

## **Police Cadets' speaking competence in English**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Teaching of ESP has been applied for a long time and has become an important subject in the training program at universities and colleges to meet the needs of improving the learners' expertise. Police Cadets are aware of the essential role of English in their future jobs. In the future, students in People's police College II can work as polices working in various areas in nationwide, so it is necessary for them to use English to manage or work with foreigners. They need English to communicate with foreigners to find out their problems and then help them to take care of their easy life in Vietnam. Through teaching and observing them during a semester, the author see how their speaking English competence is as well as see what their problems are when they speak English in classroom.

**KEYWORDS:** Police Cadets, speaking competence, English

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

English for specific purposes (ESP) has been developed worldwide since the 1960s and it is receiving a lot of attention, especially in colleges and universities. In different countries, the specialized English also develops at different levels. In Vietnam, teaching of ESP has been applied for a long time and has become an important subject in the training program at universities and colleges to meet the needs of improving the learners' expertise. However, according to Vietnam Department of Higher Education, teaching and learning English for specific purposes in Vietnam are still ineffective and has not met the society's needs. Along with that trend of development, ESP has also been taught and studied at People's police College II in order to equip students with professional knowledge in English, meeting the professional needs, as well as the needs of communication, information exchange, study, research or working.

Regarding Police Cadets in particular, they are aware of the essential role of English in their future jobs. In the future, students in People's police College II can work as polices working in various areas in nationwide, so it is necessary for them to use English to manage or work with foreigners. They need English to communicate with foreigners to find out their problems and then help them to take care of their easy life in Vietnam. Furthermore, English language is one of their most valuable resources in the labor market. Practically, the better Police Cadets in the college can use English, specially ESP, the more opportunities they will have to apply for their job. In reality, most of them are not good at English. They learn English because it is one of the modules in the training program. They sometimes feel afraid of learning English, they also feel shy when their lecturers ask them to practice speaking English, they seem not to want to actively participate in English classes and seem not to want to give the contribution to the classes. Therefore, this paper makes an effort to find out the practice and the reasons underlying the possible issues in learning English speaking in ESP classrooms.

### **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Hymes (1971) believes that EFL learners need to know not only the linguistic knowledge, but also the culturally acceptable ways of interacting with others in different situations and relationships. According to Hymes's belief, communicative competence is concerned both how grammar/lexis is managed and the socio-cultural rules of appropriate language use. Canale and Swain (1980) suggest that communicative competence consist of four components: (1) Linguistic competence (knowing how to use the grammar, syntax and vocabulary of a language). (2) Sociolinguistic competence (knowing how to use and respond to language appropriately, given the setting, the topic, and the relationships among the people communicating). (3) Discourse competence (knowing how to interpret the larger context and how to construct longer stretches of language so that the parts make up a coherent whole). (4) Strategic competence (knowing how to recognize and repair communication breakdowns, how to work around gaps in one's knowledge of the language, and how to learn more about the language in the context).

These components reflect the use of linguistic system and the functional aspects of communication. Probably the most difficult competence to acquire is sociolinguistic which is concerned with choosing the right

words for the situation. Sociolinguistic competence differentiates between a good speaker and a native-like speaker. This aspect often differs greatly from culture to culture and errors can often make a speaker sound rude, arrogant or just strange. This definition of communicative competence has become canonical in applied linguistics. However, not everyone agrees with it. Some linguists see lexical and grammatical competence as separate components whereas discourse and strategic competences are considered as subsections of sociolinguistic competence. Table 2.1 below summarizes some components of communicative competence.

Table 1: Components of Communicative Competence

Grammatical competence (Linguistic competence)	- The ability to use and understand English language structures including grammar, vocabulary, sounds, pronunciation, intonation, and stress accurately and immediately, which facilitates the fluency.
Discourse competence	- The rules of cohesion and coherence are very important in each discourse, whether formal or informal to hold the communication together in a meaningful way.
Sociolinguistic Factors	To enable learners to use target language which is socially and culturally acceptable by native users. To speak effectively and appropriately, EFL learners should: - know both the knowledge of language and the culture of the native speakers. - figure out the sociolinguistic sides of language which help them distinguish appropriate comments, how to ask questions during interaction, and how to respond nonverbally according to the aim of the talk.
Strategic competence	- the ability of appropriate use of language in order to achieve "communicative goals". - the ability to know when and how to take a conversation, how to keep the conversation going, how to terminate the conversation and how to clear up communication breakdown as well as comprehension problems. - the ability to make up for faulty knowledge of linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse rules.
Interaction	Spoken language usually has two functions: interactional and transactional. Much of our daily communication are interactional in order to keep social relationships and to pass information and ideas.

Source: Scarcella & Oxford (1992), Richards & Renandya (2002), Berns (1990), Rivers (1987)

In speaking competence, Febriyanti (2011) believes that speaking is one of the most substantial and essential skills that must be practiced at regular intervals to communicate orally. The mastery of speaking skills is a priority for many ESL and EFL learners. Learners often assess their success in language learning of English on the basis of their improvement in speaking the language. Richards (2008) states when people meet, they exchange greetings, engage in small talk, recount recent experiences, and so on, because they wish to be friendly and to establish a comfortable zone of interaction with others. This indicates that speaking fluently or being good in oral communication is a core aspect of human to stay connected to each other. Since language is an instrument of communication, there is no excuse for a language learner for not being able to speak the language learnt. Having the same idea, Yan (2007, cited in Al-Saqri, 2014) asserts that the target of learning English is to communicate with others. To achieve this, it is important to increase the students' self-confidence in the skills of speaking to support and stimulate them to be more willing to translate their ideas in the second language. Yan concludes that fluency and accuracy should be integrated within activities in the classroom. Moreover, according to Marriam, Muhammad, & Ashiq (2011), speaking ability is regarded as the measure of knowing a language. They regard speaking as the most significant skill they can obtain. Wallace (1978, p. 98) states that oral practice (speaking) becomes meaningful to students when they have to pay attention to what they are saying. Thus, the students can learn better on how to require the ability to converse or to express their ideas fluently with precise vocabularies and good or acceptable pronunciation.

In English for Specific Purposes (ESP), there are a lot of definitions of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) that have been suggested by the researchers in language. According to McDonough (1984), ESP was defined as "courses where the syllabus and materials are determined in all essentials by the prior analysis of the communication needs of the learner" (p. 3) and ESP was a kind of teaching activity with its own range of "emphases and priorities" (p. 4). Lorenzo (2005) has defined that ESP focuses more at the contextual situation rather than on teaching and learning of grammatical structures and rules of language (p.1). Robinson's (1991) definition of ESP is based on two assumptions: that ESP is normally "goal-directed", and that ESP courses are developed from a need analysis. The need analysis determines students' goals with respect to their English language abilities and the courses are developed based upon this, creating a homogenous classroom. Dudley

Evans and Johns (1991) have claimed that ESP is “the careful research and design of pedagogical materials and activities for an identifiable group of adult learners within a specific learning context” (p. 298). Hutchinson and Waters (1992) defined English for Specific Purposes (ESP) as a language learning approach based on learners’ needs. They have rationalized that ESP is an approach and not a product, in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner’s reason for learning.

Strevens (1988) defines ESP by identifying its absolute and variable characteristics. His definition makes a distinction between four absolute and two variable characteristics. Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) have suggested several similar ESP absolute characteristics, however, the variable characteristics are different. Table 2.5 below presents the characteristics of ESP according to two groups of researchers, one is Strevens (1988) and the other is Dudley-Evans and St John (1998, p. 4-5).

Table 2. The characteristics of ESP

Characteristics of ESP	Strevens (1988)	Dudley-Evans and St John (1998)
Absolute characteristics	<p>ESP consists of English language teaching which is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) designed to meet specified needs of the learners</li> <li>(2) related in content (i.e. in its themes and topics) to particular disciplines, occupations and activities;</li> <li>(3) centred on the language appropriate to those activities in syntax, lexis, discourse, semantics, etc., and analysis of this discourse;</li> <li>(4) in contrast with General English.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) ESP meets specific purposes of the learners</li> <li>(2) ESP makes use of underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves;</li> <li>(3) centered on the language appropriate to these activities in terms of grammar, lexis, register, study skills, discourse and genre.</li> </ul>
Variable characteristics	<p>ESP may be, but is not necessarily:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) restricted as to the language skills to be learned (e.g. reading only);</li> <li>(2) not taught according to any pre-ordained methodology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) ESP may be related to or designed for specific disciplines;</li> <li>(2) ESP may use, in specific teaching situations, a different methodology from that of general English;</li> <li>(3) ESP is likely to be designed for adult learners, either at a tertiary level institution or in a professional work situation. It could, however, be for learners at secondary school level. However, in some cases, ESP is also designed for high school students;</li> <li>(4) ESP is generally designed for intermediate or advanced students,</li> <li>(5) Most ESP courses assume some basic knowledge of the language system, but it can be used with beginners.</li> </ul>

Source: Strevens (1988), Dudley-Evans and St John (1998)

### III. METHODOLOGY

Research questions:

- 1) How is the practice of English speaking in ESP classroom for Police Cadets at People’s Police College?
- 2) What are causes of problems in their speaking competence?

Population

The population for the study consisted of 25 police cadets. They are all males. They are between the age of 18 and 22. All of them came from different areas in Vietnam.

Instrument

The author observed them during a semester that the author directly taught them and evaluated objectively with purposeful criteria.

#### IV. RESULTS

1) How is the practice of English speaking in ESP classroom for students at People's Police College?

Table 3. Speaking English competence

No.	Speaking English Competence	Percentages	Participants
1	Speak simple words	100%	N =25
2	Speak simple phrases	100%	
3	Speak simple sentences	100%	
4	Speak complex sentences	40%	
5	Understand simple words	100%	
6	Understand simple phrases	100%	
7	Understand simple sentences	100%	
8	Understand complex sentences	36%	
9	Use ESP words in communication	60%	
10	Communicate in ESP contexts	44%	

Through classroom speaking English activities and interactions, the author found that all of them understood and completely used basic words, phrases, and sentences. However, when using in complex levels, they found it difficult to understand and use, especially they hardly spoke English completely in ESP situations. 60% of the class could not speak English in complex sentences and 64% of the police cadets could not understand complex sentences that others said. 40% could not use ESP words in communication smoothly and 56% of the class could not communicate in ESP contexts that the teacher gave them.

2) What are causes of problems in their speaking competence?

Table 4. Problems in speaking English competence

No.	Problems in speaking competence	Percentages	Participants
1	Errors in English pronunciation	48%	N =25
2	Errors in using English grammar	52%	
3	Lack of confidence	45%	
4	Lack of vocabulary	57%	
5	Fear of making mistakes	32%	
6	Shyness in speaking English	39%	
7	Lack of information	27%	

When they spoke, the author saw that they often (48%) made errors with English pronunciation, namely sounds and stress syllables, 52% in using English grammar, 57% lack of vocabulary and 45% lack of confidence. However, in psychological factors, they were rather stronger than the author thought. Only 32% the police cadets were afraid of making mistakes and 39% of them felt shy when speaking English. Fortunately, 27% the police cadets were lack of information when they spoke English.

#### V. CONCLUSION

From the results, the author saw that their speaking English competence is in simple way. They can speak short sentences, simple words. I feel hard to use ESP. They make many errors in grammar and pronunciation. Especially, they are lack of vocabulary to express what they want to say clearly and fluently.

With these results, I recommend some solutions to tackle the problems with the hope to improve their quality of learning speaking. Firstly, teachers should design or use materials, and various activities to help them learn autonomously. Secondly, teachers should explain clearly the importance of speaking skills in learning ESP to them, and find suitable ways to consciously improve their language skills as well as build up appropriate motivation and learning methods to motivate them in speaking skills better. For examples: Give a clear learning attitude and motivation, effective learning methods, allocating reasonable self-study time. Make specific goals and plans, find the way to learn and remember effectively. Create many different activities which create

excitement in learning speaking for students and create opportunities for students to practice speaking skills in ESP classroom. Adjusting the curriculum to increase the time allocated for speaking skill. Last but not least, teachers should require students actively self-study and practice speaking skills in many different ways to achieve good skills through working in pairs.

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