mild
 296 problem for participants, at 3.30 for producing long
 297 stretches of language and 2.50 for maintaining con-
 298 versation.

299 While the score for each question varied slightly, the
 300 general consensus seems to be that anxiety was a prob-
 301 lem area for these participants. Participants agreed
 302 that they felt anxious about speaking (3.30), with one
 303 open-question response stating that they were anx-
 304 ious about both productive skills. Hesitation dur-
 305 ing speaking ranked the lowest among questions re-
 306 lated to anxiety at 3.0 while time limit was the highest
 307 at 3.40. Surprisingly, the participants were less con-
 308 cerned about making mistakes (3.12) and language
 309 proficiency (3.17), though they still agreed that it was
 310 a problem.

311 Interview results

312 When asked about problems that affected them while
 313 learning speaking skills, a vast majority of students ex-
 314 pressed concerns related to grammar (12/15). When
 315 asked to further explain their views, 5 participants
 316 stated that grammatical structures were too hard to
 317 remember and one participant specified that these
 318 structures were “too dry” - a Vietnamese expression
 319 for when something is difficult to digest due to being
 320 too boring or abstract, while another 3 said that the
 321 fact that they had to learn by heart gave them trouble,
 322 especially when recalling them in real conversations.
 323 Other notable complaints were about lacking a chance
 324 to practice (1), understanding when to use each struc-
 325 ture (2), as well as not knowing how to apply what was
 326 taught (1).

327 Vocabulary was also listed as a problem during the
 328 interview, though not to the same degree as gram-
 329 mar (9/15). Four participants stated that they did not
 330 have enough words to use in real life, while 1 con-
 331 fessed to having paralysis of choice from knowing too
 332 many words. Two participants said that they did not
 333 know the right word to express their ideas, while 1
 334 confessed to wasting too much time looking for syn-
 335 onyms in Vietnamese. Another participant claimed
 336 that although they know how to express their ideas
 337 in Vietnamese, they cannot find the equivalent in En-
 338 glish.

339 Problems with idea organization also plagued many
 340 participants. Out of ten responses related to ideas,
 341 6 participants stated that they had issues with or-
 342 ganizing their ideas both in class and in conversa-
 343 tions. Three participants said that their idea orga-
 344 nization was heavily affected by having to translate
 345 their thoughts from Vietnamese to English while 2
 346 others believed that the difference between classroom
 347 and casual conversations made it harder for them
 348 to focus. Unfamiliar topics and lacking background
 349 knowledge appeared in seven out of the 10 interview

Table 2: Questionnaire results

Area of problem	Specific problems	Frequency of answers				Mean
		1 = strongly disagree	2 = disagree	3 = agree	4 = strongly agree	
Grammar	Controlling grammar usage		2	24	34	3.53
	Applying learned grammatical knowledge		1	28	31	3.50
Vocabulary	Finding words to express ideas		3	29	28	3.42
	Applying learned vocabulary	4	7	35	14	2.98
Comprehension	Expressing ideas	2	2	39	17	3.18
	Forming ideas	1	4	47	8	3.03
Pronunciation	Pronouncing individual sounds	11	27	19	3	2.23
	Controlling speech patterns	9	35	13	3	2.17
Fluency	Producing long stretches of language		1	40	19	3.30
	Maintaining conversations	1	29	29	1	2.50
Anxiety	Anxiety from speaking		6	34	20	3.23
	Fear of making mistakes		4	45	11	3.12
	Shame from low proficiency		4	42	14	3.17
	Hesitating during speaking		4	52	4	3.0
	Anxiety about time limits	1	3	27	29	3.40
Other problems:	- "...feel anxious when speaking, especially under time pressure" - "... when I speak, I try to translate to Vietnamese" - "...I feel worried when speaking and writing" - "I don't know the (right) words for my ideas"					

350 responses, with one participant saying that the topics
 351 were "weird" (which might have meant "unfamiliar"
 352 since they are synonyms in Vietnamese).
 353 One interesting category that surfaced from the inter-
 354 view response was the influence of Vietnamese culture
 355 (6/15). Four participants pointed out that the indirect
 356 style of communication in Vietnamese culture caused
 357 them issues since they had to explain for longer and
 358 could not get to the point. Another participant stated
 359 that Vietnamese people did not like confrontations,
 360 and another claimed that Vietnamese people tend to

avoid questions, which made it harder to spark conversations. The most unique answer related to this problem was that Vietnamese children were not allowed to speak freely and that affected their communicative ability, leading to a snowball effect that debilitated their learning ability and self-confidence over the years.
 Other issues discovered through this question were: problems with anxiety (4/15), fear of being wrong (2/15), not being able to catch up with partners (1/15), and not having enough chances to practice (3/15).

372 While these problems were similar to those men- 424
 373 tioned in the questionnaire, the extra room for further 425
 374 exploration provided by the individual interviews re- 426
 375 vealed some other issues and further details on each 427
 376 problem area that might be useful. 428

377 DISCUSSION 429

378 From the results of the questionnaire, it can be seen 430
 379 that the participants of the study had problems with 431
 380 grammar, vocabulary, anxiety, and comprehension. 432
 381 Of these four areas, the former two posed the most 433
 382 challenge, which was in line with the findings of Syah- 434
 383 futra (2019)¹⁹ and Rizki (2020)¹⁴. The interview re- 435
 384 vealed further information on these areas, with some 436
 385 participants having issues with having to remember 437
 386 too many grammatical structures by heart or gram- 438
 387 mar being too hard to digest, which is an ongoing 439
 388 problem in English classrooms in Vietnam in general, 440
 389 as shown in Huynh (2015)¹⁶. For vocabulary, it could 441
 390 be inferred that since participants had to translate 442
 391 their thoughts from Vietnamese to English, and their 443
 392 Vietnamese was better than their English, they would 444
 393 try to find an equivalent of the word they wanted 445
 394 to use rather than paraphrasing or simplifying their 446
 395 ideas. This influence by the mother tongue was iden- 447
 396 tified in Ur (2018)¹¹. 448

397 However, when compared to results from Huynh 449
 398 (2020)¹³, the participants did not have as much of 450
 399 a problem with pronunciation as previously thought. 451
 400 These differences could perhaps be attributed to the 452
 401 difference in research participants since this study 453
 402 took place in Ho Chi Minh City while Huynh's study 454
 403 was in Vung Tau province. Another surprising re- 455
 404 sult from the questionnaire was that anxiety related 456
 405 to time pressure ranked rather high among the list of 457
 406 problems experienced. Due to a lack of practice time 458
 407 in the classroom and the format of the speaking test 459
 408 (in which students have 1 minute to prepare and must 460
 409 speak for 1-2 minutes), having a strict time limit com- 461
 410 bined with randomly chosen topics might have ham- 462
 411 pered their ability to use what they learned. 463

412 A newly found problem in this study was the neg- 464
 413 ative influence of Vietnamese culture on acquiring 465
 414 speaking skills. The traits stated by the participants 466
 415 matched with those identified by Tran (2021)²⁰, in 467
 416 which he claimed that due to the country's roots in vil- 468
 417 lage culture and an emphasis on maintaining a wide 469
 418 network of relationships, Vietnamese people tended 470
 419 to avoid conflicts and questions and preferred an in- 471
 420 direct style of communication that would not damage 472
 421 relationships. This problem is not exclusive to Viet- 473
 422 namese students – students from other Eastern cul- 474
 423 tures might have the same problem. Aspland (1999)²¹ 475

as quoted in Paltridge (2002)²² found that Chinese 424
 students were unlikely to pose questions and chal- 425
 lenge their instructors due to their native culture and 426
 that their lack of communication led to a lack of con- 427
 fidence in their abilities. From a purely linguistic per- 428
 spective, Kaori (2006)²³ discovered that the influence 429
 of L1 culture in an L2 classroom can be seen through 430
 how ideas are organized and developed as well as what 431
 kind of logic is applied. This idea was indeed found in 432
 some of the participants' responses, especially those 433
 related to translating ideas from L1 to L2 and finding 434
 direct equivalents for words between L1 and L2. This 435
 was also in line with Bradley (2000)²⁴, which stated 436
 that students might have difficulty expressing them- 437
 selves when they lack the appropriate resource in En- 438
 glish that does not have an equivalent in their L1 or 439
 might feel uncomfortable discussing these problems 440
 in an environment with a different cultural setting. 441

CONCLUSION 442

The current study investigated problems in acquiring 443
 and using speaking skills among second-degree En- 444
 glish majors in a public university in Vietnam. To this 445
 aim, two research questions were formulated: 446

- 447 1. What do second-degree English majors consider to 448
- 449 be problems in learning speaking skills? 448
- 449 2. What do second-degree English majors consider to 449
- 450 be problems in applying speaking skills? 450

To answer these questions, the study employed two 451
 instruments: a questionnaire synthesized from the 452
 findings of Harris (1969) and Ur (2018)¹¹ as well 453
 as the research models of Rizki (2020)¹⁴, Riadil 454
 (2019)²⁵, and Huynh (2015)¹⁶ alongside a semi- 455
 structured interview to give more depth to each prob- 456
 lem area. While some results were in line with prior 457
 studies such as problems with grammar, vocabulary, 458
 anxiety, and comprehension, pronunciation was not 459
 as much of a problem as previously thought. These 460
 problems could be alleviated with a shift from the tra- 461
 ditional approach to grammar teaching, which placed 462
 heavy emphasis on learning by heart, to a more mod- 463
 ernized version that focuses more on the practical side 464
 of grammar. 465

An interesting finding which did not appear in other 466
 studies of the same kind was the impact of native cul- 467
 ture on acquiring speaking skills. This cross-cultural 468
 issue has been identified by various literature in the 469
 past, though often limited exclusively to the use of 470
 mother tongue or L1 transfer. In the context of Viet- 471
 nam, although there was a study comparing the com- 472
 municative style of Vietnamese native and English na- 473
 tive speakers by Nguyen (2015)²⁶, it was severely lim- 474
 ited in that the study only compared how these de- 475
 mographics expressed satisfaction, which was an area 476

477 that Vietnamese speakers have long been direct in.
 478 Understanding these cultural differences and helping
 479 students acclimatize themselves to the foreign lan-
 480 guage classroom can greatly enhance the efficiency of
 481 language learning, not just in speaking but in other
 482 skills as well. Without properly identifying and solv-
 483 ing deeply rooted problems like those stemming from
 484 L1 culture, it is possible that current and future gen-
 485 erations of students will not only not improve but
 486 regress compared to the rest of the region and the
 487 world.

488 On a pedagogical level, the findings of this study are
 489 expected to provide learners and teachers with insight
 490 into what potential problems are and how to fix them.
 491 For learners, understanding the problems that other
 492 students have can encourage them to reflect on their
 493 learning journey and identify their own weaknesses.
 494 For teachers, they can use the findings of this study
 495 to form teaching and learning strategies to solve these
 496 issues in their own classroom, such as changing their
 497 approach to teaching grammar and vocabulary. These
 498 strategies, with further research, can lead to greater,
 499 sweeping changes on the curriculum level, undoing
 500 some of the shortcomings of current teaching meth-
 501 ods.

502 The current study was not without its limitations.
 503 Firstly, the small sample size meant that while the re-
 504 sults were significant for that specific group of stu-
 505 dents, it is not yet applicable to the rest of Vietnam. As
 506 such, a larger, more intricate study might be needed
 507 to truly grasp the problem and provide impactful so-
 508 lutions. Secondly, the study only managed to get to
 509 the surface of some of its findings, especially that of
 510 problems related to culture. Because culture is a mas-
 511 sive subject to explore, future studies can each tackle
 512 one aspect of culture and its effect on language learn-
 513 ing, such as the effect of cross-cultural features or
 514 contrastive rhetoric. Finally, the methodology of the
 515 study and its focus on perceived problems from the
 516 perspective of the participants, while successful in un-
 517 covering deeper problems, might prove to be rather
 518 subjective. Other educators and researchers can im-
 519 prove the research design by including the perspec-
 520 tive of other stakeholders as well or compare between
 521 perceived problems and actual problems using a pre-
 522 established rubric.

523 **REFERENCES**

524 1. Nunan D. Teaching English to speakers of other languages: an
 525 introduction. New York, NY: Routledge; 2015; Available from:
 526 <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315740553>.
 527 2. Brown G, Yule G. Discourse analysis. Cambridge: Cambridge
 528 University Press; 1983; Available from: [https://doi.org/10.1017/](https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511805226)
 529 [CBO9780511805226](https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511805226).

3. Richards JC, Renandya WA. Methodology in language teach- 530
 ing: an anthology of current practice. Cambridge: Cambridge 531
 University Press; 2002; Available from: [https://doi.org/10.1017/](https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511667190) 532
[CBO9780511667190](https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511667190). 533
 4. Brown D. Teaching by principles: an interactive approach to 534
 language pedagogy. 4th ed. New York: Pearson Education; 535
 2019;. 536
 5. Koosha B, Ketabi S, Kassaian Z. The effects of self-esteem, 537
 age, and gender on the speaking skills of intermediate univer- 538
 sity EFL learners. Theory Pract Lang Stud. 2011;1(10); Available 539
 from: <https://doi.org/10.4304/tpls.1.10.1328-1337>. 540
 6. Hartshorne JK, Tenenbaum JB, Pinker S. A critical period 541
 for second language acquisition: Evidence from 2/3 mil- 542
 lion English speakers. Cognition. 2018;177:263-277; PMID: 543
[29729947](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2018.04.007). Available from: [https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2018.04.007) 544
[2018.04.007](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2018.04.007). 545
 7. Harmer J. The practice of English language teaching. Pearson 546
 Education; 2007;. 547
 8. Fulcher G. Testing second language speaking. Routledge; 548
 2016;. 549
 9. Shen MY. EFL learners' English speaking difficulties and strat- 550
 egy use. Educ Linguist Res. 2019;5(2); Available from: <https://doi.org/10.5296/eler.v5i2.15333>. 551
[//doi.org/10.5296/eler.v5i2.15333](https://doi.org/10.5296/eler.v5i2.15333). 552
 10. Harris DP. Testing English as a second language. McGraw-Hill; 553
 1969;. 554
 11. Ur P. A course in English language teaching. Langara College; 555
 2018;. 556
 12. Nazara S. Students' perception on EFL speaking skill develop- 557
 ment. Rev Lit Arts Americas. 2011;1(1):28-43; Available from: 558
<https://doi.org/10.33541/jet.v1i1.50>. 559
 13. Huynh TAT. Problems of learning speaking skills encountered 560
 by English major students at Ba Ria-Vung Tau University, Viet- 561
 nam. Eur J English Lang Teach. 2020;5(4); Available from: <https://doi.org/10.46827/ejel.v5i4.3144>. 562
[//doi.org/10.46827/ejel.v5i4.3144](https://doi.org/10.46827/ejel.v5i4.3144). 563
 14. Rizki BAH, Prawati A, Masyhur. A survey on speaking problems 564
 faced by the second-year students of English department of 565
 Universitas Riau. JOM Keguruan Ilmu Pendidikan. 2020;7;. 566
 15. Sawir E. Language difficulties of international students in Aus- 567
 tralia: the effects of prior learning experience. Int Educ J. 568
 2005;6(5):567-580;. 569
 16. Huynh NT, Vo TTD. The application of conceptual metaphors 570
 in teaching and learning English phrasal verbs - the case of 571
 Vietnamese EFL students. In: Proceedings of A TESOL Sym- 572
 posium in Danang, Vietnam July 2015: English Language Inno- 573
 vation, Implementation, and Sustainability; 2015. p. 183-189;. 574
 17. Chun K-T, Campbell JB, Yoo JH. Extreme response style 575
 in cross-cultural research: A reminder. J Cross-Cult Psychol. 576
 1974;5(4):465-480; Available from: [https://doi.org/10.](https://doi.org/10.1177/002202217400500407) 577
[1177/002202217400500407](https://doi.org/10.1177/002202217400500407). 578
 18. Fox RJ, Crask MR, Kim J. Mail survey response rate: a meta- 579
 analysis of selected techniques for inducing response. Pub- 580
 lic Opin Q. 1988;52(4):467; Available from: [https://doi.org/10.](https://doi.org/10.1086/269125) 581
[1086/269125](https://doi.org/10.1086/269125). 582
 19. Syahfutra W, Wibowo AP, Ardiya, Febtiningsih P. Students' 583
 perceptions and challenges in improving speaking ability in 584
 public and private universities. In: Proceedings of the In- 585
 ternational Conference of CELSciTech 2019 - Social Sciences 586
 and Humanities Track (ICCELST-SS 2019); 2019; Available from: 587
<https://doi.org/10.2991/iccelst-ss-19.2019.14>. 588
 20. Tran NT. Cơ sở văn hoá Việt Nam. VNU-HCM Press; 2021;. 589
 21. Aspland T, Edwards H, O'Leary J, Ryan Y. Tracking new di- 590
 rections in the evaluation of postgraduate supervision. Innov 591
 High Educ. 1999;24:127-147; Available from: [https://doi.org/10.](https://doi.org/10.1023/B:IHIE.0000008150.75564.b3) 592
[10.1023/B:IHIE.0000008150.75564.b3](https://doi.org/10.1023/B:IHIE.0000008150.75564.b3). 593
 22. Paltridge B. Thesis and dissertation writing: An examina- 594
 tion of published advice and actual practice. Engl Spec 595
 Purp. 2002;21(2):125-143; Available from: [https://doi.org/10.](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0889-4906(00)00025-9) 596
[1016/S0889-4906\(00\)00025-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0889-4906(00)00025-9). 597
 23. Kaori H. Contrastive rhetoric and its recent studies: implica- 598
 tions for the current teaching of English writing at universities 599
 in Japan. J Kyoto Seika Univ. 2006;30:70-80;. 600

- 601 24. Bradley G. Responding effectively to the mental health
602 needs of international students. *High Educ.* 2000;30:417-
603 433;Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1003938714191>.
- 604 25. Riadil IG. A study of students' perception: identifying EFL
605 learners' problems in speaking skill. *Int J Educ Lang Re-*
606 *lig.* 2020;2(1):31;Available from: <https://doi.org/10.35308/ijelr.v2i1.2256>.
- 607
- 608 26. Nguyen TTL. Expressing satisfaction in American English
609 and Vietnamese (as seen from the categorical dimen-
610 sion of directness-indirectness). *VNU J Sci: Foreign Stud.*
611 2015;31(4):25-36;.