



Teaching Speaking Skills to Grade 4 Students at A Primary School in HCMC

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ABSTRACT: This study investigates the teaching strategies and challenges related to developing English speaking skills among fourth-grade students at a Primary School in HCMC. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected through questionnaires with 15 English teachers to evaluate the application of five pedagogical models: the Consideration Model, the Cognitive Development Model, the Value Classification Technique, the Rational Formation Model, and the Non-directive Model. Results indicated that the Non-directive and Consideration Models were most frequently used, promoting student-centered learning and interactive language practice. However, aspects like peer feedback, creative storytelling, and visual support were underutilized. Teachers reported several persistent obstacles, including large class sizes, low student motivation, limited English proficiency, and insufficient learning resources. The study highlights the importance of communicative language teaching strategies that are developmentally appropriate and adaptable to classroom constraints. Based on these findings, the study recommends a more balanced integration of all five models, improved teacher training, resource allocation, and class size reduction. These changes aim to foster an engaging, supportive environment where students can actively participate and build confidence in using English for real-life communication.

KEYWORDS: Grade 4 students, Speaking skills, Teaching strategies

INTRODUCTION

English is an international language that is widely spoken around the world. From kindergarten through the university, English is taught in Vietnam. The most crucial foreign language for establishing worldwide relationships and transferring knowledge, science, technology, art, and culture is English. According to Susanto (2007), “English becomes popular and the one of most important language in the whole aspects of life to understand literature. The students should know about language usage, but they will be unable to use it if they do not practice in daily communication”. English should thus be studied and practiced so that it may be used in daily contact.

The four English language proficiency requirements are listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Speaking is the most significant of them all. The most crucial part of learning English is mastering speaking, and success is determined by one's capacity to have a conversation. According to Ur (1999), speaking is seen to be the most significant of the four abilities. As a result, speaking is the aspect of learning a foreign language that students find most interesting. Richards (2002) notes that as English makes up a significant portion of the global lingo, students study it to improve their speaking abilities.

Implementing the General Education Program (GET) 2018, the whole country has even offered English as an obligatory course to students since the fourth grade so students spent many years in school learn English. In Binh Tan is also, all students from grade 4 they have to study English. And most schools there, students in grade 1 and grade 2 are studying English. They expected to master four basic language skills including listening, speaking reading and writing after they finish primary program, especially listening and speaking skills. Besides, the topics included in the program are also found both familiar and challenging for students. Thus, their achievements of English fall short of the expectations of the program despite the fact that they finish learning English for a minimum of three years in a row. Consequently, students are generally weak in a wide range of skills because of lack of vocabularies and practice daily. English must thus be studied and practiced in order to be used in daily communication. This study will highlight the general difficulties associated with developing speaking abilities in English as well as the revolutionary changes in teaching and learning methods. Additionally, addressing the query: “How to teach speaking skills in the direction of capacity development for grade 4 students?” This essay may not highlight technological advancements in the information and communication sectors, but it does concentrate on the teachers' perspective within a pedagogical framework and identify the didactic opportunities, advantages, and potential drawbacks in the teaching and learning of languages at a primary school.



Research questions

1. What teaching strategies do the teachers use to teach English speaking for fourth-grade students at a primary school?
2. What are the problems faced by teachers and students in teaching and speaking English skills for fourth-grade students at a primary school?
3. What are the pedagogical strategies used by teacher in overcoming students' problem to improve their speaking English skills for fourth-grade students at a primary school?

METHODS

This study adopts a mixed-methods design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to explore the teaching strategies used for developing speaking skills among Grade 4 students. Specifically, the study utilizes a descriptive survey and semi-structured interviews to gather insights from English teachers.

The quantitative component involves administering a structured questionnaire to measure the extent to which teachers apply different pedagogical models namely, the consideration model, cognitive development model, value classification technique, rational formation model, and non-directive model when teaching speaking skills. The survey also includes items addressing challenges faced in classroom practice.

The qualitative component uses semi-structured interviews to gain deeper insight into teachers' perspectives, allowing them to elaborate on their practices, perceived challenges, and solutions for enhancing speaking instruction. This triangulation strengthens the validity of findings by providing both statistical patterns and contextual interpretation.

The combination of these methods is expected to yield a well-rounded understanding of the effectiveness and practicality of current teaching strategies and to propose feasible recommendations for improving speaking instruction aligned with the General Education Program 2018.

Participants

The study sample consists of 15 English teachers, all of whom are willing to voluntarily respond to the questionnaire. There are 5 male teachers and 10 female teachers. All of them hold a bachelor's degree. Most are young teachers, with 75% aged between 25 and 30, and 25% aged between 31 and 45. All of them have at least 2 years of work experience.

Due to the limited number of English teachers at the school, which is only 15, the study uses a convenience sampling method for the survey.

Research instruments

The aim of the questionnaire is to help the researcher understand the teaching methods used by teachers for English speaking skills and to measure the level of difficulty teachers encounter when implementing these teaching methods.

The questionnaire consists of two parts: the first part focuses on the methods teachers use for implementing teaching strategies, while the second part addresses the difficulties teachers may encounter.

Part one includes 21 questions related to the methods of teaching speaking, such as:

- The Consideration Model
- The Cognitive Development Model
- The Value Classification Technique
- The Rational Formation Model
- The Non-directive Model

Part two consists of 6 questions focusing on:

- The learning environment
- The size of the study group
- The learning goals
- Learning materials
- Student's point of view
- Student's English competence



The questionnaire uses a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" for teachers to provide their assessments. The responses include '5' for Strongly Agree (SA), '4' for Agree (A), '3' for Neutral (N), '2' for Disagree (D) and '1' for Strongly Disagree (SD).

The study uses a quantitative approach to survey teachers about their teaching methods. Therefore, the author uses a direct questionnaire for each teacher, delivering it by hand and collecting the results the next day. To increase reliability, the author allows teachers one day to review the questionnaire and provide accurate and realistic responses.

Regarding data analysis, the study included both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS software, focusing on mean, standard deviation, and frequency. The mean scores were interpreted as follows:

- 1.00-1.80: Strongly disagree
- 1.81-2.60: Disagree
- 2.61-3.40: Neutral
- 3.41-4.20: Agree
- 4.21-5.00: Strongly agree

Qualitative data were collected from interview questions. The data were recorded and translated into Vietnamese solely for research purposes. The audio recordings were meticulously transcribed, following Bloor et al. (2001), which emphasizes the importance of transcribing all recorded speech, including all speakers, unfinished and interrupted speech, and very brief extracts of speech. Subsequently, the data were analyzed using a logical analysis approach.

In this study, a qualitative research method was employed to support the implementation of the topic. By reviewing previous research related to the topic, background theories, and the theoretical foundation of the research, the researcher proposed a research model and a scale for the variables within the model. This qualitative approach helped identify several key issues to support the quantitative research, including:

- The types of teaching strategies used by teachers in teaching English speaking skill.
- The current difficulties may be faced by the teachers.
- The recommendations can be suggested.

The reliability of Cronbach's alpha

- Two data tables to analyze the reliability of Cronbach's alpha (α) for teachers.

Table 1. The questionnaire's reliability for teachers

No.	Questionnaire	Cronbach's alpha (α)
Q1	I use English stories to introduce new vocabulary and grammatical structures.	0.810
Q2	I incorporate songs and rhymes to highlight the new language elements.	0.829
Q3	I use flashcards, pictures, and videos to present new words and phrases.	0.835
Q4	I decorate the classroom with posters and charts displaying new language concepts.	0.707
Q5	I use language games that make learning fun and interactive, such as bingo, memory matching, scavenger hunts...	0.721
Q6	I encourage role playing activities where students can use new vocabulary in simulated real life scenarios.	0.789
Q7	I allow students to bring objects from home and describe them using the new vocabulary.	0.792
Q8	I use digital tools to create interactive storybooks that students can explore.	0.812



Q9	I encourage students to describe what they see.	0.801
Q10	I set up scenarios where students can act out different roles (e.g., shopkeeper, teacher) using new vocabulary.	0.734
Q11	I engage students in drawing, painting, and creating crafts that are linked to new vocabulary and concepts.	0.725
Q12	I use games like "Simon Says" or matching games to reinforce vocabulary and simple sentence structures.	0.805
Q13	I read stories that highlight different values (e.g., honesty, kindness, respect). After the story, I suggest them to discuss the values demonstrated by the characters.	0.826
Q14	I show pictures depicting various values and ask students to describe what they see and what value it represents.	0.762
Q15	I organize sessions where students share their ideas and give feedback to each other.	0.682
Q16	I provide constructive feedback on their use of language and their reasoning process.	0.678
Q17	I ask students to create their own stories using new vocabulary. They can draw pictures, write, or act out their stories.	0.771
Q18	I organize group discussions on open ended questions, such as "What would you do if you could fly?" or "Describe your perfect day."	0.752
Q19	I allow students to bring an object from home and talk about it in English, sharing why it is important to them.	0.745
Q20	I praise students for their efforts and creativity, highlighting what they did well.	0.765
Q21	I offer suggestions for improvement in a supportive manner. For example, "I love your story! Can you add more details about the main character?"	0.684
Q22	Students have much time to use English in class.	0.681
Q23	The number of students in my class is fewer than 35.	0.724
Q24	My students have specific learning goals.	0.714
Q25	My students have enough materials for learning English.	0.815
Q26	My students are always ready to share their opinions in class.	0.692
Q27	My students' English competence is good enough.	0.683

The Cronbach's alpha indices in Table 1 ranged from 0.6 to 0.9, indicating that the questionnaire had acceptable to very good reliability. However, to enhance the study's quality, the researcher may need to reconsider and adjust some of the questions. This will help ensure that the scales used are highly consistent and reliable, thereby providing more accurate and valuable research results.

RESULTS

Teaching speaking skills:

Table 4.1. The results of Teaching strategies for speaking skills

No.	Teaching strategies for speaking skills	Mean	Standard deviation
1	The Consideration Model	3.5	0.74
2	The Cognitive Development Model	3.1	0.72
3	The Value Classification Technique	3.2	0.95
4	The Rational Formation Model	2.4	0.7
5	The Non-directive Model	3.7	0.8
Total mean		3.2	0.78

Before recognizing which teaching strategy is more effective, the research focuses on five models to see how teachers encourage learners to consciously decide to use the new language in their speaking class, introduce students to basic language concepts, develop hypothetical thinking, allow students to engage with complex language tasks, encourage students to reflect on their values and express their thoughts in English, assess students' understanding and expression of values in English, and define what students want to achieve with the lesson through activities.

The results in table 4.1. show that the teachers usually use the Non-directive Model ($M = 3.7$), and The Consideration Model ($M = 3.5$). They sometimes use The Value Classification Technique ($M = 3.2$), and The Cognitive Development Model ($M = 3.1$). They rarely use The Rational Formation Model ($M = 2.4$).

Teaching strategies

The Consideration Model:

The Consideration Model can be effectively applied in English teaching for young learners by guiding them through a structured process that moves from awareness of new language concepts to their confident use. The result in table 4.2. show that teachers usually use this model for teaching speaking skills with total mean = 3.48. Namely, the teachers usually use language games to make learning fun and interactive, such as bingo, memory matching, scavenger hunts... (see Q5); use flashcards, pictures, and videos to present new words and phrases (see Q3); use English stories to introduce new vocabulary and grammatical structures (see Q1). With English songs and posters, the teachers often use them (see Q2, Q4).

Table 4.2. Results of the consideration model

No.	The Consideration Model	Mean	Standard deviation
Q1	I use English stories to introduce new vocabulary and grammatical structures.	3.7	0.7
Q2	I incorporate songs and rhymes to highlight the new language elements.	3.0	0.8
Q3	I use flashcards, pictures, and videos to present new words and phrases.	3.9	0.7
Q4	I decorate the classroom with posters and charts displaying new language concepts.	2.7	0.8
Q5	I use language games that make learning fun and interactive, such as bingo, memory matching, scavenger hunts...	4.1	0.7
Total mean		3.5	0.74

The Cognitive Development Model:

Using the Cognitive Development Model, particularly Piaget's stages of cognitive development, in English teaching for young learners can help tailor instructional strategies to their developmental stages. The results in table 4.3 express that the teachers usually allow students to bring objects from home and describe them using the new vocabulary (see Q7), encourage students to describe what they see (see Q9). They also agree that they usually set up scenarios where students can act out different roles (e.g., shopkeeper, teacher) using new vocabulary (see Q10). However, they disagree that they use digital tools to create interactive storybooks that students can explore (see Q8).

Table 4.3. Results of The Cognitive Development Model

No.	The Cognitive Development Model	Mean	Standard deviation
Q6	I encourage role playing activities where students can use new vocabulary in simulated real life scenarios.	2.7	0.7
Q7	I allow students to bring objects from home and describe them using the new vocabulary.	3.6	0.7
Q8	I use digital tools to create interactive storybooks that students can explore.	2.5	0.8
Q9	I encourage students to describe what they see.	3.5	0.7
Q10	I set up scenarios where students can act out different roles (e.g., shopkeeper, teacher) using new vocabulary.	3.2	0.7
Total mean		3.1	0.72

The Value Classification Technique:

The Value Classification Technique involves helping learners identify, reflect upon, and articulate their values. When applied to English teaching for young learners, this technique can foster language skills while also promoting critical thinking, self-awareness, and moral development. The findings show that the teachers usually show pictures depicting various values and ask students to describe what they see and what value it represents (see Q14) and use games like "Simon Says" or matching games to reinforce vocabulary and simple sentence structures (see Q12). However, the teachers sometimes engage students in drawing, painting, and creating crafts that are linked to new vocabulary and concepts (see Q11) as well as read stories that highlight different values (e.g., honesty, kindness, respect). After the story, I suggest them to discuss the values demonstrated by the characters (see Q13).

Table 4. 4. Results of The Value Classification Technique

No.	The Value Classification Technique	Mean	Standard deviation
Q11	I engage students in drawing, painting, and creating crafts that are linked to new vocabulary and concepts.	2.5	0.8
Q12	I use games like "Simon Says" or matching games to reinforce vocabulary and simple sentence structures.	3.6	0.8
Q13	I read stories that highlight different values (e.g., honesty, kindness, respect). After the story, I suggest them to discuss the values demonstrated by the characters.	2.5	0.9
Q14	I show pictures depicting various values and ask students to describe what they see and what value it represents.	3.7	0.9
Total mean		3.2	0.95

The Rational Formation Model

The Rational Formation Model is an approach that involves systematic, logical thinking and decision-making processes. When applied to English teaching for young learners, it can help develop critical thinking skills, structured reasoning, and effective problem-solving abilities alongside language skills. The findings in table 4.5. show that the teachers sometimes provide constructive feedback on their use of language and their reasoning process (see Q16), ask students to create their own stories using new vocabulary. They can draw pictures, write, or act out their stories (see Q17), and organize sessions where students share their ideas and give feedback to each other (see Q15).

Table 4.5. Results of The Rational Formation Model

No.	The Rational Formation Model	Mean	Standard deviation
Q15	I organize sessions where students share their ideas and give feedback to each other.	2.3	0.8
Q16	I provide constructive feedback on their use of language and their reasoning process.	2.4	0.7
Q17	I ask students to create their own stories using new vocabulary. They can draw pictures, write, or act out their stories.	2.4	0.6
Total mean		2.4	0.7

The Non-directive Model:

The Non-directive Model, often associated with student-centered learning and the humanistic approach, emphasizes creating a supportive environment where learners can explore, discover, and construct knowledge at their own pace. In the context of teaching English to young learners, this model involves facilitating activities that encourage self-expression, creativity, and critical thinking, allowing students to take an active role in their learning process. The results in table 4.6 show that the teachers usually praise students for their efforts and creativity, highlighting what they did well (see Q20), offer suggestions for improvement in a supportive manner. For example, "I love your story! Can you add more details about the main character?" (see Q21) and allow students to bring an object from home and talk about it in English, sharing why it is important to them (see Q19).

Table 4.6. Results of the non-directive model

No.	The Non-directive Model	Mean	Standard deviation
Q19	I allow students to bring an object from home and talk about it in English, sharing why it is important to them.	3.5	0.7
Q20	I praise students for their efforts and creativity, highlighting what they did well.	3.9	0.8
Q21	I offer suggestions for improvement in a supportive manner. For example, "I love your story! Can you add more details about the main character?"	3.7	0.9
Total mean		3.7	0.8

Difficulties faced by the teachers

Look at table 4.7, there are three problems that teachers still find challenging: large class sizes (see Q23), students lacking learning goals (see Q24), and students' English proficiency not meeting the required standards (see Q27).

Table 4.7. Difficulties faced by the teachers

No.	Difficulties faced by teachers	Mean	Standard deviation
Q22	Students have much time to use English speaking in class.	3.6	0.8
Q23	The number of students in my class is fewer than 35.	2.6	0.6
Q24	My students have specific learning goals.	2.7	0.9
Q25	My students have enough materials for learning English.	3.7	0.7
Q26	My students are always ready to share their opinions in class.	3.5	0.7
Q27	My students' English competence is good enough.	2.9	0.7
Total mean		3.2	0.73

DISCUSSION

A study on teaching English speaking skills to 4th-grade students surveyed five teaching strategy models. The results showed that The Non-directive Model was used the most by teachers ($M = 3.7$), followed by The Consideration Model ($M = 3.5$), The Value Classification Technique ($M = 3.2$), The Cognitive Development Model ($M = 3.1$), and finally, The Rational Formation Model ($M = 2.4$). Although teachers utilized a variety of models in speaking classes, they did not fully implement all the elements of each model. For example, in The Consideration Model, teachers rarely used the element "decorate the classroom with posters and charts displaying new language concepts" to excite students. In The Value Classification Technique, teachers did not frequently use the element "engage students in drawing, painting, and creating crafts that are linked to new vocabulary and concepts." Particularly in The Rational Formation Model, teachers did not utilize "organize sessions where students share their ideas and give feedback to each other," "provide constructive feedback on their use of language and their reasoning process," and "ask students to create their own stories using new vocabulary. They can draw pictures, write, or act out their stories."

We know that in the 4th grade children are often visual learners. Bright, colorful posters and charts can grab their attention and make the classroom environment more stimulating. This visual engagement can help them connect more with the material. They help them repeat exposure to language concepts, like vocabulary words, sentence structures, or conversational phrases, helps reinforce what they learn. When students see these concepts displayed around them, they are more likely to remember and use them. It's real that creative and interactive posters can encourage students to participate more actively in class. For example, a chart that tracks how many new words each student has used in conversation can motivate them to speak more. Also, seeing familiar language concepts displayed around the room can help students feel more confident during speaking activities. It can serve as a visual aid, reducing anxiety and making them more willing to try speaking in a new language as well as a well-decorated classroom can make the space feel welcoming and fun, which can have a positive impact on students' attitudes towards learning. When students enjoy the environment, they are more likely to be engaged and motivated.

Moreover, if the teachers give students many chances to share their ideas and feedback, they will learn to understand different perspectives and respond thoughtfully. When students share their ideas in a supportive environment, it helps build their confidence in speaking. Receiving feedback from peers can be less intimidating than from a teacher, making them more willing to participate. In speaking, by discussing and giving feedback, students practice not just speaking but also how to communicate their thoughts clearly and respectfully. This interaction develops both their expressive and receptive language skills. Students know how to learn to work together, respect each other's opinions, and support one another in the learning process. Especially, when students give feedback, they must think critically about what they've heard. This process helps them refine their own ideas and understand the language better.

Last but not least, when students use new vocabulary in creative ways, such as in stories, they internalize the words better. It moves the words from passive recognition to active usage, making them more likely to remember and use them in the future. Allowing students to create their own stories, whether through drawing, writing, or acting, taps into their creativity. This



creative process makes learning more enjoyable and helps them connect emotionally with the language. By crafting stories, students practice using vocabulary in context, which deepens their understanding of the words. They learn how to use words appropriately in different situations, which is crucial for language proficiency. When students act out their stories or share them with the class, they practice speaking in front of others. This helps build their communication skills and confidence in using the new language. Sharing stories in class creates a fun and supportive environment. It encourages students to appreciate each other's work and learn from their peers, fostering a sense of community. When students create something original, they take ownership of their learning. This sense of ownership can increase their motivation and engagement in the subject.

CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the current practices, challenges, and pedagogical strategies in teaching English speaking skills to Grade 4 students at a Primary School. The key conclusions are as follows:

The quantitative results showed that among the five teaching models explored, the Non-directive Model (Mean = 3.7) and the Consideration Model (Mean = 3.5) were the most frequently applied strategies. Teachers also occasionally used the Value Classification Technique (Mean = 3.2) and Cognitive Development Model (Mean = 3.1), while the Rational Formation Model (Mean = 2.4) was the least utilized.

The interviews reinforced these findings, with teachers suggesting strategies such as role-play, visual aids, CLT based tasks, and supportive learning environments to overcome these difficulties. Teachers also recommended limiting class sizes and organizing more speaking focused activities to create engaging, real-life communication opportunities.

Additionally, the study identified major challenges teachers faced when teaching speaking skills: overcrowded classrooms, students' lack of clear learning goals, and limited English proficiency. These issues negatively impacted student engagement and speaking performance.

These findings suggest that while many effective strategies are in use, a more balanced and comprehensive application of communicative models could significantly enhance students' speaking abilities.

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