



## SUGGESTIONS FOR PROMOTING STUDENTS' PARTICIPATION IN ENGLISH SPEAKING CLASSES: STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS

Huynh Thien Chi<sup>1i</sup>,

Le Xuan Mai<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Cantho University,  
Vietnam

<sup>2</sup>School of Foreign Languages,  
Cantho University,  
Vietnam

### Abstract:

EFL high school students' low level of participation is reported as a problem commonly found in English speaking classes. This study aims to investigate high school students' perceptions of suggestions for promoting students' participation in English speaking classes. Questionnaires and interviews were employed as data collection instruments of the study. 206 EFL high school students from three grades in a high school in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam responded to the questionnaire and then 6 of them participated in the semi-structured interview sessions. The results strongly endorsed that "*promote students' self-confidence*", "*make learning tasks stimulating and the way teachers present tasks*", "*establish a supportive and caring relationship*", and "*create a pleasant classroom climate*" were significant strategies promoting students' participation. The results of the study are expected to contribute to the comprehension of teachers' strategies to enhance students' participation in English speaking classes.

**Keywords:** EFL speaking class, high school students, low participation, perceptions, Vietnam, WTC strategies

### 1. Introduction

There is a fact that many Vietnamese students much focus on grammar. In addition, they can write and read English rather well, but they cannot speak fluently and accurately. The majority of the students find that speaking is difficult and uninteresting. Consequently, approximately 98% of Vietnamese students who study English for seven years (from grade 6 to grade 12) cannot use it for basic communication (Nhan, 2013). After several years of teaching English, it can be found that high school students are quite

---

<sup>i</sup> Correspondence: email [henryhuynh44@gmail.com](mailto:henryhuynh44@gmail.com)

passive in speaking English. Hardly do they actively participate in speaking practices. Certainly, students' participation can be affected by a variety of factors coming from students' side, teachers' side and the context. Unfortunately, this is a common phenomenon in almost all high schools. This has driven the researcher to conduct this study to identify the effective strategies to promote students' participation in speaking activities.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Speaking skill

Among four skills of English, *speaking* is considered as one of the most important ones that are really essential to master for the communication purpose. As stated by Dakowska (2005), *speaking* is now the most emphasised skill in the field of foreign language teaching. Oxford dictionaries define "*speaking is the action of conveying information or expressing one's feelings in speech*". Additionally, *speaking* is the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, in a variety of context (Chaney, 1998).

There are numerous ways to define speaking skill in English learning and teaching. *Speaking* is a productive skill in the oral mode. It is like the other skills, is more complicated than it seems at the first and involves more than just pronouncing words (Azem & Dogar, 2011). Similarly, Hornby (1995) defined that *speaking* is the skill that the students will be judged upon most in real-life situations. It is an important part of everyday interaction and most often the first impression of a person is based on his/her ability to speak fluently and comprehensively. Also, *speaking* is one of the skills that have to be mastered by students in learning English. *Speaking* is an essential tool for communicating (Grognet, 1997).

In this study, *speaking* is defined as an interactive process in which students are able to communicate with their peers in class in order that they can show their ideas, thoughts appropriately in a meaningful context.

### 2.2 Participation

According to Vandrick (2000), most teachers believe that participation is requiring students to speak in class, answer questions, make comments and join in discussion. Besides that, Aidinlou and Ghobadi (2012) defined participation can be seen as an active engagement process which can be categorized into two dimensions: oral and non-oral participation. Oral participation means students speak in class, then answer and ask questions, make comments, and take part in discussions. Similarly, Do (2014) mentioned that students' participation can be understood as students' involvement in classroom activities and in this case the interaction in pair or group work activities.

However, Ellis (1994) considered participation from the point of views of both quantity and quality. Participation has been defined in a number of ways including "*the number of unsolicited responses volunteered*" (Burchfield & Sappington, 1999, p. 290), the "*extent of participation in class discussion*" (Weaver & Qi, 2005, p. 581), and "*any comments*

*or questions that students offered or raised in class*" (Fassinger, 2000, p. 39). They primarily focus on quantitative measurements of participation and have no mention to the quality of the responses given from students, so the result may be subjective. On the other hand, Dancer and Kamvounias (2005) proposed that participation can also be viewed as part of an overall student engagement process consisting of five separate categories: preparation, contribution to discussion, group skills, communication skills, and attendance (p. 448). This definition is more holistic because it includes the quality of discussion that affected levels of classroom participation (Weaver & Qi, 2005)

Crone (1997) indicated that if students actively participate in a learning environment, they will have more opportunity to become critical thinkers and less passive. In addition, classroom participation will help students less memorize because they are able to learn through discussion and synthesize the information more effectively (Smith, 1977), become more motivated (Junn, 1994), improve their ability to communicate orally (Dancer & Kamvounias, 2005), build confidence, and learn by being able to apply theory to their own lives (Chickering & Gamson, 1987).

Moreover, Weaver and Qi (2005) proved that students who actively participate classroom activities gain more academic success than the students who do not. In spite of numerous benefits to participation, there are still several students who do not participate in classroom discussion (Fritschner, 2000). In the current study, students' low participation can be understood as students who don't actively take part in all various in-class activities such as brainstorming, games, quizzes, group debates, role plays, simulations, collaborative creative writing, presentations and speeches.

## **2.3 Strategies to promote students' participation in English speaking**

### **2.3.1 Employing cooperative work**

It should be to get students involved in small group work (Tsui, 1995; Centikaya, 2005; Cao & Philip, 2006). Learning activity is considered as a good way that assist students to learn speaking English in a safe learning environment. Thus, students will be willing to speak in pairs and groups rather than individually or in front of class. In line with this, Fushino (2010) said that students tend to be ready to speak in a group with a small number of participants (groups of three or four) because they have opportunities to interact with their friends through sharing, helping, or learning each other. In addition, Wright (1987) indicated that students prefer working together in small groups rather than working with the teachers though they may make more individual efforts in small groups.

According to Slavin (1983), pair-work and group work in cooperative learning environment provide students more opportunities to produce language, also when they communicate with one or two closest classmates, anxiety is reduced (Kagan, 1994). In comparison with individually working in front of the class, students may work more cooperatively in a non-threatening, safe, supportive and collaborative learning environment thanks to the group technique, so their learning opportunities are fully exploited (Johnson, 1995; Flowerdew, 1998).

Moreover, the primary benefit of cooperative work is that it provides more opportunities for students to practice the target language, especially in speaking and listening skills and increases talking time, which means engaging students involved in class activities, (Harmer, 1991; Johnson, 1995; Tsui, 1995). Additionally, a small group can help students increase their motivation in studying (Fitz-Gibbon & Reay, 1982; Little John, 1983). Tran (2008) concluded that pair/group work motivated students in speaking and the weak and average students got more benefits from these cooperative work activities. Finally, through pair work and group work, the quality of student talk will be improved. Therefore, it can be proved that collaboration in pairs or small groups can enhance students' participation in speaking activities.

### **2.3.2 Promoting group cohesiveness**

Group cohesiveness is the degree to which the group coheres or hangs together and attached by three different meanings (1) attraction to the group, (2) the level of motivation evidenced by the group members; and (3) coordination of efforts of group members (Shaw, 1981). Cohesiveness is based on interpersonal attraction among group members in which emotional satisfaction provided by participation in the group is emphasized.

By asking students to work in pairs or small groups and by giving them discussion tasks (Aubrey, 2010; Aubrey, 2011; Vongsila & Reinders, 2016; Wen & Clement, 2003), group cohesiveness strategies have been implemented to increase students' participation in speaking classes. According to Shaw (1981), high group cohesiveness leads to engagement, a pleasant feeling and willingly participates to speak English. Aubrey (2011) proposed that using positive traits of students, personalizing students' connections is a good way to cultivate cohesiveness.

Class size is a key factor closely linking to group cohesiveness. The smaller group size, the higher group cohesiveness, which secures the learners from an intense sense of insecurity (Wen & Clément, 2003). Likewise, Zarrinabadi, Ketabi, and Abdi (2014) agreed that students tend to talk more when reducing group members.

### **2.3.3 Establishing a supportive and caring relationship between teacher and students**

To create a pleasant environment classroom, establishing a supportive and caring rapport is considered as successful and remarkable implications to handle the foreign language anxiety and motivate students to participate. In one specific situation, both academic and emotional support of the teacher are the determining and significant factor to enhance learners' tendency to communicate and their willingness to talk in foreign language classroom (Kang, 2005; Wen & Clement, 2003). The strategy has been pointed out by several researchers confirmed that establishing supportive and caring rapport between teacher and students or teacher support is the most powerful tool for enhancing students' motivation as well as willingness to interact in class (Clark & Trafford, 1995; Dornyei, 2001; Dornyei & Chang, 2007; Girard, 1977; Peng, 2012, Tse, 2000; Wen & Clement, 2003; Zarrinabadi, 2014).

Teacher-student relationship was regarded the most significant variable influencing the students' attitude toward L2 learning (Clark & Trafford, 1995). To support this view, Dornyei and Csizer (1998) stated that the teacher should develop the good relationship with the students to increase students' motivation and interaction in learning English. In order to create a pleasure learning atmosphere as well as motivate students to learn English, teachers need to be enthusiastic, polite, hospitable, sociable, cheerful, sincere friendly, warm, caring, fair and trustworthy (Dornyei & Chang, 2007; Ebata, 2008; Peng & Woodrow, 2010; Zarrinabadi, 2014). More importantly, teachers should be patient and encourage students frequently so as to establish good mutual rapport between teacher-student and among students.

In addition to being friendly, the teacher should give students a good model of learning, efficient presentation, positive reinforcement and appropriate feedback. By providing some active responses through words or gestures, teachers can express their support, sympathy, and attention (Tse, 2000). Moreover, if students are free to choose topics of discussion that interest them, or have enough time to think before answering questions, they will be more active in using their L2 in the classrooms (Zarrinabadi, 2014).

#### **2.3.4 Creating a pleasant classroom climate**

Creating a comfortable atmosphere classroom is one of the most effective ways to enhance students' participation in class activities (Peng & Woodrow, 2010, Vongsila & Reinder, 2016; Zarrinabadi, 2014). Numerous ways of building up a friendly, pleasant and humorous class atmosphere are chosen by the teachers such as interesting activities, encouragement or appropriate feedback. Students may feel more comfortable in speaking English when humour is used in class because there is less psychological distance. Many previous studies indicated that humor is seen as reducing discomfort, tension, stress, anxieties or fears of making mistakes (Chiason, 2002; Long, 1983, Ziv, 1976; Dixon, 1973; Gilland & Mauritsen, 1971), enhancing learners' self-esteem (Pollaak & Freda, 1997) and encourages the students (especially shy or timid students) to participate without feeling humiliated or vulnerable (Chiason, 2002). Thus, it motivates students to learn English and actively takes risk in speaking English due to a positive atmosphere, little gap between teacher and student, no fear of criticism in a joyful and non-threatening environment.

#### **2.3.5 Making the learning tasks stimulating and presenting tasks properly**

To improve students' readiness to produce the language and assist extrinsic motivation turn into intrinsic motivation, it should be better to draw students' interest with learning tasks. To support this view, Deci and Ryan (2000) claimed that interesting and enjoyable tasks and positive performance feedback may enhance intrinsic motivation which is very essential for long life. Therefore, the task should be fun, interesting, useful, or challenging to students so that they enjoy the task itself, not because of the reward from the teachers. Students who are linguistically confident are willing to participate in discussing when the topic is interesting, familiar, controversial, knowledgeable or when they feel

comfortable with (MacIntyre et al., 1998) and necessary to discuss (Kang, 2005). In fact, knowledge of the topic under discussion will increase a person's linguistic self-confidence while lack of this knowledge hinders communication. On the other hand, students hesitate to discuss topics which are not age-related, difficult or topics of which learners have little background knowledge or experience (Kang, 2005) because of sense of insecurity, lack of ideas and their fear of problems in comprehension.

### **2.3.6 Promoting students' self-confidence**

According to Vongsila and Reinders (2016), promoting students' self-confidence was one of significant strategies to increase the level of students' participation in English. The findings of the research indicated that providing positive feedback, encouragement, and highlighting success was essential ways contributing to students' participation to speak English in class. Moreover, students tend to be more willing to speak when communicative tasks designed are within their ability. Additionally, Panselinas and Komis (2009) suggested that in order to encourage students' contribution to speaking activity, it is necessary to provide scaffolding to students through tapping into the responses or initiations that they introduce. Significantly, making clear to students that communicating the meaning effectively is more important than using correct grammar, which builds students' self-confident.

### **2.3.7 Familiarizing students with English-related values**

When communicative competence has been emphasized to meet the demand of the globalization, it is believed that EFL teachers should increase the amount of using English in class so as to create the environment for students to produce the language. In other words, teachers and students should frequently use English in class, which makes English learning interesting and meaningful. In EFL contexts, there has been a national trend in Japan where English should be taught in English, even though the Grammar Translation method is still the mainstream (Lee, 2010). Similarly, in South Korea, teaching English in English (TEE) is thought to be effective and necessary; therefore, the government is promoting TEE and is training teaching (Lee, 2010).

In Vietnamese context, it is required that EFL high school students achieve level B1 (CEFR) in order to meet the requirement of learning English in the new context of innovation. Therefore, both quantity and quality of English instruction should be increased in order to improve students' oral communication. Teachers are highly recommended to use English as much as possible in the classroom since students spend only short periods accessing the target language in classroom and have little contact with foreign language outside the classroom.

Nevertheless, there has been existence of the mother tongue in EFL classroom, which impedes creation a favorable environment of English learning for learners. Additionally, using L1 in classroom brings important advantages such as facilitating communication, teacher-student relationships, the learning of L2 (Harbord, 1992) and saving time (Lee, 2013). However, relying too heavily on the mother tongue when

instructional time is limited by program design would be an inopportune waste of time and would be unlikely encourage students to communicate in English. As a result, they are resistant to using English in succeeding times when they are not trained and expected to use the target language frequently. Therefore, teachers need to make a great effort to use English as easy and comprehensible as possible. It is suggested that teachers must encourage students to think and speak in L2. Ellis (2005) also argued that the more L2 exposure students receive, the faster they learn. Accordingly, it is relatively natural that teachers would provide L2 input as much as possible in the classroom.

### **2.3.8 Conducting a positive way to error correction**

The results of many previous studies revealed that providing a positive error correction increases students' participation levels (Kang, 2005; MacIntyre et al., 2011; MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1998; Zarrinabadi, 2014; Zarrinabadi, Ketabi, & Abdi, 2014). The finding found in Kang's research (2005) indicated that teachers should try to create a secure environment in which nothing is threatening students in case they make mistakes. To support this view, MacIntyre and colleagues (2011) also considered kind of feedback by teachers as a variable exerting influence on students' participation.

Delayed error correction is kind of error modification played a significant role in enhancing students' willingness to communication levels (Zarrinabadi, Ketabi, & Abdi, 2014). Indeed, if the teachers immediately give corrective feedback when error correction happens in speaking performance, it tends to reduce students' participation. It also increases their anxiety and insecure about making mistakes in future interaction (Zarrinabadi, 2014). Regarding negative feedback, Tsui (1995) stated that inappropriate correcting creates a sense of failure and frustration among students. Moreover, it will inhibit students' participation in an activity. Accordingly, a positive approach to error correction such as delaying error correction, rather than providing correction immediately, providing indirect correction rather than direct correction; avoiding personal or negative correction; corrections of factual errors rather than grammatical rules and forms takes a noticeable attention.

Regarding negative feedback, Tsui (1995) stated that inappropriate correcting creates a sense of failure and frustration among students. Moreover, it will inhibit students' participation in an activity. The teacher provides scaffolding so that the students have an opportunity to continue speaking despite making mistakes. Scaffolding includes cognitive modeling or rephrasing the students' comments in the appropriate form. Alternatively, prompts and questions are provided in order to foster the development of repaired strategies in case of a breakdown in communication. Modeling is an indirect method decidedly less negative and personal than overt correction and thus, less likely to rise the students' affective filter.

In conclusion, various views on error treatment in classroom interaction have appeared in literature as the focus on classroom instruction has shifted from emphasis on accuracy of performance to communicative fluency. Therefore, the teacher contributes a

great part in applying the most appropriate approach of error correction, especially in the speaking class, so as to minimize students' anxiety and increase their WTC.

### 3. Methodology

This study was guided by the research question:

- What are high school students' perceptions of suggestions to promote students' participation in English speaking classes?

The research was designed as a descriptive qualitative and quantitative study in which the data were collected through questionnaires and interviews. The combination of these methods was employed to validate the data and provide more detail information about high school students' perceptions of suggestions to promote students' participation in English speaking classes. The subjects involved in the study consisted of those who participated in questionnaires and interviews. The total number of participants in the study included 206 students at a high school in the Mekong Delta. There were 206 high school students responded to the questionnaire and 6 students participated in the semi-structured interviews.

### 4. Results

A Descriptive Statistics Test was run to measure participants' perceptions of strategies to promote students' participation in English speaking classes. The result was presented in the Table 4.1.

**Table 4.1:** Descriptive Statistics of students' perceptions of strategies to promote students' participation in English speaking classes

	<b>N</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
<b>Suggestions</b>	206	1.03	5.00	3.80	.69

As can be seen from Table 4.1, the mean score of students' perceptions of strategies to promote students' participation in English speaking classes was M=3.80. A One-sample T-test was run to check whether participants level of perceptions (M=3.80, SD=.43) was statistically different from the test value of 3.5, a medium level of importance in the five-point Likert scale. The table below illustrated the result.

**Table 4.2:** One-Sample T-Test of participants' perceptions of strategies to students' participation in English speaking classes

	<b>t</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Sig. (2-tailed)</b>	<b>Mean Difference</b>	<b>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</b>	
					<b>Lower</b>	<b>Upper</b>
					Test Value = 3.5	
<b>Perceptions</b>	-4.76	205	.00	-.22	-.31	-.13



The result from Table 4.2 showed that a significant difference between participants' level of perceptions and the test values was observed ( $t=-4,76$ ,  $df=205$ ,  $p=.00<.05$ ). The results supported the conclusion that high school students' perceptions of strategies to promote students' participation in English speaking classes were high.

The repeated Descriptive Test was run to measure the mean score of eight clusters namely making tasks stimulating and presenting tasks properly, establishing a supportive and caring relationship with students, promoting students' self-confidence, creating a pleasant classroom climate, promoting group cohesiveness, familiarizing students with English-related values, employing cooperative work and conducting a positive way to error correction. The ranked order of the importance of each strategy was presented in Table 4.3.

**Table 4.3:** The ranked level of importance of strategies  
 to promote students' participation in English speaking classes

Order	Clusters	Mean
1	Promote students' self-confidence	3.91
2	Make tasks stimulating and present them properly	3.87
3	Establish a supportive and caring relationship with students	3.81
4	Create a pleasant classroom climate	3.79
5	Promote group cohesiveness	3.78
6	Familiarize students with English-related values	3.76
7	Conduct a positive way to error correction	3.76
8	Employ cooperative work	3.70

As can be seen in Table 4.3 that all mean scores fell between 3.70 to 3.91, high level of students' perceptions on the importance of strategies, which means that all strategies were important to encourage students' participation in English speaking classes. The strategies were ranked from the most important to the least important one from students' responses. It is clear that "Promote students' self-confidence" ( $M=3.91$ ) was the most important strategy in order to promote students' participation in English speaking classes. In addition, "Make tasks stimulating and present them properly" ( $M=3.87$ ), "Establish a supportive and caring relationship with students" ( $M=3.81$ ) and "Create a pleasant classroom climate" ( $M=3.79$ ) were the top four significant strategies, followed by "Promote group cohesiveness" ( $M=3.78$ ), and "Familiarize students with English-related values" ( $M=3.764$ ). However, students ranked the cluster "Conduct a positive feedback" ( $M=3.761$ ) and "Employ cooperative work" ( $M=3.70$ ) at the bottom of rank.

A One-Sample T Test was run to check if any mean scores of these suggestions are different from the test value 3.5, the accepted mean score of students' perceptions of strategies to promote students' participation in English speaking classes at a high level.

**Table 4.4:** Mean scores of students' perceptions of each strategy to promote students' participation in English speaking classes

	Test Value = 3.5					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Employing cooperative work	2.97	205	.00	.20	.07	.34
Promoting group cohesiveness	5.19	205	.00	.28	.17	.38
Establishing relationship	5.55	205	.00	.31	.20	.41
Creating a pleasant classroom climate	4.71	205	.00	.29	.17	.41
Making the learning tasks	6.66	205	.00	.37	.26	.48
Promoting students' self-confidence	7.88	205	.00	.41	.31	.51
Familiarizing students with English-related values	5.14	205	.00	.26	.16	.37
Conducting a positive way	5.05	205	.00	.26	.16	.36

As seen from Table 4.4, there was no significant difference between the mean score of students' perceptions of these strategies and the test value 3.5 ( $p=.00$ ). As the results, students highly agreed that these strategies are potential to increase their participation in English speaking classes.

In summary, teachers often employed strategies to promote students' willingness to communicate in English. The top four strategies often used include "promote students' self-confidence" ( $M=3.91$ ), "make learning tasks stimulating and the way teachers present tasks" ( $M=3.87$ ), "establish a supportive and caring relationship" ( $M=3.81$ ), and "create a pleasant classroom climate" ( $M=3.79$ ).

Through open-ended questions, there were 206 participants provided responses. The other strategies were providing bonus marks, using games, communicative strategies, applying peer-feedback and self-feedback.

To gain more in-depth information, the semi-structured interview was conducted face-to-face on six students (three females and three males), who were studying at grade 10,11, and 12 at a high school. The semi-structured interview was conducted in Vietnamese to ensure respondents' understanding of the questions. The extracts of the interviews will be presented as follows.

As regard to employing cooperative work, most respondents agreed that this strategy made great contribution to students' participation in English speaking.

*"Yes, employ pair-work and group-work of four students helps students to practice their communication skills and interaction skills. It also helps them increase amount of English they use in class."*

Moreover, student F revealed the crucial role of group-work in increasing students' participation.

*"Group-work plays an important role to encourage their participation. When students work in groups, it reduces their anxiety of making mistakes. Additionally, students have more motivation to speak English because their friends attempt to use English and participate in activities enthusiastically. They find friendly and active environment to practise speaking English."*

However, student A, student B and student D provided some evidence that employing cooperative work had some challenges namely using Vietnamese and passive students.

*"I am not sure that all students use English when they work in groups. For example, they may use Vietnamese to make sure their members understand what they mean and they discuss under pressure time, using mother tongue helps them save time."*

Regarding the strategy of establishing a supportive and caring relationship with students, student B agreed that it was one of the most significant strategies in order to increase students' level of participation in English speaking classes.

*"Yes, I strongly agree that establishing a good rapport with students can increase their willingness to speak English in class. Moreover, the teacher should spend a little time to talk to students, get closer to them to help students share many things in terms of academic works."*

Students F shared some similar opinion about the importance of this strategy.

*"[...] Of course, establishing a good relationship between teacher and students helps students feels comfortable, friendly in order to reduce their academic stress and anxiety, which promote students' participation in speaking English."*

In term of promoting group cohesiveness, student D and student F supported that promoting group cohesiveness contributed to students' readiness to participate in speaking.

*"In many cases, promoting group cohesiveness can encourage students' participation in speaking activities. For example, students are free to talk in order that they can interact each other, from that students pay attention to their friends' performance, or they can help each other in correcting mistakes."*

With respect to creating a pleasant classroom climate, three of six participants expressed that this strategy made significant contribution to students' participation. In such environment, students were more willing to taking part in English activities because they felt comfortable atmosphere.

*"Yes, the teachers have to be friendly, don't force students, create a lot of open-ended questions for students. Moreover, the teachers need to show students the meaning of learning English."*

Student F evaluated that creating a pleasant environment was one of the most significant strategy to reduce students' anxiety.

*"Creating a pleasant climate is one of the most important strategies to encourage students to be willing to speak English, which reduces students' anxiety of making mistakes."*

Considering designing communicative tasks, most respondents agreed that making tasks stimulating as well as presenting them properly were substantial strategies in order to increase their participation in speaking English.

*"Yes, designing tasks and giving instructions plays a significant role in promoting students to be ready to participate in class activities. There are two main strategies to design tasks stimulating: tasks must be appropriate for students' competence and topics should be interesting."*

Moreover, they supported that topics and visual aids were important contributing an interesting task.

*"Topics play an important role to increase students' participation in English speaking classes."*

In terms of familiarizing students with English-related values, some participants expressed that showing students English-related values significantly contributed to their participation in speaking English in class.

*"I think that it is vital to show students the importance of English, also the benefits of mastering speaking English in higher education and future job."*

Student B supported that showing the benefits of mastering English is one of the most responsibilities of teacher.

*"To me, teachers should organize more and more meetings, also field trips, or invite the foreigners to come to school in order that students have chances to meet and communicate with the native speakers. Moreover, the online meeting that connects with oversea people should be held to improve students' speaking skills."*

As regard to providing feedback on students' performance, most participants revealed that this strategy was effective to motivate students to speak English and reduce their anxiety.

*"I agree that providing students a positive way to their error can increase their volunteer of speaking English. If teacher corrects their mistakes directly while they speak or present in front of class, it will make students fear speaking, which leads in their anxiety of speaking English."*

Similarly, respondents added more reason why teacher should not provide negative feedback.

*"I think that teacher should avoid giving negative feedback because it may demotivate students to speak English."*

Interestingly, though most of students agreed that teacher should give positive feedback, two of them claimed that when providing feedback, students' perceptions of receiving correction should be taken into consideration.

*"[...]If the teachers just give positive feedback instead of correcting after in terms of correcting pronunciation, structures so that students can reflect and do better in the next time."*

The data collected from the semi-structured interview significantly contributed to the results of the questionnaire. From the aforementioned evidence, it can be concluded that EFL teachers should frequently employ strategies to promote students' participation in English speaking classes namely establishing a supporting and caring relationship with students, creating a pleasant classroom climate, promoting students' self-confidence, and making tasks stimulating and presenting them properly. Interestingly, other strategies were found including employing meaningful and appropriate game, giving bonus marks, introducing communication strategies, making personal questions and teaching English language classroom.

## **5. Discussions and implications**

The result collected from the questionnaire showed that students' perceptions of strategies to promote students' participation in English speaking classes was high, which means these strategies made strong contribution to their readiness to speak English. Specifically, "Promote students' self-confidence, "Make learning tasks stimulating and the way teachers present tasks", "Establish a supportive and caring relationship", and "Create a pleasant classroom climate" were the most important strategies contributing to students' participation in English speaking classes. Moreover, "Promoting group

cohesiveness", "Familiarizing students with English-related value", "Conducting a positive way to error correction", and "Employing cooperative work" were considered significant strategies to increase their participation.

The findings from questionnaire were in line with previous studies of Dornyei and Cheng (2007), Nguyen (2014) and Zarrinabadi (2014). The findings from studies conducted by Dornyei and Cheng (2007) and Nguyen (2016) indicated that presenting appropriate teacher behaviors, promoting students' self-confidence, creating a pleasant classroom climate and presenting tasks properly were considered the most important strategies in teaching and learning English. The result of the current study was in accordance with the findings conducted by Zarrinabadi (2014) where he found that establishing an encouraging and supportive atmosphere could increase students' willingness to communicate.

Results collected from the semi-structured interview were consistent with the findings from the questionnaire in terms of establishing a good rapport with students, creating a pleasant classroom environment, designing attractive learning task, providing positive feedback to error correction and employing cooperative work. Remarkably, all participants revealed that creating a supportive and pleasant classroom climate in which students felt secure from the fear of making mistakes. They explained that this strategy provided students more opportunity to take risk and they did not fear of making mistakes or getting bad marks when expressing their opinion in English. This was in accordance with the findings conducted by Wen and Clement (2003), and Zarrinabadi (2014) in that teachers were able to increase students' participation by creating a supportive and encouraging classroom environment.

Additionally, they claimed that choosing familiar and interesting topics made significant contribution to students' willingness to speak in English. The result was in line with the research of Aubrey (2011) and Zarrinabadi (2014) that familiar, knowledgeable and interesting topics ultimately increase students' willingness to communicate and classroom participation. In other words, students were less willing to communicate when they felt unsecure and unsure about unfamiliar topics due to the lack of ideas, the lack of background knowledge or the fear of comprehension problems (Cao & Philip, 2006; Kang, 2005).

Moreover, most participants emphasized the importance of providing positive feedback to students' performance. Most respondents claimed that giving compliments to students' correct answers or good presentation was effective strategy to promote students' readiness to speak. Moreover, giving bonus marks for good performance, which was not presented in the questionnaire, was considered an essential strategy to promote their readiness to speak English because giving marks significantly contributed to their academic results. This result was in line with the finding from the study of Nguyen (2016) which showed that plus marks played an important role in teaching English at high schools. Therefore, along with providing compliments, teachers should give bonus marks for good speaking performance to encourage them to use English in class.

Considerably, the participants highlighted the importance of providing positive feedback to error correction. Similarly, the study conducted by Kang (2005) and Zarrinabadi (2014) indicated that delayed error correction allowed students to continue and accomplish their presentation, which increased WTC. They also suggested that teachers should note students' errors during communication and present briefly when finishing their speech because immediate feedback enhanced students' anxiety and made them feel insecure about making mistakes in the next interaction. Moreover, they supported that indirect feedback played significant role to students' WTC. Importantly, peer-feedback and self-correction, which were not attached to the questionnaire, were regarded as important strategies.

Interestingly, other strategies namely employing interesting and meaningful game, inviting native English teachers to teach, and supporting students for communication strategy or presentation skill were considered significant ways to enhance students' willingness to communicate in English.

### **5.1 Implications**

In order to promote students' participation in English speaking classes, the following recommendations for EFL high school teachers are proposed.

First and foremost, the teacher should establish a warm and supportive relationship with students, which can encourage their participation in speaking English contributing to the success in oral communication. Specifically, the EFL teachers need to be enthusiastic, polite, hospitable, sociable, cheerful, sincere friendly, warm, caring, fair and trustworthy which are effective and necessary for enhancing their willingness to communicate (Dornyei & Chang, 2007; Peng & Woodrow, 2010; Zarrinabadi, 2014).

Moreover, it is significant to build a pleasant and comfortable classroom climate, which promotes students risk-taking in speaking English. The results from the current study indicated that EFL teachers frequently employed warm-up activity to start each lesson, which makes classroom environment more enjoyable. It is suggested that teachers should use more interesting pictures or videos along with be friendly and humorous considered an effective way to stimulate students' willingness to participate in speaking activities.

Additionally, EFL teachers should promote students' self-confidence by designing task within students' proficiency, providing compliment for good performances, or emphasizing on communicating meaning rather than grammatical correction. It is necessary to adapt communicative tasks to be appropriate for students' ability, which facilitates them to be willing to participate in speaking activities. The teachers should provide maximize opportunity for average and below average students to speak the target language by providing a rich environment of English. Along with giving compliment, it is suggested that EFL teachers should provide bonus marks for good performance.

Furthermore, in order to stimulate students' readiness to use English in class, designing authentic and meaningful tasks and giving comprehensive instructions should

be taken into consideration. It is obvious that under the pressure to the national high school examinations, EFL teachers focused on grammar competence rather than communication skill. As a result, most speaking tasks stopped at substitution dialogues prompted by the teacher. Therefore, speaking activities should meet the final goal, which means developing students' communicative competence. Importantly, it is suggested that tasks should be creative and stimulating, which makes student feel surprised and excited in learning tasks. Consequently, they are willing to participate in activities.

In addition, EFL teachers should employ group presentations in order to develop students' communicative competence. To encourage students to increase the amount of English used during group-work activities, the teachers should establish certain rules at the beginning of the course and be strictly about them. Another solution is that the teachers randomly choose a representative to present group ideas. Interestingly, it is suggested that the teachers should teach presentation skills and communication skill for high school students so that they are confident to produce language. Providing a positive feedback to students' error correction in speaking is also a significant strategy contributing to the success of students speaking learning. It is obvious that negative feedback can create a sense of failure and frustration among students, and inhibit their willingness to participate in speaking activities. Additionally, EFL teachers should not use immediate corrective feedback when students have not finished their utterances, role-playing or presentation because such direct correction may demotivate them and distract them from expressing their ideas.

What is more, EFL teachers should familiarize students with English-related values to increase their willingness to use English in class. The teachers should remind students the benefit of mastering English, which encourage their contribution in speaking activity. Moreover, teachers need to make a great effort to use English as easy and comprehensible as possible. It is expected that high school teachers emphasize the importance of communicative competence and encourage students to think and speak in English. Accordingly, it is relatively natural that teachers would provide English input as much as possible in the classroom because the more English exposure student receives, the faster they learn. It is suggested that the teacher should teach language classroom at the beginning at the course and practice using it very regularly so that students are willing to communicate in English.

Finally, in order to stimulate and increase students' willingness to communicate in English, much effort should be invested by teachers in their teaching method, knowledge and behaviors.

## **5.2 Limitations and suggestions**

The study has achieved its aforementioned aims. However, there exist some unavoidable limitations. One of the limitations is that due to time constraints, participants of study were restricted to only 206 high school students of only one high school in a city in the Mekong Delta. The results did not exactly generalize the situation for all high school students in the Mekong Delta, so the size of participants should be larger to make the



findings more convincing. Another limitation is that the researcher only interviewed six students of English. Therefore, the number of interviewees should be increased to yield more values to the results.

Based on the aforementioned limitations of the study, followings are some directions for further studies. Firstly, future research should be done on a larger size of population in more provinces in the region in order to obtain more evidences and provide generalization. Secondly, it is expected that further studies will conduct on students' participation in other language skills, namely listening, writing, and reading. Moreover, it is hoped that experimental studies will be conducted on diverse levels of students from primary to university.

## References

- Armstrong, M., & Boud, D. (1983). Assessing participation in discussion: An exploration of the issues. *Studies in Higher Education*, 8(1), 33-44. doi: 10.1080/03075078312331379101.
- Aubrey, S. (2010). Influences on Japanese students' willingness to communicate across three different sized EFL classes (Master's thesis). *Asian EFL Journal*. Retrieved from <http://www.asian-efl-journal.com/Thesis/Thesis-Aubrey.pdf>.
- Aubrey, S. (2011). Facilitating interaction in East Asian EFL classrooms: increasing students' willingness to communicate. *Language Education in Asia*, 2(2), 237-245.
- Bailey, K. M. & Savage, L. (1994). *New Ways in Teaching Speaking*, Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages. Inc.
- Brown, J. D., & Rodgers, T. S. (2002). Doing second language research. *Modern foreign languages*. Year.2005 *Issue (4)*, 422-425
- Burchfield, C. M., & Sappington, J. (1999). Participation in classroom discussion. *Teaching of Psychology*, 26(4), 290-291. Retrieved from: <http://top.sagepub.com>
- Cao, Y., & Philp, J. (2006). Interactional context and willingness to communicate: A comparison of behavior in the whole class, group and dyadic interaction. *System*, 34(4), 480-493
- Cetinkaya, Y. B. (2005). *Turkish students' willingness to communicate in English as a foreign language* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Ohio State University, Columbus.
- Chiasson, E. P. (2002). Using humor in the second language classroom. *Internet TESL Journal*, 8. Retrieved from <http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Chiasson-humour.html>.
- Clark, A., & Trafford, J. (1995). Boys into modern language: An investigation of the discrepancy in attitudes and performance between boys and girls in modern languages. *Gender and Education*, 7, 315-325.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2001). *Research methods in education* (6<sup>th</sup> ed). London: Routledge.
- Creswell, J. W., & Clark, V. L. P. (2007). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. Teddlie, C., & Tashakkori, A. (2009). *Foundations of mixed methods research:*

- Integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches in the social and behavioral sciences:*  
Sage Publications Inc.
- Crone, J. A. (1997). Using panel debates to increase student involvement in the introductory sociology class. *Teaching Sociology*, 25(3), 214-218. Retrieved from <http://www.sagepub.com>
- Dancer, D., & Kamvounias, P. (2005). Student involvement in assessment: a project designed to assess class participation fairly and reliably. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 30(4), 445-454. doi: 10.1080/02602930500099235.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation: Classic definitions and new directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 25, 54-67.
- Dixon, N. F. (1973). Humor: a cognitive alternative to stress? In I. G. Sarason & C. D. Spielberger's stress and anxiety, Washington D.C: Hemisphere Publishing Company.
- Do, H. T. (2014). *A study on the influences of some first cultural factors on first-year non-English-major students' participation in English speaking learning at Ha Noi University of Industry*. M.A minor program thesis.
- Dörnyei, Z., & Csizer, K. (1988). Ten commandments for motivating language learners: Results of an empirical study. *Language Teaching Research*, 2(3), 203-229.
- Dörnyei, Z., & Cheng, H. F. (2007). The use of motivational strategies in language instruction: the case of EFL teaching in Taiwan. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, 1(1), 153-174. Doi:10.2167/illt048.0.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2001). *Motivational strategies in the Language classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge
- Ebata, M. (2008). Motivation factors in language learning, the internet TESL Journal, 14(4). Retrieved from <http://iteslj.org/articles/Ebata-motivation-factors.html>
- Ellis, R. (2005). Principles of instructed language learning. *Asian ELT Journal*, 7(3).
- Ellis, R. (1994). *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford. Oxford University Press.
- Fassinger, P. A. (2000). How classes influence students' participation in college classrooms. *Journal of Classroom Interaction*, 35(2), 38-47. Retrieved from <http://www.jciuh.org>
- Fitz-Gibbon, C. I., & Rey, D. G. (1982). Peer-tutoring: brightening up FL teaching in an urban comprehensive school. *British Journal of Language Teaching*, 20, 39-44.
- Flowerdew, L. (1998). A cultural perspective on group work. *English language teaching Journal*, 54(2), 323-329. Oxford University Press.
- Fritschner, L. M. (2000). Inside the undergraduate college classroom - Faculty and students differ on the meaning of student participation. *Journal of Higher Education*, 71(3), 342-362. doi: 10.2307/2649294.
- Fushino, K. (2010). Causal relationships between communication confidence, beliefs about group work, and willingness to communicate in foreign language group work. *TESOL Quarterly*, 44(4), 700-724.

- Garside, C. (1996). Look who's talking: A comparison of lecture and group discussion teaching strategies in. *Communication Education*, 45(3), 212. Retrieved from <http://www.tandfonline.com>
- Gilland, H., & Mauritsen, H. (1971). Humor in the classroom. *Reading Teacher*, 24, 753-756.
- Gillham, B. (2008). *Developing a questionnaire*. London: A&C Black.
- Girard, D. (1977). Motivation: The responsibility of the teacher. *ELT Journal*, 31(2), 97-102.
- Gray, D. (2004). *Doing research in the real world: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*: Thousand Oaks: California: Sage Publications Inc.
- Harbord, J. (1992). The use of mother tongue in the classroom. *English language Teaching Journal*, 46(4), 350-355.
- Harmer, J., (1991). *Why do people learn language? The practices of English Language Teaching*. New York: Longman Publishing.
- Johnson, K. (1995). *Understanding communication in second language classrooms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Junn, E. (1994). "Pearls of wisdom": Enhancing student class participation with an innovative exercise. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 21(4), 385-387. Retrieved from <http://www.projectinnovation.biz/index.html>
- Kagan, S. (1994). *Cooperative learning*. San Clemente. California.
- Kang, S. J. (2005). Dynamic emergence of situational willingness to communicate in a second language. *System*, 33(2), 277-292.
- Lee, W. (2010). Insight from South Korea. In Johnstoe, R. (Ed.), *Learning through English: polices, challenges and prospects: insights from East Asia* (pp.47-68). British Coucil.
- Little John, A. P. (1983). Increasing learner involvement in course management. *Tesol Quarterly*, 17, 595-609.
- Long, M. H. (1983). Native speaker/non-native speaker conversation and the negotiation of comprehensible input. *Applied Linguistics*, 4, 126-141. Doi:10.1093/pplin/4.2.126.
- Macaro, E. (2002). *Learning strategies in foreign and second language classrooms: The role of learner strategies*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- MacIntyre, P. D., Dörnyei, Z., Clément, R., & Noels, K. A. (1998). Conceptualizing willingness to communicate in a L2: A situational model of L2 confidence and affiliation. *The Modern Language Journal*, 82(4), 545-562.
- McMilan, J. H., Schumacher, S. (2001). *Research in education: A Conceptual Introduction*, 5<sup>th</sup> edn. Longman, New York.
- Nhan, T. (2013). Promoting Content and Language Integrated Learning in Gifted High Schools in Vietnam: Challenges and Impacts. *Internet Journal of Language, Culture and Society*, 38, 146-153.
- Panselinas, G., & Komis, V. (2009). Scaffolding through talk in group work learning. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 4, 86-103.
- Peng, J. (2012). Towards an ecological understanding of willingness to communicate in EFL classrooms in China. *System*, 40, 203-213.

- Peng, J., & Woodrow, L. (2010). Willingness to communicate in English: A model in the Chinese EFL classroom context. *Language Learning*, 60(4), 834-876
- Pollak, J. P. & Freda, P. D. (1997). Humor, learning, and socialization in middle of level classrooms. *The Clearing House*, 176-178.
- Rocca, K. A. (2010). Student participation in the college classroom: An extended multidisciplinary literature review. *Communication Education*, 59(2), 185-213. doi: 10.1080/03634520903505936.
- Shaw, M. E. (1981). *Group dynamic: The psychology of group behavior* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Smith, D. G. (1977). College classroom interactions and critical thinking. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 69(2), 180-190. doi: 10.1037/0022-0663.69.2.180.
- Slavin, R. E. (1983). When does cooperative learning increase achievement? *Psychological Bulletin*, 94, 429-445.
- Tatar, S. (2005). "Why keep silent? The classroom participation experiences of non-native-English-speaking students". *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 5, 284-293.
- Tran, V. B. K. (2016). *Some strategies to promote students' willingness to communicate in second language classroom: A case of English education students at Can Tho University*. Unpublished Bachelor thesis, Can Tho University, Vietnam.
- Tse, L. (2000). Students' perceptions of foreign language study: a qualitative analysis of foreign language autobiographies. *The Modern Language Journal*, 84, 69-84.
- Tsui A. B. M. (1996). Reticence and anxiety in second language learning. In K. M. Bailey, & D. Nunan (eds.), *Voices from the language classroom* (pp. 145–167). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tsui, A. B. M. (1995). *Classroom interaction*. Harmonds-worth: Penguin group.
- Vandrick, S. (2000). *Language, culture, class, gender, and class participation*. Paper presented at TESOL Annual International Convention, Vancouver, Canada.
- Vongsila, V., & Reinders, H. (2016). Making Asian learners talk: Encouraging willingness to communicate. *RELC Journal*, 1-17. Doi: 10.1177/0033688216645641.
- Weaver, R. R., & Qi, J. (2005). Classroom Organization and Participation: College Students' Perceptions. *Journal of Higher Education*, 76(5), 570-601. Retrieved from <https://ohiostatepress.org>
- Wen, W. P., & Clement, R. (2003). A Chinese conceptualization of willingness to communicate in ESL. *Language culture and curriculum*, 16(1), 18-38. Doi:10.1080/0790831030866654.
- Wright, T. (1987). *The role of teachers and learners*. Oxford University press.
- Zarrinabadi, Z. (2014). Communicating in a second language: investigating the effect of teacher on learners' willingness to communicate. *System*, 42(1), 288-295.
- Zarrinabadi, N., Ketabi, S., & Abdi, R. (2014). Facilitating willingness to communicate in the second language classroom and beyond. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 87(5), 213-217. .
- Ziv, A. (1976). Facilitating effects of humor on creativity. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 68, 318-322.

Huynh Thien Chi, Le Xuan Mai  
SUGGESTIONS FOR PROMOTING STUDENTS' PARTICIPATION  
IN ENGLISH SPEAKING CLASSES: STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS

---

Creative Commons licensing terms

Author(s) will retain the copyright of their published articles agreeing that a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0) terms will be applied to their work. Under the terms of this license, no permission is required from the author(s) or publisher for members of the community to copy, distribute, transmit or adapt the article content, providing a proper, prominent and unambiguous attribution to the authors in a manner that makes clear that the materials are being reused under permission of a Creative Commons License. Views, opinions and conclusions expressed in this research article are views, opinions and conclusions of the author(s). Open Access Publishing Group and European Journal of Education Studies shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability caused in relation to/arising out of conflicts of interest, copyright violations and inappropriate or inaccurate use of any kind content related or integrated into the research work. All the published works are meeting the Open Access Publishing requirements and can be freely accessed, shared, modified, distributed and used in educational, commercial and non-commercial purposes under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License \(CC BY 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).