MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING
DONG THAP UNIVERSITY
FOREIGN LANGUAGE DEPARTMENT

BA THESIS

IMPROVING THE ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILL
BY SUPPORTING BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE
FOR 11TH GRADE STUDENTS
AT THONG LINH HIGH SCHOOL

LE HUNG

Dong Thap, May 2013
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SUPERVISOR: TRAN THI HIEN, MA

Dong Thap, May 2013
DECLARATION

I, hereby, declare that my thesis entitled: “Improving the English speaking skill by supporting background knowledge for 11th grade student at Thong Linh High School” is the result of my own work, submitted in the fulfillment for the requirements of the B.A degree. Except where the reference is indicated, no other person’s work has been used without due acknowledgement in the text of the thesis.

Cao Lanh City, May 2013.

Le Hung
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, M.A Tran Thi Hien, for her enthusiastic and helpful guidance, insightful comments and encouragement without which my thesis would not have been completed.

My special thanks to all my lectures in Foreign Language Faculty, Dong Thap University for their precious assistance, knowledge and enthusiasm.

I am also grateful to all the participants, students of 11CB1 class at Thong Linh High School for their enthusiastic participation and cooperation during the duration of conducting the research.

Especially, I am thankful to my classmate as well as my colleague in the research, Doan Thi Tra My, for her great support and assistance.

Last, I would like to express my profound gratitude to my family, especially my parents, who have given me constant support, both spiritual and material, and love during the completion of the thesis.

Le Hung
This study, which focused on English speaking skill of 11th grade’s students at Thong Linh High school, was conducted in the hope of finding out the relationship between background knowledge and English speaking skill. Data used for analysis in this study mainly collected through observations, surveys using questionnaire and interview during the time of experimenting an proposed method. By means of analysis both qualitative and quantitative collected data, it was concluded that between background knowledge and speaking skill, there was an existing relationship. One of the significant results from data analysis was that building up awareness via supporting background knowledge related to topics of speaking lesson to English-learning students before letting them going to talk was an effective approach to improve English speaking skill.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1. Motivation for the study

English is the most popular language in the world. English has become the world’s most used and most common language (Nikolov, 2009, p. 404). Approximately more than 600 million people around the world currently speak English, and that number is rapidly growing. More people speak English as a second or foreign language than “monolingual English”, native speaker. Many countries, including Vietnam, set up the compulsory study of English as a foreign language from primary school in their educational system, and many parents are aware that the more knowledge of English, the better jobs in the future their children will get. Countries are keen on improving their citizens’ English skills so as to ensure entry into the global market. In short, these days English is a language of worldwide influence and importance.

On the other hand, in learning English, “the ability to speak is considered as passport to success” (Spoken English, 2009, p. 5). Because speaking skill is the one can satisfy the principal function of a language, serving for communication; therefore, a person who can speak English well will certainly find it is easy to master English learning in general.

Unfortunately, to those who study English as a non-native language, speaking is regarded as the most difficult one among four main communicative skills of English. Many English learners in Vietnam also realized that it is so much difficult to speak English fluently and automatically in classroom. To improve ability, we had better look at carefully about our weakness and anticipate probable results for proposing suitable approaches. Consequently, through some interview and questionnaire surveys as well as
observations in the reality of teaching and learning English at high school, weak points of English speaking ability of Vietnamese students have partly pointed out; these problems are mostly related fluency, automatic response and the relevance content to the topic that is talking about.

First, Rizvi (2005) asserts, “fluency is the most important characteristic of effective speech” (p. 97). Undeniably, it means a fluent oral presentation can easily catch and retain the attention of audiences. Yet, Vietnamese students’ speech cannot be as fluently as it should to be, especially when they faced to unfamiliar speaking topics. There are many unexpected noticeable pauses and repetitions because of forgetting about words or ideas. It seems to be they are not actually confident on the content of their speeches. Furthermore, it leads to another problem in their speaking ability, relevance content. Actually, they also tend to speak about something that is either partly or completely unrelated to the topic although at the beginning of speech, they always point their opinions out in a clear way. The reason why is that between three main parts of a typical presentation; opening, body and conclusion, a link connected main idea does not exist and supporting details do not well organized. It causes not only unconnected sentences on speech but also such unexpected negative feelings on listeners as bored and confused.

Second, accordingly, “speaking is a process in which thought and its articulation are almost simultaneous” (Spoken English, 2009, p. 8). It is not like writing where there is much gap of time for contemplation and connection between thought and expression. Speaking must be spontaneous to be effective. However, in the interaction with English lecturers in class, English learners usually cannot automatically respond to, for example, teacher’s questions or communications. For the reason that they have to spend much time on thinking ideas in Vietnamese and translating them into English before speaking out. As a result, the duration for interactions is extended in an unanticipated way meanwhile time for other speaking activities is shortened. In short, such this inherent habit is really a barrier, which prevents them from practicing the most useful skill, speaking, and entirely participating in other speaking activities in class.
For all these reasons, how English-learning students can improve their English speaking skill to satisfy the essential requirements of speaking: fluency, relevance content and automatic response in the interactions is an interesting and complicated question. Accidentally, many Vietnamese high school students admitted that sometimes when participating in speaking activities in class, they realized their speaking presentations about such unfamiliar topics as science, philosophy, history, etc. were worse than the ones about their favorite areas related to sport, travel or health. As a result, a question has raised “Is there any relationship between background knowledge and English speaking skill”.

This idea about an undiscovered relationship may need to be verified in the reality, but its frequency, according to students’ English learning experiences below, somewhat give us a reliable foundation. They shared that whenever their teacher of English states an issue or question, which they have already found it out, probably in newspaper or on the Internet, they were willing to stand up and expressed their own ideas in a confident way with a loud voice and fluency. In such cases, their speeches flowed smoothly while main ideas and supporting ones were organized logically. With the information (knowledge) collected mostly from online articles or books, they had a plentiful supply of ideas for selection the most appropriate ones to state out in their presentations. Once oral performance was well-organized like that, it was not surprised that everything went on as well as they expected. As a matter of fact, it strongly support a belief that between speaking skill and background knowledge, there is an existent relationship.

1.2. Aims of the study

The main purpose of the research is finding out the relationship between background knowledge and students’ English speaking skill through experimental process. Also, it is intended to provide some reliable implication for teaching English speaking skill at high school in Dong Thap Province.

1.3. Research question
With the aim as mentioned earlier, the research question was addressed as following and this thesis was hoped to answer it:

*Is there any relationship between background knowledge and English speaking skill?*

### 1.4. Scope of the study

The focused area of this research is finding out the relationship between background knowledge and English speaking skill of students in grade 11th at Thong Linh High School, Cao Lanh District, and considering whether background knowledge contributes to English speaking ability or not. In addition, among various factors building up English speaking skill, this research mentions the only one, background knowledge, in improvement English speaking skill.

### 1.5. Research method

The most principal method being used in this thesis was qualitative study, in which there was an experiment applied in participants’ English speaking class to measure any development in their English speaking skill, then to find out the answer for the research question, *whether or not there is any relationship between background knowledge and English speaking skill*. The study also involved the quantitative study to collect critical statistics for discussion about aspects of the research question. The quantitative study utilized a survey by using a measurement instrument, *questionnaires*, to collect essential information about participant’s knowledge and their attitude toward their English learning in general and English speaking skill in particular. The qualitative study utilized *observations*, in which participants’ English speaking ability, before and after the research’s treatment implemented, was measure based on the observation checklist. It also consisted of another instrument, *interviews*, to collect participants’ feedbacks after the implementing of research’s approach. The data collected through either qualitative or quantitative instruments were analyzed to serve for the purposes of considerations, interpretations, and conclusions in the thesis, based on data analysis.

### 1.6. Significance of the study
The study deals with proving the relationship between background knowledge and English speaking skill. As mentioned earlier, speaking skill is really considered as the most complicated one, among four skills of English, to be learnt and many difficulties are rising in the learning procedure of speaking lesson. The study carried out with the hope to provide reliable evidence that background knowledge can be an essential element in the progression of students’ English speaking ability. In addition, once the proposed relationship proven to be right after the experiment, the study’s findings also hope to make contributions to possible English teaching methods’ improvement at high school in Dong Thap Province.

1.7. Previous related study

The thesis that mentions and make a research about the relationship between background knowledge and speaking skill have not been done before at Dong Thap University.

1.8. Organization of the study

The thesis consists of five chapters:

Chapter 1: Introductions, this part presents the overview of the thesis including motivation, aims, scope, research methods, previous related studies as well as the organization of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review, this chapter provides the theoretical background including speaking skill and its important role in English learning as well as background knowledge

Chapter 3: Methodology, this chapter focuses on presenting research questions, research setting and participants, research procedure, data collection, as well as methods of analysis.

Chapter 4: The Results and Discussion, this chapter presents the results gained in survey using questionnaires, interviews; and objective observations. Then, these results will be discussed to conclude major findings as well as to finally answer for the research question about the relationship between background knowledge and English speaking skill.
Chapter 5: Conclusions, this part summaries the major findings recorded during the making of the thesis, presents the limitations of the study, and provides some suggestions for further research.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1. Speaking skill and its important role in English learning

2.1.1. Definitions of speaking and speaking skill

Florez (1999) defines speaking is “an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing and receiving and processing information” (p.1) in her book. Indeed, in this complicated process, speaking’s form and meaning are dependent on the context in which it occurs, including the participants themselves, their collective experiences, the physical environment, and the purposes for speaking. It is often spontaneous, open-ended, and evolving. This is an explanation in a scientific and academic way, somehow very difficult to comprehend. Thus, below is another way of clarification that may help you find easily in understanding what speaking really is.

In human’s life, speaking ranks the third on human’s most activities on a day, just after breathing and sleeping. We have spent most of our daytime to speak for the purpose of communication, informational exchange and emotional expression. Dr. Brizendine (2009), a clinical professor of psychiatry at the University of California, San Francisco states that “A woman uses about 20,000 words per day while a man uses about 7,000” (p. 45). The purpose of citing these two numbers does not just compare that a female speak nearly three times more than a male, but helps us to realize how much we speak in a day and how much time we spent on speaking throughout our lifetime.

From the definition of speaking, we can generalize that speaking skill is a linguistic term that denotes human beings’ ability to express their own thoughts and feelings. And because of a close relationship with people’ daily activities, speaking is also considered as an easy-to-acquire skill. In fact, this idea is not accurate at all. Levelt (1993) considers
speaking as “one of our most complex cognitive, linguistic and motor skills” (p. xiii). In other word, speaking is a complicated skill because of its somehow strong association with speaker’s knowledge, awareness or experience. Indeed, people usually speak or response quickly to something they are familiar with. That is the reason why in most of conversation, when both speaker and listener have no thing to continue talking, they will turn their conversation into what so-called “small talk”. This term means exchanging or talking about such trivial but common topics as weather, climate, hobby, etc. These topics are so close that everyone can talk or share something to keep their conversation going on and becoming warmer. From this point of views, it is no doubt that speaking skill, just like any natural phenomenon in our world, always exists in the relationship with the others, and one of them is knowledge, personal knowledge of those who participate in speaking activities. And this relation is the main answer that this thesis wanted to seek.

2.1.2. The important role of speaking in learning English

Among the four language skills mentioned above, speaking has a great influence on other skills in particular and the process of learning English in general. To have a more specific understanding of this view, it is quite necessary to regard speaking in the relationship with the three others.

Brilhart (1965) considers “the relationship between speaking and hearing has been extended to the assumption that speaking and listening skills are positively correlated” (pp. 35-46). However, the real nature of this pair skill is not completely resemblance despite their mutual supportive relation. While listening is an existing skill, an innate ability to hear sounds from the environment, speaking is an acquired or learned skill, which is possessed through a sequence of studying. If we observe the child’s language-learning process, this fact becomes obvious. Listening is used to create and develop speaking skill and vice versa, speaking is an outer express of reaction to being heard sounds. By listening day by day and imitating strange sounds from his parents or other family’s members, a child have set first steps on the process of producing his own words.
Gradually, going along with the brain’s development, a 12-month-old child can recognize and understand these sounds in associating them with surrounding things or phenomena. He at that time is able to articulate words that can be realized by adults and later, making simple sentences at the age of two. Later, when a child has chances to interact with strange environments beyond his home, especially when going to school; and new phenomena involving in the society, the two other skills, reading and writing, are set up and reinforced.

This whole process not only denotes a remarkable accomplishment in human development, but also shows a persuasive evidence that we can learn speaking much sooner than such other skills as reading and writing. Because speaking is the first learned communicative skill in life, it surely contribute to developmental procedure of as a principal element.

Unfortunately, the order of possessing is almost exactly for all children, but in learning the first language. In this case, when we mention English as a foreign language, is it still right? To answer this question, let’s remind that language is primarily speech. This means that language is primarily learnt by listening and speaking. Speaking comes after listening, but before reading and writing. The child learns his mother tongue in this way. He can also learn English by speaking in the language first before he can read and write in the language. Speaking, therefore, occupies the most important place in English language learning.

Now, after considering the vital position of speaking in the relationship with other language skills, we should look at some important issues, which surround learning to speak English as a foreign language to realize why speaking is important.

In both teaching and learning process of English in countries in which English is not the mother tongue, many teachers have to teach mainly grammar and vocabulary because these areas are tested in examinations. This means that speaking is a neglected language skill in many classrooms. Students may have a good knowledge of grammar and a wide
vocabulary: they can use this knowledge to pass examinations, but they find it more difficult to speak English outside the classroom.

So why is it important for teachers to learn to teach speaking, and for students to learn to speak English?

More and more educators, scholarships, governments, ministries of education and employers need people who can speak English well. Companies and organizations want staff who can speak English in order to communicate within the international marketplace. And going along with the rapid development of such international certificates of English as TOEFL, IELTS, TOEIC, etc., an evaluation of learning English, instead of testing comprehension or understanding about English, students are required to prove their ability to use the language for communication in learning and living environment, thus speaking now is one main part involving in these examinations. For these reasons, students who can speak English well may have a great chance of further education, of finding employment and gaining promotion.

In a more specific scale, there are also very good educational reasons to practice and develop speaking during a lesson. Speaking activities can reinforce the learning of new vocabulary, grammar or functional language. They also give students a chance to use the new language they are learning. In addition, advanced students, through activities in speaking lesson, can find opportunities to experiment with the language they already know in different situations and on different topics. Furthermore, speaking English well also helps students to access up-to-date information written and spoken universally in English in numerous fields including science, technology, sport and health. It is an unlimited source of knowledge that can be used to develop not only English learning skills but also essential living skills.

One more important thing that speaking is a principal means of communication in classroom. Contacts between teachers to students and among students to each other are mostly conveyed by oral activities. Hence, it’s no doubt that if students’ speaking skill is developed, it will be a powerful and useful bridge connecting them to their teachers and
classmates. The more interactions students involve in the learning environment, the more advantages they will get in knowledge’s comprehension and self-confidence.

2.2. Background knowledge

2.2.1. Definition of background knowledge

It is worthy of admission that finding an exact definition for “knowledge” is quite difficult. Because of being an abstract notion, knowledge has a diversity of explanations and definitions, ranging from philosophy, sociology and psychology. Therefore, let’s make clear that we will discuss about knowledge in this thesis in the most simple and common senses, which is related to educational field and can be easily recognized when we mention about background knowledge.

According to the definitions of Oxford Dictionary of English of Stevenson (2010), knowledge is simply:

- facts, information, and skills acquired through experience or education;
- awareness or familiarity gained by experience of a fact or situation;

From these overall definitions of knowledge, we easily turn to a so-called background knowledge, which can be understood, in a minor scale, as the sum of what is known either theoretically or practically by someone through his/her experiences and educational processes. As a matter of fact, it is no doubt to say that background knowledge is the final result of a complex development in which perceptive and transformative approaches happen at the same time to get unknown information into new information serving for personal purposes in different situations.

On the other hand, Chomsky (1988) addresses that “knowledge is remembered from an earlier existence and is reawakened in someone’s mind through the questions that another person posed to him” (p. 4). His point of view is not only trying to make a definition but also taking into account the nature of knowledge in general and of personal background knowledge in particular. To clearly understand what knowledge is, it is somewhat exciting to follow Chomsky’s way: understanding how we acquire knowledge and how
knowledge works in our academic activities. First, we acquire background knowledge through the interaction of two factors: (1) our ability to process and store information, and (2) the number and frequency of our academically oriented experiences.

The former asserts that we all have an enhanced ability to receive and store information in permanent memory because of a component of what cognitive psychologists refer to as flexible intelligent. It is also an innate capability, thus it varies from one person to another. High flexible intelligence is associated with strong ability to process and store information. Low flexible one is associated with weakened ability to do exactly the same thing.

The later states that our development of academic background knowledge influenced by our academically oriented experiential base - the number of experiences that will directly add up to our knowledge from content we encounter in learning environment. It shows the correlation between our background knowledge and experiences in learning. The more academically oriented experiences we have, the more opportunities we have to store those experiences as academic background knowledge.

Next, back to the concern about how background knowledge works in our learning activities. We probably use what we retain, sooner or later, to respond to questions or topics once we recognize they are related or similar. For example, a young boy who visited a museum last weekend will eventually retell his visit if his speaking topic is “talk about your weekend activities”. In another situation, he also can write about such attracted things that he saw in the museum as paintings, collections or exhibitions if his teacher gives a more specific writing topic “describe a museum”. Therefore, we can generalize that if we have a great deal of background knowledge in our livings, we will have a plentiful source of information and ideas to answer a given topic.

In sum up, knowledge, to some extents, can be understood as a collection of various information that someone gathers from the surrounding environment and is stored in his or her memory until they face with an issue related to this information, which kind of memory will jump out into the current situation.
2.2.2. The significance of background knowledge in learning and accomplishing a non-native language.

When we talk about knowledge, we usually mention a word learning too. In this using the two words together, it seems to be that we are saying more than that there are connections between them. Robert McCormick and Carrie Paechter (1999) built up the idea of the nature of learning as a knowledge construction process (p. xi). In other words, it can be interpreted that we get our knowledge from learning and gradually accumulate to possess a system of knowledge. Acquired knowledge will lay a basic foundation for building up unknown knowledge and simple knowledge will help comprehend complex knowledge. Let’s imagine this whole process as building up a pyramid, we will have a vivid picture. If learner is a worker in this picture and his knowledge is huge blocks of stone, learning will be the constructional procedure in which these stones are placed in the order from the bottom to the top. And when we successfully create a complete pyramid, the finishing consequence, it is similar as getting the greatest achievement in learning, academic achievement.

Particularly, in learning a language, in this case, learning English as a second language, background knowledge seems to be a great and powerful source. Due to the relationship between language and culture, language learners are expected to be ones, who have a wide personal knowledge on such a field that language showed the greatest reflection and indication, culture. Morgan and Cain (2000) point out this relationship “is not a simple one and needs to be understood as an interactive dialectical process” (p. 8). In reality, this idea mentions to the fact that students will also need to know as much as possible foreign culture’s issues, aspects or contexts, which may not accord with those in their own cultures and will just happen in the operation in the foreign language classroom to be enable to truly access and comprehend as well as apply language’s conceptual norms on their learning. For example, insufficient knowledge and unfamiliarity with English-speaking country’s cultures (e.g., the U.S, England or Australia) make it more difficult for native Vietnamese-speaking learners to adapt themselves learning activities and even,
be unfamiliar with a certain culture whose aspect or matter is mentioned in the curriculum also prevent students from throughout understanding. Furthermore, with the information explosion in our modern society, particularly language-learning students are expected to, by themselves, access to huge sources of new information at home for collecting essential knowledge served for their learning purposes. While in classroom, there are various fields or topics in educational curriculum required to be extended for deeper discussion or at least, be little awareness for somewhat comprehension in case of dealing with them in the examination, ranging culture to other areas of life, e.g., history and society. This tendency sets a new requirement for all learners in general and non-native language learners in particular to constantly update and widen their own knowledge to catch up with new changes in their learning process and it also points out how important role knowledge plays in language learning.

Academic background knowledge affects more than just non-native language learning. It also influences greatly on academic achievements in general and language accomplishment in particular, obviously, included speaking skill. On considering all of elements contributed to learning activities, Richards, Hull and Proctor (1996) conclude, “speaking skill is a central focus of educational curriculum” (p. 10). Many elements in the syllabus (e.g., grammar, functions, topics, listening, pronunciation, vocabulary) all provide support for oral communication or interaction within the area of classroom. As a result, if background knowledge can help student improve their own language learning as mentioned earlier, their speaking skill, somehow, will be developed. In addition, Chen (2008) suggests, “teachers should prepare native Mandarin-speaking English language learners by helping them build background knowledge using reading text prior to speaking” (p. 97). She also show an evidence that non-native students are then able to generate better the ideas about the unfamiliar stories, based on their own experience and knowledge, after reading a text. In short, through building up background knowledge, English learning students can quickly activate their existing background knowledge as well as construct new one that can lead to meaningful exploration of the speaking topic’s
content they going to deal with, even if most information in the text are unfamiliar with them.

Generally, background knowledge has a great influence on almost all aspects of learning as well as language learning process, also on learners’ speaking ability. To briefly conclude this matter, let’s consider an advice that Rizvi (2005) gives to those who want to train their professional speaking skill, “self-analyze your own background knowledge first, before going to take part in oral communication” (p. 143).
Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1. Research question

With the aim stated earlier, the research question was addressed as following and this thesis was hoped to answer them:

*Is there any relationship between background knowledge and English speaking skill?*

3.2. Setting and research participants

3.2.1. The setting

This study took place in a rural high school named Thong Linh. It located on Hamlet 4, Phuong Tra Commune, Cao Lanh District, Dong Thap Province. Its location was in the northern and far away about 6 kilometers from Cao Lanh City, the biggest center of Dong Thap Province. With 732 students (323 males and 389 females) of 22 classes from 10th to 12th grade, Thong Linh was one of the largest high schools in Cao Lanh District’s area. In a total of these students, more than forty percent of students were in 10th grade, almost thirty-six percent were in 11th grade and about twenty-four percent were in 12th grade.

One hundred percent of student at this school had to study two shifts a day; one began in the morning and another started at an early time in the afternoon, except Thursday’s afternoon. Most of students came from Phuong Tra Commune, about 34 percent and some neighboring communes such as Phuong Thinh (16 percent), Phong My (19 percent), Tan Nghia (15 percent), Ba Sao (11 percent). Less than 5 percent of students were in such further communes as Gao Giong, My Xuong and Nhi My. Almost one hundred percent were the Kinh people (ethnic group) and nearly 70 percent were in
peasant families that their parents habitually spent time to work on the rice fields, fruit gardens or fishpond.

Formerly, Thong Linh high school took a great responsibility for educating students who graduated from secondary schools in a large area of six communes without any examination. For this reason, the students’ level of ability in Thong Linh was considered lower than some other high schools in Cao Lanh District’s area. However, from the school-year 2011-2012, those who wanted to be a student of Thong Linh high school had to pass the entrance examination with three main subjects: math, literature and English. After two years conducting the enrollment by entrance testing, there was positive change in educational quality in this school. The graduation rate was very high: nearly one hundred percent of 12th grade students had passed the graduation exam and more than thirty-three percent of these students got a chance to continue studying at universities or colleges.

The study was mostly conducted at the participants’ classroom. That was a medium-size room containing twenty-four pair-tables on which two students could sit. These tables were arranged into four rows, six tables for each row, and between each of them, there were small paths for students’ or teacher’s movement. There was a large blackboard on the front wall and below the board; there was also a platform on which there was a teacher’s table on the right side. Between the platform, which was usually considered as a teacher’s area in the classroom, and the first student’s table, there was an empty space in which students’ oral presentation could be took place.

3.2.2. The research participants

The research participants were students of 11CB1 class. There were 40 students in total in this class, with 31 female students and 9 male ones. At first, let’s see the meaning of numbers and letters in “11CB1” to have a general outlook about these participants:

- “11” indicated the grade; it means the research participants were in 11th grade.
• “CB” meant “fundamental program”; it is an educational terminology of Vietnam, referring to the content of curriculum. Students would have to learn *basic knowledge* and do basic exercises, in comparison with another program that required student to work with *advanced knowledge* and exercises that are more difficult.

• “1” was the ordinal number of the class, but this number “1” was also an important element that made this class different from others classes. As mentioned above, before being a student of Thong Linh high school, candidates had to pass the entrance examination. After that, those who got a high score in the exam were selected to, of course, “10CB1” class, and the rest were randomly put in others classes, ranging from “10CB2” to “10CB9”.

Hence, one significant thing when we talk about this class was that almost all of them were selected and pretty-good students. One year earlier, in the school-year 2011-2012, they were the first students’ generation that was selected by an entrance examination. Back to the past, the high score that had given them a chance to be a student of “10CB1” class last year was a total score of three subjects, of which English score was included. Naturally, that was the reason why we could not say that each student in this class was good at English, yet their learning English’s ability could actually be at a fair level. This judgment, evidently, corresponded with such an advanced and active teaching approaches that English teachers at Thong Linh have applied for them only. They usually let 11CB1’s students to do many extra exercises and learn more vocabulary beyond the textbook as well as required them to use the target language, English, in all of activities involved in the English lesson. As an obvious result, after more than one year being taught in this way, their skills and knowledge of English were virtually enhanced and raised to a new high-level so that they could be the best candidates for being selected as participants in this research about an issue related to English’s skill.

Thus, when seeking for suitable research participants, it was completely logical for a consideration that “11CB1” as the best choice, because of two main reasons:
First, depending on the research question and design, focusing on qualitative analysis, such a selected group of students as in “11CB1” class was assurance for the progress of the study. With 45 minutes for each learning period, the study would get no result if steps of research’s procedure were not carried out as fast as possible. The study would conduct in speaking period; obviously, students’ speaking would be a main activity. Excluding the time that speaking activities might occupy, there were about 25 minutes for supporting background knowledge to students (as proposed in theory) and doing many things that a typical English period at high school should have: warming-up activity, teaching vocabulary or doing tasks in the textbook. In other words, besides conducting an experiment and following the proposal’s steps, teaching students, also the research participant as well, was a need-to-be-completed task at the same time. For such a person who had no teaching experience in the reality, it’s somewhat difficult. One more advantage is the teaching practice’s time mostly in 11th grade. The teaching advisor in this school took a responsibility for teaching three 11th grade classes, included 11CB1, and only a 10th grade one. For this reason, with one lesson plan, it could be use to teach three different classes and of course, 11CB1 was the last one that being applied this lesson plan. It helped to manage and control the time for lesson better, thank to personal teaching experiences got from two previous lessons so that it could have enough time to record developments or at least, positive changes of students’ speaking skill during the research’s procedure. Consequently, after carefully considerations about advantages, selection students of 11CB1 among classes being taught seemed to a safe choice for the research’s successful capability.

Second, another reason to select 11CB1’s students for the study was dependent much on the compatibility between necessary condition for conducting the study and students’ textbook content. As previously mentioned, the study would be carried to find out whether there is any relationship between speaking skill and background knowledge or not by supporting information about unfamiliar speaking topics for students before letting them talk. Luckily, it was coincided that in 11th grade textbook, there were some unit’s
topics that might cause difficulties for students to discuss about in speaking lesson; and two of them were “Unit 15: Space Conquest” and “Unit 16: The Wonders of the World”. These topics, as in comments of teachers in Teacher of English’s Group, were “unfamiliar” and “very hard to be taught and learnt”. Another important thing was that, in the English teaching’s curriculum at Thong Linh high school, these units above would be taught exactly right the time when a two-month probation took place. Indeed, it was probably a coincidence, but it was also a reason why 11CB1 would be selected among other 11th grade classes for conducting this research.

3.3. Data collection instruments

To achieve the aims of the study with reliability, the study utilized three data collection instruments. These were personal observations, survey using questionnaires and interviews.

3.3.1. The observation instrument

The observations’ results were collected under natural, non-manipulative settings using an observation checklist (see Appendix 1). The observations of participants were conducted in their classroom, which was the natural setting under the supervision of two people. They are non-participant observers and they sat in the back of the room to avoid any interference to the setting and to create a suitable space or distance for evaluating participants’ speaking skill in such a criteria, voice. Observations took place once per two weeks in three speaking lessons for approximately 25 minutes per a lesson, 75 minutes in total of observation time. The observations focused on speaking activities during the students’ speaking time in the speaking class. These activities were the individual oral presentations; and the mutual oral communication between participants and the researcher, or the teacher as well. The purpose of the observation checklist was to evaluate the participants’ speaking skill. The criteria observed for the participants’ speaking skill evaluation were fluency, relevance content, voice, and automatic response in speaking situations or teacher’s questions. Based on the students’ performance, there were five wording rating scales for evaluating, including very good, good, average, poor
and very poor. A rubric table, see below, were sought and adapted for the purpose that it can be used as a reliable and convincible document of observation procedure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion Scales</th>
<th>Fluency</th>
<th>Relevance Content</th>
<th>Voice</th>
<th>Automatic response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very good</td>
<td>Can express himself/herself fluently and naturally, almost effortlessly.</td>
<td>Thoroughly master the main topic and supporting details, develop the topic fully and appropriately</td>
<td>Speak in a clear and loud voice in most instances</td>
<td>Response immediately and confidently to complex questions in the interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Fluent and natural, but occasionally needs to think in mind for expressions or compromise on saying exactly what he/she wants to say</td>
<td>Successfully present topic and organize supporting ideas, but not well-done in logic</td>
<td>Voice generally clear and loud, but somewhat unstable</td>
<td>Quite quickly in response but need a noticeable pause for thinking the answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Generally acceptable speed, but often hesitant as he/she thinks for expressions. Some noticeable pauses</td>
<td>The general organization is acceptable, but some ideas not appropriate in use</td>
<td>Listenable voice in most instance, but weak or low in some moments</td>
<td>Take a noticeable time for thinking the answer, partly confident with his/her own answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Frequent hesitations and pauses, can produce only short stretches of language at best</td>
<td>Has some noticeable difficulty in supporting for the topic, some illogical ideas not totally convinced the listener</td>
<td>Low voice, cause some difficulties for listener</td>
<td>Probably comprehend the question but take a long time to produce some key words in the answer, not a full sentence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very poor</td>
<td>Speak with long pause before most words and have limited ability to link simple sentences.</td>
<td>Listener completely do not understand what exactly the presenter talking about</td>
<td>Very low and unclear voice, partly unheard at the end of class</td>
<td>Cannot express any idea or give any answer in the interaction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Rubrics of grading speaking skill
Table 1 was a list of rubrics, or a scoring tool, that being adapted from the IELTS Assessment Criteria: Speaking, which was designed by British Council and University of Cambridge. It showed a series of criteria involving in speaking assessment, e.g., fluency, relevance content, voice and automatic response. A specific criterion was accompanied by a trait, a description to better illustrate the expectations for that section. Within this rubric table, possible and expected traits was listed and followed by a five wording rating scales. Each trait corresponded to a scale, ranging from very good to very poor. As a matter of fact, utilizing this rubric would help having a standard descriptions to compare with students’ oral performance for the most correctly evaluation.

These four speaking assessment criteria, based on the aim of the study, reflected aspects that were proposed to improve participants’ speaking skill. In other words, in the process of evaluating participant’s speaking skill, just criteria that were potentially improved by applying the proposed approach, supporting the background knowledge, would be focused during the experiment. It could be illustrated by the following figure:

![Figure 1: A proposed process of supporting background knowledge & speaking skill’s development](image-url)
Figure 1 showed the proposed process speaking skill’s development after participants were supported background knowledge, related to the topics they were going to talk. Obviously, in this diagram, the input was background knowledge and the outputs were the development of participants’ English speaking skill in four aspects: automatic response, fluency, relevance content and voice. That was a proposed procedure that was planed before and prepared to experiment in the reality.

3.3.2. The survey questionnaire instrument

Like the observation, the questionnaires were conducted at the participants’ classroom, and the procedure did not disrupt the participants’ normal daily classroom’s activities. There were two different sets of questionnaire: Questionnaire No.1 and Questionnaire No.2. Naturally, they served for different purposes:

- **Questionnaire No.1** was used to collect participants’ general information related to their own English learning in general and English speaking skill in particular as well as their personal background knowledge. Such information served for the purpose that helped researcher have a general outlook and get essential information to compare with the later evaluation of participants’ speaking ability on the observation checklist. The questions on this questionnaire were multiple-choice questions with four options: A, B, C and D, but the option D in 10 out of 12 questions could be referred to the open-ended question in which the participants had to write their own answer if they chose this option. There were 12 questions in total in Questionnaire No.1 and they can be divided into two sections as following:

  - **Section 1**: About the participants’ English learning and their English speaking ability:
    - Attitude toward English learning in general and speaking in spectacular (2 items)
    - Self-evaluation in their own speaking skill (1 items)
    - Problems in their English speaking time (4 items)
- **Section 2**: About personal background knowledge of participants

  ➢ Contact with sources of knowledge; the frequency of updating (1 item), the duration of each updating (1 item), kind of knowledge that they usually updated (information) (1 item)

  ➢ Intended effort, that is, the amount of time and effort that participants were willing spent to get more knowledge and apply their own knowledge into their speaking skill (2 item)

- Questionnaire No.2: was used to collect feedback from the participant after the process of conducting the study’s approach. It also included four multiple-choice questions with one open-ended option in each of them, concerning participants’ feelings or opinions after applying the supposed approach, supporting background knowledge source to their English speaking skill. The data collected from questions in Questionnaire No.2 were used to compare with the result in the observation checklist.

  The questionnaire surveys were conducted with the participants individually during their lunchtime, the time between the two learning spells: the morning and the afternoon; and their preparation time, about 15 minutes before starting the first’s morning period. The approximate time of conducting a survey by questionnaires ranged from 15 minutes for the questionnaire No.1 to 5 minutes for the Questionnaire No.2. Students could select only one option in each question. During the time in which participants answered questions in the two questionnaires, a silent and serious atmosphere was created and kept to, also, avoid the interruption, if any, to the natural setting and the participants’ thinking process as well.

  **3.3.3. The interview instrument**

  Interviews were conducted mostly at two different school sites, the canteen and schoolyard. The purposes of selecting these places, which were obviously outside the classroom, for interviews were to create a comfortable atmosphere as well as to increase
the friendliness in the relationship between the interviewer and the participants involved in the interviews. Totally, there were five participants, three female students and two male ones, who were involved in the process of interview. Interview’s questions focused on their feelings and attitudes after taking part in the study and being applied the research’s experiment. Also, there was a question that aimed to know what they thought about the possibility of the research’s approach, supporting background knowledge before conducting English speaking activities in classroom. Their answers was recorded by the researcher and transcribed into a paragraph for each student’s answers.

3.3.4. Validity and reliability of measure instruments

All of the two measurement instruments utilized in this thesis were valid for the intended purpose because they were carefully designed to measure what it was intended to measure. For example, as mentioned above, the observation checklist was designed to focus only on such speaking skill’s aspects, which were proposed would be changed and intended to confirm this proposal. Meanwhile, in the questionnaire, each question completely served for a specific purpose in its design and the collected information from these questions concentrated to the general purpose of each questionnaire. Moreover, the extent of the study, just experimenting with in a small group of participants within a classroom, could be considered as a factor that increased the validity of the results. The smaller area or scale involved in the study, the stronger information and result could be got for it.

The measure also had a strong the reliability so that another researcher could get similar results every time it is administered. Although the scoring and interpretation in this thesis were subjective, coding observations and open-ended questions, there were some reasons that could be used to evaluate whether the measurements are reliability or not. The first advantage increase the reliability of the measurement was that the researcher also a teacher of English as well. Although when conducting this thesis, it was just a training time in the field of teaching, evaluating the participants’ speaking skill could be conducted in the most precise way, based on learning and practicing experiences learnt at
the university. Furthermore, one of the virtuous characters of a teacher, justice in every educational activity, contributed to the reliability of measurement procedure. There was no reason for either giving certain student(s) a priority over the others or any other injustice thing in evaluating students’ speaking ability. The other reason for measurement’s reliability was relied on the setting and the participants. In the learning sites, in this case - the speaking class, participants had a conditional environment to speak English in the most natural way that they could find anywhere. This positive circumstance came not only from the participants’ acquaintance with the environment but from also their active learning attitude. Therefore, it could be assured that was a best moment to record and estimate their English speaking skill for the reliable results.

3.4. Data collection procedure

The data for this thesis were collected through three main measurement instruments: the observations, questionnaires and interviews.

3.4.1. Procedure of the observations

The observations were administered to participants in three speaking class periods: one was prior the experiment, the process in which a proposed approach was applied, and the two others were at the same time the experiment took place. In total, three observation periods were conducted, corresponding to three speaking classes in participants’ curriculum. Hence, to easily follow the observation procedure, they would be named one after the other, in the order of time; Period 1, Period 2 and Period 3. This procedure could be divided into two stages: pre-experiment stage, corresponding to Period 1 and experiment stage, corresponding to Period 2 and 3. The whole process of the Observations could be carefully described as followings:

- On Period 1 (pre-experiment stage), the researcher and his colleague observed a normal 45-minutes speaking lesson at 11CB1 class and the topic of that day was about “Hobbies” (Unit 13). They sat on different ending tables of the class and observed all students (participants)’ oral activities during the time of the lesson,
such as: oral communication between students and teacher or student and student; oral presentations and oral expressions about questions or issue involved in. Based on what observed, the researcher and his colleague, individually and independently, evaluated the speaking skill of those who participated in these activities and recorded it on the observation checklist. After the Period 1, researcher collected some initial and general outlook on some students’ English speaking ability.

- On Period 2 (while-experiment stage), the researcher, at that time, took a responsibility as a teacher of English of this class as well, conducting the proposed research’s process, supporting background knowledge to students before let them to English speaking activities while his colleague was still a pure observer. Teacher gave each student a handout (see Appendix 3) in which there was a short paragraph and five Wh-questions below the paragraph. Its content was about the significances of human’s landing on the Moon, which related to the speaking topic of that day, “Space Conquest” (Unit 15). This paragraph was rewritten by the teacher himself based on some information the teacher had collected from the official website of NASA and the encyclopedia website, wikipedia, so that the language in the paragraph was easy-to-understand. Students were required to read the paragraph silently and individually in 7 minutes, then think of the answers for all of five followed questions in 3 minutes. After that, teacher called on some students to give their answers and corrected them. Obviously, this type of supporting material was so-called reading comprehension and its purpose was to give students some essential understanding or awareness about the topic they were going to talk about. By reading the given information in the paragraph, teacher aimed that they could get, for their own, some personal ideas or outlooks about the issue from that they could relate or develop these ideas into other possible and logical ideas used in their speech. For this reason, the next pre-speaking task was brainstorming about other potential significances of human’s landing on the Moon
and students had to work in groups of ten students in 3 minutes. In order to warming up the learning atmosphere, teacher decided to integrate this brainstorming task into a competition game. The game’s rules were that each group had to choose a representative who took a responsibility for trying to remember all ideas given by group’s members. After time was over, the representative of each group came to the space before the platform and stood randomly in horizontal line. Teacher asked each of them, one after the other, from the left to the right, to speak one their group discussion’s idea and the later could not repeat the formers’ ideas. After 5 seconds when the former finished, if the later did not say anything, he or she would be a loser and come back to his or her seat. The game was continued until there was only one student standing in front of the whole class, and of course, this student and his or her group would be the winner. Then, after finish the game, it was time for speaking. Teacher asked students to continue working in-group in 5 minutes to prepare an oral presentation about one event of space conquest topic, “first humans to set foot on the Moon”. Students were allowed to use ideas that their friends had talked in the prior task (game) and encouraged to use new ones for their group’s presentation. Likewise, each group had to propose one representative to present orally the work of the group. At that time, teacher came to the end of the class and, individually and independently with his colleague, observed these students’ spoken performances. During their presentations, they focused on evaluating four main criteria, as indicated above; fluency, voice, relevance content and automatic response and recorded in the observation checklist. After the Period 2, teacher (researcher) got real experiences in the means of applying his thesis and valid information about students (participants)’ English speaking skill.

• On Period 3, the procedure was nearly the same with what had done in the Period 2, yet just the content of supporting material and speaking activities were different because at that period, the general topic was “The Wonders of the World” (Unit
16). Again, teacher put a poster (1) (see Appendix 3) on the board. The poster consisted of three very-short paragraphs, which were three descriptions about three wonders of the wonder: the Great Pyramid of Giza, the Taj Mahal and the Colosseum. All of the three paragraphs included general information about a famous and wonderful structure, but the paragraph about the Great Pyramid of Giza was a summary of the reading passage that students had learnt in the previous lesson while the teacher wrote the two others by his own word, based on his personal knowledge about the Taj Mahal and the Colosseum. Of course, there was a reason for an asynchrony in the formation of these paragraphs. Derived from the content of the students’ textbook, in which there was a requirement that students had to know about facts and opinions and how to distinguish them before started to speak. Thus, teacher had to reuse the reading lesson’s passage, the Great Pyramid of Giza, in a summary version to introduce about facts and opinions to students. It helped save time for not only teacher’s explanations but also for students’ comprehension, because that was the second time they learnt this information. The two latter were used in a different purpose from the former, supporting information, both facts and opinions, to get involved students’ awareness about two world’s wonders that were new and strange to them. The poster was used for two different purposes, as a supporting knowledge material and as a visual learning instrument for warming-up activity. At first, teacher ran through some potentially difficult words appeared in the paragraphs and asked students to read three paragraphs individually in 4 minutes to get the information mentioned in them. Then, they worked in group in 2 minutes to discuss the names of the wonders described in these paragraphs. After 2 minutes, they came to the board and wrote their group’s answers and the teacher, immediately, corrected them. Naturally, with the given information in the content of three paragraphs, students had some clues to associate with their existent background knowledge for getting a new knowledge, the accurate names of famous wonders. If the first wonders seemed to be very easy to guess, because they all known about it, all the
rest were really challenging for them. In the next step, students were required to think individually personal ideas, opinions, to answer four questions about the constructional process of the Taj Mahal in 4 minutes, derived from general information that they had read. These question were on a poster (2) (see Appendix 3) and also, in this poster, there were some useful structures that could be used to express an opinions. Later, the teacher asked students to share their own opinions in group’s discussion in 5 minutes, of five tables’ members in each group to make an oral presentation about “how could people build up the Taj Mahal?” Their speeches could be the combination of either their fours already completed answers that corresponded to the questions on poster (2) and were selected by the whole groups to form a short paragraph or some new opinions beyond these questions. After five discussion’s minutes, a representative of each group came to in front of the whole class and expressed orally his or her group’s work. As usual, the teacher came to the end of the class and sat on the last table there to observe student’s presentation while his colleague also done exactly the same thing. They individually and independently evaluated those students’ performances and recorded in the observation checklist.

3.4.2. Procedure of the survey questionnaires

The survey using Questionnaires were conducted in the classroom, the natural setting of research’s experiment, on two times, after the first and the last speaking class period, corresponding to the Period 1 and Period 3 in the Observations procedure above. It took place about 15 minutes for the former survey, using Questionnaire No.1 and about 5 minutes for the later one, utilizing Questionnaire No.2. The whole process of this survey could be described as followings:

• After finish the first Period, in the lunchtime, all of participants were asked to go back to the classroom and stand on their seat as if it was an official class period. Each of them was given a Questionnaire No.1 and heard explanations about its purposes as well as requirements in completing it. The participants were asked to
answer all the questions in Questionnaire No.1, only by themselves, in 15 minutes. Then, researcher came to the teacher’s table and sat down to avoid any unexpected interference to participants’ thinking. All participants’ actions were observed and kept control to make sure that no discussion, no idea’s exchanges happened during that period. After that, when time ran out, all of participants’ questionnaires were collected, but more importantly, in the specific order, from the left to the right and from the front row of tables to the back one. Because on the questionnaire, participants were said that they did not have to write their names on, to increase a comfortable spiritual status for them and to assure that their answers truly and exactly reflected what their actually thoughts or experiences. It seemed to be a clever strategy, in this case, because of the noticeable un-pressured environment during the time participants answered their questions. For that reason, when collecting their questionnaires, these sheets of questionnaire were purposely arranged in the order of their seats on the classroom and added their names, latter, corresponding to the questionnaires for the data synthesis and analysis in the concluding procedure.

- After finish the third Period, or the research’s experiment as well, one more time, participants were got to involve in another survey, using Questionnaire No.2. In this survey, the setting and procedure exactly as same as what was done in the mentioned survey above. This survey was conducted at 15-minutes-preparation time before the first class period on the morning and lasted in 5 minutes. The participants were also silently observed and controlled actions to which everything was happened in a serious way and as expected as what was anticipated. The questionnaires got back from participants also arranged in a particular order, corresponding to the order of participants’ seats on class for purposes of the latter procedure, data synthesis and analysis.

3.4.3. Procedure of the interviews
The survey using interviews was conducted at post-experiment stage to collect feedbacks from a small group of participants. There were five interviews and all of them took place at two outside-the-classroom places, a canteen and schoolyard, where there was a friendly atmosphere and ceremonious manner of communication between interviewer and interviewees, the participants. One more thing about the interviews was that the language used in communications was Vietnamese, to which participants could completely and truly express their own ideas at best. The procedure of these interviews could be described, in general, as followings:

- The appointments with participants were made with a particular time and place.
- When meeting together, the survey was started by asking some questions, one by one, which were focused on participants attitudes and feelings and their own opinions about the possibility of the experimental approach that was applied to the English speaking skill. These questions, somewhat, was nearly identical with questions in Questionnaire No.2, but because in this case of interviews, the participants’ answers were spoken, not chosen from given options as in the questionnaire, hence their ideas and opinions were expressed in a deeper and larger scale, in comparison with the ones in Questionnaire No.2.
- Participants’ answers or their feeling’s expressions as well, were carefully listened, and recorded in a piece of paper. When the participants were giving answers, sometimes, some additional details in their answers were asked to extend and deepen the involved content.

3.5. Data analysis methods

After the utilizing these measurement instruments, there were two different types of data: quantitative and qualitative data. Yet, to serve for the main purpose of the thesis, which focused on the English speaking ability’s changes during the experiment, referred to the qualitative study, it was decided to present collected data by organizing the
analysis around the research question. Moreover, inside the analyzing procedure of each type of data, there was a variety of micro-methods:

- Qualitative data, collected from the Observations and Interviews survey: narrative findings, coded data from these measurement instruments were used to make transcriptions, into the graphic formats and detailed descriptions; and comparisons between pre-data and post-data, of course, to find out the answer for the research question.

- Quantitative data, collected from the survey using Questionnaires: collected statistics was calculated and responded in percentages across participants or for specific item(s) in the integration with the research question. It meant that based on the discussion about the research question, percentages that derived from Questionnaires’ statistics were utilized, either in a general or specific scale, to illustrate and support for some aspects of the research question.
Chapter 4

The Result and Discussion

4.1. An overview of the research results

On this section, all of the results of the data analysis for each measurement instruments that was used in the study would be clearly stated.

4.1.1. The observations’ results

After conducting three observation periods, there were two sets of observations checklist: one set was recorded by the researcher and the other was recorded by his colleague, totaling 6 checklists. Here was the general results of these 6 checklists:

- On pair of checklist (1), corresponding to the Period 1 observation: there were five students whose English speaking ability was recorded, based on their oral presentation of the topic “talk about your stamps collection”.

- On pair of checklist (2), corresponding to the Period 2: there were four students took part in the oral presentation of the topic “talk about the important events in space exploration: first human to set foot on the Moon”.

- And on the pair of checklist (3), conducted in the Period 3: four students’ speaking skill was recorded in the checklist. The speaking topic of that period was “talk about your opinions that can be used to answer the question How could people build up the Taj Mahal?”. Now, here was the table in Figure 3.1 that synthesized all of recorded information was done in the Observations:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Fluency</th>
<th>Relevance content</th>
<th>Voice</th>
<th>Automatic response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>VG</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>VG</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1. A</td>
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<td>1. A</td>
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Table 2: The overview’s results of observations

**Annotation:**

- **VG** = very good  
- **G** = good  
- **A** = average  
- **P** = poor  
- **VP** = very poor

- **$\checkmark$**: a tick of the researcher

- **$\checkmark$**: a tick of the researcher’s colleague
Table 2 showed the final results of scoring students’ speaking ability through observation. When looking at the table above, one significant thing was that there were three students, who participated in all oral performances throughout three observation class periods. Truly, it was nearly impossible to get more students involve regularly and constantly in speaking activities due to such objective reasons as: limited time, students’ learning motivation, etc. For this reason, to measure whether or not supporting background knowledge help students improve their own English speaking skill, we could be able to utilize the scores of these three students for a completed comparison and conclusion about the experiment procedure.

Their English speaking ability, of course, before and after the experiment, would be a controversial topic in the Discussion section, but now, let’s consider the results they got for their own presentations. It had better to convert the wording rating scales used in the observation checklists into the number 1 to 5 rating scale, in which “very good” was equivalent “5”, “good” was “4”, “average” was “3”, “poor” was “2” and “very poor” was “1” to measure the student’s ability on a particular numeral. Their scores were calculated by the sum of the scores that was graded on the checklist during the whole process of observations and divided by the number of the scorers, 2, for the average results. Here were the exact average scores of our three students’ English speaking ability for each period:

- **Period 1:**
  - Student A: \((3 + 3 + 3 + 2 + 3 + 3 + 3 + 2) \div 2 = 11\)
  - Student B: \((4 + 3 + 3 + 4 + 3 + 3 + 3) \div 2 = 13\)
  - Student C: \((3 + 3 + 3 + 3 + 3 + 3 + 3) \div 2 = 12\)

- **Period 2:**
  - Student A: \((3 + 3 + 4 + 3 + 3 + 3 + 3 + 3) \div 2 = 12.5\)
  - Student B: \((3 + 2 + 3 + 3 + 4 + 3 + 3 + 3) \div 2 = 12\)
✓ Student C: \((4 + 3 + 3 + 2 + 4 + 3 + 3 + 2) \div 2 = 12\)

- Period 3:

✓ Student A: \((4 + 3 + 3 + 4 + 3 + 3 + 2) \div 2 = 12.5\)

✓ Student B: \((4 + 3 + 4 + 3 + 3 + 4 + 3) \div 2 = 13.5\)

✓ Student C: \((3 + 3 + 4 + 3 + 3 + 3 + 4 + 3) \div 2 = 13\)

![Scores of students' English speaking skill through the experiment](image)

**Figure 2**: A column chart expressing the changes on English speaking ability’s scores through the experiment

Figure 2 showed the changes on the English speaking ability’s scores of three students that the researcher had after the process of observation, based on the wording-scores on the checklist.

Now, we continue with other results from the quantitative measurement instruments, Questionnaire.
4.1.2. The Questionnaires’ result

There were two forms of the Questionnaire, named No.1 and No.2 Questionnaire. On this section, it would state all the calculated findings and respond them in percentages for each of questionnaire form, one by one.

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<th>Questions</th>
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Table 3: The overview result of the survey using Questionnaire No.1

**Annotation:**

N: number  P: percentage

The Table 3 showed the percentage of students’ answers (choices) to given questions on Questionnaire No.1.
As seen from it, on the first item, which asked students about personal attitude toward their English learning, the frequency of the responses was: 37.5 percent chose option (A) Very like, 32.5 percent chose (C) Not sure whether I like it or not, and 30 percent chose (D) Another opinion. In a total number of students who chose (D), 50 percent wrote Quite like and the rest wrote Neutral to create the answers using their own words.

On the next item, the second question, which focused on their personal opinions about whether speaking skill was the most difficult skill, in comparison with other language’s skills, or not, 72.5 percent of students selected (A) Yes while 27.5 percent chose (B) No.

On the third question, asking about how did they self-evaluate their own English speaking skill, 12.5 percent chose (B) Quite good and 45 percent chose (C) Not bad meanwhile 42.5 percent selected (D) Another opinion. The answers that students wrote by themselves when they selected option (D) were namely Bad, Quite bad and Too bad.

Subsequently, on the fourth items, which asked students about whether or not there was any difficulty during their speaking class, the results were that 92.5 percent chose (A) Yes and just 7.5 percent chose (B) No.

Next, the fifth question asked student about how often did they get involving in these difficulties. Their answers were, 70 percent of students selected (C) Sometimes and the rest chose (A) Very often.

When being asked that what these English speaking difficulties were in the sixth question, 7.5 percent of students chose (A) Having no idea to speak, 52.5 percent selected (B) Having ideas, but cannot express and 40 percent chose (C) Wasting of time on thinking in Vietnamese, then translating into English.

Later, on the seventh question about the main reason for these difficulties in English speaking, the results showed that only 1 percent of student chose (A)
Because the speaking topic is sometimes unfamiliar while 62.5 percent selected (B) Because the vocabulary is limited and 35 percent chose (C) Because there are no time and space for practice speaking outside the classroom.

- On the eighth question, students are asked about how often did they update information through such the mass media as newspapers, books, radio, television, etc., there was 30 percent of student selected (A) Everyday, 15 percent selected (B) Every week and 10 percent chose (C) Every month, meanwhile, 45 percent chose (D) Another opinion. In addition, students’ answers for option (D) were Rarely, occupying two-thirds, and Sometimes, taking one-third in a total number of written answers.

- How long did it take for each updating time was the ninth question. The results were that 22.5 percent of students chose (A) About half an hour, 15 percent chose (B) About one hour and 37.5 percent chose (C) More than one hour while the rest, 25 percent of student selected (D) Another opinion. Almost all of students who chose option (D) share the same idea that they could not remember the exact duration of each information updating time so that it was depending on free time they had and the duration of the programs they watched or listened.

- On the next couple of items, researcher aimed to know what kinds of information, or favorite source of information that students usually spent time to update and if they were freely in choosing the topic for English speaking practice, what topic would they choose. The results showed that 22.5 percent of students selected two different answers for these questions while up to 77.5 percent had the same selection for this couple of items. Particularly, on the tenth question, 10 percent of student chose (A) Science, 62.5 percent chose (B) Social affairs, 5 percent chose (C) Sport and 22.5 percent selected (D). The corresponding numbers on the eleventh question were 15 percent chose (A), 50 percent chose (B), 7.5 percent chose (C) while 27.5 percent of students selected (D) Another opinion. Answers created by students for completing option (D) were Learning and Entertainment (music, films and games).
And the last item focused on the students’ opinions that *whether or not it was worthy for spending time on updating the new information* and they also were asked to *write the reasons*, by their own words, *below the four options*. In the consequences, 87.5 percent of students selected (A) *Yes*, meanwhile 22.5 percent chose (C) *Not sure*. Students who chose option (A) gave some reason for their selection. They could be generalize into two main ideas: *Supplementing knowledge* and *widening education*. To those who selected (C), the principal reason they gave was that they were really afraid of *Wasting of time for unnecessary information and unsuccessful information seeking*.

That was all the results, responded in percentage, which was collected through the survey using Questionnaire No.1. Next, we continued with what was on the Questionnaire No. 2.

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**Table 4: The overview result of the survey using Questionnaire No.2**

**Annotation:**

N: number  
P: percentage

Likewise, Table 4 also showed the percentage of students’ answers (choices) to given questions on Questionnaire No.2. These questions were used to serve for the purpose of collecting feedbacks from those who took part in the experiment.
• As can be seen in this table, on the first question in which students were asked about what did they get through reading a piece of information related to the speaking topic, the result was 17.5 percent of students selected (A) Ideas for English speaking practice, 25 percent selected (B) Useful information and 57.5 percent chose (C) Essential vocabulary.

• On the next question, which asked about whether students felt that their speaking practice became easier or not, through given information on the supporting reading text, 50 percent of students selected (A) Yes, 35 percent chose (C) Not sure and 15 percent of students chose (D) Another opinion. In option (D), student wrote their own answers that their speaking practice was a little bit better than before but it was too difficult to say that it was improved or became easier.

• When being asked about which aspects had the most positive change through the experiment, 12.5 percent of a total number of students chose (A) Fluency, 45 percent chose (B) Relevance content and the rest 42.5 percent selected (C) Pronunciation.

• The last question in this questionnaire focused on did student think that reading a piece of information before starting speaking activities was an effective approach. The results showed that 92.5 percent of student selected (A) Yes while 7.5 percent selected (C) Not sure.

4.1.3. The Interviews’ result

After conducting totally five interviews, which was designed to collect students’ feedbacks in a deeper and larger scale. In the process of data analysis, the collected answers from students would be transcribed into short paragraphs, and then translated them into English because the originals were in Vietnamese, for the latter discussion. Here were those five paragraphs:

• “I really fell happy because of taking as a part of the research’s experiment. One thing I can notice that my English speaking ability has a somewhat positive
change during the experiment. For example, formerly I usually felt bored and sleepy when I learnt about topics that I had no idea to talk. In those speaking class, I were very passive and participated perfunctorily in speaking activities, especially when a teacher called me stand up and asked questions. However, in this experiment, even though I didn’t participate in the oral presentation, I also had some useful information, through the given supporting text, to prepare for myself in case of teacher asked me questions related to the topics. It allowed me to give responses to the questions automatically and quickly so that the interaction between me and the teacher became friendlier and easier” told Student 1.

• “When talking about the experiment, reading a supporting text before speaking, I just briefly want to say that it was better and easier to speak about what I known or understood, either party or completely. Somehow, I felt a confidence inside me and, of course, my voice also expressed this confident feeling; it seemed to be clearer and louder than before. In short, I myself actually realized that the experiment brought some benefits to my speaking ability, especially to my voice”, said Student 2

• “Reading a text helped me to collect essential information and ideas for the latter speaking activities. I used to be unable to fully develop my presentation in a well-organized arrangement because of lacking of supporting details. Thanks to ideas from the text, I could make my speech going smoothly, fluently and coherently. I thought that if the experiment was conducted in another class, the results would be as positive as what was done in our class”, said Student 3.

• “Although there were some changes in my own English speaking time, such as fluency and voice, it was also some uncertainties that make me confused and unsure to say whether the experiment was successful or not. Considered reading a text before speaking, I think it was very useful, but my existent problem is that the time was too short to do such many things as reading, understanding, then
applying what was read to speaking. I think that was very challenging and overloading”, said Student 4.

- Student 5 shared “As far as I could realize, reading a text before starting speaking activities was a helpful way to approach the speaking topic. Through the text, I could get not only ideas for speaking, but also useful vocabulary and structures for expressing my own other opinions related to the topic. But I think it had better to provide more vocabulary for us because sometimes, we all had the ideas but we didn’t have enough vocabulary to express them out”.

The above was all the results’ reporting of data analysis process from both qualitative and quantitative measurement instruments conducted throughout the study. In the next section, discussions about these findings would made to interpret what did these results mean and how did they help to conclude the research question.

4.2. Discussion

After stating the existent problem of English speaking skill, making proposal approach to solve this problem, applying the proposed method and conducting measurement process as well as survey to collect the results, now it was time to make the final interpretation of the results that were reported in the previous section. The results’ discussions would be organized within the areas of the research question, Is there any relationship between background knowledge and English speaking skill in order to be followed easily.

- The process of data analysis of quantitative data provided an interesting statistic that could delineate the relationship between background knowledge and English speaking skill. In fact, up to 72.5 percent of students selected or wrote by their own words the same answers for two different questions, (1) what kind of information, or favorite source of information, they usually spent time to update, and (2) what kind of topic would they choose if they were freely in selecting the topic for English speaking practice. It could be interpreted that students were
willing to choose a certain topic that they interested in for their speaking, or, in other words, they seemed to prefer to talk about topics that they were aware; by means of the information they spent time to update, than other ones, which were unfamiliar and challenging to them. For example, if a male student liked football very much and regularly watching football matches on TV or reading football news on daily newspaper, he certainly would feel eager and excited in speaking lesson, even if this topic just partly related (e.g., about sport in general) or fully covered the fields of football (e.g., about famous football teams, players or events). Likewise, a female one would rather talk about her favorite films, singers or actors than spend time to discuss matters related to such a complicated field as science. Generally, this correspondence between kind of most-frequently-updating information and kind of most-expected speaking topic in students’ choice could be a conclusion for the research question: between background knowledge and English speaking skill, there was an existing relationship, in which background knowledge indirectly influences on English speaking ability, via inspiring learners’ learning motivation or attitude. Indeed, background knowledge caused positive learning motivation or personal feelings, and then these active emotions helped learning and speaking English became easier in some ways. However, we just focus on pointing out this process, not further or deeper discovered how background knowledge activated students’ motivation or feelings and how these emotional conditions contributed to the more effective process of English learning as well as English speaking, because it was somewhat related to other sides beyond this study’s aims. Anyhow, it could be sum up that statistics from the quantitative data analysis pictured a perspective in which the more familiarity with a particular field students have, the easier procedure they get involved in speaking activities.

- Like quantitative data, the qualitative data analysis also showed the evidence about the existence of the relationship between background knowledge and
English speaking skill. In this section, the researcher would make the discussion on the results of the experiment process, which was conducting to answer for the research question, and the survey using questionnaire, conducted after finishing the experiment. It was the major and critical part of this thesis in which nearly almost all of statistics and findings collected from the all measurement instruments throughout the study got involved to be inflected and interpreted.

At first, we began with the result of the experiment that was recorded on the checklist and figured by the figure 2. On this column chart, one of the most significance was that all of the third Score, which was recorded on the third Period, the final period of the experiment; of all three students were higher than the first one, recorded on the first period of the experiment, as followings:

- Student 1: Score 1 = 11 < Score 3 = 12.5
- Student 2: Score 1 = 13 < Score 3 = 13.5
- Student 3: Score 1 = 12 < Score 3 = 13

Based on the comparison between the first and the last scores of three students, one of the study’s finding was supporting background knowledge to student really brought positive effects to their own English speaking ability. This finding were consistent with Chen’s recommendation (2008) that teachers should prepare non-native English learners by helping them build background knowledge using reading text prior to speaking. In other words, this finding of the study indicated that reading a piece of unfamiliar information enabled students to comprehend the upcoming speaking topic and another important thing was that it helped improve English speaking skill. Once clearly understanding main ideas that given by supporting texts, students seemed to be prepared carefully for what they were going to speak. They were equipped with vocabulary and sentence structures appeared in the reading texts, and the most significance was a series of ideas that could be used for creating and developing their latter own oral presentation, or, at
least, getting an aware so that they can deal with such classroom speaking activities as answering teacher’s question or pair working or group discussion. As a master of fact, with advantages from reading supporting texts, students’ English speaking skill would certainly be developed. In this progression, one or some certain aspects, among the four proposed speaking assessment criteria: fluency, relevance content, voice and automatic response, were improved. The improvement of these micro aspects contributed to increasing the higher final scores, in comparison with the first one; that students got for their oral performance and marked, also, a successful consequence that what the researcher had proposed and conducted were verified to be right in the practice reality.

The above was the discussion on the finding of the experiment stage collected by Observation checklists, now we kept moving to the discussion of another finding, which was came from the data analysis of other measurement instruments, survey using Questionnaire No.2 and Interviews, conducted at the post-experiment stage.

The survey’s finding showed that most of participants were in agreement about the effectiveness of the experiment and its benefits. Indeed, on these survey, most of students in class, 65 percent and all the interviewees, five out of five, were agree that the experiment brought to them benefits or advantages, or, at least, marked positive changes in their English speaking skill. Participants were those who actually participated in the experiment, truly experienced a proposed approach that the researcher had applied, and could really recognize whether or not their own English speaking ability has improved. Due to the limitation of time, being able to carefully and entirely observe and record speaking ability of all the students was an impossible thing. For these reason, their answers, or their confirmation as well, in this case, could be considered as objective evidences about the successfulness of the experiments. These answers also reinforced that the experimental results, in which although there was only three students were carefully observed and recorded, were not only founded and reliable for three cases (students) involved the study, but also
potential for successful capacity if it was conducted on other cases, in another period of time or space. Furthermore, with 92.5 percent of those who though what was done on the experiment was an effective way and 7.5 percent were unsure about this idea, there were seemed to be a great support from the majority of participants on the thesis experiment. It also indicated a high appreciation students gave to the method that they were involved in during the time of conducting the experiment.
Chapter 5

Conclusion

5.1. Summary of the research and implications on teaching

5.1.1. Summary of the research

The focus of this study was on improving students’ English speaking skill; stating the problems and possible reasons, proposing method for solution and experimenting the proposed approach. The literature review of the thesis was based on the theoretical background of speaking as well as speaking skill and its important role in English learning; background knowledge and the significance of background knowledge in academic achievements through published books of scholarships’ researches.

The study aimed to find out the relationship between background knowledge and English speaking skill. As a result, the only one research question is: Is there any relationship between background knowledge and English speaking skill?

The data analysis was provided by a group of participants, forty students of 11CB1 class at Thong Linh High School. The study utilized three data collection instruments: personal observation, survey questionnaire and survey interview. These instruments were used to serve for the purposes of the experiment conducting in this thesis. The experiment applied to participants were conducted at three periods in the duration of 8 weeks. At that time, the observation also carried out. At the beginning and after the experiment finishing, surveys using questionnaires and interviews were conducted to collect critical information for analysis and discussion.

Data analysis methods in this study were calculation, making comparisons and response in percentage to the researcher question.
After the results was presented, the discussion to the related areas of research question were made in order to point out and highlight major findings after conducting the study. Then, some implications on teaching was introduced.

5.1.2. Implications on teaching

As mentioned in the former part, finding out the relationship between background knowledge and English speaking skill were intended to provide some possible implications for teaching English speaking skill at high school in Dong Thap Province. These implications mainly came from the experiences of researcher during the procedure of conducting the experiment.

First, it was essential for teachers to get their students, as much as possible, involved in speaking activities in classroom. Due to the limited time for each lesson and the huge volume of demanding tasks required in the textbook, there was not many students actually had a chance to speak. Therefore, teacher could encourage their students in participating oral activities by providing them with many communicative opportunities. Teachers could also set students’ seats into pairs, small groups or teams, in which they can practice some oral activities as role-play or discussion. These activities can stimulate students’ enthusiasm and interest in practicing their English speaking skill.

Second, teachers should provide their students any kind of input that served for the purpose of helping student understanding the speaking topic in an easy way. In other words, it was enhancing or widening students’ background by using a variety of supporting materials related to speaking topic. Based on the condition in teaching reality, teacher should select the most appropriate one. Normally, a typical type of supporting material in classroom was reading texts, collected from newspapers, magazines, books, etc., or adapted from online articles and websites. If teachers wanted to warm the classroom’s atmosphere up, they could use such audiovisual materials as songs, pictures, video clips, etc. downloaded from the Internet. For example, if the speaking lesson’s topic was “Wonders of the world”, teacher could let students see a short video clip, of which the content certainly dealt with this topic. It would be great for students because
they could enjoy a vivid clip and get awareness or information to prepare for the lesson, as well as for their latter speaking activities.

5.2. Limitations of the study and suggestions for further studies

5.2.1. Limitations of the study

There were several limitations in the thesis that should be noted. First, there was a limitation regarding the evaluation of participants’ English speaking skill of the study. Although it was all belonged to objective reasons, the limited and short time of a class period at high school and the variety of a teacher’s works, in which the researcher had to complete within 45 minutes, being enable to observe and evaluate only three students’ speaking ability showed a weakness of the results, as well as the final conclusion. In comparison with the total number of participant, forty, obviously the number of students involved in the observations’ procedure was much smaller; thus, the final results just focused and reflected a minor scale and seemed not to be much reliable and convinced to those had a strong belief on statistics. Another limitation was related to the supporting materials used in the experiment. Although all of them were adapted and rewritten by the researcher, after a process of careful selecting and transferring from academic language, or, difficult language to easy one, they still caused problems for students to comprehend. No matter how simple to understand the researcher thought, there was a gap between supporting texts and students’ reading comprehension skill. As a matter of fact, that was a possible reason why only a few students participated in speaking activities after the supporting stage.

5.2.2. Suggestions for further studies

Although the relationship between background knowledge and English speaking skill have been discovered and experimented so far in this thesis, it still could cover one area of language learning whereas there are many aspects related to such a complicated and profound relationship between language learning process and personal background
knowledge. As a result, latter researchers could further find out more about this topic. Here are some suggestions:

- The relationship between English reading skill and personal background knowledge.
- The relationship between English listening skill and personal background knowledge.
- The relationship between English writing skill and personal background knowledge.

The thesis has been completed with greatest efforts. Yet, during the making of the thesis, a serious academic work, inadequacies and mistakes were inevitably unavoidable. Therefore, sympathetic comments and suggestions were highly appreciated.
REFERENCES:


Florez, M. A. (1999). *Improving Adult English Language Learner’s Speaking Skill*. Washington, DC: NCLE Publisher


### APPENDICES:

#### Appendix 1: The Observation checklist

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<tr>
<th>Period</th>
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<th>Relevance content</th>
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**Annotation:**  
VG = very good  
G = good  
A = average  
P = poor  
VP = very poor
Appendix 2: Supporting materials using in the experiment

1. The handout using in Period 2

Read the following text and answer these questions:

A remarkable achievement of space exploration is putting human being on the moon. When Neil Amstrong was on the Moon’s surface, he said, “That’s one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind”. This famous saying marked a significant milestone in human’s developmental history: landing on the moon, the only natural satellite of our planet. This historic movement, of course, inspired technological breakthroughs. Scientist in powerful countries spent much time in research, from modernizing astronaut’s spacesuit to improving special equipment for faster and safer spaceship. In addition, Amstrong and his fellow collected 47 pounds of Moon’s surface materials to be returned to the Earth for analysis. Based on these specimens, we could learn about its composition, age, and about the similarities between the moon and the Earth. Last, Amstrong’s feet on lunar surface were considered as the first steps of our ambition in sending human beings to other planets in the solar system, beyond the Moon.

1. What did Amstrong say when he was on the Moon?

2. What did Amstrong’s successful landing on the Moon inspired?

3. What did Amstrong collect on the Moon?

4. What could we learn from his collected specimens?

5. How did Amstrong’s feet on the Moon consider?
2. The posters using in Period 3

Poster (1)

1. This wonder of the world is located in Egypt. It was built around 2560 BC. It is believed to have been built by 100,000 laborers over a 20-year period.

2. This wonder of the world is located in Rome, Italy. It was used for contests between gladiators and public spectacles and could seat around 50,000 spectators.

3. This wonder of the world is located in India. The Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan had it built in memory of his favorite wife. The construction began in 1632.

Poster (2)

Useful language:
- I think/ I am sure…
- It is said that…
- The pyramid is said/believed/thought to have been…
- Probably they…
- They must/can/may/might have

Discuss possible answers to the following questions

1. How long did it take to build the Taj Mahal?
2. Where did the builders find the marble stones?
3. How did they transport them?
4. How could they build the Taj Mahal so wonderful?
Appendix 3: Questionnaire No.1

Read the following sentences and choose the most appropriate answers to you among A, B, C and D. If you choose option D, please write down your answer by your own words.

1. Do you like learning English?
   A. I like it very much
   B. I don’t like it at all
   C. I’m not sure about whether I like it or not
   D. Other opinion __________________________

2. Do you think that Speaking is the most difficult skill in English learning?
   A. Yes, I do
   B. No, I don’t think so

3. Can you give a general evaluation about your speaking skill?
   A. It’s good
   B. It’s quite good
   C. It’s not bad
   D. Other opinion __________________________

4. Are there any difficulties in your speaking time?
   A. Yes, there are
   B. No, there aren’t

5. How often do you get into difficulties in speaking lesson?
   A. Always
   B. Sometimes
   C. Rarely
   D. Other opinion __________________________

6. What difficulties are?
   A. Having no idea to talk
   B. Having ideas but cannot express
   C. Spending much time for thinking in Vietnamese and then translating into English
   D. Other opinion __________________________

7. According to you, what is the main reason for your difficulties in speaking?
   A. Because the speaking topic is sometimes unfamiliar
B. Because the vocabulary is limited
C. Because there are no time and space for practice speaking outside the classroom
D. Other opinion ________________

8. How often do you update news or information through such mass medium as: newspaper, TV, radio, Internet, etc?
A. Everyday  C. Once a month
B. Once a week  D. Other opinion ________________

9. How long does it take?
A. About half an hour  C. About more than one hour
B. About an hour  D. Other opinion ________________

10. What kinds of information or news you usually update?
A. Science  C. Technology
B. Social affairs  D. Other opinion ________________

11. If you can freely choose the topic to talk in your speaking lesson, what kinds of topic will you choose?
A. Science  C. Technology
B. Social affairs  D. Other opinion

12. Do you think that it’s worth spending time for updating your personal knowledge through such mass medium as: newspaper, TV, radio, Internet, etc., and why?
A. Yes, I do  C. I’m not sure
B. No, I don’t think so  D. Other opinion ________________
I think so because _____________________________________________
Thank you very much for your cooperation!
Appendix 4: Questionnaire No.2

Read the following sentences and choose the most appropriate answers to you among A, B, C and D. If you choose option D, please write down your answer by your own words.

1. Through the speaking classes, what does reading a piece of information related to the speaking topic bring to you?
   A. Ideas  
   B. Useful information  
   C. Essential vocabulary  
   D. Other opinion ______________________________

2. With what given by the reading text, do you feel that your speaking practice become more easily?
   A. Yes, I do  
   B. No, I don’t  
   C. I’m not sure  
   D. Other opinion ______________________________

3. Which aspect has the most positive change on your own speaking skill practice through what given by the reading text.
   A. Fluency  
   B. Pronunciation  
   C. Relevance content  
   D. Other opinion ______________________________

4. Last, do you think that reading a piece of information before starting speaking activities is an effective method?
   A. Yes, I think so  
   B. No, I don’t think so  
   C. I’m not sure  
   D. Other opinion ______________________________

Thank you very much for your cooperation!