

## **Ý KIẾN CỦA GIẢNG VIÊN VÀ SINH VIÊN VỀ VIỆC SỬ DỤNG HOẠT ĐỘNG CẶP VÀ NHÓM TRONG GIỜ HỌC NÓI TIẾNG ANH TẠI KHOA TIẾNG ANH CHUYÊN NGÀNH, TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC HÀ NỘI**

*Tạ Thị Thanh Hiền\**

Hoạt động cặp, nhóm được xem là một công cụ hữu ích trong việc cải thiện kỹ năng nói của người học về cả phát âm lẫn giao tiếp. Mục tiêu của nghiên cứu này là tìm ra những ý kiến của 148 sinh viên và 33 giảng viên Khoa Tiếng Anh chuyên ngành, Trường Đại học Hà Nội về việc sử dụng hoạt động cặp và nhóm trong các giờ dạy nói. Nghiên cứu được tiến hành dựa trên kết quả khảo sát và phỏng vấn nhằm tìm ra những lợi ích của hoạt động cặp và nhóm cũng như những khó khăn của sinh viên và giảng viên trong các giờ học nói tiếng Anh. Kết quả của nghiên cứu chỉ ra rằng việc sử dụng các hoạt động cặp và nhóm mang lại nhiều lợi ích cho sinh viên như họ có thể học hỏi được nhiều từ các đối tác hay các bạn trong nhóm, có cơ hội được diễn đạt nói thường xuyên hơn. Họ trở nên tự tin hơn và lĩnh hội được kỹ năng làm việc theo nhóm. Hoạt động cặp và nhóm giảm thời gian nói của giảng viên và tăng cơ hội nói cho sinh viên. Tuy nhiên, vẫn tồn tại những khó khăn như sinh viên không cùng trình độ, thiếu từ vựng, cấu trúc, chưa tự tin và cách học bị động đã ngăn cản họ tham gia các hoạt động cặp và nhóm. Dựa vào kết quả nghiên cứu, tác giả đưa ra các khuyến nghị để cải thiện kỹ năng nói cho sinh viên Khoa tiếng Anh chuyên ngành thông qua hoạt động cặp và nhóm. Sinh viên cần tăng cường vốn từ vựng và cấu trúc tiếng Anh, chủ động tham gia các hoạt động bên ngoài để tự tin khi tham gia các hoạt động cặp và nhóm. Giảng viên nên chuẩn bị kỹ nội dung phù hợp, đưa ra các chỉ dẫn và quy định rõ ràng hơn.

**Từ khóa:** làm việc theo cặp, làm việc theo nhóm, sử dụng các hoạt động cặp, nhóm để phát triển kỹ năng nói, sinh viên năm thứ nhất khoa ESPD, kỹ năng nói.

*Pair work and group work are considered useful in improving speaking skills. This study aims to examine the opinions of 148 students and 33 lecturers at the English for Specific Purposes Department, Hanoi University in using pair work and group work activities in speaking lessons. A combination of questionnaires and a semi-constructed interview was administered to discover the advantages of pair work and group work and challenges faced by students and lecturers in speaking classes. The findings revealed that pair work and group work offered many benefits to students including learning from their peers, expressing themselves more often, becoming more confident, and improving their teamwork skills. Those activities also reduced teacher talking time as students had more time to speak. However, difficulties such as mixed-level classes, shortage of vocabulary and grammatical structures, lack of confidence, and students' passive learning styles prevented them from participating in pair work and group work activities. Students, thus, were recommended to strengthen their English vocabulary and structures by actively participating in out-of-class activities. Instructors should also carefully prepare appropriate content and give more explicit instructions.*

**Keywords:** pair-work, group-work, the first-year ESPD students, speaking skills.

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# **LECTURERS' AND STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS PAIR WORK AND GROUP WORK ACTIVITIES IN SPEAKING LESSONS AT THE ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES DEPARTMENT, HANOI UNIVERSITY**

## **INTRODUCTION**

English is considered the second official language in many countries worldwide, and it is used to communicate in many industries, such as science, technology, aviation, the internet, commerce, tourism, and many other areas. As such, teaching and learning English in non-English speaking countries, including Vietnam, is becoming more and more critical (Hoang, 2010). Learning activities play an important role, and need more attention. Particularly, for better speaking skills, some activities must be carried out to create more opportunities for them to practice and feel more confident and motivated. Two common forms for speaking classes are pair work and group work.

### **Statement of the problem**

Students' ability to communicate spontaneously in English is one of the long-term targets teachers of foreign English would like to achieve in class. Indeed, it is challenging for language teachers to provide adequate input for learners to become skilled English speakers. Often, students' speaking anxiety makes them reluctant to participate in conversations (Tsiplakides, 2009). As a result, they would not be active participants in the speaking lessons and choose to remain silent as they fear making mistakes.

Pair and group activity is a useful teaching method that many teachers, in general, and the ESPD lecturers, have applied to help students move towards active rather than passive learning styles.

However, different activities or methods suit various participants from other regions. Many international researchers are studying pair work and group work to improve speaking skills among students. McDonough (2004) claims that students who work in pairs are better than groups when contributing to their language learning. Group work can help students a host of skills that are increasingly important in the professional world (Caruso & Woolley, 2008)

However, there has been no research on the use of pair work and group work at the English for Specific Purposes Department, Hanoi University. Therefore, the researcher has carried out this study to find out the opinions of lecturers and students on the use of those activities, the benefits those activities bring and the difficulties students and lecturers are facing, and ultimately, to give suggestions to help learners improve their English speaking skills.

### **Objectives of the study**

The study aims at:

- exploring what benefits pair work and group work bring to students and lecturers;

- examining the difficulties facing students and lecturers when using pair work and group work activities in the speaking lessons;

### **Scope of the study**

The study only focuses on 148 students of the academic year 2020-2021, who come from different non-English majors and 33 lecturers at the ESPD, HANU. Therefore, the scope of this study is limited to first-year non-English major students, and more specifically to those who learn Computer Science, Business Administration, Multimedia, Marketing, Tourism, International studies and lecturers at ESPD, HANU.

### **Research Questions**

To achieve the aims of the study, this study attempts to answer the following questions:

In the opinions of students and lecturers:

1. What are the benefits of using pair work and group work in speaking lessons for the ESPD students and lecturers?
2. What are the challenges of using pair work and group work in the speaking lessons for both the ESPD students and lecturers?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **The essence of speaking skills**

According to Brown (2015) speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving and processing information. He also emphasises that its form and meaning depend on the context in which it occurs, including the participants and their collective experiences, the physical environment, and the purposes for

speaking. Often, speaking is spontaneous, open-ended, and evolving. However, speech is not always unpredictable.

Richards (2013) makes a distinction between talk as transaction (such as classroom discussion, problem-solving, reserving accommodations, exchanging currency, etc.) and talk as performance (such as small talk, casual discussions, and personal recollections) (e.g. public talk, classroom presentations, lectures, etc.). Specific skills are required for each style of discourse. Talking as interaction, for instance, requires various skills, such as the ability to start and end conversations, use adjacency pairs, take turns, interrupt, and react to other people.

### **Pair work**

Linguists have introduced the concept of pair work over the years. According to Richards and Schmidt (2013), pair work is a learning activity which involves learners to work together in pairs. As per Moon (2000) pair work is a strategy “to organize students in ways that will minimize opportunities for learning” (p.53).

Bercikova (2007) confesses that pair work is an appearance of interaction in the classroom where students work mutually with other students to check answers and continue communicative activities.

### **Group work**

The term group work has a variety of definitions. Group work are all terms that can be used to describe a group of students, most commonly between two and six students, that are formed together to discuss a topic or carry out a particular task (Francis, 2022).

Cohen & Lotan (2014d) defines group work as “students working together in a group small enough so that everyone can participate on a clearly assigned learning task.” In broad terms, group work comprises any learning tasks or activities that require students to work in groups/teams of three or more members.

Advantages and disadvantages of using pair work and group work

Advantages of using pair and group work

#### *Advantages of using pair work*

According to Curtain and Dahlburg (2010), pair work creates conditions for everyone to have the opportunity to express their opinions in a pressure-free environment, that is, with a classmate, not in front of the class or in front of the teacher.

Moreover, pair work helps students focus more on the assigned task. With the help of a friend, students will feel safer and less stressed than when working alone or presenting in front of a crowd. Pair activities will help students who are shy, reserved, less vocal, and less likely to participate in class activities, especially those who have difficulty speaking English.

More importantly, this activity encourages students to share ideas and knowledge, interact more often with their classmates, and increases the chances of students speaking the target language during class.

Working in pairs also encourages cooperation because students must work together to complete their assigned tasks. Significantly, this activity helps students

be less afraid of making mistakes; they feel much more confident when completing the assigned task successfully without the teacher's help. Many pairing activities enhance learners' individualisation, allowing them to express their individuality naturally, with minor constraints. This contributes to a better classroom learning atmosphere and a positive feeling when students work in pairs.

#### *Advantages of using group work*

Group activities are the most rewarding experiences for students as it allows them to learn from each other. They often work in a small class with a teacher, meaning their support, encouragement, and motivation are provided. Davis (2009) suggested that when students work in groups, they can learn more than the teacher teaches and amass knowledge longer than in other forms. This approach is highly recommended because it helps team members understand the content better, and both benefit from guiding each other to do the job well.

According to Wyatt (2011b), those who participate in cooperative learning and educational activities outside of school hours and engage more with faculty members tend to have higher results, are satisfied with learning more, and are more likely to prolong their studies at university. Group work is a teaching method that enhances cooperation and teamwork, that allows for students to construct knowledge, and to perform tasks collaboratively (Rance-Roney, 2010)

Working in groups allows students to learn within an interactive environment,

where they are more engaged, learn independently and cooperate with others to achieve common goals, possibly unattainable individually (Sajedi, 2014)

According to Morris (2016), group work is a student-centred way of teaching that emphasises collaboration, cooperation, and teamwork. Students can do some tasks alone without teachers' help when working in a group. They can complete both easy and challenging tasks without their teachers' support. In addition, their speaking abilities also improve significantly in a short time.

Disadvantages of using pair and group work

#### ***Disadvantages of pair work***

Among the disadvantages of pair work is the unavoidable noise created in the classroom. Teachers also have difficulty managing the class as students often make mistakes and they cannot control their use of language. Working in pairs can be challenging when students interact with people who speak a language other than their own.

#### ***Disadvantages of group work***

According to Beebe and Masterson (2019b), teamwork has four disadvantages. First, group members are under pressure to conform to the majority opinion of the group. By following the majority opinion, team members may have to agree to suboptimal solutions to prevent conflict. Second, when working in a team, there will be a situation where a few members are overwhelmingly dominant making other members feeling dissatisfied because they are weak at deciding in the group. Third,

some members tend to linger, relying on other group members, which is one of the significant problems of group work. Furthermore, it can be more time-consuming than working alone because working with others takes longer to complete assigned tasks.

According to Freeman and Greenacre (2011), some members would not participate and contribute much to the group. There is also a big difference in the members' participation in joint activities. In groups with many members, we can see some individuals pushing the responsibility on other students because the score is the group's overall score, not a separate assessment for each participant. Sometimes, a team member may answer without explaining how to get it. Consequently, students do not get the knowledge they need and do not understand the content well.

One of the most prominent features of group work is that students tend to discuss out-of-focus and side stories. Some even take advantage of teachers' time to work with other groups to work individually and chat. This leads to less effective teamwork.

Not all students have the same level of understanding, so some will comprehend the task clearly while others will learn more slowly. As a result, slow learners are forced to speed up to match the whole group's progress, either learning nothing or copying other people's work. The better students do it quickly, moving on to the next activity. And when others are not finished or ready for the new activity, conflicts may arise because some members will feel frustrated.

When working in pairs or groups, teachers can only correct a few students' mistakes. To minimise errors, teachers should model before proceeding. Then, the teacher can invite some pairs/groups to present to the class to discuss the content and point out the mistakes in this presentation. Group activities need to be carefully selected to ensure students can work effectively, as not all students can reach their full potential in this activity.

Consequently, it is hard to assess students' progress in this activity. Therefore, before selecting students to work in pairs or with more members, teachers must carefully calculate so that this activity gives the best English-speaking practice.

In conclusion, pair and group work in language teaching have received significant attention and related studies are still growing. However, at the ESPD, there has never been any research on the use of pair work and group work in speaking lessons. As a result, the study was carried out to find out both the lecturers' and students' opinions on using those activities, particularly what benefits they bring and what challenges lecturers and students face.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Background to the study:**

The study was conducted at the ESPD, HANU. The department was established in September 2005 to teach English to first-year students of specialized faculties such as Business Administration & Tourism., Banking and Finance, Accounting, International Studies, Information Technology, Development Research, and

Multimedia Communication. The Department offers three courses in Basic English, Academic English and English for Specific Purposes.

The department always creates the best conditions for teaching and learning English. Each class has 25-30 students. The classrooms have a projector, air-conditioner, whiteboard, and a desktop computer.

### **The participants:**

Due to Covid-19 pandemic, the survey questionnaire was done online, and it was completed by 148 first-year students and 33 lecturers at the ESPD, HANU. They were first-year students between 18 and 19 years old and had studied English for seven years at middle and high schools.

Thirty-three lecturers participated in the survey questionnaire for lecturers. Most of them were female; the average age was from 36 to 45 years, with most having 15 years of experience in teaching English. Most of them were trained at HANU, of which 5.6% were PhD students and 80% were masters.

## **Research Instruments**

### **Questionnaires**

For data collection, two sets of questionnaires were designed. One set was for the students, and one was for the lecturers. The first section required the respondents to fill in details about their personal information and language background. This was followed by attitudinal (5-Likert scale) questionnaires. The questionnaire was divided into two sections; the first section investigated

students' personal information, language level, and language background. The second section investigated students' and lecturers' attitudes towards the benefits of pair work and group work and the challenges facing them. The first questions included a 5-point scale for the level of agreement or disagreement on a symmetric agree-disagree scale of a series of benefits of pair work and group work. The second question included a 5-point scale for fluency with different possible challenges facing them when using pair work and group work activities. The participants were required to tick the appropriate scale for different given options.

### **Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews served as the second data collection method. Semi-structured interviews were used as they offered a very flexible technique for small-scale research (Drever, 1995). The participants in this study were students as well as lecturers. However, since only 13 students and 5 lecturers were interviewed, semi-structured interviews were deemed to be a suitable method because they enable thematic analysis of the qualitative data (See Alvarez & Urla, 2002). The interviews conducted consisted of three questions to further discuss the respondents' answers regarding the advantages of pair work and group work, the challenges

students and lecturers were encountering, and what they would suggest for a more effective speaking classes.

### **Data analysis procedures**

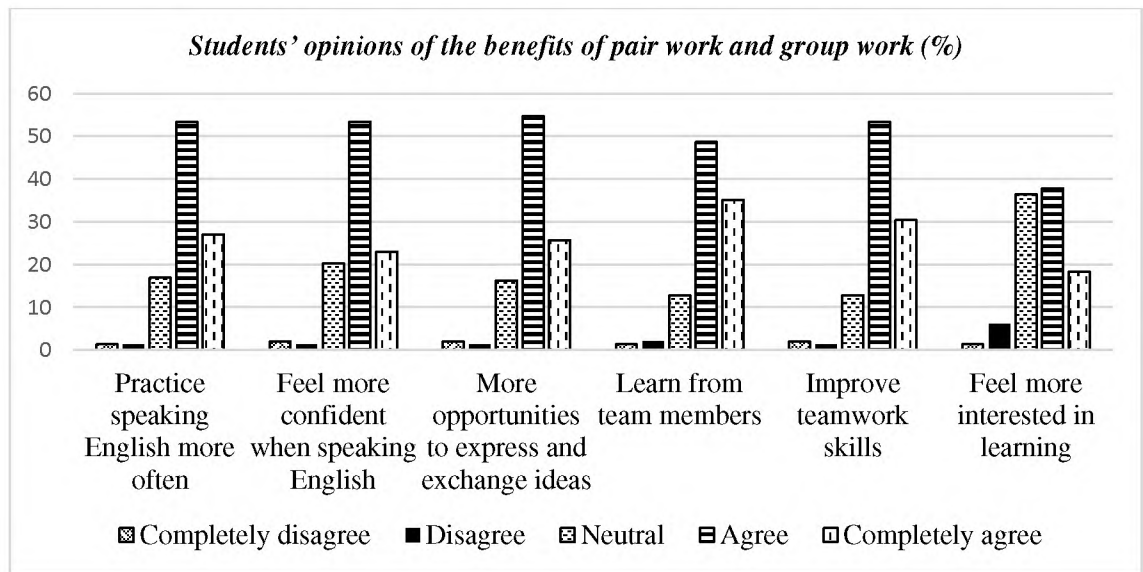
Due to the Covid-19 epidemic, the questionnaires were made available online after the first term of the academic year 2020 – 2021. First-year students of K2020 were asked to answer questionnaires made using Google Forms and distributed to members on the public Facebook groups named Hanoi University - Official Group. Google Forms then began to automatically collect the data.

To quantify the quantitative data from the surveys in the form of charts and tables, the researcher used descriptive statistics. The interviews were also conducted online using Zoom Meetings to elicit further information about the motivations behind the respondents' responses to the survey.

As for open-ended items in the questionnaires as well as the data from interviews, the researcher analyzed based on the interpretive framework incorporated into the objectives of the study. Ultimately, conclusions were drawn for the research questions.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Findings from the students' questionnaires**



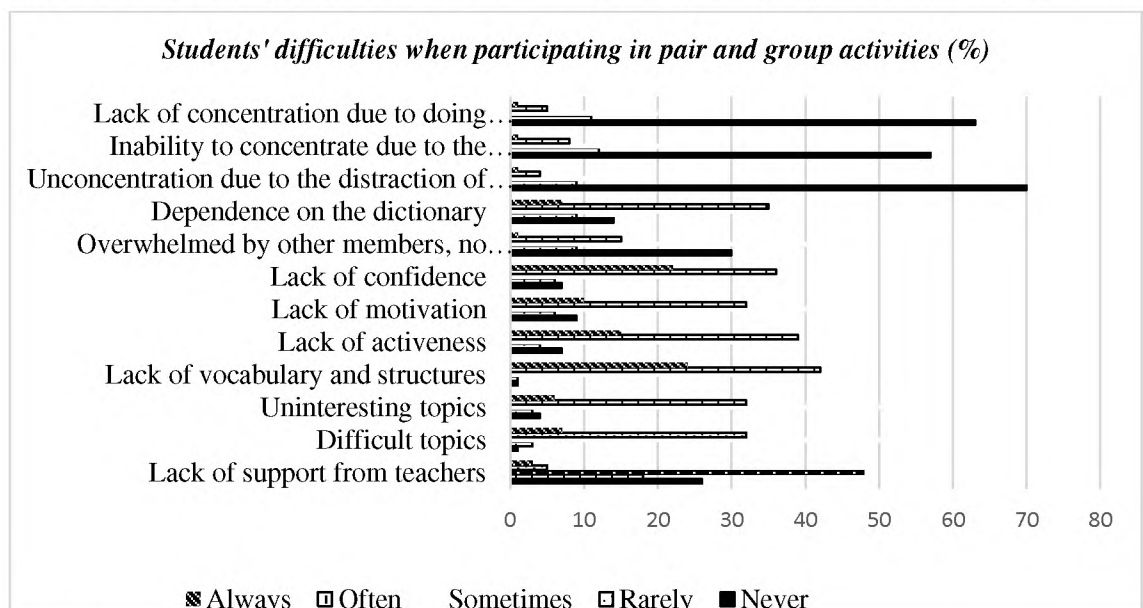
**Figure 1:** Students' opinions on the benefits of pair work and group work

Figure 1 shows that 36% of students completely agree while 48% said that they could learn from their group members.

More than half of the students (55%) agreed that pair and group activities were beneficial as they help them speak English more often, helped them feel confident in speaking English and gave them more opportunities to express themselves and

exchange ideas. Meanwhile, over 50% agreed that pair and group activities helped them improve their teamwork skills, while only 26% completely agreed. Not surprisingly, about a third of students felt that teamwork made them more interested in learning.

### Students' difficulties when participating in pair and group activities



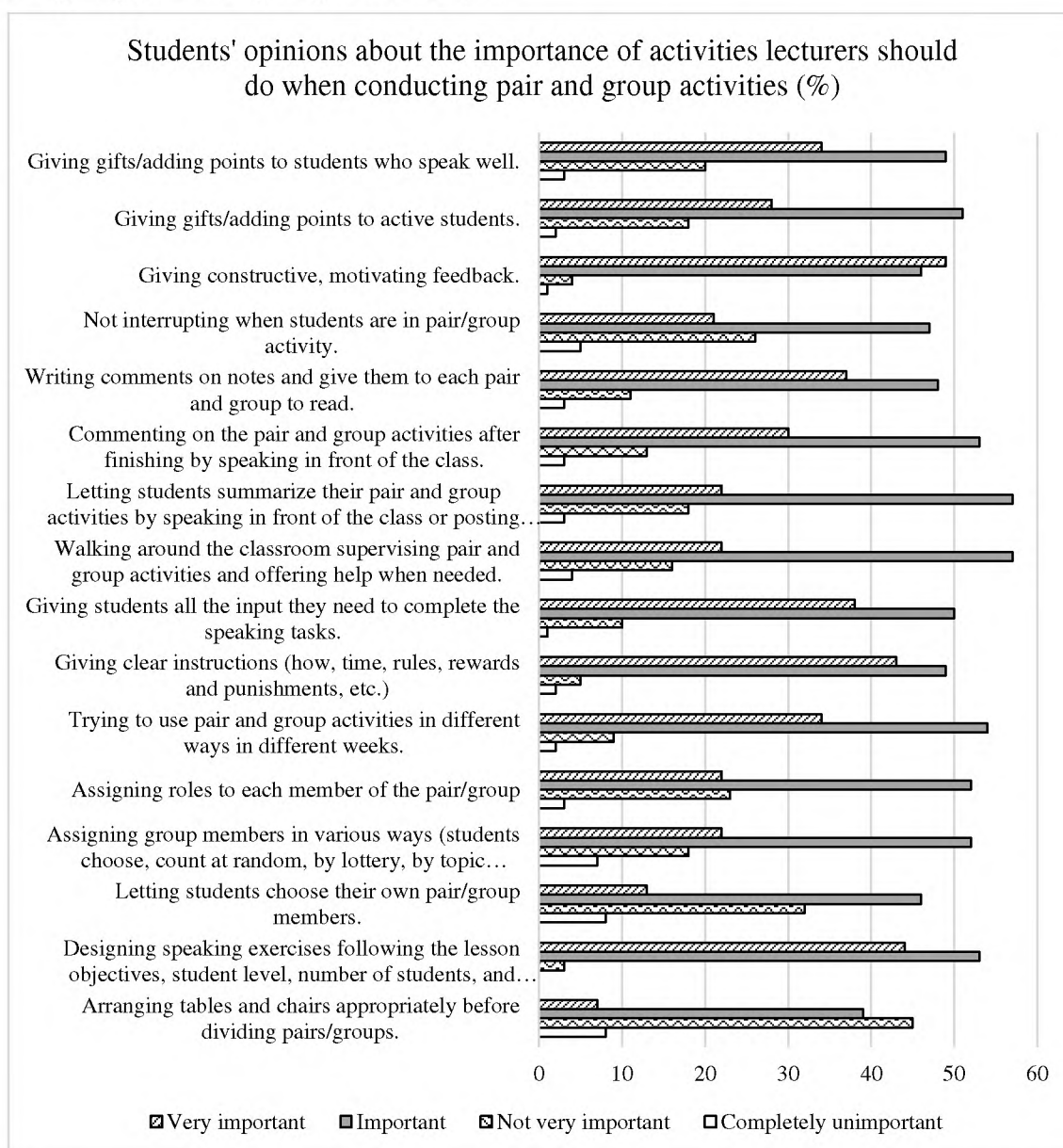
**Figure 2:** Students' difficulties when participating in pair and group activities (%)



It can be seen from Figure 2 that most students were always (25%) and often (43%) challenged to improve their speaking skills due to lack of vocabulary and structure. Also, nearly 40% of students were often inactive or felt unconfident during the pair and group work activities.

Ultimately, students encounter complicated and uninteresting topics, with 57% and 54 %, respectively. Nearly half of the students said they were sometimes overwhelmed by their peers or did not have their lecturers' support.

### Student's opinions on the importance of activities lecturers should do while assigning pair and group activities (%)



**Figure 3:** Students' opinions about the importance of activities lecturers should do when conducting pair and group activities (%)

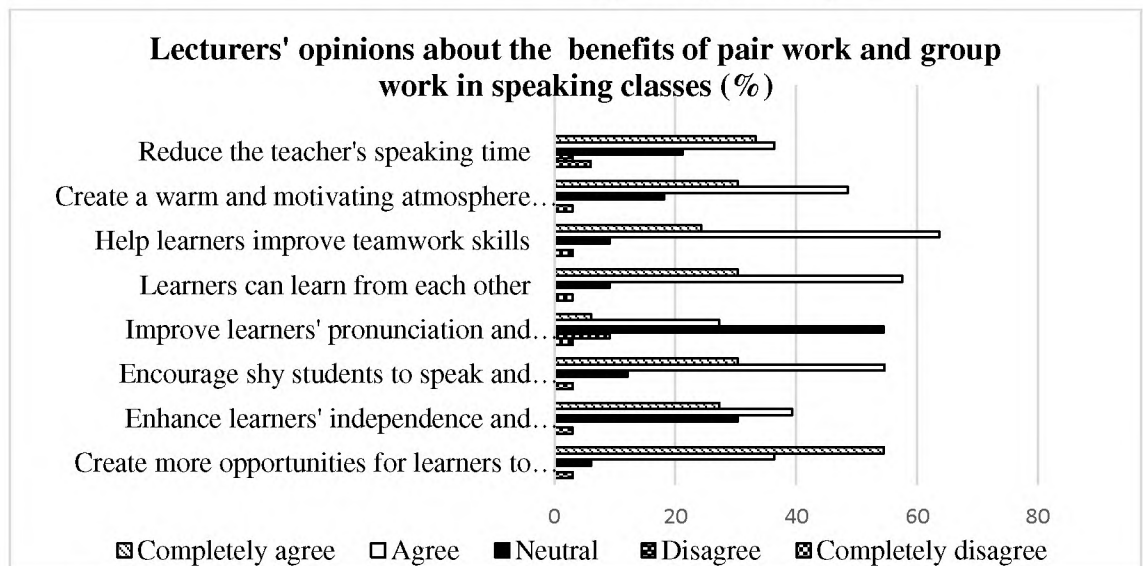
In assessing the importance of activities their lecturers should do, 49% of students said that constructive and motivating feedback are very important as shown in Figure 3. Also, designing speaking exercises corresponding to the lesson objectives and providing clear instructions (44% and 43%, respectively) were deemed necessary by the students.

Regarding the important activities that students thought their lecturers should do, 57% said that the lecturers should walk around the classroom supervising pair and

group activities, offering help when needed, and letting students summarize and report to the class in spoken or written language. Fifty four percent (54%) proposed that their lecturers use pair and group activities in various ways in different weeks, and 53% expected them to offer comments on their work after they finished working in pairs or groups.

### Findings from the lecturers' questionnaires

#### Lecturers' opinions about the benefits of pair work and group work in speaking classes (%)

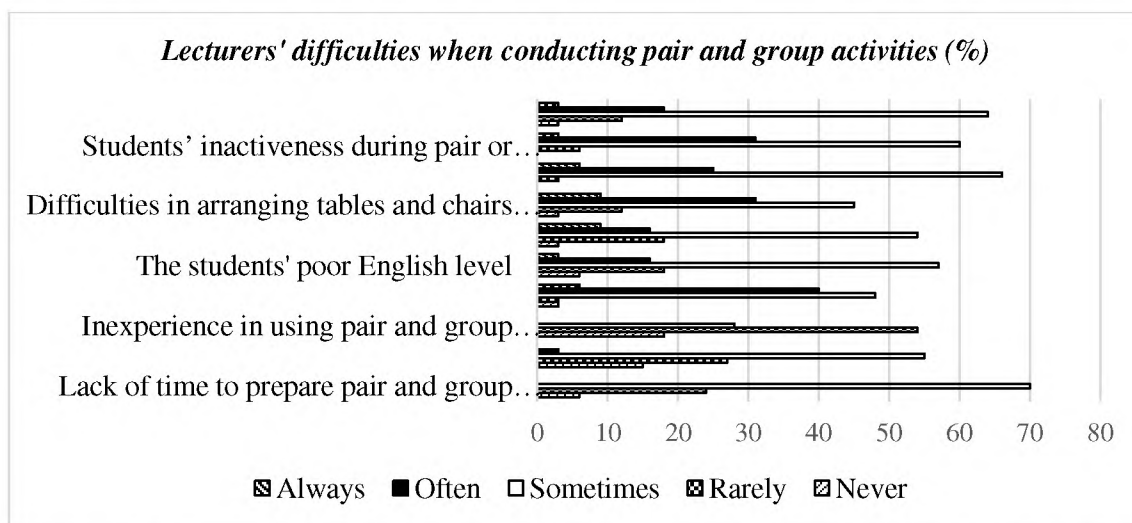


**Figure 4:** Lecturers' opinions about the benefits of pair work and group work in speaking classes (%)

In terms of its benefits shown in Figure 4, 55% of lecturers agreed that pair and group activities create more opportunities for learners to speak English. Moreover, about a third of the lecturers agreed that pair and group work helped reduce speaking time, 64% agreed that these

helped students improve teamwork skills, and 58% said that students could learn from each other when working in groups.

#### Difficulties encountered by lecturers when organizing pair and group activities (%)



**Figure 5:** Lecturers' difficulties when conducting pair and group activities (%)

Data in Figure 5 shows that lecturers often had problems with pair and group activities because of the multi-level classes (40%), while 31% said that seats were difficult to arrange. Up to 70% of lecturers said that they sometimes had problems due to shortage of time in preparing for the activities, while 66% noted that students would often use their native language. In addition, lecturers also mentioned that students do not participate (64%) or do not actively participate in those activities (60%). As shown in Figure 5, lecturers rarely had difficulties due to lack of experience (accounting for 54%) or a lack of means to conduct communication classes (27%).

It is evident that the lecturers' most significant difficulties are multi-level classes and the lack of student engagement.

### Findings from the interviews

The findings generally demonstrated the benefits and difficulties of pair work and group work in speaking lessons for 13 students and five lecturers. It was intriguing to note how little hedging or pausing was

noticed during the interviews, even when participants expressed their opinions.

The emerging themes from the data fall into three main categories: the lecturers' and students' opinions about the benefits of pair work or group work, the difficulties encountered by the lecturers and students, and the recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of these activities during the speaking classes.

### • Findings from the students' interviews

#### *Students' opinions about the benefits of pair work or group work in speaking class*

##### Learning from other members

Three out of thirteen students explained that working in pairs or in groups helped them learn from their partners. Below are some typical responses:

**Student 1:** I can learn from good students such as pronunciation and creative ideas. I like to work with them.

**Student 2:** To be honest, I learn a lot from my friends who are better at English than me. I

like to work with Huy, for example, as he is very confident in presenting his ideas.

**Student 3:** When working in pairs or groups, I can learn from other students, especially good students.

### **More chances to speak English**

Aside from this, four out of thirteen students said they had more chances to speak English as they felt more comfortable than speaking in front of the class. Common responses are as follows:

**Student 5:** When I work in pairs, I have more opportunities to speak. Some small groups also give me a chance to speak more.

**Student 6:** When the lecturers assign pair work or group work, I can have more time to talk. I prefer speaking to my partners to talking in front of the class because I often feel more confident.

**Student 7:** I like to work in small groups because I can share my ideas with my teammates.

**Student 8:** Well, the benefit I can gain from pair work or group work is that I feel more comfortable than talking to my teacher.

### ***Difficulties encountered by students***

#### **Lack of vocabulary and grammar**

Half of the students' answered that they had difficulties with vocabulary and structures, lack of activeness, and challenging topics. To further understand their answers, here are some of their responses:

**Student 1:** I have difficulty expressing my ideas because I don't have enough vocabulary knowledge.

**Student 2:** My teacher said we should have used more collocations and idioms, but I am

not good at that, so I often have troubles with the word use.

**Student 3:** If I have richer vocabulary knowledge, I could have talked more during the group activities.

### **Inactivity**

Meanwhile, four out of thirteen students said that they were not active during pair or group activities for these reasons:

**Student 4:** I was inactive during the time my teacher asked me to work with a partner. The reason may be that I was lazy in speaking.

**Student 5:** I often keep quiet when working in groups because I don't know what to say. Some topics are difficult for me.

**Student 6:** Some other friends are better at English than the other, so he often talks more, and other students just become more inactive.

**Student 11:** Well, I often run out of ideas when I want to talk, sometimes I have to use the dictionary to check the meanings of the words.

### **Complicated or uninteresting topics:**

Students also noted complicated or uninteresting topics as a hindrance in improving their speaking skills.

**Student 7:** I sometimes find that the topics are not interesting to me, for example, pets or weather. I like something more updated.

**Student 8:** I am keen on some more interesting topics. The topics used in the speaking books are more suitable for high school students rather than for university students like us.

**Student 9:** I think some topics in the speaking textbooks are not interesting. We

know too much about them, and we talked about those topics in high school. So we sometimes talk about something else.

***Student's opinions on the importance of activities lecturers should do while assigning pair and group activities***

Giving constructive feedback and designing speaking exercises are evident in analyzing the students' opinions on the significance of activities lecturers should do when assigning pair and group work. These ideas could offer lecturers useful insights that go beyond the intermediate context of the English for Specific Purposes Department.

**Constructive feedback**

From the interview, constructive feedback appeared to be a vital part of instruction for students during pair work and group work activities.

**Student 1:** We expect the teachers to give us positive feedback in front of the class.

**Student 2:** I felt more comfortable when their lecturers gave positive comments instead of simply pointing out our faults. Many of my friends felt nervous and scared when they made mistakes, so they were reluctant to speak and participated actively in activities. This was why students would like the lecturers to create a comfortable learning atmosphere.

**Designing suitable speaking activities**

Besides, designing speaking exercises following the learning objectives is crucial for students.

**Student 3:** Some teachers let us join some group work but we did not quite know what the activity was for. Maybe, just for fun, I think.

**Student 4:** Sometimes, the teacher lets us play games rather than create speaking activities to help us improve our speaking skills. We expect our teacher to design better speaking activities.

**• Findings from the lecturers' interviews**

***The lecturers' opinions about the benefits of pair work and group work in speaking classes***

Among the main concerns that emerged in the analysis of the lecturers' opinions about the benefits of pair work and group work in speaking classes are opportunities for students to talk while reducing the time of speaking for teachers and students' teamwork skill improvement.

**Opportunities for students to talk and teachers' speaking time reduction**

**Lecturer 1:** I felt less tired as I did not need to talk too much when I let my students work in pairs or groups. In this way, the students had more chances to speak.

**Lecturer 2:** When working in pairs or small groups, students have more opportunities to speak. During this time, teachers just need to go around the class and observe, which reduces the time they need to talk.

**Students' teamwork skill improvement:**

**Lecturer 3:** When I let students work in pairs and groups, I can see that they learn how to work in groups as I often assign different roles such as a reporter, a facilitator, or a writer.

**Lecturer 4:** When my students worked together, weak students could learn much from other stronger ones; particularly, vocabulary and structures or presentation skills. Besides,

pair work and group work can help to motivate shy students to speak and express themselves.

### ***The lecturers' difficulties when conducting pair and group activities***

The lecturers were also interviewed to get further information about their difficulties when conducting pair and group activities. The typical difficulties were as follows:

#### **Mixed-level classes**

**Lecturer 1:** I see that if I mixed strong students and weak ones in a group, strong students often dominated the group work, and the weaker ones did not want to speak, so most of the time I had to ask the weaker ones to be the leader.

#### **Inactiveness among students**

**Lecturer 2:** My students were not active when being assigned to pair and group work. That significantly impacted the class's success. Some good students were engaged in group activities, while some weaker ones kept quiet, so their English skills could not improve much.

#### **Seating arrangement**

**Lecturer 3:** Actually, group work activities are difficult because of the conventional table and chair layout. There are not enough spaces to move them easily and conveniently. Sometimes, students do not sit face to face, but 4 of them from the same rows of tables talk together. This affects the success of the speaking activity.

**Lecturer 5:** I find it hard to arrange group activities because the tables and chairs can't be arranged easily. The classroom is not large enough to move the tables and chairs flexibly.

### ***Lecturers' opinions on what should be done to enhance the effectiveness of pair work and group work in speaking classes***

The most common suggestions to enhance the effectiveness of pair work and group work activities in speaking classes were related to students' self-study to improve their vocabulary and grammar and classroom seating arrangement. Some typical answers include:

**Lecturer 1:** I expect the students can learn in a more equipped classroom during the speaking classes. For example, the tables and chairs should be arranged like a circle so that the lecturer can control the discussion and motivate the passive student to join in.

**Lecturer 2:** I think some students are unconfident when speaking because of their lack of vocabulary or their personality. So they should self-study more, then make lists of words, collocations, or idioms for different topics so that they can have richer vocabulary knowledge. They also can take part in some clubs to be more confident.

**Lecturer 4:** I think students need to self-study more to improve their grammar and vocabulary. They should have a smart timetable and stick to it. Practice makes perfect, you know.

**Lecturer 5:** There are different ways students can do to improve their vocabulary or pronunciation, like watching the news and the TED talks on YouTube so that they will feel more confident and ready to speak when working in groups.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Research Question 1**

The first question in this study investigates the participants' opinions on the benefits of pair and group work in speaking lessons. The data showed that both groups thought that the activities helped students learn from their partners and members like pronunciation, ideas, and teamwork. These also encouraged cooperation because students must collaborate to complete their assigned tasks, creating a positive working atmosphere. Students also have more opportunities to speak, reducing teachers' speaking time. This allowed teachers to observe, monitor, while enabling students to interact with their members, express themselves, and share their ideas to achieve the shared goal.

It can be noted that learning from other partners is a unique advantage that was not mentioned as a possible advantage of pair and group work as concluded in previously compared studies like Curtain and Dahlburg's (2010) and Wasley's (2006). The participants did not mention the benefits such as higher scores and satisfaction with learning. The reasons may lie simply in the participants' not caring about the ultimate goals of having high scores.

### **Research Question 2**

The second question examines the difficulties of using pair work and group work in speaking lessons for ESPD students and lecturers. The results showed that students had difficulties due to lack of vocabulary and structures, inaction during activities, and uninteresting topics which made their work ineffective. For teachers, students' passive learning made their classes unsuccessful. Additionally, mixed-

level classes and the arrangement of tables and chairs in some classrooms significantly affected the effectiveness of their speaking classes.

Two things are consistent with previous findings in the literature review. For example, exactly as Freeman and Greenacre (2011) described, some members would not participate and contribute to the group and quiet students often feel uncomfortable working with people who do not usually talk. Moreover, students' mixed levels make it hard for group work. However, there is an emerging aspect of difficulty not mentioned elsewhere in the literature: lack of vocabulary and structures as well as uninteresting topics. This could be because of the educational background of students from different regions.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

From the findings, it can be seen that pair work and group work bring a lot of benefits. Therefore, it is recommended that regular and suitable pair and group activities in accordance with the learning objectives will help lecturers quickly achieve their teaching goals and, ultimately, support their students in improving their speaking skills. They should also constantly research to advance their teaching methods to meet the needs of today's students.

However, challenges in conducting speaking lessons are prevalent.

With vocabulary and structures, lecturers should design suitable activities, providing enough time for students to enhance their vocabulary and sentence

patterns. They should also provide students with additional materials related to the vocabulary and structures of communicative English. As for the learners, there is a need to improve their English competency. Self-studying and practicing at least two hours each day are recommended to improve their vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation is recommended. Students should make an intelligent timetable and stick to it closely. Each student should also spend more time exploring suitable learning methods. For example, when learning vocabulary, they should have a notebook, make a list of new words and meanings in both Vietnamese and English, find synonyms, antonyms, and collocations, check the pronunciation of those words, and then make sentences to use the words effectively.

In terms of inactivity and mixed-level classes, it is suggested that students participate in out-of-class activities to become more confident in conversing and proactive in learning the English language. Their success or failure is based on the tremendous efforts that they put into learning the English language. Lecturers can help to motivate the students through extra credits and routinely changing group members, as well as giving them clear instructions and positive feedback.

And lastly, it is advised that students should be put in better-equipped classrooms with smart seating arrangements during the speaking classes. This will make it easier to arrange the table and chairs in various layouts, making it more convenient for students to work in pairs or groups.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, this study investigated the lecturers and students' attitudes towards using pair and group work in speaking lessons at the ESPD, HANU. The research showed that the said activities help students learn a lot from their partners, have the chance to speak and express themselves more often, become more confident, and improve teamwork skills. For lecturers, this reduces the time of speaking, enabling them to monitor the learners' work. However, difficulties in delivering pair and group work are prevalent such as mixed-level classes, seating arrangement, and students' passive learning styles. Several recommendations have been given to successfully improve the use of group-work activities in English-speaking lessons.

Despite the researcher's great efforts, there are two notable limitations to this study. First, the scope of the study was constrained to just 148 students and 33 teachers of English. As such, the findings are applicable to the first-year students at ESPD, HANU only. Moreover, the study is limited to English speaking lessons only. And lastly, there are restrictions on the study's reliability and validity since the researcher solely employed questionnaires and interviews as the main research instruments. It would be preferable for future studies to use more think-aloud, classroom observations, and other teaching strategies.

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## APPENDIXES

### SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE FOR LECTURERS

#### LECTURERS' AND STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS PAIR WORK AND GROUP WORK ACTIVITIES IN SPEAKING LESSONS AT THE ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES DEPARTMENT, HANOI UNIVERSITY

Dear lecturers,

Currently, we are conducting research entitled "Lecturers' and students' attitudes towards pair work and group work activities in speaking lessons at the English for Specific Purposes

Department, Hanoi University". The objective of the study is to seek students and lecturers' opinions on the benefits of using pair work and group work and the difficulties encountered by students and lecturers at the English for Specific Purposes Department, Hanoi University.

We commit that the information you provide is only for research purposes, your personal information will be kept confidential. We look forward to receiving your cooperation in providing information, sharing frankly and sincerely from you.

Thank you very much!

#### PART A: PERSONAL INFORMATION

*Please provide personal information (tick the appropriate box):*

1. Gender : ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Others  
 2. Age: ☐ Under 18-25 ☐ 26-35  
☐ 36-45 ☐ Over 45  
 3. Education: ☐ Bachelor's ☐ Masters ☐ Doctor  
 4. Teaching experience at Hanoi University  
☐ 1-5 years ☐ 6 -10 years  
☐ 11-15 years ☐ Over 15 years

#### PART B: SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Please give your opinion about the benefits of applying pair/group activities in your English speaking class. *(tick the appropriate box):*

	Totally disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Totally agree
Create more opportunities to speak English for learners	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Enhance learners' independence and cooperation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Encourage shy students to speak and express themselves	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Improve learners' pronunciation and intonation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Learners can learn from each other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Learners learn how to work in groups	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Create a warm and motivating atmosphere to help learners participate in the lesson	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reduce the teacher's speaking time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. What difficulties do you face when using pair or group activities in English- speaking lessons? *(You can choose more than 1 answer.)*

	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
Lack of time to prepare pair and group activities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of facilities to conduct communication classes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Inexperience in using pair and group activities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Multi-level classes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Students' poor English level	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Large class	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Inconvenient seating arrangement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Students' use of their native language or different topics when working in pairs or groups.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Students' inactiveness (just be quiet and listen to other members speak).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Students' doing private work (play games, do other subjects' assignments, etc.).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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If you are willing to let the research team do a quick interview (about 5-10 minutes), please leave your information, and the research team will contact you to discuss this further.

Full name: \_\_\_\_\_

Cell phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you very much!

**SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDENTS  
LECTURERS' AND STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS PAIR WORK AND  
GROUP WORK ACTIVITIES IN SPEAKING LESSONS AT THE ENGLISH FOR  
SPECIFIC PURPOSES DEPARTMENT, HANOI UNIVERSITY**

Dear students,

Currently, we are conducting research entitled "Lecturers' and students' attitudes towards pair work and group work activities in speaking lessons at the English for Specific Purposes Department, Hanoi University". The objective of the study is to seek students and lecturers' opinions on benefits of using pair work and group work and the difficulties encountered by students and lecturers at the English for Specific Purposes Department, Hanoi University.

We commit that the information you provide is only for research purposes, your personal information will be kept confidential. We look forward to receiving your cooperation in providing information, sharing frankly and sincerely from you. Thank you very much!

**PART A: PERSONAL INFORMATION**

*Please provide personal information (tick the appropriate box):*

**1. Gender:**      ☐ Male      ☐ Female      ☐ Others

**2. English learning experience:**

- ☐ 1-5 years      ☐ 6 - 10 years  
☐ 11 - 15 years      ☐ Over 15 years

**3. Majors:**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Computer Science       | <input type="checkbox"/> Computer Science (high quality)       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Multi-Media            | <input type="checkbox"/> Marketing                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accounting             | <input type="checkbox"/> Banking and Finance                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Management and Tourism | <input type="checkbox"/> Management and Tourism (high quality) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Development Studies    | <input type="checkbox"/> Business Administration               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> International Studies  | <input type="checkbox"/> Others                                |

**PART B: SURVEY QUESTIONS**

**1. Please give your opinion about the benefits of pair/group activities in English speaking classes. (Please tick the appropriate box.)**

	Totally disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Totally agree
More time to practice speaking	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feel more confident when speaking English	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
More opportunities to express and exchange ideas	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Get to know your classmates	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Learn from team members	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Improve teamwork skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
More interested in learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**2. Which of the following factors makes it difficult for you to work in pairs/groups during English-speaking lessons? (Please tick the appropriate box.)**

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
No support or care from lecturers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Difficult topics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Uninteresting topics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of vocabulary and structures	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Inactiveness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of motivation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of confidence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Being overwhelmed by the other members, I haven't had a chance to speak yet	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Depending on the dictionary for new words	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of concentration due to playing games on the cell phone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of concentration due to social networking sites	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of concentration due to other subjects' homework	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**3. For effective pair/group work in English-speaking classes, which of the following activities do you think lecturers should do? (Please tick the appropriate box.)**

	Completely unimportant	Not very important	Important	Very important
Arranging tables and chairs appropriately before dividing pairs/groups.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Designing speaking exercises following the lesson objectives, student level, number of students, and time allowed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Letting students choose their own pair/group members.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Assigning group members in various ways (students choose, count at random, by lottery, by topic interest, by list, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Assigning roles to each member of the pair/group	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Trying to use pair and group activities in different ways in different weeks.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Giving clear instructions (how, time, rules, rewards and punishments, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Giving students all the input they need to complete the speaking tasks.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Walking around the classroom supervising pair and group activities and offering help when needed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Letting students summarize their pair and group activities by speaking in front of the class or posting notes around the class or on the bulletin board.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**If you are willing to let the research team do a quick interview (about 5-10 minutes), please leave your information, the research team will contact you to discuss further.**

Full name: \_\_\_\_\_

Cell phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you very much!

#### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS**

1. What advantages/benefits do you gain when pair and group work are used in your speaking lesson?
2. What difficulties do you have when pair and group work are used in your speaking lesson?
3. What do you want your lecturer to do to enhance the effectiveness of speaking practice in pairs and groups?

#### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR LECTURERS**

1. What benefits do you think pair work and group work activities bring to your students during your speaking classes?
2. What challenges do you encounter when students work in pairs or in groups during your speaking classes?
3. What are your solutions to the above-mentioned difficulties?

*(Ngày nhận bài: 17/10/2022; ngày duyệt đăng: 11/4/2023)*