

Using visual aids to improve 10<sup>th</sup> grade students English speaking ability at a high school in Thai Nguyen, Vietnam

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**Abstract:** This research is aimed at improving the speaking ability of grade ten students at Thai Nguyen ethnic boarding school using visual aids and then explored students' attitudes towards the use of visual aid in teaching and learning speaking. The research was carried out through action research that consisted of one cycle with three meetings. The data of the study were in the form of qualitative and quantitative data. The quantitative data were acquired through pre-test, progress test, and post-test. Whereas the qualitative data were obtained from the observation during the implementation of the actions; informal interviews with the students in a grade 10 class. Thirty-one students in class 10A3 participated in this intervention. The results of the research show that there was an improvement in the students' speaking ability using visual aids. The visual aids used in this research were video, pictures, real objects and flashcards. The videos could get students' attention and improved their learning motivation. The students could have better understanding of the use of English in real situation as they learnt appropriate models of speaking English through videos. Results also showed that the students made improvements in some aspects of speaking skills, such as pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and fluency. They were more confident to speak English and actively participated during the teaching and learning process. The students also thought that learning with visual aids would be more effective if it was conducted more than once. Based on the results of the action research, the researcher proposed implications and recommendations on using visual aids to improve students' speaking ability for the students, teachers and future researchers.

**Keywords:** Visual aids, ethnic students, ethnic boarding school, speaking ability, improvement, attitude

## 1. Introduction

In the context of the global integral era in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, English can be understood as an international language because people from many different countries use it to communicate. "English as a tool of communication has been playing an important part in acquiring cultural, scientific and technical knowledge, for collecting worldwide information and carrying out international exchange and cooperation" (Liu, 2010, p. 136). According to Ihsan (2011), the importance of English includes the ability to communicate both orally and in writing.

In the teaching context at Thai Nguyen Ethnic Boarding School, there existed some problems with speaking skills that the researcher came across to help the students improve their speaking performance in the classroom. The first problem was that speaking skills was rarely taught in the classroom because each unit had a lesson of speaking. Moreover, according to the National Curriculum in Viet Nam, there were 10 lessons of speaking per year. Therefore the time for practising speaking skills was not much in class. The second problem in the speaking class was that the students were shy to speak, they were afraid of making mistakes and errors, they have limited vocabulary, they find it difficult to express their ideas or opinions and keep their talking, they could not pronounce a lot of words in their sentences well, and they always tended to forget what to say when they were sharing their ideas. Furthermore, the students were still passive in participating, mostly in the tasks of enhancing the speaking skills. The final problem was that the format of the test for the General Certificate of Secondary Education focused on grammar. In fact, although students study four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing, the time for speaking is not much. Therefore, students do not have much chance to speak. Moreover, the content of speaking is quite easy, so it appears to demotivate students. Most of the English lesson time was spent on teaching and learning structures students did not have much opportunity to practice speaking and eventually lost their interest in learning speaking. Therefore, the author decided to apply visual aids to improve students' ability in speaking skills at Thai Nguyen Ethnic Boarding School. In an attempt to improve the situation, the researcher conducted an action research entitled "Using visual aids to improve 10th-grade students' English speaking ability at a high school" to see whether visual aids application could improve the students' speaking ability or not. As an English teacher, the researcher

expected that this study can contribute a part in enhancing the speaking ability for the 10th students in particular and all the students in Thai Nguyen Ethnic Boarding school in general.

### 2. Methodology

The main aim of this study was to know whether the visual aids could improve students' speaking ability or not. Therefore, the current study answered the research questions:

*- To what extent do visual aids improve the student's English - speaking ability?*

The main aim of the present study is to explore the use of visual aids to improve students' speaking ability in an ethnic boarding school; therefore, action research is employed in designing this study. According to Hussain (2018, p.37), action research is "an approach in which the action researcher and a client collaborate in the diagnosis of the problem and in the development of a solution based on the diagnosis". In other words, one of the main characteristic traits of action research relates to collaboration between researcher and member of organization or school in order to solve organizational or classroom problems. Burns (2010, p.2) also affirms that, action research is "part of abroad movement that has been going on in education generally for some times". It is related to the ideas of 'reflective practice' and 'the teacher' as 'researcher'. Nunan (1992, p.18) stated that action research has a "distinctive feature that is those affected by planned changes have their primary responsibility for deciding on courses of critically informed action which seems likely to lead improvement and for evaluating the results of strategies tried out in practice".

This research was conducted at Thai Nguyen Ethnic Boarding School with students who came from remote and mountainous areas of Thai Nguyen province. All students had learned English with the new-version coursebook. There are 18 classes with around 30 students per class. There are 4 English teachers, all graduated from English education department. They have at least 5 years of teaching English. Their experiences also support their English teaching skills.

There were 6 classes of grade 10 at Thai Nguyen Ethnic Boarding School with a total of 180 students. The researcher was in charge of teaching English to two classes (10A1 and 10A3). This study's participants were 31 students in Class 10A3, including thirteen males and eighteen females. All of the participants were 15 years old. They had been studying English as a compulsory school subject for at least seven years. By the time of the study, they had had four years of learning English at secondary school and they were at the beginning of the first term of the academic year 2021-2022. The students shared a similar background concerning culture, education, and living conditions. When this research was carried out, they had finished the first term of the first year in high school education (grade 10).

#### The procedure of Classroom Action Research

According to Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) in Burns (2010), there are some steps in conducting the research. In this research, the researcher followed and makes use of these steps as follows

##### 1. Determining the thematic concern on the reconnaissance

The first step in conducting this research is determining the thematic concern. The researcher observed the teaching and learning process in class 10A3. Then, the researcher discussed with the English teacher about the existing problems.

##### 2. Planning

To improve the students' speaking ability, the researcher discussed with English teachers in the school. The aim of the action is to improve the students' speaking ability using visual aids to support the English language teaching. The action plans were planned as follows:

- a. using visual aids in teaching speaking,
- b. reviewing the materials and media,
- c. testing the students' speaking ability.

3. Action and Observation

Some action plans were implemented in the classroom in some cycles, depending on the research study itself. Each cycle was done in about three meetings. Besides implementing some action plans, the researcher observed and recorded the teaching and learning process and did the interview with some students of class 10A3 after the action had been done. All the members involved in the research discussion based on the actions analysis. The result of the discussion was important to serve as an evaluation for the implementation of the action plans to improve the next actions.

4. Reflection

Reflecting was the phase after acting and observing. This was the time to reflect or review everything that has been done in implementing the action. It evaluated the process, problems, effects, and measured whether the action was successful or not. In addition, the entire member involved in the research participated in the discussion. Each member was invited to contribute their perceptions, suggestions, and ideas. The unsuccessful actions were changed into ones that were more suitable but those, which were successful, would be applied again in the next actions.

Data analysis

A speaking scoring rubric was used to assess and collect the data of the students’ speaking ability. The rubric of the students’ speaking performance was used to get the information about the students’ speaking ability after using visual aids had been conducted. To collect all the data, the researcher utilized a camera and a recorder to record the students’ performances in the teaching and learning process. There were some useful steps to get an overall framework for the analysis according to Burns (2010) including Assembling the data; Coding the data; Comparing the data; Building interpretations; and Reporting the outcomes.

3. Results and Discussions

To measure the students’ initial speaking ability before implementing the action, the pre-test was conducted. The pre-test, progress test and the post-test were conducted in the beginning, in the middle and in the end of the intervention. The researcher and one English teacher became the raters to score the tests. This was to check the reliability of both the pre-test and post-test and also to fulfill the democratic validity of the research.

Table 3.1 The Pre-Test Mean Score

	Pronunciation	Grammar	Fluency	Vocabulary	Total
Mean	1.85	2.13	2.64	2.71	46.65

In the pre-test, it can be seen that students have problems with pronunciation and grammar. The researcher referred back to the recordings of the pre-test and found that the students just pronounced the word like the way they were written and grammatical errors are mainly in making questions.

Classroom Action Research Process

a. Planning

To implement the actions, the researcher did some preparations and plans to make the actions successful. The actions were focused on improving the speaking ability through the use of visual aids, in this case, video. The researcher would be the teacher during the implementation of the actions for the first cycle.

b. Action

The actions were carried out three times on October 12th, 19th, and 26<sup>th</sup> 2021. The actions were focused on the use of the video to improve the speaking ability. The researcher acted as the teacher, she also set a smartphone in the class corner to record the whole lesson for further investigation. The data during Cycle I was gained from classroom observations, interviews, and video recordings of the students’ performance.

Following is the procedure and progress of the first meetings. The others followed the same procedures and progress but with different topics and requirements. During the first meeting, the researcher told the students that they were going to learn talking about TV shows: Write Talking about TV shows. Elicit comments on the pictures and get students to brainstorm the names of some celebrities related to *Vietnam Idol* shows. The students got a paper from the researcher. The researcher told the students that she was going to play a video about a *Vietnam Idol* show and there were some expressions of comparing and contrasting if one can do something. The students should pay attention to the video and wrote down what the MC comments on the column from the paper they got.

The researcher played the video. The students paid attention to the video. The students sometimes laughed when they saw something funny in the video. Some students took a note while the others just watched the video. When the video ended, the researcher asked the students if they have finished doing the task or not. The video was being played once again, and the researcher told the students to do their tasks. The students did the task. After the students finished doing their tasks, the researcher asked some questions related to the video. The students answered them together based on their work. The students got all the correct answers. The male students seemed more active in answering the questions. The researcher showed the transcript video and emphasized the expressions. The video was being played once again, and the students repeated the expressions after the narrator. The students were very enthusiastic and interested to repeat after the narrator. The researcher asked the students if they found any difficult words but they did not find any difficult words.

The researcher told the students that the next activity was playing games. She divided the students into two groups. The first group got a picture with an activity, for example, a picture of a girl singing and the word “sing”. The other group got a card with an order, for example “find someone who can dance”. All the students got different cards. The students had to ask their friends by using the expression, “This is the same ...” “It looks like ...”, “The winner is ...”, “the prize is ...” depending on the card they got. The students did the task quickly. They wanted to be the first one to find their match. They looked very busy asking their friends one by one. They were very interested and full of spirit in playing this game.

The same procedures were applied to the other two meetings with different topics in different units (Unit 4: For a better community - Speaking lesson: Community development; Unit 5: Inventions – Speaking lesson: Unique inventions).

### *c. Reflection*

The researcher and her colleagues in the school discussed the teaching and learning process to make some reflections after executing the actions and carefully studying the video recordings in Cycle I. They reviewed the data from the observations and interview transcripts during the discussion to assess the action taken. Everyone was free to express their thoughts, feelings, and comments about the actions that had been taken.

The students learned from the acceptable models of speaking in English in the films. It was used as input materials so that students could obtain as much information and practice with the phrases as feasible. The video piqued their interest, and they relished the opportunity to learn through this medium. They learned the correct pronunciation as well as the written words being pronounced by watching the video, which included subtitles. They also understood how to employ the phrase in a real-life situation.. Students also show their interest in learning to speak English with video, pictures, games and roleplays as they expressed:

*“I like it very much, watching videos is fun and I can learn a lot”*. Student 7.

*“I can easily remember what to say and how to say it correctly. It’s fun and I want to study English like this all the time”* Student 21.

Regarding the use of English instructions in the class, the researcher used the classroom English in every meeting to make the students more aware of the English words and increase their vocabulary. The classroom English was used in some ways like for greeting the students, opening the lesson, checking the students’ attendance, explaining the materials, giving instructions, giving feedback, and closing the lesson. The researcher also used Vietnamese translation sometimes, when the students did not understand the expressions.

d. Findings

Besides the observations and interviews conducted during the implementation and reflection, there was also a speaking assessment to measure the improvements of the students' speaking ability to support the data validity. There were four indicators of the speaking performance such as pronunciation, grammar, fluency, and vocabulary that the researcher used. The following table presents the students' mean scores on each aspect of speaking during the teaching and learning process or in the progress test which was taken after the 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting (Unit 4 For a better community - Speaking lesson: Community development)

**Table 2. The Progress Test Mean Score**

	<b>Pronunciation</b>	<b>Grammar</b>	<b>Fluency</b>	<b>Vocabulary</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Mean</b>	2.36	2.84	3.11	3.42	58.65

As can be seen from Table 3.4, the results of all four examined aspects increased. During the intervention, the researcher also found out that the use of visual aids as the teaching media to provide the appropriate models of English for the students in the real context of communication were successfully achieved. Students' motivation and interest in learning English through video watching were improved. Students got more chances to practice speaking English through imitating the narrator and through communicative speaking activities. However, the researcher also found out that some students over enjoyed the video watching and forgot to do the task. The students needed more time in understanding the researcher's instruction. They would ask for Vietnamese translation because they did not understand it. The researcher also saw that the preparation was quite time-consuming.

However, due to the spread out of the new strains of Corona virus like Delta and Omicron, the second cycle was not implemented because all the classes were studied online again. The policy of focusing on some specific content in the English program from MOET and DOET stopped the researcher from continuing the intervention. Therefore, the researcher decided to end the intervention after Cycle 1 and delivered the post-test then report what she has done so far.

The following table presents the students' mean scores on each aspect of speaking or in the post-test.

**Table 3.5 The Post-test Mean Score**

	<b>Pronunciation</b>	<b>Grammar</b>	<b>Fluency</b>	<b>Vocabulary</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Mean</b>	3.07	3.71	3.90	3.95	73.15

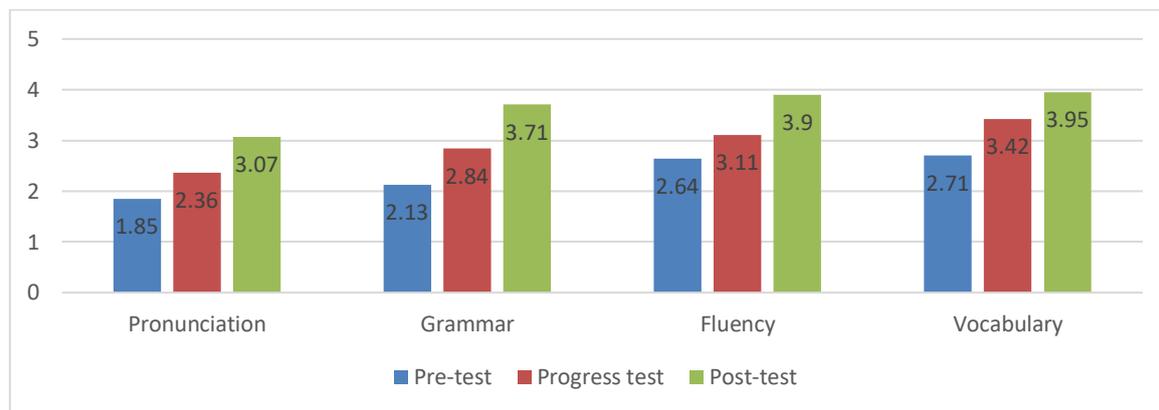
It is clear that the students' mean score was improved. In the progress test, the mean score was 58.65 and, in the post-test, the mean score was 73.15 as presented in Table 4.5 below. In general, the students made a good improvement in their pronunciation, grammar, fluency, and vocabulary. In conclusion, the use of audiovisual aids was proven to be effective to improve the students' speaking ability.

**Table 3 The Comparison of the Pre-test, Progress test and Post-test Mean Score**

<b>Score</b>	<b>Pre-test</b>	<b>Progress test</b>	<b>Post-test</b>
<b>Mean</b>	46.65	58.65	73.15

Moreover, the results of the students' speaking performance during the intervention were also presented to support the finding that the use of visual aids could improve the students' speaking ability. The improvement of the student's speaking performance during the intervention can be seen in the following figure.

Figure 1 Students' performance on different aspects of speaking



In sum, the research aimed at describing how the use of visual aids could improve the speaking ability of class 10A3 at Thai Nguyen ethnic boarding school. Referring to the research objective, the findings showed that the use of visual aids improved the students speaking ability in the aspect of pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and comprehension. Çakir (2018) states that the effect of using visual is almost twice as much as using audio-only or visual-only media. Marzuki (2019) emphasizes the best side of visual aids that they made the process of learning has become quite exciting for the students with the visual aids. It helps the students in generating an open mind for learning. In the interview, the students said that they could easily understand the materials through watching the video. They were very enthusiastic in learning English. They could practice their pronunciation by imitating the narrator and get more understanding since there were subtitles on the video. They knew how to pronounce some words. The students found it was easily to understand the content of the video even when they did not know the meaning of some words. Just by watching the moving pictures, they could guess what happened to the video.

The implementation of visual aids (videos) and its supporting actions including applying some communicative speaking tasks, using classroom English during the teaching and learning process, giving feedback on the students' works, giving handouts and giving rewards were successful in improving the students' speaking ability of the class 10A3 at an ethnic boarding school in Thai Nguyen province in the school year 2021-2022. That finding could be inferred from the observation and the interviews with the students during the research.

In addition, the students were more engaged in the activities and showed a high level of motivation throughout the process. The use of visual aids in the classroom when teaching them how to speak can encourage them to participate more actively in the lesson. It can be evident in their participation in group or individual work tasks, for example. The students' attention and interest are drawn to the movies, photographs, and other information they are exposed to through their viewing. It encourages the students to express themselves. They are able to collaborate with their peers without interfering with their work. It can be observed when the students work in groups on group projects. Moreover, they are in intimate contact with one another. They also have a close relationship among them.

They were more eager to answer the teacher's questions. Piaget in Byrnes (1996, p.16) claimed that: "The children should be active, brave and have high motivation in learning, therefore they will get success in the future, and the teachers are able to guide them by giving appropriate media, but the most important is the children are able to understand knowledge by finding itself".

From the statement, it can be summarized that the students' activeness and motivation are really needed in conducting the teaching and learning process. Having high motivation and activeness in early education will influence the students' success in the future.

#### 4. Conclusion

This research was conducted to investigate the positive effect (if any) of using visual aids in improving students' speaking ability among the ethnic students in class 10A3 at an ethnic boarding school in Thai Nguyen province during the first semester of the academic year 2021-2022. By using visual aids to support the communicative teaching, the researcher succeeded to improve the speaking ability of the students in class 10A3. The action research

was carried out in a cycle and was effective in improving the students' pronunciation, grammatical mastery, vocabulary, fluency and confidence. The actions consisted of the use of videos (as one kind of visual aids) as modeling of the input materials combined with the use of communicative speaking activities, such as games, giving feedback, acting out dialogues, and role-play.

After implementing the action research, the researcher found some effective ways to improve the speaking ability of the grade 10 students at Thai Nguyen ethnic boarding school by using visual aids in the academic year of 2021-2022. First, the use of visual aids could attract the students' attention and motivation in learning English, especially speaking. It made a good atmosphere for the students to understand the materials. By giving them this kind of media, learning English could be done in such a fun and interesting way without burdening them with difficult materials. This way could make the students build up their confidence.

Second, the students could get a better understanding of the materials given, since the visual aids gave them clearer examples of the real context in life. The students could guess the meaning just by watching the video. Third, this media gave both audio and visuals that made them know exactly how to pronounce the words because they also could see the subtitles on the video. Fourth, by giving them communicative speaking activities such as games, acting out dialogues and role-play, the students could get more opportunities on practicing their speaking skills. They could interact with all their friends since the task required them to do so. Some students mixed both English and Vietnamese in answering the teacher's questions or instructions. It showed that the students' willingness to try to use English when they were speaking was improved. Therefore, the teaching and learning processes became more interactive and communicative. Acting out a dialogue and doing role-play in front of the others were able to build the students' self-confidence to speak English. They were excited and also enjoyed doing these activities in front of the class. The students who just gained 58.65 in the pre-test, were able to increase their score up to 73.15 in the post-test. It indicated that they made a considerable improvement in some aspects of speaking skills such as pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary and comprehension

The implications of the research are presented as follows:

1. The use of visual aids in the teaching and learning process can help to capture the attention and motivation of students. Students can listen to how to pronounce certain words and observe how to portray certain expressions by using visual aids. Furthermore, this medium assists the teacher in properly explaining the contents to be taught without having to speak too much. During the class, it also generates a pleasant and enjoyable atmosphere. This is a good way to get their attention and break up the monotonous spoken teaching and learning process. This means that visual aids should be used frequently in the teaching and learning process, as they can be an enjoyable learning medium.
2. Playing games is a great approach to get pupils to practice their expressions in a fun way. They are able to communicate with their pals and become closer to them. This activity might encourage kids to think more quickly and then practice what they've learned. This indicates that, in order to avoid boredom, games should be used in the teaching and learning process.

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