

# Using Pictures to Increase Interest for Students in Speaking Lessons at a Vietnamese University

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**Abstract:** - *In teaching and learning English, speaking skill is probably a top priority. Therefore, teachers always strive to find methods, materials, and tools to help learners practice and improve their speaking ability. Bowen's (1982) study has shown that the process of language acquisition is a complex process, in which visual aids play an important role in promoting language learning. Using visual tools in general and images in particular in teaching English speaking skill so far has attracted attention not only of educators but also learners. Therefore, the authors of the article study the role of images in English speaking lessons and the influence on learners' interests through previous studies. Moreover, this study suggests some activities using images to apply in speaking lessons to create excitement for learners.*

**Keywords:** - *speaking skill, images, interest*

## 1. Introduction

In the current trend of integration, more than ever, English is considered as the most popular language, a particularly useful means for communication, economic, cultural exchange, etc. in the world. For our country, Vietnam, learning English has been paying special attention to all levels of study.

We all know that learning English involves a combination of different skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. In particular, speaking skill is the most difficult skill. However, the ominous fact is that the speaking skill of students in general and of students, majoring in Business Administration in the first semester at Hanoi University of Industry, in particular, has many limitations. One of the reasons students are not active in speaking classes is that they have not found interest in speaking activities yet. As a first step to overcome these limitations, the authors will address the factors affecting students' interest in learning English and at the same time propose some methods to use images to improve the quality of learning speaking skills.

## 2. Content

### 2.1. Definition of "Excitement"

There are many different definitions of interest. However, this study uses the definition of "Excitement" as a special attitude of an individual to those objects that are both meaningful in life and bring about personal pleasure in activities "of author Huynh Van Son [p.196]. Learning is also called learning, learning the process of acquiring new or additional things, cultivating knowledge, skills, experiences, cognitive values or hobbies and possibly related to the different types of information. From the above definition of interest and learning, interest is the attitude of the subject to the object of the learning activity, which is a combination of internal and external influences such as efforts and desires of learners in the learning process; have practical implications in the cognitive process.

### 2.2. Factors affecting interest in learning a foreign language in general and English in particular

From the understanding of the interest in learning above, interest plays an important role in determining success or failure in acquiring a second language. Motivated and interested learners acquire

language better than non-motivated or interested learners. In specific learning situations, learners with less interest in learning are more likely to lose focus than learners who are interested in learning more.

Many factors are affecting the interest in learning a foreign language. Influencing factors are divided into two main groups: subjective factors stem from each individual learner and external factors that dominate the learners.

Subjective factor, the learner, is an important factor to help students realize how important this course is for their future lives and careers. It is very important to have a right attitude towards the content of a subject. When learners are conscious of learning, they will show a positive, proactive and creative learning attitude to dominate the knowledge, skills, and techniques when studying a subject.

Objective factors consist of subject characteristics, conditions of facilities, and learning environment. Subject characteristics are the structure, content, nature, and arrangement of the subject's program by subject. Teachers show professional qualifications, pedagogical competence, attitude in organizing the process of teaching and learning. This is considered an important factor to create excitement in learners. Conditions of facilities include documents, books, and teaching facilities. Although not a deciding factor, it is a necessary factor affecting the learning outcomes of learners. If studying in conditions of adequate facilities, learners will feel comfortable and study better. Learning environment is the atmosphere of the classroom, relationships with friends, teachers and so on. For example, in a well-organized collective, there is a learning competition that is also a factor to help each individual rise up in the study.

### **2.3. Use pictures to interest learners in speaking lessons**

As mentioned above, teachers and teaching methods are important factors that directly affect learners' interest in learning, thus affecting the language acquisition process. It is an essential requirement

for teachers to apply abundant methods and activities to create excitement for learners.

In teaching English speaking skills, teachers use images as one of the methods to create excitement for learners. Cobuild (1987) defines an "image" as "a visual or drawn image, a photograph, or any image made on a flat surface". As such, one of the most striking characteristics of images is that learners can see and teachers can use those images for educational purposes. There are several types of image images such as pictures in books, pictures from magazines or newspapers, and images presented on PowerPoint.

#### **2.3.1. Types of pictures**

Pictures can be sorted by size and design. Each type of picture has its own characteristics from which the teacher can use to suit each target audience or class.

Wall pictures: According to Bowen (1982), definition of wall pictures is a big illustration of a scene or an event.

Sequence pictures: According to Bowen (1982), this type of picture shows a specific topic, it can be a story, or a topic.

Flash cards: Picture cards are pictures drawn on cards that are used by the instructor (Bowen, 1982).

#### **2.3.2. Use pictures to inspire students in speaking lessons**

Using pictures has many effects in teaching English. First of all, pictures can promote the love of learning foreign languages in general and English in particular. Secondly, according to Byrne (1990), pictures can be interesting for students to actively participate in discussions. Thirdly, the creativity of learners is also enhanced based on visuals and visual aids. Moore (1982) said: "Visual aids, especially pictures and colorful posters, can make the classroom atmosphere more comfortable." Moreover, Wright (1989) also pointed out that pictures can motivate students to engage in speaking activities.

## **2.4. Method of using pictures in speaking lessons**

How and when to use pictures depends a lot on the teacher's ability, flexibility, and purpose. In this study, the author applies two forms of using pictures to practice the speaking skill. According to research by Andrew Wright (1989), that is: using pictures to "practice techniques" (Mechanical Practice) and "practice communication" (Communicative Practice). According to the research of Andrew Wright (1989) on "Pictures used in learning foreign languages", he distinguished two ways to use the following practice images.

### **2.4.1. Mechanical Practice**

Using imagery in technical practice means that the instructor directs the learner to concentrate primarily on imitating the sound with little emphasis on the meaning of the sentence. In other words, in technical practice, learners mainly focus on the accuracy of grammar, vocabulary, and phonemes. Therefore, pictures can be used to stimulate learners and to remind students what to say. In all cases, teachers often know exactly what learners should say.

### **2.4.2. Repetition**

In this activity, the instructor points to the picture and asks the participants to repeat what they say.

For example, the teacher points to a picture of two boys fighting and saying, "They have been fighting". Then, learners repeat the teacher's sentence.

Thus, in this example, the learners can get acquainted with the present perfect continuous tense and tenses.

### **2.4.3. Merge**

Combining includes questions and answers, replacement and conversion. Visuals are a form of nonverbal impulse that helps readers improve their speaking skill. Teachers often provide sentence patterns to guide learners

*For example, "Yesterday they bought a dog/bag/radio."*

Teachers can use a picture to ask many questions about the picture. Often, teachers will focus on one focus.

Example: The teacher wants to teach about the near future, the teacher will point at the girl looking for a pen in the picture and ask:

*T: "What is the girl going to do?"*

*St: The girl is going to find a pen in her bag.*

### **2.4.4. Pronunciation**

Images are available for use to illustrate certain tones. Teachers can attach images and sounds below for learners to grasp and imitate.

### **2.4.5. Communicative Practice**

In communicative practice, learners use pictures that the teacher has chosen.

#### **2.4.5.1. Describing**

In these activities, learners are required to describe an item/object so that another learner can identify what the object/thing is by pointing, drawing or commenting.

Saying anything you know to describe a picture: The teacher gives each learner a picture. Learners rely on the picture and say anything to describe the picture. This is an opportunity for learners to practice vocabulary, description, explanation and connect everything in pictures.

Describe and draw: In this activity, learners are asked to work in pairs. A student prepares a picture or plan but does not let the other student know about the picture/plan. After that, the student (with a picture/plan) will use the word/sentence to describe the picture/plan so that the other student can draw and convey the picture / plan exactly.

#### **2.4.5.2. Identifying**

In this activity, learners are asked to identify and name a picture through a part of the picture.

Example: The instructor only gives a picture of a part/detail of an object and asks the learner to identify what the object is.

*T: What's this? What're these?*

St: *It's a desk.*

### 2.4.5.3. Matching

In this matching activity, the teacher will give the learner two pictures randomly and ask the learner to find the connection between the two pictures.

For example:

St A: *They are both made of iron.*

St B: *The man was playing the guitar while they were cycling.*

Or, the learner must point out the difference between the two pictures

### 2.4.5.4. Grouping

In this activity, learners will be provided with many pictures and asked to group them into groups or find a picture that is not in the group and explain why.

For example:

St: *The bike is the odd one out.*

T: *Can you tell me the reason?*

St: *Because riding a bike uses physical movement while other vehicles use fuel.*

### 2.4.5.5. Ordering

In this sorting activity, the learner is asked to arrange the picture in order of quality subjectively or objectively and explain why.

Example: The teacher will give learners a number of pictures of different school things and ask learners to arrange pictures based on different purposes.

T: *Which should we use to draw a picture?*

St: *Pencils*

### 2.4.5.6. Memorizing

Remembering is one of the important skills in learning a foreign language in general and learning skills in particular. In this activity, the learner is allowed to see a picture carefully. Then standing with his back to the picture, the learner tries to remember to describe the picture. The rest of the students can see the picture and ask the student who is describing it.

## 3. Conclusion

In conclusion, many studies have shown that the use of images/pictures is effective in promoting foreign language learning in general and learning speaking skill in particular. The research has listed a number of activities that teachers can use pictures to interest learners. It must be said that teachers play a very important role in the teaching process. Whether or not these activities are effective depends on the ability and flexibility of the teacher. Before choosing an activity, the teacher always asks himself why he has chosen the activity, when it is possible to use the activity and students will be really interested in participating in the activity to practice the speaking skill or not. Another problem is where the sources of pictures will be taken? Many books can be sources of pictures for teachers to exploit such as:

- Longman. (1976). *Wall Pictures for Language Practice.*
- McGarath, I., & Arnord, E. J. (1981). *Picture Pack, Stories for Oral Work.*
- Plumb, J., Farris, D., & Heinemann, H. (1970). *Contact English Wall Pictures.*
- Wright, A. (1993). *1000 Pictures for Teacher to Copy: Nelson.*

In addition, newspapers, magazines and especially the Internet are extremely valuable resources for teachers to exploit in accordance with the lesson objectives. The authors hope that, through this research, teachers can equip themselves with more activities that use images to be able to create interest in learning the speaking skill of learners, thereby having a positive effect to the language acquisition process.

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