

An evaluation of secondary students speaking skill at UK Academy School, Ba Ria Vung Tau – Viet Nam

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ABSTRACT

It is widely known that language acts as a crucial and characteristic product of every country according to the fact that it is the typical nature of each country. Once students are exposed to an international language, they must master four skills, especially listening, speaking, reading, and writing in order to effectively master and use it. Among the above four skills, oral English is probably considered to be one that requires a lot of study and practice time. A large number of students encountered challenges in early phonetic learning. In fact, a decent language acquisition is one of the keys for students to gradually open the door to this magical language. The aim of the study is to evaluate the speaking skill of secondary students at UK Academy School in Ba Ria city, Ba Ria Vung Tau province to investigate whether the students using their language ability through their speaking skill suitably meet the requirements of the school curriculum in terms of their language proficiency and especially the speaking skill. Teacher-based speaking evaluation conducted in the classroom are not only strongly recommended at UK Academy policies but are also the only tool used to evaluate students' oral skills in the formal schooling system. The data was collected from questionnaires and interviews of 26 English teachers who are recently working at UK Academy school. The result of the survey showed that the teaching quality and the curriculum of school highly met the stakeholder's requirements in terms of aims. The research also suggested the designing aspect of materials and teaching methods to make them more interesting for students to learn how to speak English better.

Keywords: Evaluation, speaking skill, learning outputs

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I. INTRODUCTION

UK Academy bilingual school in Ba Ria city, Ba Ria Vung Tau province was founded on June 2016. During the past 5 years with all effort of UK Academy teachers and staff, the academy has been recognized and appreciated for its training quality by the modern and integrated teaching method it is one of the education system that takes humanity as philosophy, UK Academy provides pupils the foundation for comprehensive development, from learning, skills to physical health through the combination of 7 programmes: Cambridge English International programme, Programme of the Ministry of Education and Training, Living skill and Living value programme; LCM music Programme, Junior Business Programme JA, STEM Robotics in combination with utmost physical development programme.

Learning in UK Academy, the students are ready to be integrated into the international programme to accomplish high school with 2 certificates. MOET diploma and IFY certificate to be equipped in standard output of English relative to each learning grade and developed by 4 H educational philosophy: Heart (establish sustainable foundation on motion for children), Health (Establish physical development foundation, develop height and overall spiritual for children); Head (develop at at most child's intelligent); Hand (drill, generate goods and useful habits). These 4 educational criteria of philosophy generates comprehensive humanitarian capacity.

At UK Academy school, the curriculum was designed to help the students to comprehensively develop 4 skills: active listening, speaking confidently, reading for thoughts and creative writing to acquire necessary academic skills such as responding thinking, teamwork, researching and communicating naturally as native speakers, to be prepared to take examination for English Cambridge certificate after each class and grade. It also helps students master the English Moet programme to make sure that they can take the national examination.

At UK Academy school, the focus has been on the speaking skill since the establishment of UK Academy school as this skill is designated to those in grade 11 and 12 students. Since its first use in teaching, there has been no official evaluation from researchers or teachers conducted to review the suitable methodology

for teaching this skill. Furthermore, complaints about the problems arising during the learning process regularly emerge, especially the complaints on the teaching methods, vocabulary and pronunciation. Moreover, some teachers still question the relevance of this skill students' needs. Therefore, a study to evaluate teaching and learning speaking skill is urgently needed.

The aim of the study is to evaluate and improve the speaking skill of secondary students at UKA school to investigate whether the teaching methods are suitable for students and whether students' speaking fluency suitably meets the requirements of school output in term of teaching and learning speaking. The findings will help teachers to adjust the teaching methods and materials so that they can optimize and adapt strong points, or substitute weak points from other related teaching methods and materials to meet the school objective. Furthermore, it is expected that the results of the research, to some extent, could help secondary students at UKA school get over their obstacles of speaking in class as well as outside school.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Bygate, speaking is defined as "Oral expression involves not only the use of the right sounds in the patterns of rhythm and intonation, but also the choice of words and inflections in the right order to convey the right meaning" (as cited in Mackey, 1965, p.266). Auditory communication consists of short, fragmentary utterances, in an exceedingly range of pronunciation. There is often an excellent deal of repetition and overlap between one speaker and another, and speakers usually use non-specific references. They also imply that in speaking the loosely organized syntax, and non-specific words and phrases are used, auditory communication is, therefore, made to feel less conceptually dense than communication. More importantly, speaking, or productive skills, is thought to possess two main forms of conversation namely, dialogue and monologue, which are rather different (Brown & Yule, 1983). In monologue, we give uninterrupted speechmaking while in dialogue we interact with one or more other speakers for transactional and international purposes.

It can be seen from the two productive language skills that spoken language is different from the writing counterpart, whether they are processing conditions or reciprocal conditions. Spoken language is affected by time constraints and problems related to planning, memory and the production of stress. Then, it is a reciprocal activity, which has a crucial influence on the type of decision to be made. (Bygate, 1987, p. 1112).

Speaking is the most significant skill that is crucial to be mastered by most language learners. As we know that speaking is the verbal utilization of language to interact or communicate with others. And what is speaking? Various linguists indicate concept of speaking in various ways. In Byrne's view (1986), speaking skill is one of two ways of oral communication process, and is the productive skill. The speaker has to conceal the message he wants to transfer in sensible language, while the listeners have to figure out (or interpret) the message. Chaney & Burk (1998) explained that speaking is "the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, in a diversity of contexts". Spratt et al. (2005) indicates speaking is a productive skill that involves using speech to show meanings to other people. Florez (2005) has comprehensive definition when interpreting that speaking is "an interactive process of building meaning that combines produce, receive and process information". It is obvious that speaking is an activity including two or more people in which the attendants are both the speakers and listeners who have to act what they listen and make their improvement in this activity.

Acting as one of the four key language skills (others being listening, writing and reading), speaking is the means through which students can communicate with others to achieve certain goals or to express their viewpoints, hopes, intentions and opinions. Apart from it, people who notice a language are referred to as 'speakers' of that language. Furthermore, in almost any setting, speaking is the most frequently used language skills. As argued by Rivers (1981), speaking is used twice as much as writing and reading in our communication.

Also, Pattison (1992) indicates that when people discuss knowing or learning a language, they imply being able to speak that language. In a social context, social role seems to be accomplished by those who know and learn how to speak the language, but not by those who do not have such skills. It cannot be rejected that speaking deserves as much consideration as or even more attention than writing skills. In order to accomplish many of the most basic transactions, it is essential for learners to speak with assurance.

In other words, speaking is the most significant skills among the others in learning any language. It is the main skills that language learners have to acquire after language learning process. As Nunan (1999) indicated that "if listening is the Cinderella skills in the second language learning, then speaking is the over-bearing elder sister. The possibility to function in another language is generally featured in terms of being able to speak that language". This saying shows that the ability to speak is the most crucial aspect that students should advance. Also, Goh and Burns (2012) claimed that "the mastery of speaking in English is a priority for many second language learners. Learners often assess their success in language learning, as well as the effectiveness of their English course, on the basis of how well they feel they have improved in their spoken

language”. Depending on this statement, the students’ accomplishment in learning a language is demonstrated by how well they can speak and practice it in daily routine. On another aspect, Burkart (1998, p.1) also declared that “Many language learners regard speaking capability as the measurement of acquiring a language. He determined fluency as the ability to converse with others, much more than the ability to comprehend, read or write speaking language. They consider speaking as the most significant skills and they assess their progress as regards their accomplishments in spoken communication”. It is clear that speaking plays a pivotal role in students’ language learning and acquisition because of the fact that the mastery of a language is assessed by how well students do the speaking in that language.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study used designed by the mixed method (quantitative and qualitative). For the quantitative approach, a quantitative dataset was collected from the questionnaire presenting the overall picture of classroom evaluation of speaking in UK Academy secondary school. Second, the data conducted from teachers interviews to provide detailed information on how teachers perceived benefits.

The participants included 26 teachers aged over twenty-two who were currently working or had worked within the last two years in secondary school in UK Academy school voluntarily participated in the research. Among those who specified their readiness to attend the interviews, six teachers actually participated in these follow-up interviews.

Table 1. The number of teachers eligible for the survey and interview

In-service teachers	Age	Gender	Degree	Years of teaching	Courses	Experienced in teaching skills
1	25	M	B.A. (English)	2	Secondary Student Speaking	Speaking & listening
2	26	F	B.A. (English)	4	Secondary Student Speaking	Speaking & listening
3	28	F	B.A. (English)	6	Secondary Student Speaking	Speaking & listening
4	27	M	B.A. (English)	5	Secondary Student Speaking	Speaking & listening
5	30	F	B.A. (English)	6	Secondary Student Speaking	Speaking & listening
6	32	F	B.A. (English)	8	Secondary Student Speaking	Speaking & listening
7	40	M	B.A. (English)	17	Secondary Student Speaking	Speaking & listening
8	38	F	B.A. (English)	16	Secondary Student Speaking	Speaking & listening
9	34	F	B.A. (English)	12	Secondary Student Speaking	Speaking
10	32	F	B.A. (English)	10	Secondary Student Speaking	Speaking
11	35	M	B.A. (English)	9	Secondary Student Speaking	Speaking
12	29	F	B.A. (English)	7	Secondary Student Speaking	Speaking
13	34	M	B.A. (English)	10	Secondary Student Speaking	Speaking
14	39	M	B.A. (English)	17	Secondary Student Speaking	Speaking
15	40	F	B.A. (English)	16	Secondary Student Speaking	Speaking
16	32	F	B.A. (English)	10	Secondary Student Speaking	Speaking
17	31	F	B.A. (English)	8	Secondary Student Speaking	Speaking
18	30	M	B.A. (English)	7	Secondary Student Speaking	Speaking
19	29	F	B.A. (English)	5	Secondary	Speaking

					Student Speaking	
20	31	F	B.A. (English)	8	Secondary Student Speaking	Speaking
21	26	F	B.A. (English)	3	Secondary Student Speaking	Speaking
22	25	F	B.A. (English)	2	Secondary Student Speaking	Speaking
23	24	F	B.A. (English)	2	Secondary Student Speaking	Speaking
24	27	M	B.A. (English)	5	Secondary Student Speaking	Speaking
25	28	F	B.A. (English)	5	Secondary Student Speaking	Speaking
26	29	F	B.A. (English)	6	Secondary Student Speaking	Speaking

Questionnaires research employed a questionnaire to analyses the primary research question: what the present status of evaluation regarding classroom speaking conducted in UK Academy school to see what the key purposes of such evaluation and its evaluation outcomes are. According to Thomas (2003), the principal strength of questionnaires is that they make possible a researcher to supply an oversized quantity of factual information during a relatively short period of time. The format and content of the questionnaire partly replicated previous research (Grierson, 1995) which was also keen on the nature and quality of classroom speaking evaluation practice in the secondary level B1. Yet, because of the varied research interest and scope, variety of modifications were made as summarized below:

It was written in both Vietnamese and English to make sure participants' understanding of the questions.

The questions inquiring the needs of evaluation, methods of evaluation, and evaluation tasks were selectively drawn from Grierson (1995).

Minor correction involved implementing a Likert-scale in step with the item purpose and changing some choices pertinent to the research objective and context. The questionnaire included two sections.

There were questions on 26 teacher profiles including gender, age, and length of teaching experience. The questionnaire focuses on details of what the main purposes of classroom speaking evaluations and its evaluation outcomes are. There were three kinds of questions used here: closed, open-ended, and Likert-scale questions.

In finding out what the main purposes of classroom speaking evaluations, the questions were about the present evaluation purposes and the significance of evaluation purposes as perceived by the teachers were interviewed: indicating effect for what purpose you employ classroom speaking evaluation and indicating the significance of the purpose of classroom speaking evaluation. Teachers were encouraged to evaluate the importance of the evaluation purposes as they perceived on a scale 1 to 5 in response.

In finding out the evaluation practices in terms of evaluation tasks, frequency, and teacher feedback about evaluation practices, the three survey questions included evaluation methods, particular speaking task formats, frequency, and format of teacher feedback.

The questionnaire was taken approximately fifteen minutes to finish. Teachers were asked to accomplish the survey with their own nicknames to identify themselves in the event of withdrawal. The questionnaire was operated by two qualified English teachers prior to the main study.

The interviews were conducted to amass further information about teachers' perceptions regarding classroom speaking evaluation in UK Academy school. A semi-structured interview format was chosen on the essential of being the foremost appropriate for the research purpose, time availability, and requirements of flexibility. It allowed the researcher to ask a collection of questions during a familiar manner but also to keep up the pliability to look at relevant information where necessary.

The interview included seven questions in three parts: (1) background information on teaching experience, teaching approach and evaluation practices; (2) teacher's approach of effectiveness of classroom speaking evaluation; and (3) difficulties in conducting such evaluation. The completed interview questions are provided in Appendix B.

All interviews were duplicated and translated into English by the researcher. As Marshall and Rossman (2006) showed that translating is complex because it involves more suitable issues of connotation and meaning. In addition, the researcher delivered the English transcription back to each interviewee through email to make sure that their intention and meaning of the interview were accurately and eloquently translated. If disagreements on transcriptions were raised, modifications were made.

IV. RESULTS

The current status of classroom speaking evaluation conducted in UK Academy school: 100 % teachers say they always use classroom speaking evaluation for their students because they employ classroom speaking evaluation as followings:

Table 2. Purpose of classroom speaking evaluation

Purposes of classroom speaking evaluation	Percentages	Time spent (minutes) per-student: 1-2'; 3-5'; 5-10'; >10'	Percentages
Evaluation of students for class placement	100%	5-10'	100%
Pre-topic planning	100%	3-5'	100%
Ongoing programming (lesson planning)	100%	5-10'	100%
Ongoing student assessment (e.g. marking, feedback)	100%	3-5'	100%
Final evaluation of topic/unit of acquisition	100%	3-5'	100%
Providing information to others (e.g. bureaucratic report, parents, school)	100%	>10'	100%
Following the policy of schools or the school council	100%	5-10'	100%
Learning output	100%	>10'	100%

Firstly, the results in table 2 show 100% teachers agree that the purpose of classroom speaking evaluation includes evaluation of students for class placement, ongoing programming (lesson planning), following the policy of schools or the school council within 5-10'; pre-topic planning, ongoing programming (lesson planning), final evaluation of topic/unit of acquisition within 3-5'; providing information to others (e.g. bureaucratic report, parents, school), learning output within more than 10 minutes. These results mean that the most important purposes of classroom speaking evaluation are providing information to others (e.g. bureaucratic report, parents, school) and learning output.

Secondly, classroom speaking evaluation expresses its importance. In table 3, the research states that providing information to others (e.g. bureaucratic report, parents, other teachers), diagnosing each student's strengths and weaknesses, and indicating the students' achievement of the school outputs are the most important factors to conduct classroom speaking evaluation. These results are also similar with the results of the table 4.1.

Table 3. The importance of classroom speaking evaluation

The classroom speaking assessment (N = 26)	Mean	SD.
To place students in class	3.03	.763
To give learners feedback on learning progress	3.95	.794
To give teachers feedback on their learning progress	4.65	.682
To diagnose each student's strengths and weaknesses	4.95	.946
To provide information to others (e.g. bureaucratic report, parents, other teachers)	5.00	.872
To indicate students' speaking ability levels	4.11	.731
To indicate the students' achievement of the school outputs	4.89	.682

Thirdly, the study hopes to know which methods of assessment do teachers use frequently when they teach speaking in classroom? The results show that 100% teachers use observation of students in typical speaking activities during regular classes and marking of a specific test tasks. However, they sometimes use peer evaluation and self evaluation.

Table 4. Using methods of assessment

Methods of assessment	Frequency
observation of students in typical speaking activities during regular classes	100%
marking of a specific test tasks	100%
peer evaluation	46.1%
self evaluation	30.7%

Next, the research wants to know which activities do the teachers usually use to evaluate the students' speaking in classroom. The findings in table 5 give us a picture of role-play and presentation as techniques used commonly in their classroom. The groupwork and individual activities are sometimes used by the teachers.

Table 5. Test tasks/activities used in classroom speaking evaluation

Test tasks/activities	Percentages
Role-play	100%
Presentation	100%
Group-work	46.1%
Individual	34.6%

With the requirements of school output, almost all the teachers (84.6%) strongly agree their classroom speaking evaluation meet it (see table 6). From the six of the requirements of the school output, pronunciation is considered better than others with 92.3%. Also, all others factors like fluency, grammar, vocabulary, coherence, content are good enough to meet the school output (see table 7).

Table 6. the classroom speaking evaluation meets the requirements of school output

Scale	Percentages
Strongly agree	84.6%
Agree	15.4%
Disagree	0%
Strongly disagree	0%

Table 7. the classroom speaking evaluation meet the requirements of the school output (B1)

B1	Percentages
Pronunciation	92.3%
Fluency	84.6%
Grammar	80.7%
Vocabulary	76.9%
Coherence	61.5%
Content	57.6%

To make clear these results, the research interviews six teachers with a hope to know how the teacher's perceptions of classroom speaking evaluation are. The questions focus on the purpose, importance of classroom-speaking evaluation as well as teaching speaking methods and materials used. The researcher will report shortly each of the following questions.

What do you perceive the purpose of classroom-speaking evaluation?

Teacher 1: "Improve students' speaking competence and the students' confidence in speaking English"

Teacher 2: "Meet the parents' and students' requirement"

Teacher 3: "Meet the school output of speaking criteria equivalent B1"

Teacher 4: "Develop speaking skills in communication"

Teacher 5: "Measure whether the students achieve their lesson's goal"

Teacher 6: "Meet the school's, parents', teachers' requirements"

What is the importance of classroom speaking evaluation?

Teacher 1: "Make the students feel interested in the lesson and practice speaking English"

Teacher 2: "Help the students see the importance of speaking English skill"

Teacher 3: "One of the criteria of evaluation in learning English course"

Teacher 4: "Have a good chance to practice speaking English"

Teacher 5: "See the students' achievement in English speaking skills"

Teacher 6: "Use English in their real life and education"

Do you consider your teaching speaking methods effective?

Teacher 1: "I usually use communicative language teaching method into classroom English speaking and I see it's better than I thought"

Teacher 2: "The direct method is good for me to design speaking classroom interesting and effectively"

Teacher 3: "I often combine community language learning and task-based to teach speaking skill and I think they are good methods to help me make the speaking lesson exciting"

Teacher 4: "Cooperative learning is used effectively to teach English speaking in my class"

Teacher 5: "I use content-based and task-based very well to instruct my students speaking English"

Teacher 6: "Interactive learning used in teaching speaking is a good way to help my students study English speaking fluently"

Do you consider your teaching speaking materials suitable with the learning outcomes?

All six teachers said that they combine the textbook and their own materials prepared to make the lesson interesting and effective. All of them showed a high agreement that the main textbook used in the school is completely suitable for the students.

Do you consider your teaching speaking in classroom effective?

All six of teachers interviewed said that they find their teaching speaking in classroom effective because they are satisfied with the students' results after tests of English course.

What are students' difficulties in classroom speaking, what are they?

The similar answers such as unsimilar English competence and limited time for speaking skills among students in classroom are considered difficult for them to express and understand others' English. They said that speaking is interacted in English lesson, so it is not a single subject taught privately in classroom.

V. Discussions

Resee the purpose of the classroom speaking evaluation, the research saw that it firstly comes from learning output, providing information to stakeholders (parents, students, teachers and administrators). Secondly, it comes from the English program purposes. Finally, it starts at evaluation of students for class placement. The results can look at the requirements of the society in English competence for further learning in higher education and real situation. Therefore, the school makes plans to achieve the learning goals of the stakeholders. The process of teaching is based on Bloom's Taxonomy "Remember – Understand – Apply – Analyze – Evaluate – Create" with a hope that the students can use English fluently in both classroom and out of class.

From this aim, the speaking activities in classroom are warmly concerned to promote both students and teachers use English naturally, so 100% the teachers and students at UK Academy school always has speaking test to evaluate students' English speaking performance. On the one hand, evaluating students' English speaking skill is a requirement of the school output. On the other hand, it helps the students improve their English pronunciation, fluency, grammar, vocabulary, coherence, and content when performing English in classroom.

Glance at the results of the interviews, the research also reveals that they are completely aware of the purpose, importance of teaching English speaking and classroom speaking evaluation. They are considered as duties and responsibilities in educating. It can be seen that although each of the teachers has their own teaching method, all of them think that it's very effective method to help their students study better because the school policy hopes the teachers who can show their creation and flexibility in teaching English, namely speaking skill.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

This study revealed that the classroom speaking evaluation considered good for the stakeholders and the English program purposes. The study implicates that the classroom speaking evaluation is very significant to control and develop the students' speaking abilities and make their parents satisfied about their children learning results. Moreover, classroom speaking evaluation is the primary criteria to measure the school output (B1), so its' curriculum and materials are provided students with many opportunities to practice English and help them to be more confident in communication.

Teaching speaking activities in classroom are cared and organized sensibly by the teachers and the students are very keen on participating and studying. Learning activities usually concentrates on role-play and presentation. These activities help students improve their confidence, performance, communication skills and social skills.

VII. Suggestions

In speaking environment: The classroom is the only place where most students are exposed to English. Extracurricular activities that aim to improve students' speaking skill are extremely rare in this school. Because speaking skill is the only skill that is not included in the exams, it is given less teaching emphasis. The focus is mainly on teaching reading, listening and writing besides grammar and vocabulary. Although the teaching of speaking can be integrated into other skills like listening, reading and writing, the teachers think that time is insufficient to do that, and priority is given to other skills rather than speaking because they are included in the exam and speaking is not. The most important factor that affects the students' speaking skills effectively is the class being overcrowded. More than 30 students in class at secondary school makes the teachers confused and feel hard to develop appropriate active teaching methods and have enough energy to help each student individually. Last but not least, the restriction on homework assignments are also a barrier that prevent the students from speaking English. If the Ministry of Education allows homework assignments for secondary school students, teachers can design speaking exercises for them to do and practice with their classmates at home. This way can help them study more effectively.

The school should organize speaking contest more often in order to help students improve their performance and discuss complex topics and opinions. The school should facilitate outdoor classroom learning like bringing students to interesting places such as museums, galleries, and even supermarkets in order that students can develop their speaking by practising with each other and presenting what they have learned after the field trip.

In placement test: the school needs to participate more in speaking skills instead of paper tests because the teachers can not evaluate the students English ability completely. The teachers must assess students' English competence by evaluating all 4 skills especially oral skills due to the fact that speaking is one of the most essential skills in learning a language. At the time, the school has all of their students at the correct level regarding all 4 skills which help teachers deliver their lessons effectively and evaluate students' English ability leading to students' achieving their desired learning results and the school meeting their academic targets.

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