

Using the Think-Pair-Share Technique to Improve Non-English 10th Graders' Speaking Skills: An Action Research in a Vietnamese Educational Setting

Nguyen Thi Kim Anh¹, Nguyen Duy Binh^{2*}, Lao Thi Tuyet Hue³

¹Lecturer, Foreign Languages Department, Vinh University

Email: anhtk@vinhuni.edu.vn

ORCID: 0000-0002-2456-3479

^{2*}Corresponding author

Lecturer, Foreign Languages Department, Vinh University, 182 Le Duan Street, Truong Vinh, Nghe An Province
Vietnam

Email: nguyenduybinh@vinhuni.edu.vn ORCID: 0009-0003-4586-4507

³Teacher, Tran Van On High School, Vietnam, Email: laothituyethue77@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT:

Think-Pair-Share (TPS) has recently been introduced to enhance English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students' speaking skills. However, few studies have been conducted to see how the medium can be applied effectively in a real EFL context in Vietnam. Therefore, to examine the efficacy of TPS in a Vietnamese educational setting, 30 10th graders at Tran Van On High School in Chau Thanh District, Ben Tre Province, Vietnam, were selected to participate in an action research study. The research was conducted in multiple cycles, each covering the stages from problem identification to plan revision. After each cycle, observation and tests were applied to collect data on students' speaking performance. The research findings demonstrated that the Think-Pair-Share technique did improve the 10th graders' speaking proficiency.

Keywords: Think-Pair-Share (TPS), speaking skill, action research, students

1. Introduction

Various studies demonstrated the noteworthiness of speaking competence. El-Beltagy (2019) affirmed that EFL students need to improve their speaking skills to acquire further information and

communicate their ideas successfully. He recommended that EFL instructors focus more on demonstrating speaking expertise and on providing language students with a rich, pleasant context that supports meaningful and effective communication.

It is worth specifying that in any communicative event, speaking is at the core of foreign language learning. Moreover, according to Decision No. 1400/QĐ-TTg dated September 30, 2008, of the Prime Minister, high school graduates are expected to reach level B1 in English, aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR).

Although speaking skills are crucial to mastering English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning and teaching, they are often disregarded in many educational settings, despite their significance. Results from the informal observation and pre-test conducted with 10th graders in our teaching contexts revealed that speaking skills were undervalued and that the teaching and learning process remained teacher-oriented. To identify students' speaking levels, a proficiency speaking test consisting of three oral parts adapted from the Cambridge Preliminary English Test (PET) was administered to a sample of 30 EFL 10th graders at Tran Van On High School in Ben Tre during the academic year 2020-2021. The speaking test results showed that 10th graders had low speaking skills. The most common problems among students are limited vocabulary, hesitations, and mispronunciation. Likewise, they had insufficient ideas to express themselves comprehensibly in English. Those observable difficulties prevented students from communicating or expressing ideas in English. As a result, students are demotivated to engage in meaningful conversations and/or participate in learning activities.

Among the wide range of teaching strategies for speaking skills, Think-Pair-Share (TPS) was considered an effective strategy for addressing students' speaking problems and thereby improving that skill (Lyman, 1987). However, there has been little research among underprivileged students in Vietnam's Mekong Delta. Considering those problems, the author raised concerns about how to tackle them immediately and effectively. Otherwise, there would be detrimental effects on those students' academic learning and even their future career pathways. Therefore, this paper was composed to examine the efficacy of Think-Pair-

Share for improving 10th graders' speaking in a Vietnamese educational setting.

To examine the sense of improvement in speaking among 10th graders before and after the implementation of TPS, the research question is: Would there be a difference in the improvement of speaking skills among 10th graders before and after the implementation of TPS? If yes, how different is it?

2. Literature review

It is expressed that speaking is a productive skill in the spoken mode, which is taken for granted in daily life (Harmer, 2007). This definition aligns with other researchers' definitions, which view speaking as a means for people to interact with their participants to achieve a specific communicative purpose across a variety of contexts. Meanwhile, Thornburry (2005) added that speaking is an interactive procedure that requires learners to construct meanings to convey, exchange, and process information regarding knowledge, interests, attitudes, opinions, or ideas cooperatively to manage speaking turns. Therefore, those definitions shed light on the operational definition of speaking skill in this study as the ability to produce meaningful discourse to address participants, using grammatical and lexical features with accuracy and fluency.

Cooperative language learning (CLL) is a part of the collaborative learning approach, a general instructional approach (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). It is implemented to maximize the use of cooperative activities as teaching arrangements that involve students in participating with their friends in small, heterogeneous groups within the classroom context (Kagan, 1994). In other words, CLL is a social-based learning because it allows students to work together and support one another in achieving the same academic goals. Consequently, it is believed to improve students' classroom participation, help them master their speaking skills, and enhance their academic achievement.

When implementing CLL as a teaching approach, Richards and Rogers (2001) express that speaking

tasks have to meet the goals of using CLL as the followings (i) providing opportunities for authentic second language acquisition through the use of interactive pair and group work; (ii) providing teachers with a methodology to be applied in various curriculum settings such as content-based (iii) enabling foci on particular vocabulary, grammar, and communicative functions through interactional tasks; (iv) providing opportunities for students to develop successful learning and communication strategies (v) improving students' motivation in creating a positive sentimental classroom environment.

Think-Pair-Share (TPS) is a part of CLL, which was first developed by Lyman (1987). It is a strategy designed to encourage students to think about a given topic by enabling them to formulate individual ideas and share their ideas (Derewianka & Jones, 2016). In other words, this cooperative discussion strategy offers students opportunities to work independently or collaborate with others. Moreover, Kagan (1994) adds that TPS can elevate students' critical thinking skills through meaningful conversations. In general, Richards and Rodgers (2001) introduce TPS, which gets its name from a three-stage process that emphasizes what students do at each stage. The authors describe the steps students take, including formulating a response, discussing it with their partners, and sharing their partners' responses in front of the TPS class after the teacher poses a question. The teacher can encourage the other students to ask the pairs while they share their response. It will create a meaningful interaction in the teaching and learning process.

There have been studies on the effectiveness of using the Think-Pair-Share strategy in improving the students' speaking ability. A study by Sanjani (2015) found that students became more confident in speaking English after using this technique. They actively participated in the teaching and learning process. Moreover, Hasanah, Andayani, and Sudarsono (2013) asserted the effectiveness of using the TPS strategy in teaching English speaking. Classroom observation and the results of the study revealed that the students successfully developed their speaking skills by using the Think

Pair Share strategy, which facilitated their idea construction, showing better English speaking performance. Depending on action research, a study by Oktaviani (2013) showed the students' English speaking skills improvement, which covered the students' mastery of vocabulary and pronunciation. Similar to the research conducted was the work by Syafii (2018), who applied the TPS method to increase students' activity levels and improve their speaking abilities.

This research demonstrates that this strategy is highly effective in increasing students' active involvement in improving their speaking skills. This increase is evident in students' speaking ability, as the number of students with an average score of 3 increased from 0 out of 30 (0%) in the preliminary test to 4 out of 30 (13%) in the post-test. The study by Cahyani (2018) found that students' scores in the experimental group increased after they were taught using TPS. The results of the calculations show that the t-score (78.635) is higher than the t-table (37.952) at the 5% significance level with a degree of freedom (df) of 29. This shows that student scores in speaking performance increase after applying the TPS technique. Therefore, the results indicate a significant difference (sig. = .000) between students taught using the TPS method and those taught using the conventional method. In addition, the TPS method has also proven to be effective for teaching English speaking, which shows a significant difference (sig. .000) between the pre-test and post-test as well.

Though several studies have been carried out to investigate the usefulness of the TPS technique on different aspects of speaking performances, such as mastery of vocabulary and pronunciation, an increase in students' involvement in the speaking activity, and an improvement in students' speaking scores, the research samples, to some extent, are different from Vietnam, where English is included in school curriculum as a compulsory subject. For example, our 10th graders do not have sufficient or frequent access to English outside the classroom, and they tend to be quiet whenever they do speak English with a foreigner. Therefore, it is proposed to apply action research among 10th graders by

using TPS, which “was believed to make the most use of cooperative activities involving pair-work or group-work for improving the students’ speaking skill” (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

The study based the hypotheses on the mean score of pre- and post-test regarding speaking improvement. The 10th graders were supposed to significantly improve their speaking skills. After implementing TPS, most would have better scores than before.

- **Null hypotheses (Ho):** The following hypotheses were tested: a) There is no statistically significant difference at ($P > 0.01$) of the mean scores between the pre- and post-administration of the speaking test regarding the total score in favor of the post-test among 10th graders. b) There is no statistical difference at ($P > 0.01$) of the mean scores between pre- and post-test regarding the individual components (Grammar, Vocabulary, Pronunciation, Fluency, and Communication) respectively among 10th graders.

- **Alternative hypotheses (Ha):** The following hypotheses were tested: a) There is a statistically significant difference at ($P < 0.01$) of the mean scores between the pre- and post-administration of the speaking test regarding the total score in favor of the post-test among 10th graders. They are supposed to be significantly higher than the pre-test scores. b) There is a statistically significant difference at ($P < 0.01$) of the mean scores between the pre- and post-administration of the speaking test regarding the individual components (Grammar, Vocabulary, Pronunciation, Fluency, and Communication), respectively, in favor of the post-test.

3. Methodology

3.1 Aims and objectives of the study

This research was designed to investigate whether implementing the Think-Pair-Share can improve students’ speaking skills. The study has an eminent objective, expected to be achieved through Think-Pair-Share, one of the interactive strategies for teaching speaking, to solve students’ communication problems by eliminating the obstacles hindering appropriate communicative

interaction. The author aimed at achieving the following objectives:

- Examining whether the implementation of the Think-Pair-Share strategy has any effects on the students’ English speaking improvement.
- Proposing some suggestions to take advantage of Think-Pair-Share to optimize students’ participation in speaking classes.

3.2 Instruments of data collection

Data on students’ speaking performance were collected through observations and tests (a pre-test and a post-test after each cycle). a. Observation was conducted before the implementation of the strategy and during the implementation of the Think-Pair-Share strategy in the learning process from the first, second, and third cycles. Through class observation, the teacher identified who was dominant in discussions, who avoided participation, and the types of feedback and follow-up questions to give during class discussions. b. A pre-post speaking test was administered to evaluate students’ speaking ability comprehensively (Brown, 2004). The test was adapted from the Cambridge PET, with 3 parts, and was tested for validity, reliability, distinguishing power, and difficulty level. A pre-test was used to gather information about the students’ previous ability to speak before they were given TPS, and see their normality and homogeneity. A post-test was administered to the students after the treatment (TPS was implemented) to assess students’ speaking achievement and the treatment’s viability. c. A scoring rubric for the test was used to measure students’ performance on a five-point scale (1-5) for each criterion during the pre-post speaking test: grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, and communication. d. A score descriptor was used to describe how each criterion was marked. The rubric indicates that participants succeed when they achieve a score of 19 or higher in the speaking test.

Those methods are triangulated so that data gathered from multiple sources of information are accurate and credible. The data enabled the author

to gain a clear picture of her students' speaking ability and their involvement and participation in class discussion. The author would then be able to determine if the use of TPS was viable.

3.3 Research treatment

This action research aimed to study the efficacy of the TPS strategy on EFL 10th graders' speaking skills. TPS was implemented as the treatment during the research. The treatment was applied during the first semester of the academic year 2020-2021 at Tran Van On High School. This learning model uses a pair discussion strategy followed by a plenary discussion. With this learning model, students are trained to express their opinions and to respect others' opinions, provided they align with the material or learning objectives.

The steps of the learning model TPS are as follows: Firstly, the teacher conveys the core material and competencies to be achieved. Secondly, students are asked to reflect on the material or problems the teacher has assigned. Thirdly, students are asked to pair up with a friend next to them or in groups of two and express the results of each thought. Fourthly, the teacher leads a brief plenary discussion before each group presents the results. Fifthly, after departing from these activities, the teacher coordinates the conversation on the topic, adds material that the students have not revealed, and finally concludes.

This model differs from other TPS models in general in that teachers are needed to plan and manage the learning cycle methodically. This demonstrates that implementing this TPS learning model is truly necessary, particularly for English-speaking learners.

Procedures: This research was conducted in different cycles. Each cycle covered the stages starting from finding the fact until revising the plan as follows:

- **Planning stage:** Participants were randomly selected as the study sample. The researcher selected lessons from the Textbook that were well-matched to the objectives and the research treatment. The materials needed for the study, such as the

teacher's guide, lesson plans covering all sessions, teaching media, pre-test and post-test, rubrics, and band descriptors using TPS, were well-designed and prepared for the treatment.

- **Action stage:** The researcher met the sample group for two periods (one and a half hours) twice a week for ten weeks to conduct speaking lessons. During the first week, the researcher conducted the pre-test with the participants during the first three periods. In the last period of the first week, there was an introductory session in which the participants were informed about the research, its purpose, the content of the materials, and the strategy to be used. They were informed that their participation was voluntary and would not affect their final English score. The implementation of the TPS strategy went through the following steps: Brief introduction and training; Pre-activity; During-activity; Post-activity.
- **Observation stage:** During this stage, the author collected observational data on the teaching and learning process, focusing on interactions between the teacher and students, among students, and during teaching activities in speaking classes.
- **Reflection stage:** At this stage, the author would analyze the practice, propose, and implement changes to improve understanding of the research objectives.

Data analysis techniques. The improvement of EFL 10th graders' speaking skills was examined via the implementation of TPS. The independent variable in the analysis was speaking teaching methods, that is, Think-Pair-Share. The dependent variable was the goal type or improvement that the students set for their speaking skills. Quantitative data were collected through pre-test and post-test results, which were analyzed using a range of statistical techniques, including paired-samples t-tests and effect sizes, to test the hypothesis. The combination of various analysis techniques is expected to provide a complete picture of the

phenomenon of interest. Descriptive statistics, including mean scores and standard deviations for pre- and post-test scores, were used to determine the viability of TPS for speaking competence using SPSS 26.0. Inferential analysis was used to determine whether differences existed before and after implementing TPS, using pre- and post-test data.

The analysis of data was organized so that hypotheses were tested using the following findings and analyses of results. In testing each hypothesis, the format was presented as follows: (i) Reporting the statistical test used, (ii) Presenting the findings, (iii) Rejecting or accepting the hypothesis at the 0.01 level of significance, and (iv) Comparing findings with other research findings. Before the treatment, a pre-test was delivered to the 10th graders to measure their speaking ability. The test scores revealed that 10th graders confronted a variety of problems in speaking skills. What is significant is that a great number of participants were not actively engaged in learning activities and were reluctant to participate in communicative tasks. Speaking became a problem that needed to be resolved urgently. To address issues with students' speaking ability, the teacher prepared a schedule, developed a lesson plan, selected interesting topics from the students' textbook, and chose the instruments for the first cycle.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results at each cycle

Cycle 1

Cycle 1 was conducted within one month (from September 14th to October 12th, 2020). In the 1st meeting, the researcher introduced the TPS technique and provided instructions to students. In the next meetings, students were assigned in pairs to fulfill the speaking task. After that, each pair had to share their discussion with the class. In these meetings, the researcher observed students' participation and involvement in discussions. A speaking test was delivered to students to gather information about their speaking performance after 8 meetings.

The test result showed that in cycle 1, 14 out of

30 students (47%) met the criteria of a successful score, namely, 19 or higher, while the rest of them still failed the speaking test. Since each rubric component accounts for 5, students' scores were calculated by adding all components. Furthermore, the test's mean score was 16.7, indicating it was higher than the mean score at the preliminary study. There was actual progress, but this cycle must continue into the next because only 47% of the students reached the success score. Apart from the test, when observed, students seemed more interested in learning to speak using the TPS technique. It was evident from their enthusiasm in sharing their ideas and in asking questions that they had never known the answer to in the task given.

Before moving on to the next cycle, some revisions were made to the Think-Pair-Share strategy steps. Firstly, during the activity, the students were pre-taught new words relevant to their topics before the thinking process. They were asked to look up the meanings of those words in the dictionary and then adjust them to the context. This step was taken to facilitate students' completion of the task. Secondly, in the first cycle, the pairs were randomly assigned by the students themselves; most good students paired with others of the same level, and the same was true for low-level students. As a result, good pairs were likely to get higher scores than the others. In Cycle 2, students were mixed into different groups and assigned to work together. It was expected that the higher-level students would be able to assist their mates in accomplishing the task.

Cycle 2

Cycle 2 was also conducted from October 12th to November 23rd, 2020. During the implementation stage, the researcher applied the TPS strategy based on the revisions made after cycle 1. During the time students worked and discussed, the teacher observed and noted down their performance. In the meeting after 6 weeks of the implementation, the test was given to the students to measure their ability. The results showed significant improvement in the students' scores. 1 (one) out of 30 students (3.3%) got 24, 3 (10%) students got 22.5, 2 (two) students (7%) got

21.5, 8 (eight) of them (26.7%) got 20, 6 (six) students (20%) got 19, 4 (13%) students got 17.5, 2 (7%) students got 16.5, and 4 (13%) got 15.

Based on the results of the speaking test above, the researcher decided that the action research could proceed, as 20 out of 30 students (67%) met the success criterion of 19 or higher. This result exceeds the researcher's expectations, as the researcher's success criteria indicate that if 60% of students score 19 or higher, the cycle can be completed. To determine whether the difference

between the pre-test and post-test scores of the sample group was statistically significant, a paired-samples t-test was conducted, and the results are displayed in Table 1. The results demonstrated that the mean total post-test score (19.05) was higher than the mean total pre-test score (9.30), almost twice the mean total pre-test score. A paired-samples t-test showed that this difference was statistically significant ($t(29) = 78.635$, $P < 0.01$). This result provides confirmatory evidence of a noticeable increase in the mean speaking score in favor of the post-test.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for comparing pre-test scores and the post-test scores

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
PairTotalpre	9.30	30	2.02825			
1 Totalpost	19.05	30	2.40456	.43901	-78.635	.000

Consequently, the Think-Pair-Share treatment was found to be effective for the 10th graders' speaking skills. Moreover, it can be concluded that the Think-Pair-Share learning strategy was more effective than traditional instruction.

4.2 Overall Findings

Based on the results of the preliminary study's tests in Cycle 1 and Cycle 2, it can be concluded

that students' speaking competence improved steadily. It means that the TPS technique improved the students' speaking ability in fulfilling the speaking task and producing speech in pairs. In other words, the use of the TPS technique could increasingly help and motivate them to learn for better communication through pair work. Thus, most of them gradually improved their scores at the end of each cycle, particularly in Cycle 2.

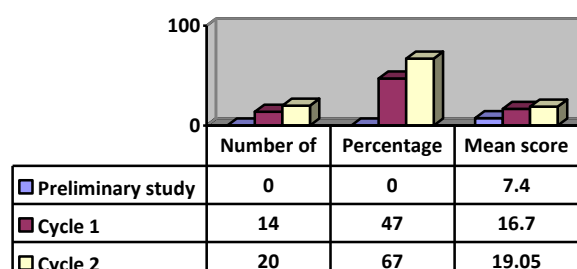


Figure 1: The progress of students after each cycle

As it can be seen in Figure 1, in the speaking test, 0 (0%) out of 30 (thirty) students got > 18 and the mean score was 7.4 in the preliminary study, 14 (fourteen) students (47%) got > 18 in the cycle 1 with the mean score 16.7, and in the cycle 2, 20 (twenty) students (67%) got > 18 with the mean score 19.05. This indicates a significant difference in mean scores across the cycles.

Verifying the first hypothesis. The first hypothesis stated that there is a statistically significant difference at ($P < 0.01$) between the pre- and post-administration scores on the speaking test, favoring the post-administration score. To verify the first hypothesis, the paired-samples t-test was used. Table 2 shows the results of the statistical analysis of the sample group's performance on the pre-speaking test and post-speaking test of Cycle 2.

Table 2: Comparing performance on the pre-post speaking skill test of cycle 2

	The experimental group	N	Mean	Standard deviation	T-test			Significance	Effect size
					T-value	DF	Sig.(P-value)		
Total test score	The pre-administration	30	9.30	2.03	78.635	29	0.000	Significant	0.96
	The post-administration	30	19.05	2.40					

Table 2 shows that the mean post-administration score is higher than the pre-administration score. The mean score increased from 9.30 to 19.05. The t-value is significant at the 0.000 level (< 0.01). Therefore, the first hypothesis was accepted, and the first null hypothesis was rejected. As for the total score, the Eta-square value was 0.96, indicating a large effect, suggesting that 96% of the variance in students' speaking skills can be attributed to the research treatment. To estimate the effect size of the implementation of eclectic teaching strategies on the speaking skills test between pre- and post-administration, the square

of eta (η^2) was calculated. As for the total score across all five speaking sub-skills, the Eta square was 0.96, indicating a high effect, and accounting for 0.96% of the variance in students' speaking skills.

Verifying the second hypothesis

The second hypothesis stated that there is a statistically significant difference at ($P < 0.01$) in the mean scores between the pre- and post-administration for the individual components (Grammar, Vocabulary, Pronunciation, Fluency, and Communication), favoring the post-test.

Table 3: Comparing the sample group performance on the individual items of the speaking skills test

The skills	Speaking	The sample group	N	Mean	Standard deviation	T-test			Significance	Effect Size
						T-value	DF	Sig.(P-value)		
Fluency	Pre-test		30	1.53	0.39	-37.952	29	0.000	Significant	0.81 large
	Post-test		30	3.85	0.49					
Pronunciation	Pre-test		30	1.68	0.44	-36.970	29	0.000	Significant	0.64 large
	Post-test		30	3.73	0.46					
Grammar	Pre-test		30	1.86	0.34	-30.243	29	0.000	Significant	0.78 large
	Post-test		30	3.85	0.47					
Vocabulary	Pre-test		30	2.08	0.52	-24.678	29	0.000	Significant	0.66 large
	Post-test		30	3.83	0.51					
Communication	Pre-test		30	2.18	0.48	-27.603	29	0.000	Significant	0.69 large
	Post-test		30	3.88	0.56					

Table 3 shows that all speaking sub-skills were significantly developed ($P < 0.01$). Therefore, the second hypothesis was accepted, and the second null hypothesis was rejected. Every sub-skill showed a large effect size, with the highest variance explained in fluency (81%) and the lowest in pronunciation (64%). Overall findings on the

implementation of TPS indicated that participants significantly improved their speaking competence from pre-test to post-test.

4.3 Discussion

Results demonstrated a statistically significant difference in the mean score between pre- and

post-administration, favoring the post-administration. In the preliminary study, 0% of students achieved a score of 19 or higher, with an average score of 7.4. Later in Cycle 1, 14 students (47%) met the success criteria, with an average score of 16.7. At last, in Cycle 2, 20 students (67%) achieved a score of 19 or higher and met the criteria for success, with a mean score of 19.05.

Students use a pair discussion followed by a plenary discussion, which helps them express their opinions and respect others' while still referring to the material/learning objectives. The results of the current research illustrate an improvement achieved through the use of Think-Pair-Share techniques in speaking lessons. The findings align with the foundations of theories on creating TPS learning designs proposed by experts. There is also consistency between the results of the present study and those of several previous studies. In this study, observations showed that when the researcher managed the class well, students understood the material better. Besides, the students were really engaged in using these strategies and rarely got bored or tired. The TPS teaching strategy increased students' participation and reduced the teacher's speaking time. The students were seen to become less dependent on the teacher and to take more responsibility for their own learning.

5. Conclusion

The primary motivation for the study was to explore the effects of the Think-Pair-Share teaching strategy on 10th graders' speaking skills at Tran Van On High School. Regarding the outcomes stated, the following conclusions were drawn: (i) Utilization of Think-Pair-Share was effective in building up the students' speaking skills compared to traditional teaching. After the Think-Pair-Share was conducted through the cycles, the researcher concluded that the TPS technique improved the speaking ability of the 10th graders. It was demonstrated by improvements in students' scores from the preliminary study through to Cycle

2. This technique appeared to empower and motivate them to think, explore, and share their opinions and ideas. It also helps enhance cooperation with others and increases students' confidence in sharing their ideas with many people.

The results of this study can be practically applied as a learning model to develop speaking skills for Vietnamese students of English. Moreover, this technique can work among different learners of different ages as long as the teachers know how to adapt the activity. Based on the results of the study, several recommendations are proposed:

- For curriculum developers: In-service teachers should receive frequent training and workshops on teaching strategies to enhance students' speaking skills.
- For EFL teachers: Use this technique as an alternative to improve students' language achievement, especially for proficient English users. Teachers can create student-centered instructions and consider varied, attractive, and appropriate activities for students of different levels.
- For students: It is suggested that they use the TPS technique as a learning strategy to improve their speaking comprehension, both in and out of school.

This study may provide a basis for further investigations into the implementation of TPS in EFL teaching for other researchers. Along these lines, the outcomes likewise make some suggestions which ought to be taken into consideration: (i) Conducting more studies to investigate the viability of the TPS teaching strategy in developing other language skills, (ii) administering the intervention at different stages (primary and secondary), and (iii) replication of this investigation on a wider population and for longer timeframes.

Conflicts of Interest:

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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Bio:

Nguyen Thi Kim Anh, PhD., is the Dean of the Foreign Languages Department, Vinh University. She obtained a bachelor's degree (2001) and a master's degree (2005) in English Language Teaching at the University of Languages and International Studies, Vietnam National University (ULIS), and a doctoral degree in Linguistics at Vinh University (2016). She is also among the Key Trainers of Teachers (ToTs) for the National Foreign Languages Project 2020. She is responsible for teaching English majors and developing syllabi for English Linguistics subjects, such as Semantics, Pragmatics, Discourse Analysis, and others.

Nguyen Duy Binh, PhD., is the Vice-Dean of the Foreign Languages Department, Vinh University. He teaches courses in translation, translation theory, pragmatics, and British and American Culture. His research interests include translation studies, contrastive linguistics, literature, and the application of IT in foreign language teaching.