

Using Project-Based Learning To Improve The Students' Speaking Skills: An Action Research Project At Dong Nai Technology University

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Abstract – Nowadays, English becomes more and more important in almost aspects of life. English is a global language, so it is a compulsory subject at schools and universities. Communication is one of the most important skills in study, and work. Being a lecturer at a university, I recognize that we should help our students find the better way to improve their speaking skills and feel confident when talking or speaking in front of the class or the crowded or making a conversation with foreigners. After learning about some methods to help the students improve their speaking skills. We chose Project – based Learning to apply for our speaking classes in experiment. After doing this experiment, we found out two issues: (1) the students' attitudes to using Project – based Learning in speaking classes; (2) the result of students in Speaking classes when applying Project – based Learning. I randomly chose a Class with class code 0070133 to carry out my action research project with the participants: 30 the first-year students a Dong Nai Technology University. We performed this study in 12 weeks and used questionnaires, pre- testing, post-testing and interviews for collecting data instruments. The research findings us that the students has positive attitudes to using Project – based learning in speaking classes and PBL was a good way to help students improve their speaking skills. With the result we got in the findings, both the lecturers and the students could find the own way for teaching and learning to achieve the best result in speaking skills in speaking classes.

Keywords – *Project – based Learning, pre-testing, post-testing, Dong Nai Technology University.*

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Rationale

Nowadays, with the development of science, technology, education and economy, English becomes more and more important in our modern society. We have to use English in almost every aspect of life and in almost fields of work and study. So English becomes a compulsory subject in primary schools, secondary schools, high schools, especially in universities throughout the country in Vietnam. In almost universities, students learn English as a compulsory subject. They learn listening skill, speaking skill, reading skill and writing skill. And one of skills which students lack the confidence when practicing is speaking skill. After twelve years studying at school, they just focused on grammar and reading comprehension to pass the college entrance exam, they did have lots of chances for practicing speaking. They often lack of confidence in communication. On the other hand, Dong Nai Technology University' outcomes require that the students must speak English well and have enough ability to pass the English interview for trial job interview. One of the reasons leading them to this problem is they lack time and method for learning speaking. Being acknowledged, speaking is one of the most important skills in our modern society, especially at work. Moreover, after teaching for a long time at the University, the speaking abilities of the third-year and final-year students were supposed to be not good. So we should help the first-year student improve their speaking skills to gain the better speaking abilities in the future, especially when

they graduate and apply for work. In each lesson, we should make many different activities so that students have lots of chances to speak English and have an assignment to do as a mini project. To do the mini project, the students have to make a group and divide the task become smaller parts to do. In each group, the students have to share the assignment to do. Each student takes a task, and the leader collects the data and material to make the perfect project. During doing the project, they have the chances to explore the real world, cooperate with their partners, practice searching information, analyze data, prepare and practice speaking for the presentation.

The latest years, Project-based learning (PBL) has been strongly promoted and applied in teaching speaking skills in universities to help the students improve their abilities. PBL makes the students spend more time on using some tools to complete their English assignment. It creates an environment for studying and learning professionally. The students feel very eager to come to class each day when they have English lesson. Moreover, PBL is believed that it will help student feel passionate about learning English, especially speaking skills and feel confident in daily communication, also at work because they have chances to practice in group task and experience in real life.

Having been teaching English at a university for many years and recognizing the main causes for the problem – lack of confidence of students in speaking skills, and the researcher is also motivated by the new approach PBL for teaching speaking skills. The research really desires that the students can have more opportunities to search, study and practice. Also, they can find out that PBL is one of the best ways to help them improve their English day by day. With above reasons, the researcher really aspires to conduct a study on “Using project-based learning to improve the students’ speaking skills: an action research project at Dong Nai Technology University” to find the better way for the teaching and learning English speaking skills and apply suitable techniques and activities in speaking class. With the hope, the students can improve their ability for speaking skills. This study with the objective is to explore the application of the project-based approach to improve speaking skills for the first-year students at Dong Nai Technology University.

1.2. Aims of the Study

There are many reasons to conduct this study, and one of the majority aims of this study is to improve the first-year students’ English speaking skills at Dong Nai Technology University. To gain the aim, the researcher must reach the following objectives as:

- Learning about the students’ attitudes to Project – based learning applied in speaking classes whether it is positive.
- Finding out the advantages of project – based learning for the students in speaking skills when it is applied in speaking classes.

1.3 Research Questions

To achieve the above aims of the study, the researcher must find out the answers to the following research questions:

1. *What is the first-year students’ attitude to project-based learning at Dong Nai Technology University in speaking lessons?*
2. *What do the first-year students gain from applying project-based learning in speaking skills?*

1.4 Scope of the Study

Studying English language is very large. We have many aspects to do the research. So this study cannot cover all skills in teaching English. We only divide into smaller parts in the skill which we chose to do the research. And in this study, the researcher only focuses on using Project-based Learning to help the students at Dong Nai Technology University improve their English speaking skills. This research only focuses on some typical skills used in project-based learning which could improve the students’ speaking ability and help them feel confident in communication.

In this study, the main subject is the thirty male and female students in English class with class code 0070133. They are the first-year students, and they are non-majored English students. The average age of the students is around 19. They are going to be the main subject to participate in and respond to the survey questionnaires, the trial lessons and the tests.

The action plan is going to last in 3 months from early March 2019 to late May 2019, in third semester of the academic school year 2018-2019 Dong Nai Technology University.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The study focuses on the material and definition and theories relevant to Speaking skills and PBL to find out the effective

techniques to help the students at Dong Nai Technology University improve their speaking ability. Besides, previous studies are also mentioned to help the research find the new points in this study as well as good references. This chapter is divided into 4 main parts below:

- Concepts of speaking
- Communicative Language Teaching
- Concepts of Project-based learning
- Previous studies

2.1. Concepts of speaking

This part will explain about the theories concerned about speaking field. Almost language learners think that knowing a language is ability that they can speak that language fluently. They appreciate speaking ability as a measure for the knowledge of that language. To them, speaking skill is one of the most important skills in learning a language, especially in a practical language. Speaking is really necessary in daily life, in communication, in getting and exchange direct information. If your speaking skill is good, you can feel confident and have more motivation to learn that language. In the case, learners do not feel excited about speaking lessons. They don't have any motivations to speak. They are no longer able to speak English well. So we need to use new teaching method to motivate the students join in speaking activities. Speaking skill is really important so the students should be taught how to improve their speaking in each lesson.

As stated by Freeman (in Risnadedi, 2001, pp. 56-67), speaking skill was one of the most important students' abilities to help them express their ideas by speaking. It can be used to test the students' ability through oral tests or speaking examinations. He also claimed that speaking was much more complicated and difficult than many people thought. It was a process of practicing. It required the learners' ability of pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and structure.

According to Johnson (1977) this language ability obviously played a vital part in life because of its importance. The first thing, it played an enormous role in language learners in informing and communicating with others in daily communication, work and others. The second thing, if you wanted to become an expert in communication, you had to be professional in dealing with any difficult situations in communication and making any speech effectively. Finally, mastering the public speaking skills was a strong advantage for enhancing career opportunities and got promotion for career, especially for those who have just graduated from colleges or universities.

2.1.1. Definitions of speaking

In learning a language, speaking is considered as one of the most important skills. If we know a language, we cannot speak that language smoothly. No one acknowledges that you know that language. So there are many language experts having studied this field. They have tried to find out the best definition for speaking, and many people agree with these definitions.

Brown (1994), Speaking is defined as an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving and processing information.

In Brown and Yule's opinions (1983), spoken language included short, fragmentary utterances in a range of pronunciation. Usually, there was a great deal of repetition and overlap between one speaker and another. Speaker usually uses non-specific references. They also add that spoken language was made to feel less conceptually dense than other types of language such as prose by using the loosely organized syntax, and non-specific words, phrases and filters such as *oh*, *well*, *uhuh*.

According to Bygate (1998), speaking skill can be seen as the production of auditory signals to produce differential verbal responses in a listener. In other words, it is regarded as the human's ability to combine sounds in a systematic way so as to form meaningful utterances.

According to Chaney (1998: 13), he claims that speaking is the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, in a variety of contexts.

Doff (1987:2), he says that in all communication or conversation, two people are getting and exchanging information or they have a communication or conversation need.

Under a top-down view, Eckard and Kearny (1981), Florez (1999) and Howarth (2001) consider speaking as a two-way process relating to a true communication of ideas, information and feelings, cited in the article of Leong & Ahmadi (2017). Besides, taking

its form and meaning into consideration, Burns and Toyce (1997) define speaking as an interactive process of constructing sense that involves receiving, producing and processing collected data.

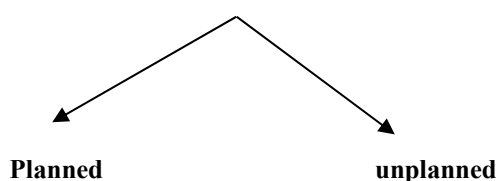
Tarigan (1985), speaking is stated as the ability to produce articulation, sounds or words to express, to say, to show and to think about ideas, thought and feeling.

Basing on the above statements from the language experts, we can get a conclusion that speaking is a process of oral activity used in daily life as a tool of communication in which verbal mainly and non-verbal symbol used in sending and receiving message. In speaking activities, to gain the purpose of communication effectively, the speaker must master in using pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension.

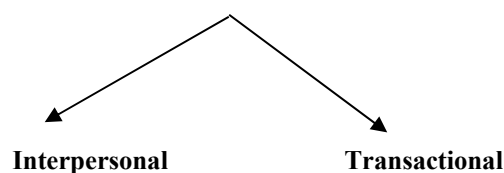
2.1.2 Types of Speaking.

In speaking languages, especially in English, there are some kinds of speaking English. Some authors studied this field. One of these authors is Brown. According to Brown (2001:250), he stated that language teaching focused on leading to master English conversation. In his opinion, Oral language was divided into two types:

1. Monologue



2. Dialogue



Monologue's meaning was the oral language. It involved only one person in it. In some cases, there is only one person to do the task speaking such as lectures, news casting, radio broadcast, etc. Monologue can be divided into two types: planned monologue and unplanned monologue. The meaning of planned monologue is the speaker use the materials or notes nor texts prepared already to help him or her speak fluently. The meaning of unplanned monologue is the speaker speak naturally without any materials or notes prepared before starting speaking. All words spoken emerge from the speaker's mind naturally and spontaneously.

In Dialogue, there are two kinds: interpersonal communication and transactional communication. Each type is used in the particular situation to get the purpose of communication.

2.1.3. Characteristics of speaking

Speaking has many characteristics. In my opinion, it has these characteristics:

Speaking style' form and meaning are depended on the context of the conversa, including the participants themselves, their collective experiences, the physical environment, and the purposes for speaking. It is often spontaneous, open-ended, and evolving. However, speech is not always unpredictable. Language functions (or patterns) that tend to recur in certain discourse situations can be identified and charted.

Speaking requires that learners not only know how to produce specific points of language such as grammar, pronunciation, or vocabulary, but also that they understand when, why, and in what ways to produce language.

Speech has its own skills, structures, and conventions different from written languages. A good speaker synthesizes this array of skills and knowledge to succeed in a given speech act.

To sum up, it is undeniable that speaking is a key to communication. By considering what good speakers do, what speaking tasks can be used in class, and what specific needs learners report, teachers can help learners improve their speaking and overall oral competency.

2.1.3. Functions of Speaking

Richards (2008) states that speakers should consider three functions of speaking to obtain successful communication, including *talk as interaction*, *talk as transaction*, and *talk as performance*. These activities are different from each other with regard to form and function. Therefore, they need a variety of teaching approaches.

- “Talk as interaction refers to what we normally mean by “conversation” and describes interaction that serves a primarily social function.”
- “Talk as transaction refers to situations where the focus is on what is said or done. The message and making oneself understood clearly and accurately is the central focus, rather than the participants and how they interact socially with each other.”
- “Talk as performance refers to public talk, that is, talk that transmits information before an audience, such as class room presentations, public announcement, and speeches.”

In short, when making a plan for an English speaking class, it is necessary to put these core issues into considerations. Therefore, PBL can provide learners will great opportunities to be competent in all types of speaking activities.

2.1.4. The importance of teaching speaking skill

Teaching speaking is indispensable in the process of teaching and learning a second language. Obtaining great communicative competence brings many benefits for students in not only academic environment but also in their future careers. For that reasons, language teachers should concentrate on facilitating students and guiding them with meaningful communicative situations and active learning environment rather than force them to memorize the structures and rules, which can demotivate them in learning the language. In order to fulfil this objective, it is crystal clear that PBL enables students to achieve the three factors which are interaction, transaction and performance when taking part in speaking activities. Furthermore, students are well equipped with the essential basic life skills and become more interested as well as energetic in their learning. This results in the enjoyment and purposefulness in their learning.

Students' speaking competence can be evaluated and assessed based on the set of proposed Common Reference Levels in each holistic paragraphs, as displayed below:

Table 1: Assessing Speaking Performance – Level B1, CEF

B1	Grammar and Vocabulary	Discourse Management	Pronunciation	Interactive Communication
5	- Shows a good degree of control of simple grammatical forms, and attempts some complex grammatical forms. - Uses a range of appropriate vocabulary to give and exchange views on familiar topics.	- Produces extended stretches of language despite some hesitation. - Contributions are relevant despite some repetition. - Uses a range of cohesive devices.	- Is intelligible. - Intonation is generally appropriate. - Sentence and word stress is generally accurately placed. - Individual sounds are generally articulated clearly.	- Initiates and responds appropriately. - Maintains and develops the interaction and negotiates towards an outcome with very little support.
4	Performance shares features of Bands 3 and 5.			
3	- Shows a good degree of control of simple grammatical forms. - Uses a range of appropriate vocabulary when talking about familiar topics.	- Produces responses which are extended beyond short phrases, despite hesitation. - Contributions are mostly relevant, but there may be some repetition. - Uses basic cohesive devices.	Is mostly intelligible, and has some control of phonological features at both utterance and word levels.	- Initiates and responds appropriately. - Keeps the interaction going with very little prompting and support.
2	Performance shares features of Bands 1 and 3.			
1	- Shows sufficient control of simple grammatical forms. - Uses a limited range of appropriate vocabulary to talk about familiar topics.	- Produces responses which are characterised by short phrases and frequent hesitation. - Repeats information or digresses from the topic.	Is mostly intelligible, despite limited control of phonological features.	- Maintains simple exchanges, despite some difficulty. - Requires prompting and support.
0	Performance below Band 1.			

The scales can be used in the classroom when the speaking activities are conducted to recognize the strengths and weaknesses

of students. Thanks to the results, teachers can know whether they are familiar with the speaking activities and they are efficient enough to attend the speaking test.

2.1.5. Principles of Teaching Speaking

2.1.5.1. Concept of Teaching Speaking

Thombury (2005) mentioned that teaching speaking was the process of distributing the English language knowledge to learners. The information relating to this concept is presented as follow.

Teaching speaking is fundamentally considered as a long-term progress which teachers instruct learners to convey and articulate their opinions and ideas in the target language and lead them to the concentration on correct novel language pronunciation. Then, teachers introduce learners with a specific criteria used to evaluate learners' ability to produce sounds. Based on this criteria, learners can conduct their self-assessment, which reduces the necessity of teachers correcting their potential mistakes in the classroom. However, teachers still possess a crucial role in the classroom. They contribute to learners' encouragements and motivation. Thanks to this action, teachers can make learners interested in speaking lesson and practice their skills more frequently.

According to Nunan (1991, pp.54 - 56), there were five main principles of teaching speaking. These principles are very important so they will be mentioned and clarified in the next part below:

2.1.5.2. Five main Principles of Teaching Speaking

- Awareness of Difference:

Teaching and learning a second language and a foreign language are different from each other due to their discrepancies in terms of context and situation. More specifically, teaching and learning a foreign language are set in a non-communicative environment where the target language is not commonly used in daily life and they can be mostly affected by the presence of mother tongue. On the other hand, in a second language context, the target language is widely used in daily conversation together with L1, so teaching and learning a second language is significant to the development of learners. Therefore, teachers should put this factor into consideration to create appropriate communicative tasks in speaking lesson.

- The Importance of Fluency and Accuracy:

Fluency and accuracy are fundamental elements to be considered when speaking. Accuracy shows the ability to produce correct speech which is similar to what the native speakers deliver in their daily speech. Fluency presents learners' competency to be confident in using the target language without hesitations or unnatural way. For this reason, teachers are suggested to concentrate closely on learners' fluency and accuracy in order to help learners communicate effectively.

- Providing Opportunities:

In order to be good at speaking, learners should practice regularly, therefore, in the speaking lessons, it is necessary for learners to be given opportunities to speak and interact with other learners.

- Tasks Planning:

Carefully-prepared lesson plans enable teachers to conduct the activities logically in a limit of time. Besides that, they help teachers anticipate and control the problems which may occur during the lessons in order to have effective lessons.

- Designing classroom activities

In speaking lessons, classroom activities play significant role to get learners involved in learning the target language efficiently and effectively. Classroom activities should be selective and meaningful to help learners achieve their goals in learning the language. Therefore, teachers should carefully select appropriate materials to design various activities for learners

2.1.6. Teacher's Roles in Teaching Speaking

Harmer (2007), claimed that teachers have fundamental role in the speaking lessons, as follow:

- Applying the language students are learning to deal with the subject matters and besides, stimulate the involvement of students in the class.
- Asking the least amount of display questions. In other words, teachers should encourage students to "display" their background and subject

knowledge by asking questions instead of giving information directly. For instance: "What is the noun form of *communicate*?"

- Building the speaking topic with the students and giving advice and comment to each of their contributions.
- Encouraging students to speak as much as they can by giving some further suggestions basing on what students have just spoken and trying not to use a student's short utterance to be a springboard for another lengthy turn.
- Including a clarification of the intention of what students say by extending your opportunities to another student and trying not to cut off an exchange too early.
- Taking serious notice of the usage of natural feedback rather than assessing or evaluating the utterance of the students and ask them to follow the judgment deliberately.
- Giving an explicit credit to the students by quoting them and trying not to take credit for the contribution that students have made by giving the intention for the content of the conversation that the teacher had prepared previously.

These features clearly show the importance of teachers in the process of teaching and learning a language. With the other extents, Brown (2009) suggested teachers should focus on three characteristics as a prompter, participant, and feedback giver.

- As a prompter, teachers can let learners tackle their problem to encourage them to find out the appropriate solution. Learners can recognize the mistakes with their fluency and pronunciation by self-awareness or from their peers. Moreover, teachers can help learners when they are in shortage of ideas to take part in speaking activities.
- As a participant, teachers play the role of instructors and models for learners to know how to complete the speaking tasks when taking part in the classroom activities.

As a feedback giver, teachers should give immediate feedbacks to stimulate learners when learners express their ideas and opinions or make presentation on some topics. The feedback should be carefully chosen and positive so that learners were not demotivated when learning speaking.

2.1.7. Components of Teaching Speaking

Carrasquillo (1994) presents five components which are considered carefully when teachers teach speaking, namely:

- Pronunciation

It is widely known that pronunciation is a useful technique for pupils to create clearer language during the speaking process. It means that learners can communicate efficiently when they have decent pronunciation and intonation in spite of having inadequate vocabulary and grammar. Pronunciation could be mentioned with the traditional or regular expression of words (Kline, 2001, p.69). Furthermore, according to Gilbert (2008, p.1), English articulation is not a mastery of sounds or isolated words. As an alternative, it is related to learning and applying the way of making a speaker's opinions and feelings become easier for listeners to follow. In addition, pronunciation comprises all those characteristics of speech which is an intelligible flow of speech, including "segmental articulation, rhythm, intonation and phrasing, and more peripherally even gesture, body language and eye contact." (Fraser, 2001, p.6).

- Grammar

Grammar is necessary for the students to create an appropriate expression in conversation, both in written and oral forms. In general, the definition of grammar can be given as an organized way of accounting for and forecasting a model knowledge of the language of both speakers and listeners, which is done by a set of instructions or philosophies that can be used to create all well-formed or grammatical utterances in the language (Purpura, 2004, p.6).

On the other hand, according to Batko (2004, p.24), grammar refers to the fundamental principles and structure of the language, including clear and correct sentence construction and the proper forms of words. Having an agreement with this opinion, Harmer (2001, p.12) noted that the grammar aspect of a language, especially second language, is the portrayal of the techniques in which words can be under a modification in their forms and jointed into sentences in that language. Because of its function, grammar is used to avoid misapprehension among members of a conversation.

- Vocabulary

Vocabulary is considered the most significant thing in a language, especially in speaking because the more words the students know, the easier they get to express their thoughts, emotional states and ideas in both oral or written form. According to Turk (2003, p.87), in spoken language, the vocabulary tends to be familiar and aims at daily-life use. It means that in spoken language, the vocabulary used have to be very acquainted and used in everyday conversation on the purpose of understanding the spoken discourse. In order to use words in speaking proficiently, students need to remember their meanings, spelling and pronunciation. Consequently, when teaching vocabulary, the teachers need to make certain that the explanation of the meaning, as well as the spelling and pronunciation are conveyed correctly.

- Fluency

According to Pollard (2008, p.16), fluency is defined as the capability to speak fluently, confidently and accurately. Generally, it refers to the expression of oral language freely without pause or stoppage. In the process of teaching and learning speaking skills, if the teacher wants to check how fluent his or her student is, he or she can let them express themselves freely and see the level of interruption from the speech. However, the teacher should not fix the mistake immediately; he or she should encourage the students and praise them if necessary.

- Comprehension

Comprehension is a capability to observe and process sections of discourse, to express demonstrations of the meaning of sentences. Comprehension of a second language is harder to study because it must be inferred from obvious verbal and nonverbal answers, by artificial instruments, or by the awareness of the teacher. On the other hand, comprehension also mentions that members can fully comprehend the nature of the educational program, even when processes are complex and entail risks (Cohen, 2005, p.51).

2.2. Communicative Language Teaching

The history of language learning and teaching methods has experienced many changes with many approaches such as Grammar - Translation Method, Audio lingual Method, the Total Physical Response, the Natural Approach, and, etc. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is the latest influence on teaching methodology which has been put forth around the world as an innovative approach to teach English as a second or foreign language.

* Nunan's definition of CLT:

"CLT views language as a system for the expression of meaning. Activities involve oral communication, carrying out meaningful tasks and using language that is meaningful to learners. Objectives reflect the need of the learners: they include functional skills as well as linguistic objectives. The learners' role is as a negotiator and integrator. The teachers' role is as a facilitator of the communication process. Materials promote communicative language use; they are task - based and authentic." (Nunan, D, 1989:194)

* Characteristics of CLT:

Nunan, D (1991:279) offered five characteristic features of CLT:

- *The introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation.*
- *An emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language.*
- *The provision of opportunities for learners to focus not only on language but also on the learning process itself.*
- *An enhancement of the learners owns experience as important contributing elements to classroom learning.*
- *An attempt to link classroom language with language activation outside the classroom.*

Communicative Language Teaching is an approach which proposes that language learning should be done in a meaningful setting with authentic language as the input. It is an umbrella term which consists of an array of methods and techniques (Parrish, 2004). According to Lindsay and Knight (2006, p.20), this approach is based on the view that language is learnt in order to communicate effectively "in the world outside the classroom." It emphasizes on meaningful use of language for communication, rather than on the form and structure; hence the term "real-life" communication in the classroom (Brown, 2000). Savignon (2001, p.13) describes CLT as the "new", "innovative" way of teaching English as a second or foreign language as it deals with "the interactive nature of communication." CLT puts an importance on fluency and ability to communicate in a variety of settings and in a variety of ways. Nguyen (2010, p.209) points out that "CLT may currently be considered and accepted as an inclusive approach

to language teaching, which encompasses various approaches and methods, motivations for learning English, types of teachers and the needs of individual classrooms and students themselves; it is learner-centered and emphasizes communication in real-life situations." CLT emphasizes on contextualized, meaning-based instructions and the use of authentic materials, as well as maximum learner interaction (Parrish, 2004).

According to the principles of the CLT, the learners do not study only the linguistic structures and the rules of grammar, but it stressed the importance of using language for communication (Allwright, 1978; Cambell, 1972; Numan, 1991; Richards & Rodgers, 1995; Savignon, 1991). Besides, Johnson (1981) suggested while studying, students must try to communicate with their peers and try to make them understand what they have said. Furthermore, teaching English for communication is to emphasize the language competence for learners and they must try to communicate in real situation (Murphy, 1991). As such, it could be included that in order to teach language for communicative purposes, the teacher must put the emphasis on the students' communicative competence to use it in real communications.

The English text book for grade 10 follows this dominating approach. It was designed with a view to developing students' communicative skills at basic level: speaking, listening, reading and writing as well as providing students with appropriate, systematic and basic knowledge of English. With this approach, the need for communicative proficiency is focused on rather than mere mastery of structures. However, those activities in English 10 did not meet the demand of communicative proficiency. Then, the researcher used PBL, and found that it was really a good teaching practice to help students develop their communicative competence.

2.3. Concepts of Project-based Learning

2.3.1. Definitions of project-based learning

Project-based learning approach is a teaching method which is studied by many experts. So it also is defined in many different ways. Each definition shows the underlying theories or perspectives that the authors study and assume. Here are some definitions of project-based learning.

Carter and Thomas (1986, p.196) characterized project work with three features referring to the venue, the inter-disciplined characteristic and student's autonomy:

- i) it takes place outside the classroom
- ii) it is cross-curricular
- iii) it allows learners to set their own targets as they proceed.

Moss, D. and Duzer, V.C. (1998, p.1) defined that "*PBL is an instructional approach that contextualizes learning by presenting learners with problems to solve or products to develop*". Accordingly, the essential feature of project-based approach is a tangible and visible result such as a product or a solution to a defined problem.

There are a range of terms which both refer to project-based learning such as experiential learning and negotiated language learning (Eyring, 2001; Legutke & Thomas, 1991), project method (Kilpatrick, 1926), project approach (Diffily, 1996); and investigative research (Kenny, 1993).

Additionally, many specialists from various countries have afforded to give definitions of this approach..

PBL is defined as an oriented model which requires students to explore matters; ending in authentic results. More specifically, projects can be expanded in terms of scope as well as involved aspects with the aim of increasing learning opportunities at school. The writer also emphasizes that learners should be acted and experienced in some important roles like decision maker, problem solver and investigator (Blumenfeld, 1991).

According to Legutke and Thomas (1991, p.160), PBL is not an available method but an "educational philosophy which aims at providing the direction, and some possible routes, to a more democratic and participatory society". In other words, it is the learners' duty to base on instructional steps to create their own products and deal with troubles by themselves.

Also, Beckett (2002) regards a project work as a lasting activity which consists of both personal and collaborative tasks, namely building up inquiry questions and schedule as well as gathering and analyzing data. He states that students have a choice to report collected information in oral or written form.

In addition, it is claimed by Haines (1989) that projects, multi-competence operations, attach special importance to topics rather than small details. Learners play a vital part in choosing appropriate fields and working approaches so that they can control the "end product". The writer convincingly concludes that project method helps students to "recycle" their existing knowledge by giving them "natural contexts".

Moreover, researchers are advised to consider typical types of projects when defining PBL. The first type named structured project in which teachers give their pupils available and specific methods. Thus, students just follow the indicated way for finding and tackling information. Besides, a semi-structured research method shows both project area and methodology providing that learners must be much more active and responsible for their studying process. In general, not only teacher but also students take charge in this kind of method.

Thirdly, learner-centered language target is the characteristic of an unstructured project. That means they are free to create and manage the learning timetable, content and methodology (Petersen, 2004).

In Petersen's viewpoint, the diverse ways of collecting data and where it is found also produce a number of projects. One of them is correspondence research through which messages are sent between people by using letters, phone calls and email. Another type is survey project that allows students to search for their favorite survey instruments, to gather necessary document and to analyze assembled ones. Last but not least, production project requires learners to work with materials such as boards, chalk, posters, slides and other visual and audible aids. Then, they are also asked to hand in reports, narrative work and brochures or to give a short oral presentation.

A clearer picture of PBL from the above definitions is that Project-Based Learning is engaging learning experiences that involve students in complex, real-world projects through which they develop and apply skills and knowledge. The outcomes can be identified up front but sometimes are only experiences to allocate resources such as time or materials.

2.3.2. Types of projects

Sarah North (1990) classifies projects into four categories based on the primary sources of data.

1. *Community projects*, in which students derive their information largely from local community, using methods such as observation, questionnaires, interviews and letter writing.

2. *Case studies*, in which students are provided with specific documents (real or imaginary) relating to a particular problem which has to be solved.

3. *Practical projects*, in which students are required to carry out practical work to reach their objectives, for example, producing a design, building a model or real object, carrying out an experiment, or the form of equipment and material.

4. *Library projects*, in which the main resource base is a library. Typically, students are expected to take a particular topic, read about it, and produce some kinds of written work.

2.3.3. Key features of Project-Based Learning

There are 6 key features of PBL offered by *Stoller's* (2007: 4-5). These are as follows:

1. *Project work focuses on content learning rather than on specific language targets. Real-world subject matter and topics of interest to students can become central to projects.*
2. *Project work is student-centered, though the teacher plays a major role in offering support and guidance throughout the process.*
3. *Project work is cooperative rather than competitive. Students can work on their own, in small groups, or as a class to complete a project, sharing resources, ideas, and expertise along the way.*
4. *Project work leads to the authentic integration of skills and processing of information from varied sources, mirroring real-life tasks.*
5. *Project work culminates in an end product (e.g., an oral presentation, a poster session, a bulletin board display, a report, or a stage performance) that can be shared with others, giving the project a real purpose. The value of the project, however, lies not just in the final product but in the process of working towards the end point. Thus, project work has both a process and product orientation, and provides students with opportunities to focus on fluency and accuracy at different project-work stages.*

6. *Project work is potentially motivating, stimulating, empowering, and challenging. It usually results in building student confidence, self-esteem, and autonomy as well as improving students' language skills, content learning, and cognitive abilities.*

From the features of PBL, a wide range of benefits to both students and teachers are further clarified. A growing body of academic research supports the use of project-based learning in school to engage students, cut absenteeism, boost cooperative learning skills, and improve academic performance (George Lucas Educational Foundation, 2001).

For many students, the appeal of this learning style comes from the authenticity of the experience. Students take on the role and behavior of those working in a particular discipline. Whether they are making a documentary video about an environmental concern, designing a travel brochure to highlight sites of historical significance in their community, or developing a multimedia presentation about their interests, students are engaged in real-world activities that have significance beyond the classroom.

For teachers, additional benefits include enhanced professionalism and collaboration among colleagues, and opportunities to build relationships with students (Thomas, 2000). Additionally, many teachers are pleased to find a model that accommodates diverse learners by introducing a wider range of learning opportunities into the classroom.

Furthermore, an author named Bryson (2013) shows that PBL's features can be briefly summarized in the six A's following terms:

❖ *Authenticity: Projects designed at schools are usually practical and applied programs. These approaches put the passion on students and enable them to work with "real world issues". Therefore, learners are likely to get excited with the topic they are caring about.*

❖ *Academic rigor: This feature refers to the basic requirement of PBL that asks students to keep in mind content standards and to think of the topic critically.*

❖ *Adult connections: Projects with adult connections characteristic inspire students through the meaningful involvement of adults beyond the classroom.*

❖ *Active exploration: This vital feature aims at motivating learners' creativity, enthusiasm »and willingness while learning subjects centered projects.*

❖ *Applied learning: Working with projects, pupils have to interact with various circumstances and use the target language immediately as well as apply useful skills to come up with the employer's expectation.*

❖ *Assessment practices: It is considered to be a good chance for students to receive useful evaluations and feedback not only during but also after the process of working with projects.*

Project-based learning owns a wide range of features which support students' learning process. Therefore, teachers are recommended to master these characteristics and apply them to teaching method efficiently.

2.3.4. Advantages and challenges of project-based learning

2.3.4.1. Advantages of project-based learning

The benefits of PBL are numerous and well-documented.

According to Gallacher (2004), PBL has the following advantages:

1. Increased motivation - learners become personally involved in the project.
2. All four skills are integrated.
3. Autonomous learning is promoted as learners become more responsible for their own learning.
4. There are learning outcomes - learners have an end product.
5. Authentic tasks are given to learners.
6. Interpersonal relations are developed through working as a group.
7. Content and methodology can be decided between the learners and the teacher and within the group themselves so it is more learner-centered.
8. Learners can get help from parents for the project work thus involving the parents more in the child's learning.
9. A break from routine and the chance to do something different.

10. A context is established, which balances the need for fluency and accuracy.

Fried-Booth (1997), taking a more practical view of PBL, emphasizes that project work is a bridge between using English in class and using English in real life situations outside of class. From a learner-centered perspective, Thomas et. al. (1999) claim that the PBL can respond effectively to the needs of learners with varying skill levels and learning styles.

2.3.4.2. Challenges of Project-based learning

Though PBL is considered a profitable learning strategy, its implementation faces several challenges as projects are complex endeavors involving many different activities. In fact, there still exists a lot of criticism concerning the successful use of project-based instruction. Beckett G. H. & Slater T. point out that according to Eyring (1989)'s study, the students from the project class appeared to be "*dissatisfied with the project approach to teaching ESL because they did not think that these tasks were worthwhile pursuits in ESL classes*" (p. 109) A similar finding was also uncovered in Beckett (1999) and Moulton and Holmes (2000). The reasons for student dissatisfaction with the PBL are quite complex, reflecting potentially different philosophical, cultural and linguistic beliefs held by the teacher and the students.

As for the students, a number of difficulties have been reported in Thomas (2000). The first and most prevalent challenge is their *lack of necessary skills to conduct a scientific study* such as initiating inquiry or generating meaningful research questions, managing complexity and time, analyzing data and developing a logical argument to support claims. Another challenge to students is *access to technology and needed materials* and the last difficulty pointed out by those studies reviewed in Thomas (2000) is *ineffective group work*, or the failure to work collaboratively with other members in their groups.

Gallacher (2004) has pointed out that despite its advantages, PBL has some drawbacks, especially in a language class such as the excessive use of the first language, the different speeds of different students and the control on actual learning with lazy students when they have much freedom in doing project.

According to Thomas (2000), there are three kinds of challenges involving students, teachers and school factors. However, the author only focus on the students' problems as it is the centre of discussion in this study. The first challenge encountered by learners is the students' failure to work in a team. The second is the students' lack of skills to conduct a scientific study such as generating meaningful scientific questions, managing complexity and time, transforming data, and developing a logical argument to support claims.

In conclusion, students will face many challenges in doing a project. However, being aware of these challenges will help them minimize the intervention of these challenges to the success of a project.

2.3.5. Process of Project-based Work

Project work is multi-staged and the division of stages may vary from researcher to researcher. Stoller (2002) divides the process of project work development into five stages: *Selection of topic and idea generation, organisation of ideas and identification of areas of enquiry; research and information gathering; compilation and analysis of information; publication, presentation and evaluation of project*. Hedge (1998) gives very clear guidance on how to carry out a practical project which include six stages: *orientation; preparation and planning; implementation; collation; presentation; and reflection*. Within the context of English language teaching, I take Diana Curtis' view which divides the project into three phases: orientation and planning; research and implementation; sharing results.

Phase 1: Orientation and planning

According to Curtis (2001), this phase involves initial discussion of a topic in certain groups. All students are involved by brainstorming, sharing ideas related to the topic, making the final decision. During this phase, new issues and topics that are appropriate for language learning may arouse (Moss & Van Duzer, 1998) and it is these ideas that help them to study the language better. Gallacher (n.d) proposes some guidelines that teachers can use to help their students work out their plan:

- What they want to include in the project
- What form it will take
- Who will be responsible for what
- An idea of the time it will take to introduce each part of the project
- Any material or resources they might need

Phase 2: Research and implementation

After making the final decision on the project topic and working out a plan for the project, students move on to the next phase. This phase involves mostly such activities as research, fieldwork, sessions with experts and various aspects of gathering information, reading, writing, drawing, and computing (Curtis, 2001). This is an important stage for language learning and skill development as various skills will be needed for the completion of the project. Although students work mostly on their own or in their group, the teacher must be aware of and perform their role as an instructor, a consultant, a facilitator, and even a group member. He/She must decide on when, where and how much he/she should support the students. This support, in Moss and Van Duzer's view, may take the form of language structures and skills, problem-solving strategies, and methods for developing plans (Moss and Van Duzer, 1998).

Phase 3: Sharing results

This is the final phase occurring when students have accomplished their project and it can be in the form of group presentation or disseminating the results in the larger community (Moss and Van Duzer, 1998). Hedge (1998) uses other terms, *presentation and reflection*, and makes a clear distinction between these two ways of sharing results. Students will 'listen' to others presenting in the former and 'read' other writing in the latter. However, these authors and some others such as Curtis (2001), Gallacher (n.d) share a belief that the most common way of sharing results is the presentation of the project to an audience. This is the last but not least important stage as students, by giving their own presentation, can improve their presentation skills and, by attending other groups' presentation, can learn a lot from others.

The teacher, again, plays an important role as it is he who will make a summary and comment on the presentation. By doing so, he will help enhance students' process of language learning and knowledge widening. What's more, an evaluation will be made by the teacher after the presentation of the project and this is one of the main sources of motivation for students.

III. METHODOLOGY

This chapter focuses on using the methodology for the study basing on applying Project-based learning to improve the students' speaking skills at Dong Nai Technology University. Besides, this chapter gives the rationale for the choice of the research methods employed by the study. It also clarifies information on the participants, instruments, procedures, and data collection and data analysis instruments.

3.1. Research Setting

Dong Nai Technology University is a private school located in Bien Hoa city, Dong Nai Province. It was established by Phan Ngoc Son, Ph.D after the Decision No. 929/ QD – TTG of the Prime Minister, June 16th, 2016.

The forerunner of Dong Nai Technology University is Dong Nai College of Technology, established on October 3rd, 2005. At present, the university provides training in various fields of science and technology, technology, construction, nursing, automobile technology, English language, including: university and graduate. With fresh and friendly environment and modern technology applied in teaching and learning, a thousand of students are attending at this university with many different majors and more than three hundred lecturers and specialists are working here. And teaching English is a big problem for the university.

At Faculty of foreign languages, there are about 37 lectures being in charge of teaching English for the entire students at the university. To do this, the lecturers must try their best to gain the assignment and purposes of the faculty of foreign languages. As everyone knows that English is important at this school and has been taught as a compulsory subject to all students, they only learn English to pass the exams and they do care much about what level they can get after studying. So when they become the first-year students, their English knowledge and English skills are a big hole. Hence, being an English lecturer, I must find the ways to solve a number of difficulties in teaching skills such as reading, listening, speaking and writing, especially speaking skills. When they were in schools, they just focused on grammar, reading and comprehension, vocabulary, sometimes listening. They did not have much time for speaking, communicating and the environment for speaking practicing is almost zero. With above reasons, they feel scared and unconfident when they speak something in English. Moreover, most of the students live in rural areas so they do not have chance to study at English center and meet native speakers. So speaking English is one of their biggest disadvantages.

To help the students improve Speaking skills, the researcher will carry out the project names applying Project – based learning in the English classroom. This is a project for a trial class. The class applied PBL for the trial project is class code 0070133 at Dong Nai Technology University. And the students are the first-year students. They belong to different faculties at University. They are

non-majored English students..

3.2. Participants

3.2.1. The Researcher

The researcher attended at University of Social Sciences and Humanities. His major was English Linguistics and Literature. He graduated from the University in 2013. After graduation, he worked for some companies with full time job. In the evening, he has been taught English at Some English centers since 2013. With the passion for teaching, he applied for Lecturer Position. So far, he has been teaching English at Dong Nai Technology University for near 3 years. At present, he is taking an M.A course in English Language in Graduate Academy of Social Sciences.

During carrying the project, the researcher and two other lecturers are observers in the study. During the first two weeks of the third semester of school year 2018-2019, the teacher will teach and observe the class to collect initial data. In the English Division for pre-test, the researcher will identify the weaknesses and difficulties of students in speaking English. In the action stage, he and two supported lecturers will observe the class when applying PBL in learning to elicit data on the effectiveness of the action adopted.

3.2.2. The Teachers

There are more than 300 lecturers and specialists are working Dong Nai Technology University. In particular, at Faculty of foreign languages, there are about 37 lectures being in charge of teaching English for the entire students at the university. The average age is 30. They are really young. They are enthusiastic in teaching, learning and applying the new methods in teaching English. They always support and learn from each other to improve their teaching quality.

3.2.3. The Students

Most of students at Dong Nai University come from the countryside and rural province. In the past, when they studied at secondary school and high school, they just focused on grammar and reading comprehension to get marks and pass the exams. They did not have much time for speaking and listening. They also did not have chances to study English at English centers and environment for practicing speaking. On the other hand, they did not know the importance of Speaking English in modern society, especially for work in the future. As a result, they did not spend much time on practicing speaking English. The result of this problem is that their speaking ability is a serious problem, needs to be improved immediately. When they become students at the University, they luckily know the importance of Speaking English. They really desire that they can improve their speaking skills to pass the special exams and have enough ability to speak English to answer the question in the interview but most of them still feel bored with learning it. They think speaking is very difficult and feel unconfident when speaking it. So they do not have motivation in learning speaking lessons. Besides that, some students are really interested in speaking activities when they can speak something. This is a good signal for the researcher to have more motivation to carry out this project.

The students applied PBL for the trial project is class code 0070133 at Dong Nai Technology University. And the students are 30 first-year non-major English students. They belong to different faculties at University.

3.3. Data Collection Instruments

Data collection instruments are the really important part in the study. It plays an important role in collecting exact data. So we should mention clearly the data collection instruments which were used to collect the data, analyze and find out the result of the study. The questionnaire is used to evaluate the students' attitude to the project-based learning and the problems which the students have when PBL applied in speaking lessons. The pre-test, post-test is used to evaluate the improvement of the students' speaking ability after applying PBL in teaching speaking skills. The interview is used to discover the opinion and attitude of the lecturers join in the project, and CEFR speaking skill assessments were used to give students' scores basing on their oral tests. All instruments above support collecting the basic data effectively. Action research is a very good method for this research. It is chose as the main method in collecting data. With these data collection instruments and action research method are used in the study, hopefully we can collect the exact data for analyzing to find out the best result for the study. Each instrument is useful in each stage of the action. They combine and support each other to collect the best data. From that, we have the reliable result for the study from analyzing the best data collected.

3.3.1. Speaking test

To evaluate students' speaking ability before applying project-based learning and after applying project-based learning, speaking

test really needs to be used in the project as an instrument to collect the data. In this part, speaking tests were divided into two parts: pre-test used before PBL applied in speaking lessons and post-test after PBL applied in speaking lessons. From the scores of the two speaking tests, we can analyze the result to verify PBL is really effective or ineffective in helping the students improve their speaking skills. Besides that we can also find out the advantages and disadvantages of PBL. Then we can make some changes to perfect our speaking lessons and our new method.

Pre-test and post-test were designed as the same model. In each test, there were three parts with different language functions and situations, including greeting, exchanging information and discussing and persuading. The tests were expected to meet the CEFR's demands at B1 level.

The evaluating and giving score were based on the B1 Level Assessment Scales of the CEFR with the appropriate Scoring Rubric for Oral Presentations (see Appendix 4). The components of assessment included Behavior, Fluency - Pronunciation, Grammar, Vocabulary - Ideas. The researcher invited two other English lecturers at DNTU to be examiners. Thirty students were requested to make each pair in speaking test. Each pair of students' speaking ability would be tested by two teachers. The two examiners rated the criteria according to the students' performances with English Speaking Ability Evaluation (see Appendix 5). Each lecturer evaluates and gives scores to each student. After having the scores from the tests, the researcher will calculate the index of the correlation of all items by using Means scores. From the data collected, the researcher will analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of PBL. After the researcher can adjust some points in Project-based learning if it is necessary.

3.3.2. Questionnaires

In almost studies, the questionnaire is an integral part in collecting the primary sources of the data in the research. Many experts have studied about the importance of questionnaires in the study. According to Richards & Schmidt (2002) designing questionnaire was very important, they strongly advised that the researcher should ensure that the questionnaire is "valid, reliable and unambiguous" (p. 438). Nevertheless, Salkind (2003), questionnaire is considered as a useful tool in doing the educational research because "individuals can complete them without any direct assistance or intervention from the researchers". Nunan (1999), he has his own opinion about the questionnaire: "The important issue in closed-ended questions is that the responses to these types of questions will more accurately reflect what the respondent wants to say" (p. 143). Besides, Seliger and Shohamy (1989) thought that closed-ended questionnaires were more effective than the normal questionnaire because they were easy to get the data for analysis.

To collect and have good data, designing the questionnaire met the objective of study is really important. So the researcher must design the questionnaire so that he can get the necessary information from the students' answer and help save time for the researcher and the participants in this part. In this research, the questionnaire is considered as a primary tool in collecting data. The questionnaire is designed to make the participants find easiest to understand and give the best response to the given question. The answers to the questions are designed by the option(s) A, B, C, D, and E. Options depended on the questions and extent of the answers. The participants just choose one of options. In some cases, they can choose more than one option. All participants must answer all the questions in the questionnaires.

In data collection instruments, the first questionnaire (Appendix 2) in total has seven questions concerning the first - year student' opinions about learning speaking lessons and their feedbacks on the English lecturer's activities. The second questionnaire (Appendix 7) consists of five questions related to the students' attitudes to the activities of projected-based learning applied in the optional lessons and their improvement in speaking skills.

After collecting the answer in the questionnaires for students of the class which has class code 0070133, the researcher should focus on the students' answers to find out the answer to the first research questions: "What is the first-year students' attitude to project-based learning at Dong Nai Technology University in speaking lessons?"

3.3.3. Interviews

The next data collection instrument is interviews. Interview is considered one of the useful tools in collecting data. With this tool, we can have reliable data, we can know the attitude of the participants in the interviews. There is much theory from the experts study about the interviews. Burns (1999) said that "Interviews are a popular and widely used means of collecting qualitative data" (p. 118). According to Salkind (2003). Interviews was really good tool to help researchers "get better response and more accurate data". During the process of the study, interviews were applied after the Project-based learning had been applied in the trial lessons and after the post-trying out test. Interview can normally be conducted in two forms: the first one was person-to-person, and the

second one was group or collective formats. Besides, Merriam (1998) stated that both of these forms of interview were a kind of goal-oriented conversation. In the interview part, the interview was conducted by the researcher as the interviewer and two English lecturers as two interviewees at a different convenient time after the trial lessons to get more objective, exact opinions and feedbacks about learning speaking with Project-based learning. With the semi-structured interviews (Appendix 7), the researcher hope to get information about the difficulties, interests, advantages from the students after applying Project-based learning technique and discover their desire. During the interview, all information and the answers are noted carefully.

3.4. Research Design

After learning about some kinds of methods used studies, the researcher chose Action Research (AR) approach to use in this study. The researcher hoped that with this kind of research, the researcher could exactly find out the difficulties of the students in speaking skills. Besides, identifying the students' attitude to the project-based learning technique was really important. And the last thing, hopefully, this kind of research could help examine the effectiveness of PBL in improving the students' speaking ability. The research was carried out at class which had class code 0070133 at Dong Nai Technology University.

In doing research, choosing a research method will decide the study get successful or unsuccessful. So choosing the right research method is extreme important thing. The researcher chose an Action research method as a main method used in this study after learning about it carefully. This method has been used in many today's educational studies. Many scholars and experts have studied this method. They have given lots of theory about Action Research, also its application. Here is some theory for references. According to Cohen & Marion (1980), Action research was situational or content-based, collaborative, participatory, and self- evaluative. In this method, each part connects each other to make the process of research. Nunan (1998) believed that Action Research was "problem focused", and mainly "concerned with a single case in a specific situation". It helped find solutions to the main problems. Teachers could compare methods and ideas with a critical eye, and to adopt these ideas in teaching environment by using Action Research. Richards, as cited in Brenner (1993) added that Action Research also engaged teachers in their teaching in a deep way.

According to Burns (1999), in the action research, teachers must perform two functions the primary researchers and practitioners as the same time. Classroom activities were performed to find out the problem and result was based on the classroom activities between the students and teachers. And Richards & Lockhart (1994), they said that action research was a kind of studies which the researcher carried out it in the classroom to evaluate exactly about the classroom and improve classroom activities. Stringer (1996) has indicated that action research is closely linked with theory and practice as well as reflection.

Nunan (1992) defined that AR was a method which focused on find the problems of the study. It connected closely to a single case in the particular situation. It encouraged both teacher and the students in classroom activities. It helped the researcher observe and find out the solution for teaching activities. The research could compare the methods and effectiveness by Action research. From that, teaching activities were adjusted to gain the purposes in teaching. According to Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon (2014), they supposed that action research was a deliberate research method. It led the researcher to investigate in oriented solution to identify the problem. This method could be conducted by individual or a group. It owned the complex cycles. It helped identify the problem, collect and classify, analyze and give the reflection base on the result, adjust the action base on the result discovered, and redefine the problems. The term "action" and "research" had the particular link. From doing trial activities, then analyzing the result of action research, the solutions were found out to gain the purposes: increasing knowledge, gaining positive teaching and learning results. .

The teacher was individual who derived the action research process. The teacher should also "engaging in meaningful reflection and discussion with colleagues". From these activities, Action research could bring the benefits to the teachers in improving teaching and having useful experiences and to the students in helping them improve their learning and attitude (Arhar et al., 2001; Wallace, 1998). Action research was also considered as a bridge to connect between research theory (the theoretical) and practical action (the empirical) checked the link and effectiveness by the practitioners – researchers (Arhar, Holly & Kasten, 2001). In an action research, an individual or a group of participants could be the researcher. There were many people join in the action activities such as researcher, colleagues as observers, students. All the participants in the project were closely connected to each other to make a cooperative community. During carrying the process of action research, the researcher –teacher should observe, listen to the students to identify their feedbacks, attitude, opinion and improvement to collect reliable data. So action research was considered as teamwork. It was combination among the researcher-as-researcher, the students, and the colleagues (Arhar et al., 2001) to bring the improvement in education. This action at the same time helped improve personal growth, the collective profession for the teachers and students. This

was meaningful to communities, institutions or society. And Reason (2004) defined that action research in the study was a potential instrument in changing the opinion of individual and group during the process of action, helped them improve themselves.

From the definitions of experts above, Action research is a good solution in improving teacher's teaching technique in classroom in education setting. Action research focuses on the action and activities. Action research helps the researcher solve the problems through the steps and detailed plan to find out the ways to get the answer for the research.

In this study, the researcher chooses Action research as the methodology to support in finding the result of the research because it has strong advantages. The first thing, Action research is in general useful to teaching and learning. It is suitable for this research which the subjects and purpose consist of the students and lecturers. Cohen and Marion (1980) stated that action research happened in the classroom when one teacher as the researcher, carried out the project with his classroom since he found that it helped improve his teaching experience and students' learning. So AR was said that it could help improve teaching method. The second thing, AR brings benefit to the researcher – lecturer and the students in the classroom. AR helps the researcher evaluate exactly what is happening in classroom. From that, the research considers the teaching method to change to get the better result if it is necessary. Moreover, the researcher can also identify the attitude and cooperation of the students in lessons. According to Gibbs (1995, p.18), he said that this change was “a change essential for sustained pedagogical development”. Action research is also meaningful to the students in some cases. They have the chance to try on learning with new methods. This thing maybe is useful for them in improve their learning effectively. With two worthy benefits above, AR is surely chosen as the best method to carry out in finding the result of the study. It can help the teacher and students improve the skills which they need, especially teaching and learning speaking English.

After referring the theory about Action research of experts, Action is evaluated as the most suitable type of researches for this study. The stages in Action research are detailed. Each step is planned in the schedule carefully. Action research focuses on the activities and tools to find out the answer to the research questions. Action research can help the researcher recognize the problems. From that, the researcher can use tools in action research to solve the problems. At the result, Action research brings the benefit to the participants. By using survey questionnaire, pre-test, post-test, observation and interview, the researcher can identify the difficulties of the student, the improvement of students' speaking ability, the attitude of students to the project-based learning, the cooperation of the students in the project, the opinion of observers to PBL. From the strong advantages, the researcher is confident to choose the Action research as the main type of research in this study. With the hope, this kind of research can help the students improve their speaking skills and have a positive attitude to speaking lessons.

The researcher finds that the theory of action research of Kemmis and Mc (1988) is suitable to the lecture to carry out the project. They proposed the model in action research with four main steps: Planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. To have the good planning, the researcher adds one step – predicting. This helps save time and directs the researcher on the right way to find the result. The next step, the four phases are detailed. The outline below shows us the action research procedure of the study on detail.

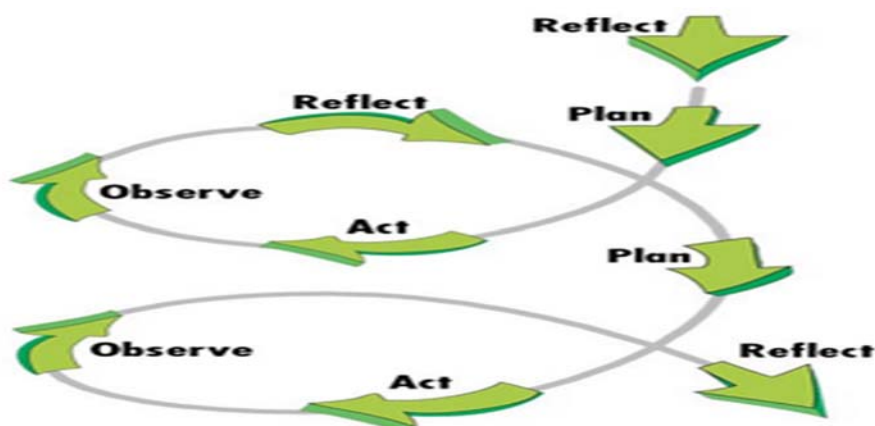


Figure 1: Action research cycle (Kemmis & Mc Taggart, 1988)

3.5. Research Procedures

Research procedure shows us steps in each stage, help us gain the purposes when applying action research in the classroom. In this study, the cycle's procedure of action research includes these phases:

3.5.1. Phase 1: Planning

Planning plays a very important role in Action Research in the classroom. Planning should be planned clearly. Orientation and detailed plan are extremely important in determine the success of the study. Having good planning, we can do the next step easily. In the project-based learning activity, the students – learners are the center of the classroom. Excepting the activities in the classroom, the students have to learn out lots of out-of-class activities to complete the assignment. The lecturer should carefully prepare necessary things before directing the students to do the steps in their project. Here are the things needs to be prepared:

- Designing the survey questionnaires to evaluate the students' attitudes toward speaking lessons before and after applying Project-based learning in classroom.
- Designing the lesson plan for project.
- Designing the classroom observation sheet in order to take notes the teaching situation when the strategy of the learning process is conducted.
- Preparing Pre-test and post-test, semi-structured interview to test the improvement of the students' speaking ability after PBL applied in speaking lessons.
- Requesting the students to make some groups to carry the project and giving them clear instructions on how to complete, the way to evaluate the contribution on the project of each member in each group.
- Give the students the basic knowledge of project-base learning and things students must do in this project

3.5.2. Phase 2: Action

In the second phase of the study, we carry out the steps to find out the answers to the two research questions. In action part, we need to do many things. The first thing, we must design the survey questions which helps the researcher find out the answer to the first question in the research questions of the study. The researcher should make the questions focus on identify the students' attitude to project-based learning. Then, the survey questionnaires are delivered to 30 students of the class which has class code 0070133. The survey questionnaires are written in English, so to make the students feel easy to answer the survey questionnaires, the researcher should translate the survey questionnaire into Vietnamese, guide and clarify some points in case the students are not clear. And the purpose of this survey questionnaire is also told to the students. With that way, we can get the exact data from their answers.

To find out the answer to the second question of the research questions, the researcher must conduct the other steps, involving pre-test, trial lessons and post-test. Designing the pre-test is very important. The researcher must design how to evaluate exactly the 30 student's speaking ability in the class which has class code 0070133 before teaching the trial lessons. In the pre-test, the students are asked to take part in the test in pairs. The examiners are two other English lecturers at Dong Nai Technology University. After the test is completed, the researcher conducts to teach trial lessons with Project-based learning techniques. The lecturer will supply some given topics for each student group choose, and then give the students clear instructions for doing their project.

About the topics for the presentation in front of the class, the lecturer-researcher provides some basic topics based on the themes of the textbook named I-discovery 1. (The kind of hobbies). Then, each group chooses two topics which they think they can do them well. After getting the topic, each group carries out doing the project. The leader in each group will divide the task into smaller parts. Each member in the group will undertake one part. The leader summarizes all the information from each member, then the group discusses and prepares for the presentation. As planned, 30 students are divided into 6 groups. Each two weeks, each group will present their project. Each group will make a presentation in front of the class in about 15 minutes (including asking and answering part). Two or three groups will present their project each week. After each presentation, the lecturer will give the feedback on their presentation and direct them how to get better presentation and speaking skills if it is necessary for the next turn

After all groups complete the presentation, students will take the post-test to evaluate the effective of PBL in teaching speaking skills. and the post-trying out questionnaires are also delivered to the students to evaluate what students gain from PBL. Besides, two lecturers as observers in the class will be interviewed to express their opinions of the effectiveness of project-based learning which is applied in the speaking lessons.

3.5.3. Phase 3: Observation

Observation is an important part in Action research. Observation or Field Note is one of the methods which helps the researcher collect data in class directly. When a new teaching method is applied in class, it is necessary to evaluate both students and teachers on their opinion, attitude and cooperation; Another lecturer will evaluate base on the observation sheet and take notes for the important points. The observation sheet focuses on the quality of the lesson, feelings, thoughts, attitude and cooperation of the participants in the lesson. According to Hopkins (1993), Field note was an effective method for reporting observation and reaction to classroom problems.

Table 2: Observation checklist

No.	Statement	Opinion	
		Yes	No
1	Teacher prepares the lessons well.		
2	Teacher can manage classroom conditions well.		
3	Teacher uses time effectively.		
4	The method used by the teacher is interesting.		
5	Teacher is friendly to the students.		
6	Teacher is able to use the technique well.		
7	Teacher explains the instructions clearly.		
8	Teacher anticipates the students' difficulties.		
9	Students pay attention to the teacher's explanations.		
10	Students understand the teacher's explanation.		
11	Students become active in the classroom.		
12	Students are able to present their project confidently.		
13	Students are brave to ask and answer.		
14	Students feel happy during the lessons.		
15	Students get bored during the lesson process.		

3.5.4. Phase 4: Reflection

Action Research is a series of activities done to gain the objectives of the study. So it requires the researcher having good preparation. The researcher must set up the detailed plan and make sure to keep a personal schedule during doing each stage of planning, acting, observing, reflecting, planning etc. To have the reliable result, each participant joining the activities must complete the task which is given well. The students are considered as the center of this activity. They are learners. The lecturer is in charge of directing for the students to do the project. Besides, two lecturers are considered as two observers during applying the new trial lessons. This reflection helps evaluate the level of completing the work of each person. The table below shows the action plan as detailed:

Table 3: Procedures of the study

Time	Phases of Action Research	Instruments
Week 1 (1/3-4/3/2019)	Predicting	- Observing by the lecturer - Questionnaire and in-put test to identify the problems.

Week 2-> 11 (8/3- 24/5/2019)	- Planning - Acting - Observing	- Listen to lecturer's instruction on how to carry out a project and explanation of assessment and evaluation. - Listen to lecturer's directions for presentation skills. - Sharing and agreeing on an outline - Prepare for the final presentation: editing, designing power point, preparing handouts, designing visual aids, etc. - Making 2 presentations in front of the class. - Lecturers observe students' improvement weekly and give the feedback on the presentations - Post- test for the final assessment. - Students answer post-trying out questionnaire. Two lecturers answer the interview.
Week 12 (25/05-31/05/2018)	- Reflecting	- The researcher analyzes data collected to evaluate the action plan.

3.6. Data Analysis

This part mentions data collected and talks about the methods to analyze to find out the result of the research. In this part, figures, tables, charts, pie chart are used to show the result of each part. All kinds of data were analyzed to meet the requirements of this study. Both qualitative and quantitative methods are used in this action research method. The result from using these methods is more exact and reliable.

The questionnaire used with the aim is to identify the students' attitude to the project-based learning applied in speaking lessons. Each answer of the students will be collected and counted to fill in the statistic. From this data, we can calculate the percentage of each option chosen by students to illustrate in figures, or tables, or charts or pie charts. Next step, the researcher compares the percentage among the choices of the students to find out the attitude of the students to PBL: positive or negative

In giving scores for the pre-test and post-test, the examiners base on the scoring rubric for the speaking. After receiving the score sheet from the two examiners, the researcher computes, calculates and converts into mean scores basing on the total number of students participated. After doing the steps of data analysis process, the researcher finds out the mean scores, and then using that result – the mean score to evaluate the differences between pre-test and post-test to check the effectiveness of applying Project-based learning in improving the students' speaking ability.

To the interview, in this part, the feedback from the two lecturers joining the project is taken notes by citing relevant responses. After that, the researcher will analyze the data to find out the answer.

In summary, the data collected was summarized, analyzed, displayed, and interpreted to find out the findings of the study. After having the data from the students' answers in pre- and post- test scores, feedback from interviews and students' opinions, the researcher uses analysis and interpretations to clarify figures. From the figures of result in analysis, the researcher can evaluate to find out the result of the study.

IV. CONCLUSION

The research's main purpose was to find out the answers to the two research questions. From the result of the survey questions, pre-test, post-test and interview questions, the study shows us the effectiveness of applying project-based learning in improving

students' speaking skills. The students have only the improvement of their speaking skills but also good attitude to the project-based learning. This is a good signal for both students and teachers. PBL is really good teaching speaking method to the other teacher and lectures. It should be widely applied in speaking lessons.

4.1 Implications

After doing collecting and analyzing the data, the result of using Project-based Learning to improve the first-year students' English speaking skills showed that the researcher was in the right direction in finding the useful and effective teaching speaking method and the result met the aims of the study. So the result of this study suggests some practical implication for not only the English Lecturers and students at Dong Nai Technology University but also other teacher and lecturers and next researchers as follows:

Firstly, to English lecturers at Dong Nai University, English lecturers play an extreme important role in the students' success learning. The attitude and teaching method of the lecturers impact on the students' learning strongly. So using a good method in teaching speaking skills is necessary and needs to be applied to bring the best result for the students. With the positive result, the lecturers can confidently use project-based learning in teaching speaking to help the students improve their speaking abilities. Besides that, the lecturers should design more speaking activities in using Project-based learning to motivate the students and make them feel excited and happy in speaking lessons. Additionally, the lecturers should learn about the theory of PBL and master this method before applying it so that it can bring the best result when using it. One more thing, the lecturers can combine the traditional teaching method and PBL technique in each situation if PBL is supposed to be quite new to the students. In that way, the success of this method is obvious.

Secondly, to students at Dong Nai Technology University:

To students, succeeding in leaning requires that the attitude and awareness of the students are good. Excepting the help and support from the teacher and lecturers, they have to try their best, and have serious view in learning. Besides that, it also requires the right learning method. And the research showed that PLB is very useful and effective in learning speaking skills. It can help the students feel excited about the speaking lessons and help them improve speaking abilities well. To be good at speaking skills, the students must know the importance of English in modern society and take effort in learning it, especially leaning speaking skills because the good speaking ability is one of the strongest advantages in getting success in having a good job in the future. They should be enthusiasm and positive during the lessons. They also need other skills to support speaking skills such as pronunciation skills, listening skills, communication skills, reflection skills in communication so that they can feel confident in communication and speaking. Moreover, Project-based learning technique is not only useful and effective to learning speaking skills, but also good for leaning other skills of English and studying other subjects.

Finally, to the future researchers:

The research in helping improve English speaking skills is one of the practical topics. So there will have many other researchers interested in this topic. With the hope, the researchers who have the same problems in doing the research can get some benefits from the positive result of this study. They can consider this study as useful materials for references. From that, they can study deeply about their topics and bring the good and useful result.

4.2 Limitations

During process of doing the study, some limitations were discovered. The first thing, the number of students participating in trial method – PBL was small and modest, just only one class with 30 students. The result of this study was positive, but it should not be considered as a large scale. The second thing, at the same time applying the trial method – PBL, the research still met the curriculum of Faculty of foreign languages. So the researcher and students did have much time for PBL as we desired. The students must do the test based on the format of the faculty for the final test, following the university's curriculum. The last thing, with the inconsiderable experience, short time for preparation and the limited knowledge of this PBL, doing research got much trouble.

From above limitations, the author hope that these limitations will solve well in the next studies of the future researchers in finding out the importance and effectiveness of using PBL in teaching speaking skills and motivating the students in learning Speaking English. And PBL is considered one of the most effective teaching speaking methods by English teachers and lecturers.

AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTIONS

N.V. Duc, and D.C. Tinh contributed to the design and implementation of the research, to the analysis of the results. All authors discussed the results and commented on the manuscript. The author N. V. Duc edited and revised the final manuscript. All authors have read and agreed to the final manuscript.

COMPETING INTERESTS STATEMENT

Authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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