NGHIÊN CỨU ẢNH HƯỞNG CỦA HOẠT ĐỘNG LẶP LẠI NHIỆM VỤ ĐỐI VỚI KỸ NĂNG NÓI CỦA SINH VIÊN CHUYÊN ANH NĂM NHẤT TẠI TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC LẠC HỒNG

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TÓM TẮT

Mục đích của nghiên cứu hành động định tính quy mô nhỏ này là để kiểm tra xem việc lặp lại nhiệm vụ ảnh hưởng như thế nào đến khả năng nói của sinh viên năm nhất chuyên ngành tiếng Anh tại Đại học Lạc Hồng. Đối tượng nghiên cứu gồm 30 sinh viên năm nhất chuyên ngành tiếng Anh trình độ tiền trung cấp của Khoa Ngôn ngữ Anh. Bài nghiên cứu khai thác dữ liệu từ quan sát đối tượng nghiên cứu và phỏng vấn cá nhân để đánh giá nhận thức của sinh viên về hoạt động lặp lại nhiệm vụ và ảnh hưởng của hoạt động này đối với kỹ năng nói của họ. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy rằng các sinh viên đều có quan điểm tích cực đối với hoạt động lặp lại nhiệm vụ và tin rằng hoạt động này có thể cải thiện khả năng nói, từ vựng, phát âm và ngữ pháp của họ, đặc biệt là khi họ thực hiện hoạt động này dưới áp lực về thời gian. Qua đó, các nghiên cứu sau này có thể tiếp tục xem xét những lợi thế của hoạt động lặp lại nhiệm vụ trong thời gian giảm dần trong việc dạy và học tiếng Anh tại Đại học Lạc Hồng và cung cấp những hiểu biết sâu sắc hơn về cách sử dụng phương pháp này để nâng cao sự phát triển kỹ năng nói của người học.

INVESTIGATING THE EFFECTS OF TASK REPETITION ACTIVITY ON FIRST-YEAR ENGLISH MAJORS' ORAL PERFORMANCE AT LAC HONG UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this small-scale qualitative action research was to examine how task repetition affects the oral performance of first-year English majors at Lac Hong University. The study involved a small group of 30 pre-intermediate English majors from the Faculty of English Language and exploited open participant observation and semi-structured interviews to evaluate the students' perceptions of task repetition activity and its influence on their oral performance. The results demonstrated that the students held a favourable view towards task repetition activity and believed that it could improve their oral fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar, especially when they were under time pressure. It is suggested that further research is needed to examine the advantages of task repetition activity under time constraint in English teaching and learning at Lac Hong University and provide insights on how it can be employed to enhance learners' development in speaking skills.

Available online at: https://js.lhu.edu.vn/index.php/lachong.

1. INTRODUCTION

Learning a second language has become a necessity in today's world of globalization, where it is crucial to be able to communicate with people from different countries (Zheng [1]). In Vietnam, English is a compulsory subject taught at primary, secondary and high schools. Despite this fact, a majority of students, both English majors and non-English ones, still struggle with their speaking skills when they continue studying at universities (Nguyen et al. [2]). To address this issue, researchers have been investigating the impact of various teaching methods and activities on speaking skills development, including task-based language teaching (TBLT) and task repetition activities.

TBLT emphasizes the use of real-world tasks as the basis for language learning. One of the main theories that underpins TBLT is the constructivist theory of learning, which highlights the importance of learners' active participation in the learning process (Long [3]). According to this theory, learners acquire language by engaging in communicative tasks relevant to their needs and interests. In TBLT, task repetition is often used as a way of providing learners with additional practice and feedback on specific language features or communicative skills. The idea behind task repetition is that learners can benefit from multiple exposures to the same task, which can help them to develop greater fluency and accuracy in using the language [4].

Given the effects of task repetition on learners' speaking abilities, there has been a growing body of research conducted worldwide. For instance, a study by Nassaji and Swain [5] found that task repetition can help learners to develop greater fluency and accuracy in using the language. In this study, 40 Iranian English as a foreign language (EFL) learners participated in a series of information gap tasks, with half of the participants repeating the tasks twice. The results showed that the learners who repeated the tasks performed better on measures of fluency and accuracy than those who only completed the tasks once. Another study by Kim and McDonough [6] examined the effects of task repetition on Korean EFL learners' speaking abilities. The study involved 60 learners who participated in a series of jigsaw tasks, with half of the participants repeating the tasks twice. The results revealed that the learners who repeated the tasks demonstrated significant improvements in fluency and complexity. Similarly in Vietnam, Nguyen [7] investigated the effects of task repetition on language learners' performance and fluency in a speaking task. There were 20 intermediate-level English as a second language (ESL) learners who completed a picture description task twice, with a one-week interval between the two tasks. The results of the study indicated that the participants showed significant improvements in accuracy,

fluency, and complexity in their second task compared to their first task.

These studies suggest that task repetition can be an effective way of enhancing learners' speaking abilities in TBLT. That being said, at Lac Hong University, there has been no research on this topic. Consequently, this small-scale qualitative action research is an expansion of previous studies on the impact of task repetition on the oral performance of EFL English majors. The study not only investigates the learners' attitudes towards task repetition but also uncovers the effects of task repetition and time constraint on the learners' oral performance, particularly their fluency, from the learners' point of view. The research was carried out to address the following questions:

❖ How do first-year English majors at Lac Hong University perceive the task repetition activity in improving their speaking skills?

❖ What effects does the task repetition activity have on the first-year English majors' oral performance at Lac Hong University?

2. CONTENT

2.1 Research Methods

- Participants

The research included 30 participants who were aged between 18 to 20 and majoring in English at the Faculty of English Language, Lac Hong University. They were studying in the second term of an eight-term program and had a pre-intermediate level of English proficiency. These participants were chosen because they were in the early stages of learning, which would allow the introduction of task repetition activity to have a significant impact on their speaking performance. Additionally, as the researcher noticed at the beginning of the course, a number of the participants had difficulty with their fluency in speaking, making them ideal subjects for the study since they could find the task repetition activities both useful and interesting.

- Descriptions of task repetition activity

The current research employed task repetition activity, which is based on the "4/3/2" technique developed by Nation and Newton [8]. In this technique, learners engage in a collaborative activity where they take turns being speakers and listeners. Each speaker talks about the same topic to three different listeners in 4 minutes, 3 minutes, and 2 minutes, respectively. The technique is effective for improving oral fluency because it involves a familiar topic, time pressure, and higher-than-normal performance standards (Nation & Newton [8]). The task repetition activity in this research required learners to talk to the same partners and complete the task within a

progressively shorter time frame of 3-2-1 minutes per turn, making it distinct from previous studies. There were three phases in this activity.

Phase 1. Preparation: The teacher and students engage in a discussion about the goals, vocabulary, grammar, and pre-determined questions related to the collaborative task while the roles of the students in the task repetition activity was also clarified. The task used in the study was adapted from a textbook.

Pair work. Take turns describing an interesting trip you took. Ask the questions below and add a second question to make double questions. Add as many details and reasons to your answers as possible.

Where did you go?

Who did you go with?

When did you go?

How did you get there?

Where did you stay?

What did you do there?

How was the weather?

Phase 2. Implementation: Students work in pairs for two rounds. For the first round, one student is an interviewer for three turns, and then, he or she changes the role with his or her partner in the second round. In each turn, the interviewees are expected to keep the same answers to the questions and record the time they finish the task. Both interviewers and interviewees are expected to finish the task in 3 minutes in the first turn, 2 minutes in the second turn and 1 minute in the third turn.

Picture 1. *Students' engaging in the task repetition activity*

Phase 3. Reflection: Students are provided with feedback by the teacher and their peers to help them become more aware of their language usage, which includes their sentence structures, vocabulary choices and pronunciation.

• Data collection instruments

The data of the research were gathered through both open participant observation and semi-structured interviews within March 2023.

The open participant observation is the initial data collection method for the current research, chosen by the author based on its nature and the research aims. As noted by Bryman [9], participant observation is a popular research method in social sciences that involves an observer-practitioner's extensive involvement in a setting to observe members' behaviour. Jorgensen [10] also highlights that participant observation focuses on human interaction and meaning from insiders' viewpoints in everyday situations. This method can be categorized as covert or open observation, with practitioners conducting action research in school-settings preferring the latter due to ethical concerns (Smith & Bowers-Brown [11]). Open participant observation is considered indispensable for the current researcher to understand learners' perspectives on task repetition activity (research question 1) and their oral fluency performance (research question 2). To ensure focused observations, the author created an observation checklist that concentrated on two main areas: the emotional state of the learners and their oral fluency performance during the task repetition process. The participants' performances were meticulously observed during the two rounds of task repetition activity. Additionally, decreasing completion time between the second and third repetitions are considered indicators of learners' fluency development. Therefore, participants playing the roles of interviewees were asked to track the time they completed the task each turn, enabling the researcher to confirm the observation data of the learners' oral fluency improvement.

To increase the reliability of observation data, the current study employs semi-structured interviews as a second method of data collection as qualitative research findings can gain more reliability when supplemented by participant interviews (Bryman [9]). With this method, the researcher can prepare questions as a guide during the interview. However, the flexibility of this method allows the researcher to ask follow-up questions, change the wording or order of questions, and gain new perspectives they may not have anticipated (Smith & Bowers-Brown [11]). Accordingly, besides improving data reliability, the semi-structured interview method also enables the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' perspectives on the effects of the task repetition activity. Having participated in the task repetition activity, the participants were invited for one-on-one semi-structured interviews. These interviews were recorded on audio and later transcribed for analysis.

• Research procedures

The current study is an action research that follows Costello's [12] model of action research, which involves

four main stages: plan, act, observe, and reflect. In the planning stage, the author discussed his classroom issue with colleagues and developed a plan to use task repetition to improve students' oral fluency. During the acting stage, a small-scale qualitative action research was conducted in the speaking class where the students were informed of the research objectives and introduced to the task repetition activity. Next, the observation of the task repetition activity was carried out using an observation checklist, and semi-structured interviews were then conducted. Finally, during the reflection stage, the data gathered from observation and interviews were analyzed, interpreted and categorized as students' attitudes towards task repetition activity and effects of task repetition activity on students' oral performance, which then made room for necessary changes to the author's teaching practice and suggestions for next research. The whole research procedures took place within six weeks.

2.2 Findings and Discussion

2.2.1 Learners' perspectives on the task repetition activity

The following table reveals that more than half of the participants exhibited excitement while repeating the task, and almost all of them smiled or laughed during the process. Additionally, none of the participants showed any negative emotions such as boredom or confusion during the task. These positive emotions indicate that students possess favourable attitudes towards the current teaching method in the study [13].

Table 1. *Learners' perspectives on the task repetition activity*

Learners' attitudes towards task repetition	Recurring Times of Code (*n*=30)	%
Students appeared enthusiastic while performing the task.	26	86.66
Students exhibited smiles or laughter while completing the task.	28	93.33
Students seemed uninterested while carrying out the task.	0	0
Students appeared to be puzzled while carrying out the task.	0	0

Additional confirmation of participants' positive attitudes towards task repetition activity is found in the semi-structured interviews with the students afterwards. When asked about their feelings towards the task repetition activity in the first question of the interview, a majority of the participants expressed that it boosted their confidence in speaking. To illustrate, most participants

reported feeling more assured after their second and third attempt at answering questions, as it allowed them to express their ideas to the same partners. That being said, about two-thirds of the participants reported feeling nervous during the task repetition activity. These feelings, nevertheless, cannot be considered entirely negative since students viewed the shortened time allocated for each turn as a real challenge and tried their best to complete the task within the timeframe. These emotions expressed by the participants imply that most of them possess a positive attitude towards task repetition, which corroborates the researcher's earlier observations during the implementation of the task repetition activity. Similar findings about learners' positive attitudes towards task repetition activity are also found in studies of the related topic. For instance, participants in studies implemented by Kim and Tracy [14] and Shokrpour et al. [15] believed that they felt more confident when repeating tasks because this activity enabled them to be more familiar with the task and feel more comfortable expressing themselves.

2.2.2 Effects of task repetition activity on learners' oral performance

Table 2. *Effects of task repetition activity on students' oral fluency*

Effects of task repetition on students' oral fluency	Recurring Times of Code (*n*=30)	%
Students finished the task within the given time frame.	30	100
Students could speak faster in the second and the third turn.	30	100
Students could deliver more fluent speeches in the second and the third turn.	30	100

Data in Table 2 reveals that in the second and third attempts, all participants were able to speak more smoothly and at a faster pace. Additionally, they were able to complete the task within the allocated time for each turn. The researcher considers it significant for the students to verify their own completion time in order to corroborate the researcher's observation results, as demonstrated in Table 3 below.

Table 3. *A sample of students' self-recorded completion time for each turn*

Students (ST)	First turn/ 3minutes	Second turn /2 minutes	Third turn/ 1 minute
ST1	2:24	1:58	51 seconds

ST2	2:15	1:41	58 seconds
ST3	2:32	1:47	56 seconds
ST4	2:21	1:39	55 seconds
ST5	2:27	1:42	59 seconds
...	...	...	...

As the participants' performance in the task repetition activity displayed all of the definitions of oral fluency proposed by Rossiter et al. [16] and Nation and Newton [8], it can be inferred that the repetition of tasks in a shortened timeframe has a significant impact on learners' oral fluency, improving their speech rate and continuity to some extent. This critical finding is further supported by the responses provided by the participants in the semi-structured interviews.

The second question of the interview is designed to investigate how learners perceive the impact of task repetition activity on their oral performance. Intriguingly, apart from its potential for improving fluency, learners believe that task repetition activity can positively affect other aspects of their oral performance.

Table 4. *Students' perception on the impacts of task repetition on their oral performance*

Effects of task repetition	Recurring times of codes (*n*=30)	%
Fluency enhancement	30	100
Grammar enhancement	10	33.33
Pronunciation enhancement	21	70
Vocabulary enhancement	25	83.33

According to the data in Table 4, all participants shared the belief that practicing a task repeatedly could enhance their speaking fluency by increasing their speech rate. Particularly, a majority of the participants stated that they initially had to think about their answers before speaking, but in the second and third attempts, they felt more comfortable and were able to speak faster. This aspect in the students' responses supports the observation findings and implies that task repetition activity has a significant advantage in improving learners' fluency. Furthermore, a large number of the participants believed that repeating tasks could assist in their acquisition of new vocabulary by providing them with additional chances to practice using new vocabulary. This finding corroborates the study

conducted by Li and Ma [17] who also found that task repetition activity can contribute to increased vocabulary retention and improved speaking proficiency among language learners.

Finally, the current study's findings suggest that task repetition, along with time pressure, can aid in improving learners' grammar and pronunciation. This result aligns with previous research conducted by Han and Lee [18], Liu and Li [19] and Zhang et al. [20], which also reported similar results. However, it is essential to note that only one-third of the participants believed that task repetition could assist in improving their grammar. Some of those participants explained that they were unable to recognize grammatical mistakes until pointed out by the teacher. This emphasizes the importance of providing timely and specific feedback for learners' speaking proficiency improvement [21].

To sum up, the results of the open participant observation and semi-structured interview suggest that most of the first-year English majors at Lac Hong University involved in this study have favourable opinions of task repetition activity. Additionally, these students believe that task repetition activity combined with time pressure can have significant benefits not only for improving their fluency but also for enhancing their vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar skills. With the potential benefits of task repetition activity for students' oral performance demonstrated in this research and others in the same topic, this method should be widely exploited in the English teaching and learning at the Faculty of English Language for the students' sake.

3. CONCLUSION

To explore the impact of task repetition activity on the oral performance of first-year English majors at Lac Hong University, a qualitative action research was implemented with a small group of 30 pre-intermediate English majors from the Faculty of English Language. The study utilized open participant observation and semi-structured interviews to investigate the students' perceptions of task repetition activity and its effects on their oral performance. The findings indicated that the students had a positive attitude towards task repetition activity and believed that it could enhance their oral fluency and facilitate their development in vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation as well, particularly when combined with time pressure.

However, the primary limitation of the current small-scale qualitative action research was the limited number of participants, which makes it challenging to ensure that the selected sample is representative of the broader population. As a result, the generalizations of the results is restricted to some extent. Notwithstanding, it is essential to recognize the limitations of the current study as they

offer insight into areas for future research in this field. Subsequent studies could explore the impact of task repetition activity and time pressure on a more extensive range of participants with varying language proficiency levels to acquire deeper insights into the challenges while implementing this method and suggest optimal solutions. Additionally, it would be beneficial to conduct quantitative research to confirm the effects of task repetition and time pressure on English majors' oral fluency, accuracy, and vocabulary development.

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