

Cambodian EFL University Students’ Learning Strategies and Motivation to Improve Their English Language Speaking Skills: a Qualitative Study

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Abstract

The ability to speak English fluently and effectively is highly desirable in today’s world, and one of the primary goals for anyone who learns English is to be able to successfully engage in meaningful communication with others. Given the significance of one’s ability to speak English effectively, this paper investigated Cambodian EFL university students’ perceptions of effective English speaking skills, using focus group interviews with 20 Cambodian undergraduate and graduate students majoring in English. Qualitative data analysis revealed that Cambodian EFL university students utilize a variety of techniques and strategies, including speaking to oneself in front of a mirror, watching Hollywood movies and YouTube videos, and chatting with friends on the Internet in order to enhance their English speaking skills. The study also revealed that extrinsic motivating factors, such as job opportunities, family reputation and scholarships, are major sources of motivation for Cambodian university students to sharpen their English speaking skills. Moreover, issues with vocabulary, pronunciation, L1 interference, speaking anxiety, and peer pressure are among the most frequently cited difficulties for Cambodian university students when engaging in English conversations and trying to improve their speaking.

Keywords: Cambodian university students, English speaking skills, strategies to improve speaking skills, motivation

บทคัดย่อ

การพูดภาษาอังกฤษได้อย่างคล่องแคล่วและมีประสิทธิผลนั้น เป็นหนึ่งในจุดมุ่งหมายของผู้เรียนภาษาอังกฤษในโลกปัจจุบัน เพื่อประสบความสำเร็จในการสื่อสารกับผู้อื่น ด้วยเห็นความสำคัญของการพูดภาษาอังกฤษได้อย่างคล่องแคล่วและมีประสิทธิผล งานวิจัยนี้จึงสำรวจทัศนคติของนักศึกษามหาวิทยาลัยในประเทศกัมพูชา ซึ่งเป็นผู้เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศต่อทักษะการพูดภาษาอังกฤษอย่างมีประสิทธิภาพ โดยใช้ระเบียบวิธีวิจัยแบบการสนทนากลุ่ม (Focus Group) สัมภาษณ์นักศึกษาระดับปริญญาตรี และบัณฑิตที่ศึกษาในสาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษ จำนวน 20 คน จากการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลเชิงคุณภาพพบว่า ผู้เข้าร่วมวิจัยใช้เทคนิคและกลวิธีอย่างหลากหลายเพื่อการพัฒนาทักษะการพูด เช่น การพูดหน้ากระจก การดูภาพยนตร์ฮอลลีวูด (Hollywood) และวิดีโอทางยูทูป (YouTube) และการพูดคุยกับเพื่อนทางอินเทอร์เน็ต อีกทั้งยังพบว่าปัจจัยภายนอก เช่น โอกาสในการทำงาน ความมีชื่อเสียงของครอบครัว และทุนการศึกษายังเป็นแรงจูงใจในการพัฒนาทักษะการพูดของผู้เข้าร่วมวิจัยอีกด้วย นอกจากนี้ผู้เข้าร่วมวิจัยส่วนใหญ่เห็นตรงกันว่าอุปสรรคในการพัฒนาทักษะการพูดและการพูดคุยบทสนทนาภาษาอังกฤษคือ คำศัพท์ การออกเสียง อิทธิพลของภาษาแม่ ความตื่นเต้นในการพูด และการกดดันจากเพื่อน

คำสำคัญ: นักศึกษามหาวิทยาลัยในประเทศกัมพูชา ทักษะการพูดภาษาอังกฤษ กลวิธีในการพัฒนาทักษะการพูด แรงจูงใจ

Introduction

The last few decades have seen the ever-growing popularity of English as a lingua franca globally and as a medium of instruction in higher education in Cambodia. Since English is one of the main languages of international communication, business and science, knowledge of English is absolutely crucial and highly desirable. The emergence of globalization, the economic and cultural influence of the United States, as well as that of other English-speaking countries, has brought English to the four corners of the world, and has shaped many people's perspectives on the importance of being able to effectively communicate in English.

Moreover, with the advent of computer technology, particularly the Internet, as well as the prevalence of newspapers, magazines, books and journals in English, the English language has been attracting and will continue to attract, considerable global attention in the immediate and distant future. Not surprisingly, speaking, which is one of the four macro skills in the English language has become an essential tool for communication across the globe. It is becoming more and more common for people from different countries to communicate with one another by using English regardless of whether it is for a business or personal matter.

In the Cambodian EFL classroom context, English has also received considerable attention. Both teachers and students understand and acknowledge the practical value of being able to function well in English, particularly the beneficial aspects of knowing how to speak English effectively in different communicative settings. Many students, therefore, are seen to be motivated to learn English and enhance their English speaking skills, using a variety of techniques and learning strategies. However, there is an apparent lack of research studies conducted to investigate how Cambodian university students learn to

improve their speaking skills, what motivates them to do so, and what difficulties they encounter in their efforts to sharpen their English speaking skills.

Given the amount of difficulties students have to overcome when striving to enhance their speaking skills (Brown, 2001) and a very limited, if nonexistent, amount of research on strategies that Cambodian university students use to improve their English speaking skills, this study was initiated to explore Cambodian EFL university students' views on effective English language speaking skills. In order to explore this problem the study focused on the strategies that successful Cambodian university English majors use to improve their speaking skills, as well as their sources of motivation to enhance their speaking. The study also examines the difficulties students face in their endeavor to successfully engage in English conversations and develop their English speaking ability. The study also investigates other contributing factors which make some Cambodian EFL university students become successful in their English speaking ability.

Literature review

With reference to the development of EFL learners' speaking skills, a large amount of research has been conducted to discern factors and strategies that help make learners succeed in their ability to speak English effectively. Much of the research related to the improvement of students' oral communication skills has often focused on three important areas: 1) motivation, 2) learning strategies, particularly communication strategies and 3) factors which are conducive for developing speaking skills.

According to Harmer (2005), motivation is essential for success in learning any subject, and attempts to initiate and sustain students' motivation are therefore absolutely crucial to their learning success.

Furthermore, Brown (2007) suggests that there are a number of studies showing that motivation plays a very important role in the success or failure of almost any task, especially learning. Recognizing the significant role of motivation in language learning success, Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) conducted a survey with 200 Hungarian teachers of English and were able to compile a concise set of ten motivational macrostrategies which they named, “Ten commandments for motivating language learners,” (p. 215) as seen below.

Ten commandments for motivating language learners

1. Set a personal example with your own behaviour.
2. Create a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere in the classroom.
3. Present the tasks properly.
4. Develop a good relationship with the learners.
5. Increase the learners’ linguistic self-confidence.
6. Make the language classes interesting.
7. Promote learner autonomy.
8. Personalize the learning process.
9. Increase the learners’ goal-orientedness.
10. Familiarize learners with the target language culture.

Research has identified a number of language learning strategies employed by EFL/ESL students who wish to increase their English proficiency. Those strategies which are believed to be among the main factors which help determine how, and how well, students learn a second or foreign language are divided into six main categories of L2 learning strategies, including cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, memory-related strategies, compensatory strategies, affective strategies,

and social strategies (Oxford, 2001). Moreover, there are many empirical studies that investigated the relationship between language learning strategies and learners' English proficiency. Results from such studies confirm that learning strategies, particularly metacognitive and communication strategies, play an essential role in developing students' language competence (Alqaltani & Alhebaishi, 2010; Griffiths, 2013; Ghavamnia, Kassaian, & Dabaghi, 2011; Nakatani, 2006; Nisbet, Tindall, & Arroyo, 2005). Although communication strategies (CSs) have been defined differently from one researcher to another, they share one similarity, namely that they help promote students' communicative competence (Alqaltani & Alhebaishi, 2010; Burrows, 2009; Nakatani, 2006).

Furthermore, there are a number of other factors which facilitate the development of learners' speaking skills. Those facilitating factors are mostly related to classroom environment, learners, teachers, and teaching methods. It is undeniable that a classroom environment which is encouraging, stress-free and enjoyable is conducive for successful language learning. According to Hedge (2000), for example, a classroom which encourages interactions (i.e. pair work and group work) among learners provides the right conditions for learning to take place. Moreover, learners' aptitude and attitude toward learning a language, and learner autonomy, are also important factors which facilitate their learning process (Hedge, 2000). Apart from the classroom environment and learner themselves, teacher's roles are also necessary in the process of speaking development. Harmer (2005) suggests a number of roles that teachers in language classrooms maintain, such as controllers, organizers, assessors, prompters, participants, resources, tutors, and observers. Each role can shape learners' perspectives on language learning and present a clear picture of the responsibilities of teachers in the teaching and learning process.

Another factor which contributes to learners' speaking skill development is related to teaching methods. In this regard, one of the methods which has gained considerable attention as an excellent tool for the development of students' speaking skills is the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach. According to Widdowson (1985), CLT is an approach to teaching second and foreign languages that emphasizes interactions both, as the means and ultimate goal of, learning a language. The main principle of CLT, as its name suggests, is to develop students' communicative competence and to equip them with the knowledge of how a language is used in the society. Both Harmer (2005) and Lightbown and Spada (2013), moreover, point out that in the communicative approach much attention is paid to the significance of language functions, rather than focusing solely on grammar and vocabulary, and that the plentiful exposure to the target language plays an integral role in shaping students' language development. Similarly, Savignon (1991) and Lazaraton (2001) claim that the use of games, role play, pair and group work, and other types of speaking activities, such as discussions, speeches, conversations, audiotaped oral dialogue journals, and other accuracy-based activities, have gained greater acceptance and are now widely recommended for inclusion in any language teaching programs.

Based on the literature review above, there is a good deal of research which has been carried out in the area of communicative competence and speaking skill development (see, for example, Bakar, Latiff, & Hamat, 2013; Boonkit, 2010; Leong & Ahmadi, 2017; Marzuki, Prayogo, & Wahyudi, 2016; Sotoudehnama, & Hashamdar, 2016). The results of those research studies are mostly consistent with one another, and the three main areas described above have become the central foci of attention in English Language Teaching (ELT) research. However, not a single research study on the topic under investigation can be identified in a Cambodian EFL context. Therefore, the present

study aims to fill that void by exploring strategies Cambodian EFL students use to sharpen their speaking skills. The study also explores factors which contribute to their success in speaking and what motivates them to attain their success in that area.

Research questions

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What strategies do Cambodian EFL university students use to improve their English speaking skills?
2. What motivates them to pursue their own goals of improving their English speaking skills?
3. What other factors besides motivation and learning strategies make some Cambodian EFL university students become successful in their English speaking skills?

Significance of the study

The present study is of significance in that it can firstly provide insight into the views of Cambodian EFL university students on effective English speaking skills, insight which definitely helps add to the existing body of knowledge on this area. Secondly, the study can encourage debates and discussions related to English speaking skills, particularly the discussions on effective English speaking strategies among successful Cambodian university students. These discussions will hopefully bring about more research among Cambodian researchers, in particular, novice or student researchers. Thirdly and most importantly, the study will be able to raise both teachers and students' awareness of the importance of strategy instruction and learning. The findings of the study are therefore of value to students who want to learn how to improve their

speaking ability, and teachers who would like to better understand what really motivates students to learn and enhance their speaking, and what challenges students face in developing their speaking and the strategies Cambodian university students utilize to ensure success in their efforts to enhance their speaking skills.

Methodology

Research participants

The participants in this study were 20 university students (11 male and 9 were female) from the Department of English, the Institute of Foreign Languages (IFL), Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP). Among them, 15 students were from the Bachelor of Education (BED) in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) program, and 5 were from the Master of Arts (MA) in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) program. The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 35. All participants who were enrolled in the MA program were also working as teachers of English for at least four years respectively. All of the participants were selected based on three main criteria. First, they were studying English at the Institute of Foreign Languages, which is considered to be one of the best English institutions in Cambodia. Second, was a matter of convenience since most of the participants were students of the researcher's friends including five of whom were the researchers' former classmates in the MA program. The third and most important reason was related to the participants' level of English speaking skills. It should be noted that all of the 15 participants from the BED program were recommended by their teacher based on their outstanding class performance and great speaking ability. The other five from the MA program were also conveniently selected based on their remarkable speaking merits.

Data collection and analysis

The subjects involved in this study were divided into four focus groups, based on their levels of study. That is, the 15 participants from the BEd program were put in three different groups (five participants per group), while those from the MA program were grouped together. Therefore, there were 5 (K1 to K5) key participants in the first group, 5 (K6 to K10) key informants in the second, 5 (K11 to K15) in the third and 5 MA students (K16 to K20) in the last focus group. Each group was informed about the purpose of the study before they were interviewed, and permission to audio tape each interview was requested and granted, with consent forms. Having received verbal and written permission to audio tape the interview, the researcher started to pose questions for discussion. There were twelve main questions (see Appendix A) and some probing questions that were employed. The interviews, which were conducted in English, lasted between 50 and 70 minutes, and at the end of each interview all participants were reassured of their anonymity and the confidentiality of their information.

After the interviews, recordings were transcribed verbatim to keep the originality of the message. The interview transcripts were then sent to each participant for informant feedback to improve the accuracy and validity of the data interpretation. The transcripts were then examined and compared with each other to discover the patterns or themes which could be used to answer the research questions.

Results

Careful examination of the interview transcripts revealed four main themes relative to the research questions, as follows:

Strategies Cambodian EFL university students use to improve their English speaking skills

Strategies students use to improve their speaking skills is one of the research questions this study sought to answer. Based on the data analysis, it was found out that most of the participants agreed with the concept of “practice makes perfect.” They believed that seeking opportunities to practice speaking with friends, classmates, relatives, teachers, and native speakers is very important for the development of their speaking skills. As K16 said, “...the best way to improve speaking is to practice a lot. So I spend a lot of time practicing with my classmates, my teachers and also sometimes native speakers of English.” Speaking alone in front of the mirror was another popular speaking strategy used by several participants (K3, K7, K10, and K20). For example, one student mentioned:

Sometimes I like to speak alone with myself in front of the mirror. Sometimes I look at myself like a crazy man. But I think that if I don't use this strategy I cannot improve my English speaking. (K10)

Another strategy that all participants believed to have a crucial role in improving their speaking skills is listening to radios/music and watching TV/Hollywood movies/YouTube videos. They pointed out that they often spent time listening to English songs/radio or watching American movies to improve their English, particularly speaking skills. Many participants tended to state in agreement about the importance of listening and watching English programs such as the following:

I often listen to the English songs and watch American movies ... (K1)

I often listen to BBC news and watch Hollywood movies. They help me improve my speaking too. (K4)

I think speaking good English is also from other experiences such as listening to radio and watching TV ... (K14)

If we watch foreign movies, especially American, we can improve our speaking ... (K15)

I think listening and watching English programs, especially YouTube videos, are very important. It can improve our speaking also because we get exposed to a lot of input ... (K16)

Of course you know like listening, watching [...]. All of them are very important. (K18)

It is undeniably true that in order to improve speaking skills, one should take chances to speak as much as possible without caring about making mistakes or being laughed at. As mentioned by a number of participants, taking risks was an important strategy to break through the barriers that prevent them from speaking out or sharing their ideas in English. One participant (K19), for instance, said that before he was so shy that he did not want to share anything in his English class, and he was afraid of being ridiculed for his mistakes in speaking. He stated that if he still let himself stay in the same condition – keeping silent in class – his speaking would not improve at all. Therefore, he decided to take risks, to talk and to speak to different people using what he had learned from class.

Another participant (K11) expressed a similar idea saying that risk taking was very important in the development of English speaking skills. He suggested that we should take risks and should not be afraid

of making mistakes or being laughed at. We should also be confident and try our best to speak English. This sentiment was also affirmed by K5 who said, “I always try to speak English. I’m not afraid of mistakes or whatever.”

Other participants agreed with the above proposition but stressed the significance of reading and imitation. K12 for example said, “I want to add one more point which is reading. Reading books also improves your speaking. When you read, you get the ideas to speak.” Similarly, a student from the same group (K15) claimed that reading was really important. Most speakers couldn’t speak English because they didn’t read a lot. They need to read in order to learn a lot of words and vocabulary to express their ideas when speaking.

The data from the interview also indicated that chatting with friends on the internet using Skype, Line, Viber, WhatsApp, Telegram or Facebook Messenger is another key facilitator that helps improve students’ speaking skills. K9 said, “One strategy (to improve speaking) is chatting. I like to chat on the internet with foreigners. I chat with Korean friends and American friends so that I can talk with them and practice speaking English with them.” K6 also agreed that chatting helped improve her speaking skills. She mentioned that she used Skype to talk with her international friends like Indonesians, Singaporeans, Canadians, Americans and many others. Moreover, she added that chatting helped her to differentiate between accents. She said, for example, “Singaporean accent and Indonesian accent are different. Singaporean sounds similar to Chinese, but Indonesian sounds similar to Malaysian.” In general, a majority of respondents made reference to the use of social media tools, particularly Facebook Messenger, as a means of communication and speaking skill improvement.

Cambodian EFL university students' motivation to improve their English speaking skills

Based on the data analysis, almost all participants in the study stated that extrinsic motivation played a crucial role in generating and maintaining their motivation, and their determination to enhance their speaking skills. The following is a list of extrinsic motivating factors that helped motivate students to enhance their speaking skills.

Sources of students' motivation (in order of the number of mentions)

1. Job opportunities
2. Family reputation
3. Scholarships
4. Ability to understand English songs/movies
5. Teachers, relatives and friends
6. Traveling or living abroad
7. Scores and admiration from others
8. People who can speak English well

However, only a few participants mentioned sources of motivation which came from within, that is, intrinsic motivation. One participant K20 said, "I do enjoy learning English and improving my speaking skills because it enables me to understand native speakers and their culture."

When asked what keeps them motivated, all participants referred back to the motivators listed above, such as family, teachers, friends, scholarships, job opportunities and so on. Furthermore, several participants stressed the importance of positive thinking and commitment. For example, K16 said that in order to keep himself motivated he had to believe in himself that he could speak English well. K8 and K10 believed that commitment was a strong motivator. For example, K10 said, "we need to have a very strong commitment to improve

our speaking.”

Classroom factors that promote speaking skills

Having discussed the strategies the participants used to improve their speaking skills, we now turn to classroom factors believed to bring about the improvement of students’ speaking ability. The data from the focus group interviews showed that there were two kinds of classroom factors – teachers and class activities – that encourage the development of Cambodian university students’ speaking skills. Talking about teachers, the participants mentioned that the interaction between teachers and students, specifically encouragement from their teachers, played a very important role in enhancing their English speaking skills. They suggested that teachers should not allow students to speak Khmer in the class. They should create classroom rules, such as “English only” and punish students who speak Khmer in class by fining them a certain amount of money.

For the classroom activities, there was a general consensus among all participants that a number of activities were particularly useful for their speaking development. Those activities included, but are not limited to, group work, pair work, presentations, role play, group discussions and debates. A participant in the fourth group (K17) said, “besides group discussion, pair work, fluency activities, two more things that I learned from my teacher is presentation and debate. I think these two things are also very important because they can help students to improve their speaking.”

Nevertheless, it was intriguing that a few participants argued that group discussion did not work all the time. K1, for instance, said:

I think an activity that teachers should avoid is group discussion. Group discussion is a good activity but when it comes to groups for Cambodian students like us, we tend to use Khmer instead of using English. So in order to improve English, I don't think group discussion is a good idea. (K1)

K2 who shared a similar opinion said that in group discussion clever students would dominate the discussion and poor students could not share anything. Thus, not all students would benefit from group discussion in the class. This proposition seemed to be supported by other informants most notably K3 and K7.

Cambodian EFL university students' difficulties in improving their English speaking skills

The results indicated that participants faced a number of difficulties while trying to engage in English conversations as well as to improve their speaking skills. Among those difficulties, vocabulary and pronunciation were most frequently mentioned. Other constraints included: L1 interference on L2, speaking anxiety, inability to think fast, and discouragement from friends and others. A majority of participants expressed the same opinion that they had troubles with vocabulary or "word choice." They agreed that sometimes it was very hard to choose a correct word to express their ideas. As K19 said, "to me one of the serious problems is word choice...I'm looking for a particular word or proper word that my mind really wants to say. And this one is very difficult for me." Similarly, K18 said, "it's true that you know sometimes you have ideas but it's hard to express...because of the word; you cannot find any word that can express your ideas."

Problems related to pronunciation were also encountered by most participants. The data analysis showed that most students found some sounds in English difficult to pronounce. For example, K17 said, “to me the difficulty in speaking is some sounds in English you know which I cannot adapt appropriately and it’s really hard for me to twist my tongue to be native-like.” Other difficulties were related to L1 interference, nervousness in speaking, and discouragement from others.

At my brother’s university when I try to speak English with his friends or with my classmates, they laugh at me. And they discourage me. (K11)

Speaking nervousness is very difficult for me to overcome. (K12)

We think L1 first and then we use L2 to express that. (K17)

Discussion

The purpose of this study has been to investigate the factors which make some Cambodian EFL university students become successful in speaking, and the strategies they use to improve their English speaking skills. The results suggested that Cambodian EFL university students use a variety of learning strategies to improve their English speaking skills. The findings of this study are consistent with a study by Chang and Liu (2013) who found that Taiwanese EFL university students employed similar strategies (e.g., watching TV/movies) to improve their English. Likewise, Boonkit (2010) who investigated factors enhancing Thai university students’ speaking skills also found that frequent exposure to English materials through listening and watching activities improved the participants’ speaking ability.

It should be noted that the use of the internet, in particular social media tools, such as: Line, Viber, Skype, or Facebook Messenger, to improve English is becoming more and more popular among Cambodian university students. With the advent of computer technology and the availability of wifi networks, many Cambodian students have turned their attention to the internet as a rich source for information, entertainment and study. This phenomenon is evidenced by the growing interest amongst Cambodian university students in websites, such as Facebook, with 3.4 million Facebook users in Cambodia in 2016 (Tan, 2016).

This study reveals that extrinsic motivation plays a more important role in sustaining the participants' aspirations to improve their speaking skills than intrinsic ones. External motivators such as job opportunities, family reputation, and scholarship opportunities are among the key motivating factors. This is not surprising, given the present status of English as a language of business, education, science, and technology and a global lingua franca. The findings of this study are in line with that of Rehman, Bilal, Sheikh, Bibi, and Nawaz (2014) who studied 50 Pakistani learners' motivation for learning English and found that 70% of them were motivated by extrinsic motivation. Tahaineh and Daana (2013) also found that external motivators had greater effects than internal ones on Jordanian university students' attitudes toward learning English.

Another finding worth discussing is related to the difficulties the Cambodian university students face in striving to enhance their speaking skills. All of the difficulties presented in the findings section above are found to be encountered by other Cambodian students as well, because of the large number of English words and the differences in sounds, structures and other linguistic features between English and Khmer. Such difficulties, and the absence of English–Khmer equivalence,

are discussed in Keuk's (2008) article on the English language variety in Cambodia. Similarly, learners of English in other parts of the world also face similar difficulties when learning and trying to improve their English speaking skills. From Colombia, León and Cely (2010) found that Colombian students of English considered speaking skills to be the most difficult skillset to be put into practice, and cited lack of vocabulary (48%) as one of their difficulties. Vietnamese students of English also encountered a number of problems when learning to improve their speaking; their major problems included fear of making mistakes, inability to say anything in English, and lack of speaking practices (Tuan & Mai, 2015).

All in all, the findings of this study not only shed some light on the strategies Cambodian EFL university students use to enhance their speaking skills, but also reveal the challenges they have to overcome in their efforts to develop their English speaking proficiency. The study, moreover, offers a valuable insight into the factors that promote the development of Cambodian university students' English speaking ability. A clear understanding of these facilitating factors is absolutely crucial for all learners and teachers of English in Cambodia and elsewhere. The present study is therefore of significance for the field of ELT because it further contributes to the existing body of knowledge by most notably increasing the limited amount of academic research on English language teaching in Cambodia.

Conclusion

Limitations of the study

This study is limited in scope since the number of participants is relatively small. The study explored the views of a group of participants from a public university in Phnom Penh city only; it did not extensively study the perceptions of participants from other public

or private institutions, such as English centers, institutes, schools and universities in Phnom Penh city, other cities, or provinces. Thus, it would be inappropriate to conclude that the views of the participants examined above represent those of all Cambodian students in Cambodia. However, some conclusions can be drawn from the findings that may be relevant, to some extent, to the Cambodian EFL context.

Summary for key findings and pedagogical implications

First, it was found that there are a number of strategies that successful Cambodian university students of English use to improve their speaking skills. The most popular ones include seeking opportunities to practice speaking with friends, classmates, relatives, teachers, and native speakers, speaking alone in front of the mirror, listening to radios/music in English, watching TV/movies/YouTube videos, taking risks by speaking to different people, reading and imitation, and chatting with friends or relatives on the internet, especially through various social media tools such as Facebook Messenger, Line, and Viber.

Second, we identified a number of extrinsic motivating factors that Cambodian university students employ to pursue their own goals of improving their speaking skills including job opportunities, family reputation, scholarships, the ability to understand and enjoy English songs/movies, teachers and friends' encouragement, chances to travel, study or live abroad, the attainment of high scores, admiration from peers and others, and the inspiration derived from fluent English speakers.

Third, the findings lead to a conclusion that despite a number of difficulties that students face while trying to improve their English, particularly their speaking ability, there are a handful of key factors related to teachers and class activities which facilitate the development of Cambodian university students' speaking skills. Such factors include

the interactions between teachers and students, encouragement from their peers and teachers; and the employment of such classroom activities as group work, pair work, presentations, role plays, group discussions and debates.

Finally, based on the findings of the study, pedagogical implications for language learning and teaching can be drawn as follows:

- Teachers should pay full attention to the developmental process of students' speaking by creating an encouraging classroom environment and providing their students with ample opportunities to be exposed to both language input and output. Only through maximum language input and output will students' speaking skills be substantially enhanced.
- Teachers should take into consideration the enhancement of students' ability to confidently use the language for communication. In this regard, they should make use of problem-solving activities and tasks, which require students to interact, negotiate or exchange information with one another; such as pair work, group work, role play, interviews, presentations, debates, games, and surveys.
- Students themselves should work in cooperation with their teachers and peers for the sake of their speaking skill development. They should explore and try out the speaking strategies that successful Cambodian EFL university students use in order to see how useful or effective they are. They can alternatively adapt those strategies for their personal use to improve their speaking ability in particular and their English proficiency in general. Last but not least, Cambodian EFL university students should be confident and optimistic about their ability to learn and use English by seeking available opportunities to practice the language, take risks and never ever give up.

- Both teachers and students should engage in some forms of strategy instruction and learning. By introducing their students to a variety of strategies for improving speaking, and training them to use those strategies, teachers are properly equipping their students with knowledge and skills necessary for them to become self-directed learners who are able to explore, improve and navigate their own learning strategies and styles. By so doing, they are more likely to succeed in their academic endeavors and their successful learning outcomes are achieved.

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Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Mr. Douseh Chhoun and Mr. Kol Tuy for their assistance in conducting the focus group interviews and transcribing the interview data. The author is also grateful to the editorial team and anonymous reviewers for their very helpful suggestions and comments on an earlier draft of this article.

Appendix A

Questions for Focus Group Interviews

1. What strategies do you use to improve your speaking skills?
2. What strategies does your teacher use to help improve your speaking skills?
3. What motivates you to improve your speaking skills?
4. How do you keep yourself motivated?
5. How does your teacher motivate you to speak English?
6. What are the difficulties you face while you are trying to improve your speaking skills? How do you solve those problems?
7. What are other factors that help improve your speaking skills?
8. What activities do you think can help you improve your speaking skills?
9. What activities does your teacher use to help you improve your speaking skills?
10. Do you think pair-work and group work help you improve your speaking? How?
11. What should other students do in order to improve their speaking skills?
12. As a student, do you think what teachers should do in order to help students improve their speaking skills?