



## The 8<sup>th</sup> Graders' Perspectives on Speaking Problems in EFL Classrooms: A Study at the Asian High School - Cao Thang Campus

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**Abstract:** Speaking is considered one of the most significant macro skills in the process of language acquisition. In ELF classrooms, however, this skill is likely to be ignored, which may cause ELF learners confusion and problems when learning it. The present study aimed to explore English speaking problems perceived by the 8<sup>th</sup> graders at The Asian High School (AHS). A quantitative study was conducted with the participation of 80 students who are in grade 8. In addition, the quantitative data collected from the questionnaire were processed by SPSS (19.0). The findings showed that most of students "agreed" that they faced some speaking problems. Specifically, the most dominant problems included lack of vocabulary and motivation, mispronunciation, uninteresting topics, the curriculum limitation, large class size and the unsuitable organization of tables and chairs. Finally, it is recommended that further research should investigate the speaking strategies that the students have unconsciously used to deal with the speaking problems, explore the differences in terms of speaking problems encountered and strategies used between proficient learners and non-proficient learners, and elaborately examine the links between the specific speaking problems and the specific speaking strategies.

**Keywords:** English speaking skill, problems, suggested solutions, Vietnamese EFL context

**Abbreviations:** AHS: The Asian High School, EFL: English as a Foreign Language

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Speaking is one of the most important skills in English language learning because it plays an essential role in making connection among people. Being good at speaking is not easy because it requires learners to be good at other skills and aspects of English including pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension. Efrizal (2012) says that speaking is a means of communication that helps people interact and understand one another through daily conversations. As the same concern on this view, Ur (1996) suggests that among the four English skills, speaking is the most major one because it is the best means of communication that effectively connects people together. Speaking is considered a contributing factor that helps students develop other skills including vocabulary, grammar and writing (Ur, 1996). Students can express their ideas, talk together in daily conversations, discuss, and show the different functions of language (Baker & Westrup, 2003). In brief, good English speaking learners will have many chances for good education, seeking for jobs or gaining promotion (Baker & Westrup, 2003).

Although speaking is considered a significant aspect in the process of learning a language, it has been likely to be neglected so far. In fact, students have been facing a lot of difficulties while learning speaking in the classrooms. In the past, students were required to remember as many words as possible and master grammar in order to pass the English tests with flying colors. However, according to the current trend, when more and more foreigners immigrate to Vietnam, the target of learning English is not only to read and write, but also to communicate verbally. To (2006) defines that in order for students to achieve the purpose of listening and speaking in the process of studying English, teachers' teaching methods are immensely influential. However, some teachers still apply the

traditional teaching methods such as grammar- translation, teacher-centered, book-based, and driven-exam (Le & Barnard, 2009; Tomlison & Bao, 2004; Le, 2002; Liu & Littlewood, 1997). This means that speaking has been mostly excluded from the lessons as well as the tests. With this way of teaching, students will successfully complete the course but fail to communicate effectively in real-life conversations (To, 2006).

As for the 8<sup>th</sup> graders at AIS, it is not an exception. Although students have been studying in an international environment, they have suffered from plenty of troubles while learning English skills, specially speaking. Being aware of the situation, the author wanted to conduct this study to learn about speaking problems perceived by 8<sup>th</sup> graders at The Asian High School (AHS). Therefore, the two research questions are formulated as follows:

**Research question 1:** What are the speaking problems perceived by the 8<sup>th</sup> graders at The Asian High School, Cao Thang Campus??

**Research question 2:** To what extent do the students agree or disagree with the factors making speaking difficult for them?

## **2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

Based on the aforementioned reasons and the reality of teaching and learning English speaking at The Asian High School (hereafter AHS), the author conducted a study with the aim of allowing AHS students at Cao Thang Campus to share what English speaking problems they have faced while learning speaking in the classroom.

## **3. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Factors making learning speaking difficult includes lack of motivation, lack of confidence, lack of vocabulary, teaching curriculum, learning environment, and teaching methods.

### **3.1. Lack of Motivation**

Garnder (1985) defines that motivation refers to the combination of effort and desire to achieve the goal of learning a language plus favorable attitudes towards that language. It means that if learners must speak a foreign language in the wide range of social situations or to fulfill professional ambitions, they will perceive the importance of being proficient in that language and will, therefore, be motivated to practice saying it (Garnder, 1985). Moreover, Babu (2010) argues that lack of motivation in learning is the cause leading to the unwillingness to speak in classrooms. He says that the teachers' demotivating behavior and unsupportive management also contribute to reduce students' motivation to speak up (Babu, 2010).

### **3.2. Lack of Confidence**

Harmer (2004) states that students are often unconfident when they convey, share or express their ideas in front of their teachers and classmates. They prefer to keep silent because they are afraid of losing face in front of the class when speaking incorrectly. Tsui(as cited in Nunan, 1999)says that students who suffer from a lack of confidence will lead to the fear in communication.

### **3.3. Lack of Vocabulary**

According to Schmitt (2010), vocabulary is considered an indispensable component in the process of learning speaking skill. Khan (2005) defines that the problems of using the words when communicating is a common matter for students who learn a new language. In addition, in the real communication, attention is much paid to the contents instead of grammar. It is very easy for students to express their idea using the mother tongue; however, they get confused when they are asked to convey their opinion using the target language. Since they not know how to choose and combine the word properly.

### **3.4. Teaching Curriculum**

Another factor causing speaking problems is the teaching curriculum. Olson (1997) suggests that training programs and materials are the important parts to attract students' interests in learning. Moreover, the training programs need to satisfy students' needs. For instance, they are expected to make students feel that they are making progress, they have chances to orally interact with the

classmates and they can control their language pace. According to the context in Vietnam, speaking activities are not enough provided in English textbooks and curriculums while there are too many exercises referring to grammar, reading and writing. Sharing this view, Gan (2012) indicates that one of causes inhibiting learners from being proficient in speaking English is that communicative skills are not much focus in the curriculum.

### **3.5. Learning Environment**

Another constraint regarding the learning environment is also a contributing factor that negatively affects language learners. Concerning the mother tongue, Harmer (1991) and Ur (1996) suggest that language learners who share the same native language have a tendency to use their mother tongue to communicate in English classrooms because it is more convenience for them to exchange ideas, especially when discussing new speaking topics. Furthermore, learners would like teachers to use mother tongue to teach and explain rather than English (Harmer, 1991). Additionally, class size is considered a major factor that can positively and negatively affect students' learning outcomes for speaking. Furthermore, the organization of the tables and chairs could negatively influence the outcomes of the speaking lesson. More than that, teachers can not cover all of the students and ask them to speak in front of the class within a short period of time (Vo, Pham & Ho, 2018).

### **3.6. Teaching Method**

Teachers' teaching methods exert the considerable influences on the students' learning outcomes (Williams, 2011). Furthermore, that the speaking activities have been skipped is blamed for the insufficiency of time for a teaching period (Rababa'ah, 2005).

Another reason related to teaching methods is that teachers do not introduce interesting topics to students. The topics for discussion must be authentic and interesting enough to catch the student interest to speak (Bachman & Palmer, 1990).

Another factor regarding feedback during the speaking activities, Harmer (1991) says that during the process of speaking lessons, students are sure to make mistakes. Thus, they expect their teachers to give feedback on the mistakes they have made. However, this method does not apply very often (Harmer, 1991). Noticeably, it is better to give comments after students finish speaking because if they are interrupted and corrected many times while speaking, they may feel pressured and become afraid of speaking (Baker & Westrup, 2003).

## **4. PREVIOUS STUDIES**

There are some studies which have investigated speaking problems encountered by EFL learners as follows.

MacIntyre, Clement, Dornyei and Noels (1998) studied the effects of lack of confidence on speaking performance. The result showed that self- confidence was an essential component for learners to communicate effectively. Park and Lee (2005) also examined that the relationship between language learners and internal influences including anxiety and self-confidence on oral performance. Therefore, they concluded that if language learners wanted to communicate better, they needed to be more confident. A study by Gan (2012) on speaking difficulties that English majored students in Hong Kong have encountered reported other deciding factors causing speaking difficulties including lacking of vocabulary, grammar-based approach and constraints regarding in-class speaking opportunities and out-of-class English speaking environment. In addition, another study was conducted at six Jordanian public universities to learn about the problems that students faced in speaking classes. The study found some problems including lack of time to speak, lack of opportunities to practice and especially crowded classes (Al- Jamal, 2014). Izadi (2015) concluded that mother tongue, linguistic problems, negative emotions and opportunities to speak English were the key factors making speaking difficult for Iranian learners of English. Lack of speaking activities in textbooks, insufficiency of the English teaching periods and the syllabus which do not satisfy the learners' communicative needs are significant reasons that negatively affect students' improvement in speaking skills (Ambu & Saidi, 1997). Ali and Savas (2013) found that students always felt nervous about learning speaking English. They were in lack of motivation. Besides, many students thought that they were incapable of learning a foreign language. Only few students felt that they had ability to learn English. In the same vein,

In the context of Vietnam, Le (2011) concentrated on challenges that students faced in speaking skill. The main factors emerged from the findings were learning styles, speaking anxiety and language proficiency, lecturers' issues namely teaching methodology and teaching facilities. Moreover, Ngo (2011) also found that speaking difficulties might be resulted from the factors regarding psychology, linguistic features and social- culture. Vo, Pham, and Ho (2018) conducted to study in order to investigate the challenges to speaking skill encountered by English majored students at one university in Mekong Delta Region. The study was carried out with the participation of 113 students answering the questionnaire. The findings revealed that speaking challenges resulted from both external and internal factors. Internal factors included lack of vocabulary, basic knowledge, speaking strategies, speaking anxiety, and motivation. External factors regarding speaking environment, and extracurricular activities were identified the dominant reasons for speaking challenges.

## **5. METHODOLOGY**

This study employed the quantitative research method to find out the problems perceived by the 8<sup>th</sup> graders in the process of learning English speaking skill in EFL classrooms. According to Bryman (2001), the numbers or figures collected in quantitative research are important for data analysis in scientific research. An important factor of this research method is that in the data collection process, the author can combine the description and analytical summary to interpret the results (Smith, 1994).

### **5.1. Participants**

This study was carried out with the participation of eight students who are in grade 8 at The Asian High School, at Cao Thang Campus (35 females and 45 males). Moreover, their age ranged from eleven to fifteen.

### **5.2. Instruments**

The questionnaire in the present study was adapted from the study of Vo, Pham, and Ho (2018). The reason for this choice was because the author has realized that the questionnaire employed in this study has had most of the features in common with the literature that the author reviewed.

The questionnaire of this study consists of four parts. In part I, there are three questions regarding students' demographics including gender, and age range. Part II refers to factors making speaking difficult for the students. Part II includes seventeen items which are grouped into four main categories: 5 items about speakers, 4 items about teaching methods, 4 items related to curriculum, and 4 items about in-class learning environment. In order to answer part II, students were asked to choose the appropriate level for five closed-ended items designed in 5-points Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). The questionnaire was translated into Vietnamese in order that the participants could clearly understand the questions.

### **5.3. Data Collection and Analysis Procedures**

Participants answered the questionnaire in 10 minutes without prior preparation. 80 Vietnamese questionnaires were administered to the 8<sup>th</sup> graders in the break-time. The class teacher and the author directly guided and helped participants to complete the questionnaire.

SPSS 19.0 was employed to process the data. Descriptive statistics results in terms of percentage were produced to explore the students' perspectives on problems of speaking English.

## **6. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **6.1. Problems Related to the Speaker**

The questionnaire data analysis in terms of percentage (hereafter P) for the first theme including five items in order to investigate the 8<sup>th</sup> graders' perspectives on the speaking difficulties related to the speaker was presented in Table 1.

**Table1:** Results of Problems Related to the Speaker (n=80)

| No | Items   | Strongly disagree | Disagree    | Neutral     | Agree                     | Strongly Agree |
|----|---|-------------------|-------------|-------------|---------------------------|----------------|
| 1  | I cannot express my ideas because my vocabulary is limited. | 27<br>33.8%       |             | 20<br>25.0% | <b>33</b><br><b>41.3%</b> |                |
|    |   | 3<br>3.8%         | 24<br>30.0% |             | 22<br>27.5%               | 11<br>13.8%    |

|   |  |                           |             |                           |
|---|--|---------------------------|-------------|---------------------------|
| 2 | I do not know English speaking strategies.   | <b>65</b><br><b>81.3%</b> | 8<br>10.0%  | 7<br>8.8%                 |
|   |  | 36<br>45.0%               | 29<br>36.3% | 5<br>6.3%                 |
| 3 | I am unmotivated to speak English with my classmates.                                | <b>55</b><br><b>68.8%</b> | 7<br>8.8%   | 18<br>22.5%               |
|   |  | 28<br>35.0%               | 27<br>33.8% | 12<br>15.0%               |
| 4 | I am afraid of being criticized and losing face when speaking in front of the class. | 16<br>20.0%               | 28<br>35.0% | <b>36</b><br><b>45.0%</b> |
|   |  | 4<br>5.0%                 | 12<br>15.0% | 24<br>30.0%               |
| 5 | I mispronounce many words.   | 28<br>35.0%               | 20<br>25.0% | <b>32</b><br><b>40.0%</b> |
|   |  | 6<br>7.5%                 | 22<br>27.5% | 24<br>30.0%               |

According to Table 1, most of the participant agreed that vocabulary was a main factor strongly affecting their speaking performances because their vocabulary was limited, they failed to express their ideas (item 1, P=41.3%). Similarly, nearly half of the participants agreed that since they were afraid of being criticized and losing face when speaking in front of the class, they were not confident in speaking (item 4, P=45.0%). In a same vein, mispronunciation was also considered another factor causing speaking problems perceived by most of the students (item 5, P=40.0%). However, English speaking strategies were not judged to be the contributing factor causing speaking problems perceived by over two-thirds of the participants (item 2, P=81.3%). Likewise, that the students were not motivated in learning speaking was not the big problems leading to the failure of speaking (item 3, P=68.8%).

In conclusion, table 1 shows that lack of vocabulary, mispronunciation and speaking anxiety were considered the main factors making speaking difficult for the students, whereas speaking strategies and motivation were not judged to be the deciding factors responsible for speaking problems. This finding is in line with the previous studies in some aspects. Firstly, lack of vocabulary led to the failure of speaking (Gan, 2012; Izadi, 2015; Le, 2011; Vo, Pham & Ho, 2018). Secondly, that students mispronounced English words made the listeners fail to understand what they wanted to express (Le, 2011; Ngo, 2011; Vo, Pham, & Ho, 2018). Thirdly, speaking apprehension was the key factor that negatively affected students' speaking performances (Park & Lee, 2005; Le, 2011; Ngo, 2011; Vo, Pham, & Ho, 2018).

However, this finding of the study does not agree with the findings in the studies of Ali and Savas, (2013), Izadi (2015), and Vo, Pham, and Ho (2018) who found that motivation was an important component for the effectiveness in learning speaking skill. Moreover, the present study found that speaking strategies were not considered important in the speaking learning process by the students. This finding is not in agreement with the finding of Vo, Pham, and Ho (2018) who concluded that speaking strategies contributed to the success in speaking.

## **6.2. Problems Related to Teaching Methods**

The questionnaire data analysis in terms of percentage (hereafter P), for the second theme including four items (from 6 to 9) in order to investigate the 8<sup>th</sup> graders' perspectives on the speaking difficulties related to the teaching methods was presented in Table 2.

**Table2: Results of Problems Related to Teaching Methods (n=80)**

| No | Items   | Strongly disagree         | Disagree    | Neutral                   | Agree       | Strongly Agree |
|----|---|---------------------------|-------------|---------------------------|-------------|----------------|
| 6  | Teachers do not focus on teaching speaking skill.         | <b>40</b><br><b>50.0%</b> | 33<br>41.3% | 7<br>8.8%                 | 7<br>8.8%   | 0<br>0%        |
|    |   | 14<br>17.5%               | 26<br>32.5% |                           |             |                |
| 7  | Speaking topics introduced by teachers are uninteresting. | 16<br>20.0%               | 28<br>35.0% | <b>36</b><br><b>45.0%</b> | 24<br>30.0% | 12<br>15.0%    |
|    |   | 4<br>5.0%                 | 12<br>15.0% |                           |             |                |



|   |   |                           |             |             |             |             |
|---|---|---------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 8 | Teachers ignore student's speaking mistakes.            | <b>35</b><br><b>43.8%</b> |             | 30<br>37.5% | 15<br>18.8% |             |
|   |   | 11<br>13.8%               | 24<br>30.0% |             | 5<br>6.3%   | 10<br>12.5% |
| 9 | Teachers use more Vietnamese than English in classroom. | <b>53</b><br><b>66.3%</b> |             | 17<br>21.3% | 10<br>12.5% |             |
|   |   | 16<br>20.0%               | 37<br>46.3% |             | 8<br>10.0%  | 2<br>2.5%   |

As presented in Table 2, 45.0% of students agreed that the topics given by teachers were not interesting, that led to the students' unwillingness to participate in the speaking activities (item 7). However, half of the participants disagreed with the statement that the teachers did not focus on teaching speaking (item 6, P=50%). It is understandable that speaking has been separately taught from other skills at AIS, so some students were consciously aware of this, some were not. In the nature of item6, 43.8% of the participants "disagreed" with the ideas that teachers did not correct mistakes (item 8) and 66.3% of them did not agree with the idea that teachers spoke more mother tongue than English in class (item 9).

In conclusion, uninteresting topics were considered the main factor causing speaking problems for the students, whereas teaching methods, feedback and correction, and use of mother tongue in class were not judged to be the most significant factors leading to speaking problems. The result of the present study is in line with that of previous study by Bachman and Palmer (1996) who concluded that one thing encouraging students to get involved in speaking activities in class was about interesting topics. It means that uninteresting topics made students feel bored and unwilling to join the speaking activities. However, the present finding seems to be not consistent with other research which found that teachers' teaching methods strongly affected students' speaking performances and may create a barrier leading to failure of speaking (Le, 2011; William, 2011). Similarly, the present result does not agree with the findings of Izadi (2015) and Harmer (1991) about the ideas that teachers used more the mother tongue to teach and explain rather than English in EFL speaking classes. It can be explained that AHS is an international university, so all the teachers are required to use 100% English while they are teaching in English classes.

### 6.3. Problems Related to Teaching Curriculum

The questionnaire data analysis in terms of percentage (hereafter P), for the third theme including four items (from 10 to 13) in order to investigate the 8<sup>th</sup> graders' perspectives on the speaking difficulties related to the curriculum/syllabus was presented in Table 3.

**Table3:** Results of Problems Related to the Curriculum/Syllabus (n=80)

| No | Items  | Strongly disagree         | Disagree    | Neutral     | Agree                     | Strongly Agree |
|----|--|---------------------------|-------------|-------------|---------------------------|----------------|
| 10 | Teaching curriculum limits learners' English speaking practice in class. | 16<br>20.0%               |             | 28<br>35.0% | <b>36</b><br><b>45.0%</b> |                |
|    |  | 4<br>5.0%                 | 12<br>15.0% |             | 24<br>30.0%               | 12<br>15.0%    |
| 11 | The textbooks do not provide enough English speaking activities.         | <b>43</b><br><b>53.8%</b> |             | 18<br>22.5% | 19<br>23.8%               |                |
|    |  | 9<br>11.3%                | 34<br>42.5% |             | 15<br>18.8%               | 4<br>5.0%      |
| 12 | Students' speaking competence is not regularly assessed.                 | 28<br>35.0%               |             | 20<br>25.0% | <b>32</b><br><b>40.0%</b> |                |
|    |  | 6<br>7.5%                 | 22<br>27.5% |             | 24<br>30.0%               | 8<br>10.0%     |
| 13 | Speaking is separately taught from other skills.                         | <b>43</b><br><b>53.8%</b> |             | 18<br>22.5% | 19<br>23.8%               |                |
|    |  | 9<br>11.3%                | 34<br>42.5% |             | 15<br>18.8%               | 4<br>5.0%      |

As can be seen from the data in Table 3, nearly half of the students agreed that they did not have opportunities to practice in class and that was the main cause leading to the failure in speaking (items 10, P=45.0%). Moreover, students "agreed" they could not improve their speaking skill because their

speaking competence was not regularly assessed (item 12, P= 40.0%). Therefore, they may not know their strengths and weaknesses in order to remedy. On the contrary, more than half of participants disagreed with the factor that textbooks did not provide enough speaking activities (item 11, P=53.8%). Likewise, that speaking was separately taught from other skills was not a determining factor making speaking challenging (item 13, P=53.8%).

In sum, other important findings were that many students admitted that their English speaking skill was not regularly assessed and the curriculum did not allow them to do enough speaking practices in class. These findings were also found in previous studies including the studies of Gan (2012), and Ali and Savas (2013). Moreover, the findings of the present study are similar with the results of the study of Vo, Pham, and Ho (2018) who found that speaking skill which was separately taught from other language skills was not the highlighted factor leading to speaking difficulties. However, the findings do not absolutely agree with the previous research by Ngo (2011) who found that most of the participants considered a lack of speaking activities in the textbooks as the decisive factor leading to the failure in speaking.

#### **6.4. Problems Related to In-Class Learning Environment**

The questionnaire data analysis in terms of percentage (hereafter P), for the third theme including four items (from 14 to 17) in order to investigate the 8<sup>th</sup> graders' perspectives on the speaking difficulties related to the in-class learning environment was presented in Table 4.

**Table4:** Results of Problems Related to the In-class Learning Environment (n=80)

| No | Items   | Strongly disagree         | Disagree    | Neutral     | Agree                     | Strongly Agree |
|----|---|---------------------------|-------------|-------------|---------------------------|----------------|
| 14 | The number of native teachers is limited.   | <b>37</b><br><b>46.3%</b> |             | 31<br>38.8% | 12<br>15.1%               |                |
|    |   | 10<br>12.5%               | 27<br>33.8% |             | 7<br>8.8%                 | 5<br>6.3%      |
| 15 | Speaking classes are only for good students, not weak students.   | <b>65</b><br><b>81.3%</b> |             | 8<br>10.0%  | 7<br>8.8%                 |                |
|    |   | 36<br>45.0%               | 29<br>36.3% |             | 5<br>6.3%                 | 2<br>2.5%      |
| 16 | The speaking class size is quite large.   | 27<br>33.8%               |             | 20<br>25.0% | <b>33</b><br><b>41.3%</b> |                |
|    |   | 3<br>3.8%                 | 24<br>30.0% |             | 22<br>27.5%               | 11<br>13.8%    |
| 17 | The arrangement of tables and chairs in class prevents students from joining interactive speaking activities. | 16<br>20.0%               |             | 28<br>35.0% | <b>36</b><br><b>45.0%</b> |                |
|    |   | 4<br>5.0%                 | 12<br>15.0% |             | 24<br>30.0%               | 12<br>15.0%    |

According to statistics displayed in Table 4, a big class (item 16) and the arrangements of tables and chairs (item 17) were considered crucial factors causing speaking problems by many students, 41.3% for item 16 and 45.0% for item 17 respectively. Nevertheless, that the shortage in number of native teachers was not considered a key factor for speaking difficulties by 46.3% of the participants (item 14). Understandingly, AHS is an international school which may have enough native teachers to teach English. In a same vein, over two-thirds of the students expressed their disagreement on the factor that speaking classes were offered to good students only, not weak students (item 15, P=81.3%).

In summary, class sizes and classroom arrangement were significant causes leading to speaking difficulties while a shortage of native teachers and pessimistic idea about the focus of a speaking class were not factors that make students fail to speak. The findings of other studies by Al-Jamal (2014) and Gan (2012) revealed the similar results with that of the current study regarding class size and English speaking environment in class. When class sizes were large, and the layout of tables and chairs was not suitable, students were prevented from joining interactive speaking activities. Nevertheless, the findings did not corroborate ideas of Vo, Pham, and Ho (2018) who found that external factors regarding limits of native teachers and pessimistic idea about the focus of speaking classes were identified the dominate reasons for speaking challenges.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

### **7.1. Summary of the Research Findings**

The investigation was carried out with an attempt to figure out current barriers in speaking skill that the 8<sup>th</sup> graders at AHS, Cao Thang Campus have encountered. The results have shown that the 8<sup>th</sup> graders did not encounter many problems while learning speaking in the classrooms. Nevertheless, according to the data presented in the above section, factors related to the speaker was identified as the main cause of difficulties in speaking skill, namely limited vocabulary, anxiety about being criticized and losing face when speaking in front of the class, and mispronunciation. In addition, the top five most common problems perceived by the students were about uninteresting topics, teaching curriculum, large class size, and the organization of tables and chairs.

### **7.2. Pedagogical Implications**

#### *7.2.1. For Students*

It is suggested that students should equip themselves with vocabulary in different fields of knowledge through reading and listening practices using different kinds of topics. By using different resources and ways to practice English, students could enhance their language knowledge in terms of vocabulary and linguistic features. Moreover, it is better for students to do listening practices not beyond their English levels in order to imitate the pronunciation as well as the intonation of the native speakers.

#### *7.2.2. For teachers*

It is recommended that teachers should help students to be aware of the rules of pronunciation in order to help them pronounce words intelligibly. Teachers should create a learning environment which makes all students comfortable to speak. When students are provided with everything they need about the topics in order to produce some speaking, they will be willing to share their ideas confidently. Teachers should give students more assignments on speaking after class and strictly check and assess how well they complete their work.

One of the useful ways to promote oral communication is to provide students with opportunities to participate in the speaking activities with interesting topics. Thus, it is suggested that teachers' teaching methods should be flexible in choosing speaking topics to engage students to get involved in the speaking activities. Furthermore, speaking activities should be provided based on the student's needs. In addition, teachers should create good atmosphere at the beginning of class for the students, especially young students, because they will not be willing to communicate if they don't feel comfortable. More speaking tasks should be designed in order to arouse students' interest. These tasks not only test the students' speaking but also encourage them to unconsciously use various types of speaking strategies so as to obtain the maximum benefits in doing their activities. Importantly, the curriculum should be designed in an synthesized way among the four English skills in which speaking can be integrated with other skills, i.e. before listening, reading, or writing, it can be speaking. What is more, time allotted for speaking lessons should be expanded more to allow all students to have opportunities to speak. Finally, teachers should actively arrange tables and chairs to allow students to work in groups or to take part in class seminars.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

It would be worthwhile to investigate the speaking strategies that the students have unconsciously used to deal with the speaking problems. Moreover, further research in this field would be great help in investigating the differences in terms of speaking problems encountered and strategies used between proficient learners and non-proficient learners. Finally, further work needs to elaborately examine the links between the specific speaking problems and the specific speaking strategies.

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**APPENDIX**

**Questionnaire**

Dear student,

I am conducting a study entitled: *“The 8<sup>th</sup> graders’ perspectives on English speaking problems in EFL classrooms: A Study at The Asian High School – Cao Thang Campus”* which is the most important part of my thesis for the degree of Bachelor in English. Your contribution will be a great help to my research. There are no right or wrong answers to this questionnaire. Your personal information will be kept confidential and anonymous. Please kindly take some time to honestly complete this questionnaire.

**Part1: Personal Information**

*Please put the mark (X) in the place that suits your case:*

- 1) Gender:      male            female
- 2) Age range:  11-15        over 15

**Part2: English Speaking Problems Perceived by the 8<sup>th</sup> Graders in EFL Classrooms**

*Please indicate your opinion after each statement by putting (X) in the box which best expresses your perspective*

**Problems Related to the Students**

| 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree;<br>3 = Neutral; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| I find English speaking difficult because...                                       |  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1  | I cannot express my ideas because my vocabulary is limited.                          |   |   |   |   |   |
| 2  | I do not know English speaking strategies.   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 3  | I am unmotivated to speak English with my classmates.                                |   |   |   |   |   |
| 4  | I am afraid of being criticized and losing face when speaking in front of the class. |   |   |   |   |   |
| 5  | I mispronounce many words.   |   |   |   |   |   |

**Problems Related to Teaching Methods**

| 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree;<br>3 = neutral; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| When learning speaking skills, I find that...                                      |  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6  | Teachers do not focus on teaching speaking skill.            |   |   |   |   |   |
| 7  | Speaking topics introduced by teachers are uninteresting.    |   |   |   |   |   |
| 8  | Teachers ignore student’s speaking mistakes.                 |   |   |   |   |   |
| 9  | Teachers use more Vietnamese than English in the classrooms. |   |   |   |   |   |

**Problems Related to Curriculum/Syllabus**

| 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree;<br>3 = neutral; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| When learning speaking skills, I find that...                                      |  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10   | Teaching curriculum limits learners’ English speaking practice in class. |   |   |   |   |   |
| 11   | The textbooks do not provide enough English speaking activities.         |   |   |   |   |   |
| 12   | Students’ speaking competence is not regularly assessed.                 |   |   |   |   |   |
| 13   | Speaking is separately taught from other skills.                         |   |   |   |   |   |

**Problems Related to In-Class Learning Environment**

| 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree;<br>3 = neutral; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree                               |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| I find that ...  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14 The number of native teachers is limited.   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 15 Speaking classes are only for good students, not weak students.   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 16 The speaking class size is quite large.   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 17 The arrangement of tables and chairs in class prevents students from joining interactive speaking activities. |   |   |   |   |   |

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