

NGHIÊN CỨU HIỆU QUẢ CỦA HOẠT ĐỘNG VÒNG TRÒN ĐỒNG TÂM ĐỂ NÂNG CAO KỸ NĂNG NÓI CỦA SINH VIÊN CHUYÊN ANH TẠI TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC LẠC HỒNG

Hoàng Vĩnh Lộc^{1*}, Lương Thùy Trang²¹Khoa Ngôn ngữ Anh, Trường Đại học Lạc Hồng, 10 Huỳnh Văn Nghệ, Bửu Long, Biên Hòa, Đồng Nai, Việt Nam²Trung tâm Cao Trí, Chung cư A2, Nguyễn Ái Quốc, Biên Hòa, Đồng Nai, Việt Nam

Tác giả liên hệ: vinhloc@lhu.edu.vn

THÔNG TIN BÀI BÁO

Ngày nhận: 21/4/2024
Ngày hoàn thiện: 23/5/2024
Ngày chấp nhận: 30/5/2024
Ngày đăng: 15/3/2025

TỪ KHÓA

Hoạt động vòng tròn đồng tâm;
Hoạt động tương tác;
Năng lực nói;
Quan điểm của sinh viên;
Sinh viên chuyên Anh.

TÓM TẮT

Nghiên cứu này khảo sát hiệu quả của hoạt động vòng tròn đồng tâm trong việc nâng cao kỹ năng nói của sinh viên năm hai chuyên Anh tại Đại học Lạc Hồng. Tập trung vào một nhóm bốn mươi sinh viên trình độ trung cấp thuộc Khoa Ngôn Anh, nghiên cứu sử dụng bảng câu hỏi khảo sát và phỏng vấn để tìm hiểu quan điểm của sinh viên về hoạt động này và ảnh hưởng của nó đến khả năng nói của họ. Kết quả cho thấy quan điểm chủ yếu tích cực về hoạt động vòng tròn đồng tâm, với việc sinh viên công nhận hoạt động này góp phần tạo ra một môi trường học tập thân thiện và hỗ trợ, thúc đẩy việc cải thiện mức độ tự tin, sự lưu loát và độ chính xác khi nói tiếng Anh. Tuy nhiên, nghiên cứu cũng nêu lên những thách thức, đặc biệt về thiếu vốn từ vựng và ngữ pháp, đã cản trở khả năng biểu đạt rõ ràng và hiệu quả của một số sinh viên. Điều này nhấn mạnh tầm quan trọng của việc cung cấp hướng dẫn rõ ràng hơn và dạy trước từ vựng và cấu trúc liên quan để hoạt động diễn ra suôn sẻ hơn.

EXPLORING THE EFFICACY OF THE CONCENTRIC CIRCLE ACTIVITY IN BOOSTING ENGLISH MAJORS' SPEAKING SKILLS AT LAC HONG UNIVERSITY

Hoang Vinh Loc^{1*}, Luong Thuy Trang²¹Faculty of English Language, Lac Hong University, 10 Huynh Van Nghe, Bui Long, Bien Hoa, Dong Nai Vietnam²Cao Tri Center, A2 Apartment Building, Nguyen Ai Quoc Street, Bien Hoa City, Dong Nai Province, Vietnam.

Corresponding author: vinhloc@lhu.edu.vn

ARTICLE INFO

Received: Apr 21st, 2024
Revised: May 23rd, 2024
Accepted: May 30th, 2024
Published: Mar 15th, 2025

KEYWORDS

Concentric circle activity;
Interactive activity;
Oral proficiency;
Students' perceptions;
English majors.

ABSTRACT

This research investigates the effectiveness of concentric circle activity in enhancing the oral competence of second-year English majors at Lac Hong University. Focusing on a cohort of forty intermediate-level students from the Faculty of English Language, the study utilized questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to explore students' views on this activity and its influence on their speaking competence. The findings reveal a predominantly favourable perception of the concentric circle activity, with participants acknowledging its contribution to a supportive and friendly learning environment conducive to improving confidence level, fluency, and accuracy in speaking English. However, the research also highlighted several challenges students encountered during their engagement in the activity, especially a lack of vocabulary and grammar, which hindered some students' ability to express themselves clearly and effectively. This observation emphasizes the significance of providing more explicit instructions to elevate students' comprehension and pre-teaching relevant vocabulary and structures to ensure smoother implementation of the activity.

Doi: <https://doi.org/10.61591/jslhu.21.455>Available online at: <https://js.lhu.edu.vn/index.php/lachong>

1. INTRODUCTION

Oral proficiency is not only a key component of overall language competency but also critical for academic and professional success in a globalized world. Therefore, enhancing speaking confidence among learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has long been a central focus of language education research. Specifically, Hu [1] explored the relationship between students' confidence levels and their proficiency in English through the implementation of content-based instruction strategies. At the same time, a study conducted in the Vietnamese context by Nguyen [2] investigated the implementation of task-based language teaching to enhance learners' confidence in the English language classroom. This research highlighted the role of authentic tasks, meaningful communication, and learner autonomy in building students' confidence and language proficiency. Another research carried out by Cadiz-Gabejan [3] discussed strategies to enhance speaking confidence among 46 bachelors of elementary education students at Samar State University. Findings indicated that increased classroom speaking activities and peer collaboration significantly boosted learner confidence.

Among these studies, the role of interactive and engaging pedagogical strategies is vital in addressing the unique challenges EFL learners encounter, including limited exposure to the target language and opportunities for practice in real-life contexts. Particularly, Saeed et al. [4] observed that learner interactions notably improved speaking skills in classroom settings. The research emphasized the critical role of integrating communicative language teaching materials to enhance speaking proficiency through classroom peer interactions. Additionally, Omar et al. [5] looked at the impact of self-confidence, motivation and learning environment on learners' English language speaking ability and their findings revealed that engaging in interactive language learning activities can effectively address communication challenges in language classrooms.

The concentric circles activity, as highlighted in the resources from Literacy Minnesota [6] and Learning Strategies for English Language Learners (ELLs) [7], offers a lively and effective approach for enhancing English language learners' speaking and listening abilities. In this method, students are arranged into two concentric circles, with the inner circle facing outwards and the outer circle facing inwards, forming pairs that engage in discussions based on teacher-provided prompts. This arrangement ensures active participation from all students, facilitating diverse conversations and interactions crucial for ELLs to practice English speaking and listening. The adaptability of this activity accommodates a broad spectrum of learning goals, from vocabulary acquisition to complex topic discussions. By periodically rotating partners, the activity promotes engagement with various peers throughout the session, aiding in English practice and fostering a sense of community and mutual understanding among students.

Research has demonstrated the effectiveness of the concentric circle activities in enhancing language skills and promoting a sense of community within classrooms.

For instance, Copeland [8] discusses its role in promoting critical and creative thinking among middle and high school students through structured, dialogic discussions, emphasizing its versatility across educational contexts. Similarly, findings in Acim's [9] study highlight that concentric circles encourage students to consider diverse perspectives, thereby fostering acceptance and esteem for others. Additionally, Brown [10] notes the method's capacity to facilitate collaborative evaluation and refinement of ideas, enhancing critical thinking and analytical skills. Most recently, Fisher and Machirori [11] find that concentric circles help students overcome reluctance to speak publicly, enhancing their sense of belonging and overall classroom satisfaction by creating a supportive environment for meaningful dialogue with multiple partners.

While the use of interactive activities such as concentric circles is acknowledged for their ability to boost speaking confidence, there is still a clear need for thorough research to assess their impact in various EFL settings. To date, no research has been conducted at Lac Hong University regarding this subject; therefore, this qualitative research extends prior explorations into the effectiveness of interactive activities, such as the concentric circle technique, on enhancing learners' spoken language competencies. The research aims to address this gap by exploring learners' perspectives regarding the concentric circle activity and reveals obstacles encountered by the participants during their engagement in the activity, thereby generating recommendations for pedagogical adjustments by educators. The study was conducted to answer the subsequent research questions.

- ❖ What are students' perceptions of the concentric circle activity in enhancing their oral proficiency?
- ❖ What specific challenges do participants encounter when engaging in the activity?
- ❖ What practical recommendations can be offered to teachers seeking to integrate this activity into their teaching methodologies?

2. RESEARCH METHODS

2.1 Participants

This qualitative study involved 40 undergraduates, all majoring in English at the Faculty of English Language of Lac Hong University, with ages ranging from 19 to 21 years. These students were enrolled in the "Speaking 3" course, which serves as both a vital and final interactive speaking module in their curriculum, aimed at strengthening their basic oral communication skills. Although these students were presumed to have achieved an intermediate level of English proficiency, initial observations by the researcher showed a notable reluctance among some students to actively engage in classroom activities. Moreover, when tasked with conducting conversational presentations with their peers in front of the class, some of the students demonstrated inadequate speaking skills, characterized by limited vocabulary, incorrect grammatical constructions, and pronunciation errors. This group was selected for the research due to the significant discrepancy between their expected proficiency levels and their observed

performance, thereby offering an excellent opportunity to assess the effectiveness of the concentric circle activity in improving their oral communication proficiency.

2.2 Descriptions of the concentric circle activity

The current research adopted the “concentric circle talk” activity developed by Pollard and Hess [12]. In this activity, students are first arranged into two concentric circles with each inner-circle student facing an outer-circle partner. The teacher selects a topic and gives students a minute to prepare before instructing the inner-circle students to speak continuously for three minutes, encouraging them to keep talking even if they run out of words or ideas. Outer-circle students listen attentively without responding. After the time is up, inner-circle students rotate to the right, repeating their speech with new partners in shorter intervals, first two minutes and then one, requiring more concise communication. This process is then repeated with the outer circle students becoming the speakers. The activity concludes with a feedback session where students discuss their experiences and what they learned from their partners.

To enhance the interactivity of the activity, the researcher introduced two significant modifications. First, while speakers present their talks, listeners are expected to actively respond using non-verbal cues and expressions that demonstrate engagement. Second, when speakers struggle to continue their dialogue due to a lack of ideas, listeners are encouraged to ask questions, promoting a smoother flow of conversation. These changes help make the activity more engaging and a more realistic reflection of actual communicative interactions.

The activity was conducted over four sessions, each lasting 45 minutes, which allows students sufficient time to practice and hone their speaking skills. At the beginning of each session, detailed instructions were provided to students, including giving clear, step-by-step guidelines on the objectives and procedures of the activity, demonstrating the expected interactions, and providing examples of effective speaking and listening strategies. Besides, preparatory tasks were assigned to students, such as brainstorming ideas and practicing key phrases, to ensure they were adequately prepared for the discussions.

The activity was conducted in three stages:

Stage 1. Plan: Students receive detailed instructions outlining the objectives and procedures of the activity. In addition, they are allotted time to think about the ideas, vocabulary, grammatical structures and introduced reaction phrases they plan to use during their presentation. Since they are going to talk about their childhood experiences, they are expected to use the past tenses for the verbs. The task employed in this study was structured as follows.

Task for Student A: Tell the person standing opposite you about your childhood. Choose one of the following topics:

- your favorite childhood friend
- an unforgettable childhood story

- a comic book that you enjoyed reading the most when you were a child
- your favorite school subject when you were at primary school
- your favorite teacher when you were at primary school
- your first present from your parents
- or your own idea

You should mention the time, the place, the beginning, the middle, the end of the story and the lesson learnt from the story.

Task for Student B: Listen to your partners' talks. React to the information you hear and ask questions to encourage your partners to speak if they run out of ideas. Change your roles afterwards.

Stage 2. Act:

Round 1:

Turn 1: Students in the inner-circle talk continuously for 03 minutes while outer-circle students listen attentively, react to their partners' information with learnt expressions and ask their partners questions if their partners run out of ideas.

Turn 2: when the time is up, inner-circle students move to the right, giving the same talks to their new partners in 02 minutes.

Turn 3: students in the inner-circle move to the right again and talk about the same topic to new partners in 01 minute.

Round 2:

The same process is repeated. However, this time students from the outer circle take the role of speakers while their partners in the inner-circle become listeners.



Picture 1. Students' participating in the activity

Stage 3. Reflect: Students report what they have learnt from their partners, share their perspectives about the concentric circle activity and make suggestions for improvement.

2.3 Data collection instruments

The data for this qualitative action research study were collected using a combination of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.

The questionnaire was selected as the primary method of data collection due to its alignment with the research objectives and its suitability for qualitative action research. This method provides several advantages. Firstly, it allows for the gathering of detailed, nuanced insights into participants' experiences through open-ended questions, essential for comprehending the depth of human experiences (Smith [13]). In addition, the structured yet flexible nature of questionnaires is particularly advantageous in research settings where the involvement of the researcher might influence responses (Johnson [14]). Finally, the anonymity provided by questionnaires encourages more authentic responses, thereby enhancing the reliability and authenticity of the data collected (Taylor [15]). The questionnaire is crucial for this research as it facilitates a comprehensive understanding of learners' views concerning several key areas. It enables the researcher to assess the influence of the concentric circle activity on students' speaking abilities (research question 1), identify the challenges they encounter during the activity (research question 2), and collect insightful recommendations for educators considering the implementation of this activity in their teaching methods (research question 3). Consequently, the questionnaire was structured into four distinct sections. The first section concentrates on the participants' experiences prior to their involvement in the concentric circle activity. The second section is designed to elicit students' perspectives on how effectively the activity enhanced their speaking skills. The third section explores the challenges encountered by students while engaging in the activity. Finally, the fourth section solicits students' recommendations for enhancing the efficacy of the activity. The questionnaires were handed out to participants in the Reflect stage, accompanied by detailed guidance and explanations from the researcher. Ethical considerations were carefully addressed by obtaining explicit consent from all participants before they participated in the survey and interviews. Moreover, strict measures were taken to preserve their anonymity and ensure confidentiality.

To enhance the depth and context of this qualitative study, semi-structured interviews were adopted as an additional data collection method. According to Smith and Davis [16], these interviews employ a conversational approach that allows researchers to delve deeply into participants' thoughts and emotions, thereby enriching data interpretation. The inherent flexibility of semi-structured interviews enables adjustments to be made to the questions based on participant feedback, revealing insights that structured questionnaires may fail to capture (Jones [17]). This adaptability is especially critical when addressing complex or sensitive issues, where a profound understanding of participants' motivations and emotions is vital (Brown [18]). Additionally, these interviews play a pivotal role in clarifying ambiguities and verifying interpretations of questionnaire data, thus ensuring a more comprehensive and accurate analysis of the research topic (White & Thomson [19]). Consequently, the effective integration of semi-structured interviews significantly enhances the validity and reliability of the findings in qualitative research (Taylor et al. [20]). After analysing the questionnaire data, the researcher conducted

interviews with participants who showed no changes in confidence levels after the activity and identified certain aspects of the concentric activity as challenging. The purpose of these interviews was to explore their difficulties and to request their suggestions for enhancing the activity.

2.4 Research procedures

This study employs Lewin's [21] cyclical action research process, which is structured into four major phases: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. During the planning phase, the researcher conducted observations within his classrooms to identify issues in students' speaking abilities, subsequently developing a strategy to incorporate the concentric circle activity to address these problems. In the acting phase, the study advanced to executing a qualitative action research in the speaking classes where students were briefed on the research objectives and introduced to the concentric circle activity. Following this, the observing phase involved distributing questionnaires to participants and conducting semi-structured interviews after analyzing the questionnaire data. Finally, the reflecting phase centered on the interpretation and categorization of the research data, which included evaluating students' perceptions of the concentric circle activity, its impact on their speaking skills, the challenges encountered, and proposals for future enhancements. The entire research process was completed over a period of four weeks.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Learners' experiences in speaking English before joining the concentric circle activity

The following chart reveals students' confidence levels in English-speaking before participating in a concentric circle activity. The data displayed a broad spectrum of self-assessed competencies. Five students identified with "Very Low" confidence, while eight indicated "Low" confidence, underscoring a significant portion of the group who felt quite uncertain about their English-speaking skills. On the other end, 15 students expressed either "High" or "Very High" confidence, suggesting a strong self-perception of capability. The majority, however, with 12 students, labelled their confidence as "Moderate", indicating an awareness of their own proficiency coupled with a recognition of potential areas for improvement.

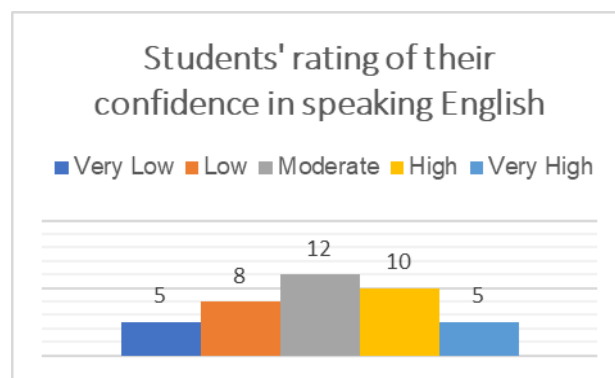


Chart 1. Students' confidence levels prior to their participation in the concentric circle activity

In fact, confidence plays a crucial role in language learning, particularly in speaking proficiency, as it directly influences students' performance and willingness to engage in communication. Research has consistently shown that higher levels of confidence lead to improved speaking performance (MacIntyre & Charos [22]; Yunus [23]). When students feel confident in their language abilities, they are more likely to take risks, participate actively in class discussions, and experiment with new vocabulary and grammatical structures. Conversely, low confidence can hinder students' willingness to speak, leading to limited participation and reduced opportunities for language practice and improvement. Therefore, fostering confidence in speaking English is essential for students to develop fluency and proficiency in the language (Moradiyousefabadi and Ghafournia [24]).

In response to the next item of the questionnaire, students reported their preferred methods for enhancing English speaking skills prior to engaging in the concentric circle activity, highlighting a significant inclination towards interactive and social learning environments. Specifically, while 10 students utilized English movies and 6 practiced speaking to themselves, a substantial majority, 35 practicing with friends and 28 attending language clubs, opted for more collaborative approaches. These findings corroborate earlier observations on the positive impact of interactive activities on speaking confidence and fluency (MacIntyre & Gardner [25]; Ghafournia [26]). The preference for group interactions not only bolsters linguistic competencies but also fortifies self-confidence, essential for mastering a new language.

3.2 Students' perceptions of the impact of the concentric circle activity on their speaking proficiency

The data gathered from students about their initial impressions and comfort levels during the concentric circle activity provides insightful reflections on how such activities are perceived and their impact on students' English speaking skills. To begin with, a large majority of the students (30 out of 40) had positive impressions of the activity, suggesting an overall enthusiasm or optimism about participating in this interactive exercise. Only a small fraction felt neutral (5 students) or nervous/unsure (5 students), indicating that while the activity was generally well-received, it also evoked a sense of uncertainty in some participants. This initial positivity translated into increased comfort in speaking English during the activity for many students (30 out of 40), highlighting the activity's potential to create a supportive environment that reduces anxiety and facilitates language practice. The fact that 10 students experienced no change in comfort might indicate that while the activity was beneficial for most, it did not universally address all students' needs for feeling more at ease with language use. Research in language education has persistently demonstrated that interactive methods, including real-time dialogues and cooperative activities, substantially enhance oral language skills. For example, a study by Türkben [27] indicated that interactive pedagogical techniques not only boost speaking performance but also alleviate speaking anxiety, thereby cultivating more confident and capable speakers. In parallel, findings by Khansir and Pakdel [28] support that dynamic and immersive exercises, such as

role play, significantly bolster speaking competencies. These studies collectively underscore the importance of activities that simulate authentic interactions and engage students actively, proving essential for the development of effective communication skills in a second language context. Consequently, integrating interactive components like the concentric circle activity into educational strategies can greatly aid in diminishing language learning anxiety and promoting learners' speaking confidence and enhancing overall communicative abilities.

After participating in the concentric circle activity, a significant majority of the students (32 out of 40) reported increased confidence in speaking English, thereby demonstrating the positive impact of the activity on language self-efficacy. Students provided detailed feedback on three specific aspects in which this activity has helped improve their speaking skills:

Enhanced Confidence and Willingness to Speak: Students noted a boost in confidence and a greater eagerness to speak. One student remarked, "*Initially, I was nervous about speaking, but as I continued with the activity, I felt more confident and less anxious.*" This rise in confidence is crucial, as it promotes more active participation and a willingness to take risks in language use, which are essential for language development. Research by Mahjoob [29] supports this, indicating that structured interactive activities help reduce speaking anxiety and build student confidence.

Improvements in Fluency and Accuracy: Many students also reported notable enhancements in their fluency and accuracy. One student mentioned, "*The repetitive nature of the activity, discussing the same topic with different partners, helped me become more fluent and precise with my grammatical structures.*" This feature of the activity corresponds with research suggesting that repeated practice and peer interactions boost language proficiency. For instance, Zare and Othman [30] found that classroom debates, similar to concentric circles, significantly improved students' fluency and accuracy over time by providing a practical and supportive context for language use.

Collaborative Learning and Peer Support: The collaborative aspect of the activity received positive feedback from students. They valued the peer support and collaborative learning environment, with one student noting, "*Working with different partners helped me learn new expressions and ways of thinking, which was very beneficial.*" This aligns with educational research highlighting the importance of collaborative learning in language acquisition. For example, Safdari and Falsafi [31] found that peer interaction in structured activities significantly enhances language learning outcomes by offering diverse perspectives and mutual support.

In contrast, eight students indicated that their confidence levels remained unchanged. This divergence prompted further investigation through semi-structured interviews, which yielded more detailed explanations and insights from these students.



Chart 2. *Changes in students' speaking confidence after their participation in the concentric circle activity*

The observed enhancement in confidence among participants reaffirms the value of repeated interactive activities in boosting learners' speaking skills, as supported by existing literature. Notably, studies by Kim and Tracy [32] and Shokrpour et al. [33] have shown that repeated participation in such activities as the concentric circle talk can enhance EFL learners' confidence. This increase is attributed to learners becoming more accustomed to engaging in the same task with various partners, thereby growing more comfortable in expressing their ideas.

When asked to specify the aspects of the concentric circle activity that were crucial for boosting their confidence in speaking English, 25 out of 40 students reported that frequently changing partners was the most beneficial, crediting the dynamic interaction environment this process creates. Such regular shifts expose students to a variety of speaking styles and proficiency levels, thereby boosting their adaptability and linguistic skills - a point confirmed by existing research (Walsh & Li [34]). This ongoing adaptation aids in developing speaking fluency and the ability to think quickly, which are vital skills in language education. Furthermore, timed discussions, which 15 students appreciated, establish a fixed timeframe that enhances focus and promotes precise and effective communication, echoing the demands of real-world situations that require swift and adept speaking abilities (Bygate [35]). The unique contributions of these features underscore the importance of diverse and vibrant interactions in language learning settings. Combining changing partners with timed discussions, the concentric circle activity provides a holistic method that not only cultivates speaking confidence but also advances overall language proficiency, as confirmed by studies that highlight the role of sophisticated interactive tasks in increasing both linguistic accuracy and fluency (Richards & Rodgers [36]).

3.3 Students' challenges while engaging in the concentric circle activities and recommendations for improvement

The table below presents the obstacles encountered by students during the concentric circle activity, as identified through data compiled from questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.

Table 1. *Challenges students encountered while participating in the concentric circle activity*

Challenging factors	Number of students	%
Pace keeping and time managing	28	70
A lack of vocabulary and grammatical structures	22	55
A loud noise environment	12	30
Uneven language proficiency	6	15

As illustrated in the table, the primary challenge identified by 28 students is managing time and keeping pace during the concentric circle activity. Particularly, the rapid transition between different partners under stringent time constraints often leads to increased anxiety and a reduction in language fluency and complexity - a phenomenon corroborated by Segalowitz and Lightbown [37]. Additionally, 22 students reported difficulties stemming from an insufficient grasp of vocabulary and grammatical structures, which significantly hindered their ability to express ideas clearly. In line with Hulstijn [38], who advocates for deeper vocabulary processing to improve retention, there appears to be a crucial need for enhanced vocabulary instruction within educational frameworks. Another notable challenge, as reported by 12 students, is the disruptive impact of a loud noise environment on communication. Shield and Dockrell [39] emphasize that such conditions can distract learners and impair speech perception, which is vital for effective language acquisition. Lastly, uneven language proficiency, though only mentioned by six students, remains a significant issue that causes frustration among learners due to disparate skill levels, as noted by Derwing and Rossiter [40]. These collective challenges underscore the importance of developing customized strategies to enhance both the quality of interaction and the educational outcomes of such interactive activities.

To effectively address the challenges faced by students during the concentric circle activity, tailored solutions are crucial. First, improving time management and pacing can be achieved through more adaptable strategies. Several participants recommended that each pair of students should control their own timing for each round, alleviating the stress associated with time constraints and fostering a more relaxing speaking environment. Moreover, another popular suggestion from the students was to incorporate soothing background music during the discussions, which makes the activity more enjoyable and less stressful and creates a more supportive atmosphere for language practice. Supporting this approach, by Hallam et al. [41] finds that background music can have beneficial effects on students' behaviour and performance, potentially reducing anxiety and enhancing concentration during learning tasks.

Regarding the lack of vocabulary and grammatical structures, a significant number of students interviewed expressed a desire for more time to reflect on vocabulary before the activity commenced. In addition, there was strong support among interviewees for teachers to pre-teach relevant vocabulary. Such strategies align with evidence from educational research which emphasizes the effectiveness of preparatory vocabulary instruction in enhancing language learning outcomes. For instance, Joe [42] highlights the benefits of pre-teaching vocabulary, noting that it can significantly boost comprehension and retention rates, particularly in language learning contexts. By providing students with a foundation of vocabulary before engaging in communicative activities, they are better equipped to participate actively and confidently. Similarly, Stahl and Fairbanks [43] argue that pre-teaching vocabulary not only aids in immediate comprehension but also contributes to long-term academic vocabulary development, which is crucial for mastering complex grammatical structures.

Addressing the issue of noisy environments, students participating in interviews recommended that pairs involved in activities should be positioned sufficiently apart from one another. They further suggested that instructors should provide explicit directions, advising students to modulate their speaking volumes to levels audible only to their respective partners, thereby minimizing disruptions to other pairs. This feedback underscores the critical role of precise and deliberate instructions in language practice, particularly in environments causing potential auditory distractions. Research in the field of teaching EFL supports the notion that clear instructions significantly enhance learning outcomes. Gilakjani and Ahmadi [44] note that clarity in teacher instructions not only aids in reducing confusion but also improves students' overall ability to perform tasks as intended, facilitating a more effective learning experience. Moreover, Goh and Burns [45] emphasize that explicit instructional strategies are crucial in enhancing the speaking skills of EFL learners. Their research demonstrates that clear instructions boost learners' confidence and ability to engage in speaking activities effectively.

Finally, to deal with the issue of varied levels of language ability, interviewees expressed that pairing less proficient learners with more competent peers can enhance effectiveness during the activity. Implementing mixed-ability grouping strategies, as suggested by Webb and Palincsar [46], promotes peer learning by allowing students of various skill levels to work together. This setup enables learners who are more advanced to help those who are less skilled, thereby creating a supportive and inclusive educational environment. Such a method highlights the need for a flexible and responsive educational framework, which is crucial for meeting the varied needs of students and boosting the overall effectiveness of language learning programs.

With clear and comprehensive instructions, and careful consideration of the challenging factors outlined in this research, the concentric circle activity can be effectively implemented across a diverse range of educational contexts. This method is advantageous not only for

English majors but also for students in other disciplines. For instance, in business and economics courses, this activity can facilitate discussions on case studies, business strategies, and economic theories. Students can enhance their analytical and communication skills by expressing and defending their viewpoints. Specifically, they might debate the potential outcomes of business decisions or the impacts of economic policies, thereby gaining deeper insights into the subject.

In summary, the findings from the questionnaires and semi-structured interviews reveal that initially, a significant number of students had low to moderate confidence levels. However, post-activity feedback showed a marked improvement in confidence for the majority, highlighting the concentric circle activity's effectiveness in enhancing learners' confidence level, fluency and accuracy in speaking skills. Besides, most participants responded positively to the activity, reporting greater comfort in speaking English, which indicates the activity's potential to create a supportive environment for language practice. On the other hand, challenges such as pace and time management, lexical and grammatical deficiency, noisy conditions, and varied language proficiency levels were identified, prompting students to propose specific solutions. These included allowing pairs to manage their own time to reduce stress, using background music to improve the atmosphere, pre-teaching vocabulary to better prepare students, guaranteeing sufficient space among pairs to reduce distracting noise, and matching mixed-ability learners for a more conducive learning environment. These adaptations, suggested by students and aided by educational research, emphasize the need for clear instructions and proactive preparation by the teachers who wish to employ this activity in their teaching methodologies.

4. CONCLUSION

In an attempt to investigate the influences of the concentric circle activity on EFL learners' speaking skills, a qualitative action research was conducted among 40 intermediate English majors at Lac Hong University. The data were collected from questionnaires and semi-structured interviews which sought to understand the students' perceptions of the activity's effectiveness in enhancing their speaking abilities, the challenges encountered, and their recommendations for improvement. The findings suggest that the majority of participants experienced increased confidence and recognized the activity's potential to improve fluency and accuracy in spoken English. This was attributed to the creation of an environment conducive to practicing speaking skills. However, participants also identified several obstacles, including difficulties in pacing and time management, limited vocabulary and grammatical knowledge, distractions from a noisy environment, and disparities in language proficiency among peers. To address these issues, the students proposed several practical solutions, including the need for pre-activity scaffolding by instructors, such as providing relevant vocabulary, clear activity instructions, and thorough preparation to ensure the efficient execution of the activity.

This study contributes significantly to the field of communicative language teaching by providing empirical evidence of the concentric circle activity's effectiveness in enhancing oral proficiency among language learners. Furthermore, it extends the literature on communicative language teaching by illustrating how active learning strategies can be integrated into language education to foster a more engaging and supportive learning environment. However, the generalizability of the study is limited by its small sample size and single-institution context, and its reliance on self-reported data may introduce bias. Future research should consider a larger, more diverse cohort and incorporate longitudinal and mixed-method approaches to more comprehensively assess the impact of the activity on learners' oral competence and adapt it across different linguistic and cultural contexts, ensuring a robust evaluation of its long-term effects on language proficiency.

5. REFERENCES

- [1] Hu, G. (2017). Enhancing Students' Confidence in Speaking English through Content-Based Instruction. *Language Education in Asia*.
- [2] Nguyen, T. L. H. (2017). Enhancing Learners' Confidence in the English Language Classroom: A Case Study of Task-Based Language Teaching. *Journal of Education and Practice*.
- [3] Cadiz-Gabejan, A. M. (2021). Enhancing students' confidence in an English language classroom. *International Journal of English Language Studies*, 3, 16-25. <https://doi.org/10.32996/ijels.2021.3.5.3>.
- [4] Saeed, K., Khaksari, M., Eng, L., & Abdul Ghani, A. M. (2016). The role of learner-learner interaction in the development of speaking skills. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 6, 235.
- [5] Omar, S. F., Haslinda, S. A. N., Tengku Shahdan, T., Rita Mee Mee, Seong Pek, L., & Che Yob, F. S. (2020). Interactive language learning activities for learners' communicative ability. *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education (IJERE)*, 9, 1010. <https://doi.org/10.11591/ijere.v9i4.20605>.
- [6] Literacy Minnesota. (2019, December). Classroom activity: Concentric circles. Literacy Minnesota. Retrieved from <https://www.literacymn.org/classroom-activity-concentric-circles>.
- [7] Learning Strategies for ELL's. (n.d.). Concentric circles. Retrieved from <https://learningstrategieseng491.weebly.com/concentric-circles.html>.
- [8] Copeland, M. (2005). *Socratic circles: Fostering critical and creative thinking in middle and high school*. Stenhouse Publishers.
- [9] Acim, R. (2018). The Socratic method of instruction: An experience with a reading comprehension course. *Journal of Educational Research and Practice*, 8(1), 4.
- [10] Brown, A. C. (2016). Classroom community and discourse: How argumentation emerges during a Socratic circle. *Dialogic Pedagogy: An International Online Journal*, 4.
- [11] Fisher, R. L., & Machirori, T. L. (2021). Belonging, achievement, and student satisfaction with learning: The role of case-based Socratic Circles. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 58(1), 25-35.
- [12] Pollard, L., & Hess, N. (1997). *Zero prep: Ready-to-go activities for the language classroom*. Alta Book Center Publishers.
- [13] Smith, J. (2018). Exploring participant experiences: The depth of qualitative inquiry. *Journal of Empirical Research*, 16(2), 117-129.
- [14] Johnson, M. (2020). The flexibility of qualitative research methods. *Advanced Research Methods*, 22(1), 50-65.
- [15] Taylor, S. (2021). Anonymity and authenticity in qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 27(5), 600-615.
- [16] Smith, J., & Davis, R. (2020). Investigating participant reactions through semi-structured interviews. *Journal of Qualitative Research*, 12(1), 45-59.
- [17] Jones, L. (2018). Adaptability and insights in qualitative research approaches. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 18(2), 134-145.
- [18] Brown, T. (2019). Emotional dimensions in qualitative research. *Sociology Methods & Research*, 48(3), 664-687.
- [19] White, K., & Thomson, H. (2021). Examining qualitative data: A detailed look at semi-structured interview methods. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 24(4), 457-471.
- [20] Taylor, S., Bogdan, R., & DeVault, M. (2017). *Introduction to qualitative research methods: A manual and resource*. Wiley.
- [21] Lewin, K. (1946). Action research and minority problems. *Journal of Social Issues*, 2(4), 34-46.
- [22] MacIntyre, P. D., & Charos, C. (1996). Personality, attitudes, and affect as predictors of second language communication. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 15(1), 3-26.
- [23] Yunus, M. M. (2011). The relationship between extroversion/introversion and speaking achievement of English as foreign language learners. *International Education Studies*, 4(4), 200-208.
- [24] Moradiyousefabadi, M., & Ghafournia, N. (2023). The impact of self-confidence on English language proficiency.
- [25] MacIntyre, P. D., & Gardner, R. C. (1994). The subtle effects of language anxiety on cognitive processing in the second language. *Language Learning*, 44(2), 283-305.
- [26] Ghafournia, N. (2023). The impact of self-confidence on English language proficiency.
- [27] Türkben, T. (2019). The effects of interactive teaching strategies on speaking skills of students learning Turkish as a second language. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 15(3), 1011-1031.
- [28] Khansir, A. A., & Pakdel, M. (2021). Speaking skills and role play in language learning.
- [29] Mahjoob, E. (2015). Reducing speaking anxiety in English as a foreign language classroom through cooperative learning. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 6(21), 1-7.
- [30] Zare, P., & Othman, M. (2015). Students' perceptions toward using classroom debate to develop critical thinking and oral communication ability. *Asian Social Science*, 11(9), 158-170.
- [31] Safdari, S., & Falsafi, N. (2015). The impact of structured speaking activities on improving fluency and accuracy in EFL learners. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 6(4), 858-866.

- [32] Kim, D. H., & Tracy, R. (2021). Task repetition and its effects on learners' confidence in speaking English as a foreign language. *TESOL Quarterly*, 55(2), 296-311.
- [33] Shokrpour, N., Malmir, A., & Kassaian, Z. (2022). The impact of task repetition on Iranian EFL learners' speaking performance and confidence. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 18(1), 69-88.
- [34] Walsh, S., & Li, L. (2013). Conversation analysis and real-world applications: Identity, interaction and learning in EFL. *Modern Language Journal*, 97(1), 217-229.
- [35] Bygate, M. (2001). Effects of task repetition on the structure and control of oral language. In M. Bygate, P. Skehan, & M. Swain (Eds.), *Researching Pedagogic Tasks, Second Language Learning, Teaching, and Testing* (pp. 23-48). Longman.
- [36] Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2001). *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- [37] Segalowitz, N., & Lightbown, P. M. (1999). Psycholinguistic approaches to SLA. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 19, 43-63.
- [38] Hulstijn, J. H. (2001). Intentional and incidental second language vocabulary learning: A reappraisal of elaboration, rehearsal and automaticity. In P. Robinson (Ed.), *Cognition and second language instruction* (pp. 258-286). Cambridge University Press.
- [39] Shield, B., & Dockrell, J. E. (2003). The effects of noise on children at school: A review. *Building Acoustics*, 10(2), 97-116.
- [40] Derwing, T. M., & Rossiter, M. J. (2003). The effects of proficiency on the communicative tasks of adult ESL learners. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 59(3), 473-490.
- [41] Hallam, S., Price, J., & Katsarou, G. (2002). The effects of background music on primary school pupils' task performance. *Educational Studies*, 28(2), 111-122.
- [42] Joe, A. (2010). The quality and frequency of encounters with vocabulary in an English for Academic Purposes programme. *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 22(1), 117-138.
- [43] Stahl, S. A., & Fairbanks, M. M. (1986). The effects of vocabulary instruction: A model-based meta-analysis. *Review of Educational Research*, 56(1), 72-110.
- [44] Gilakjani, A. P., & Ahmadi, M. R. (2011). The relationship between L2 instructors' teaching style and students' learning style in the EFL context. *Journal of Studies in Education*, 1(1), 1-17.
- [45] Goh, C., & Burns, A. (2012). *Teaching Speaking: A Holistic Approach*. Cambridge University Press.
- [46] Webb, N. M., & Palincsar, A. S. (1996). Group processes in the classroom. In D. C. Berliner & R. C. Calfee (Eds.), *Handbook of educational psychology* (pp. 841-873). New York: Macmillan.