

International Journal Research Publication Analysis

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THE ROLE OF NATIVE ENGLISH-SPEAKING TEACHERS IN ENHANCING ENGLISH COMMUNICATION SKILLS OF SECOND- YEAR ENGLISH-MAJOR STUDENTS AT HAI PHONG UNIVERSITY

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Article Received: 14 June 2026

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Article Revised: 04 July 2026

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Published on: 24 July 2026

DOI: <https://doi-doi.org/101555/ijrpa.1638>

ABSTRACT

The development of English communication skills has become an essential requirement for English-major students in the context of globalization. Despite completing foundational language courses, many second-year students at Hai Phong University continue to experience difficulties in communicating confidently and effectively in English due to limited opportunities for authentic interaction and practical language use. This study investigates the role of Native English-Speaking Teachers (NESTs) in improving students' communication skills. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining questionnaire surveys and semi-structured interviews with second-year English-major students. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis. The findings reveal that students generally perceive native English-speaking teachers as having a positive influence on pronunciation, listening comprehension, speaking fluency, confidence, and intercultural communication. Authentic classroom interaction and increased exposure to natural language use significantly motivate students to participate in communicative activities. However, several challenges remain, including language anxiety, differences in teaching styles, and limited opportunities to interact with native speakers outside the classroom. The study concludes that integrating native English-speaking teachers into English language programs contributes positively to students' communicative competence when combined with appropriate pedagogical support from Vietnamese lecturers. The findings provide practical implications for curriculum development and English language teaching at Hai Phong University and similar higher education institutions in Vietnam.

KEYWORDS: Native English-speaking teachers; English communication skills; English-major students; communicative competence; higher education.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, English has become the dominant international language in education, business, science, and intercultural communication. As globalization continues to expand, university graduates are expected not only to possess grammatical knowledge but also to communicate effectively in real-life situations. Consequently, communicative competence has become one of the most important learning outcomes in English language education.

For English-major students, communication skills are particularly significant because they directly influence academic achievement, professional development, and future employment opportunities. However, many Vietnamese university students continue to struggle with spoken English despite spending years studying the language. Although they often demonstrate acceptable grammatical knowledge and reading ability, they frequently experience difficulties when communicating spontaneously with others. These problems are commonly associated with limited exposure to authentic English, insufficient speaking practice, lack of confidence, pronunciation difficulties, and communication anxiety. Similar challenges have also been reported among English-major students at Hai Phong University.

One potential solution receiving increasing attention is the integration of Native English-Speaking Teachers (NESTs) into English language programs. Native English-speaking teachers provide authentic language input, natural pronunciation, cultural knowledge, and communicative learning environments that encourage students to use English more actively. Through continuous interaction with native speakers, learners are expected to improve not only their linguistic competence but also their communicative confidence and intercultural awareness.

Previous studies have highlighted both the advantages and limitations of native English-speaking teachers. While NESTs are generally appreciated for their pronunciation models, fluency, and authentic language use, non-native English-speaking teachers often demonstrate strengths in grammar instruction, learning strategies, and understanding students' learning difficulties. Recent international research suggests that effective English language education should combine the complementary strengths of both teacher groups rather than viewing them as competitors.

In Vietnam, numerous studies have investigated factors affecting English communication skills, including language anxiety, learning strategies, communicative language teaching, and

technology-assisted language learning. Nevertheless, relatively few studies have specifically examined the educational contribution of native English-speaking teachers within local universities. At Hai Phong University, although foreign teachers have participated in English teaching activities, there remains limited empirical evidence regarding their impact on second-year English-major students' communication skills. This research gap makes it difficult for the university to establish evidence-based policies for integrating foreign teachers into English language programs.

Grounded in the theory of Communicative Competence proposed by Hymes (1972) and further developed by Canale and Swain (1980), this study considers communication as a combination of grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence. From this perspective, successful language learning requires not only linguistic knowledge but also meaningful interaction in authentic communicative contexts. Native English-speaking teachers may therefore play an important role in creating learning environments that facilitate the development of communicative competence among university students.

Accordingly, this study aims to investigate the role of native English-speaking teachers in improving the English communication skills of second-year English-major students at Hai Phong University. Specifically, the research seeks to identify students' communication difficulties, examine their perceptions of learning with native English-speaking teachers, and evaluate the influence of these teachers on learners' confidence, pronunciation, fluency, and overall communicative competence. The findings are expected to contribute to the improvement of English language teaching practices and provide practical recommendations for curriculum development at Hai Phong University and other higher education institutions in Vietnam.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Communicative Competence

Communicative competence has been widely recognized as one of the fundamental objectives of English language teaching. Hymes (1972) argued that successful communication requires not only grammatical knowledge but also the ability to use language appropriately in different social contexts. This perspective marked a significant shift from traditional language teaching, which primarily emphasized grammatical accuracy, to communicative language teaching that values authentic language use.

Building upon Hymes' theory, Canale and Swain (1980) proposed a comprehensive model of communicative competence consisting of four interrelated components: grammatical

competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. Grammatical competence refers to knowledge of vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. Sociolinguistic competence concerns the appropriate use of language according to social and cultural contexts. Discourse competence involves producing coherent and cohesive spoken or written texts, while strategic competence enables learners to overcome communication breakdowns through appropriate communication strategies. These theoretical perspectives provide the conceptual framework for evaluating students' communication skills in the present study.

2.2. Native English-Speaking Teachers in English Language Teaching

Native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) have long been regarded as valuable contributors to English language education. Their strengths generally include authentic pronunciation, natural language use, cultural knowledge, and the ability to create communicative learning environments. Students often perceive native teachers as language models whose classroom interaction increases motivation and confidence.

However, previous studies also indicate that native teachers are not necessarily superior in every aspect of teaching. Non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) usually possess stronger awareness of students' linguistic difficulties because they have experienced the same language-learning process. They are often more effective in explaining grammar, providing learning strategies, and using students' first language when necessary.

Recent research therefore suggests that English language education benefits most from collaboration between native and non-native teachers rather than relying exclusively on either group. Such collaboration combines authentic communication opportunities with explicit language instruction, creating a more balanced learning environment.

2.3. Research Gap

Although numerous studies have investigated factors influencing English communication skills among Vietnamese university students, most focus on communicative language teaching, learning strategies, technology-assisted learning, or language anxiety. Comparatively few studies have examined the educational contribution of native English-speaking teachers, particularly within provincial universities.

At Hai Phong University, foreign teachers have participated in several English language courses; however, there has been limited empirical research evaluating how their presence influences second-year English-major students' communication skills. Consequently, evidence-based recommendations for integrating native teachers into English language programs remain insufficient. This gap provides the rationale for the present study, which

aims to examine students' perceptions and evaluate the contribution of native English-speaking teachers to communication skill development.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods research design that integrated quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative component aimed to identify general trends in students' perceptions of native English-speaking teachers and their communication abilities, while the qualitative component provided deeper insights into students' learning experiences and expectations.

The mixed-methods design was selected because it allowed the researchers to obtain both statistical evidence and detailed explanations, thereby increasing the reliability and validity of the research findings.

3.2. Participants

The participants consisted of 120 second-year English-major students at Hai Phong University during the 2025–2026 academic year. Stratified random sampling was employed to ensure representation across different classes and English proficiency levels.

The participants were divided into two groups. The experimental group included 60 students who participated in communication courses involving native English-speaking teachers, while the control group consisted of 60 students receiving instruction from Vietnamese lecturers following the regular curriculum. This grouping enabled meaningful comparison of students' communication development under different instructional conditions.

3.3. Research Instruments

Two research instruments were employed.

First, a structured questionnaire was administered through Google Forms. The questionnaire contained four sections: demographic information, self-assessment of communication ability, communication difficulties, and students' perceptions of native English-speaking teachers. Most items employed a five-point Likert scale, while several open-ended questions allowed respondents to provide additional comments.

Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected participants to obtain deeper understanding of their classroom experiences, communication challenges, and opinions regarding learning with native English-speaking teachers.

3.4. Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection was conducted during the first semester of the 2025–2026 academic year. Questionnaire responses were collected electronically and exported to Microsoft Excel and SPSS for statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were calculated to summarize students' responses.

Interview data were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis. Emerging themes related to communication confidence, pronunciation improvement, classroom interaction, motivation, and perceived challenges were identified and interpreted alongside the quantitative findings.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative data enabled triangulation of evidence and strengthened the credibility of the study's conclusions.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Students' English Communication Proficiency

The survey results indicate that the majority of second-year English-major students rated their English proficiency at the intermediate level (B1), accounting for 45% of the participants. Meanwhile, 30% reported being at the elementary level (A1–A2), whereas only 25% considered themselves to have reached upper-intermediate or advanced levels (B2–C2). These findings suggest that although most students have acquired basic linguistic knowledge, relatively few have achieved a level of proficiency sufficient for confident and effective communication.

Students' self-assessments further revealed considerable limitations in communicative competence. Only 18% of respondents reported feeling confident when communicating in English, while merely 15% believed they could express their ideas fluently and coherently. In contrast, 25% admitted experiencing anxiety when speaking English, and 20% identified pronunciation, stress, and intonation as major obstacles. These results indicate that psychological factors and insufficient speaking practice remain substantial barriers to communicative development.

Table 1. Students' Self-assessment of English Communication Competence.

Item	Percentage
Confident in communication	18%
Speak fluently and clearly	15%
Understand spoken English	22%
Feel anxious when speaking	25%
Difficulties in pronunciation	20%

4.2. Communication Practice Habits

Students reported relatively limited opportunities to practice spoken English. Only 11% indicated that they practiced speaking every day, whereas most practiced two or three times per week (28%) or three to four times per week (22%). Notably, approximately 39% practiced only occasionally or rarely.

Limited speaking practice also affected students' communicative responsiveness. When encountering English in authentic situations, only 15% reported responding immediately, while 40% required additional time to process the language before replying. Furthermore, 30% experienced anxiety, and another 15% tended to avoid communication altogether.

These findings suggest that many students continue to translate mentally from Vietnamese into English before speaking, preventing them from developing automatic communicative competence.

4.3. Students' Perceptions of Learning Strategies and Native English-speaking Teachers

The survey demonstrates that students actively employ a variety of learning strategies to improve their communication skills. Watching English films, listening to podcasts, and practicing with friends were among the most frequently reported activities. Technology-assisted learning through applications such as Duolingo, ELSA, ChatGPT, and Gemini also emerged as popular approaches.

However, only a relatively small proportion of students had opportunities to practice regularly with native English-speaking teachers. Despite this limited exposure, students consistently perceived interaction with native teachers as highly beneficial. Interview responses highlighted several perceived advantages, including:

- + improvement in pronunciation accuracy
- + increased speaking confidence
- + better listening comprehension
- + exposure to authentic vocabulary and expressions
- + greater understanding of English-speaking cultures.

Many participants emphasized that communication with native teachers encouraged spontaneous language use and reduced dependence on memorized grammatical structures. Authentic classroom interaction motivated students to communicate more naturally and actively participate in discussions.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study support Hymes' (1972) theory that communicative competence extends beyond grammatical knowledge to include the ability to use language appropriately in authentic contexts. Although many students possess adequate grammatical knowledge, they continue to experience communication anxiety and limited speaking confidence. These results suggest that successful communication requires continuous exposure to meaningful interaction rather than grammar instruction alone.

Similarly, the four-component model proposed by Canale and Swain (1980) provides an appropriate framework for interpreting the findings. Students' weaknesses were particularly evident in sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence, as many participants reported hesitation, fear of making mistakes, and difficulty maintaining conversations. Interaction with native English-speaking teachers appeared to provide valuable opportunities to strengthen these dimensions of communicative competence.

The results are also consistent with previous studies conducted in Vietnam and other Asian countries, which emphasize that native English-speaking teachers contribute positively to pronunciation development, learner motivation, and intercultural awareness. Nevertheless, this study confirms that native teachers should complement rather than replace Vietnamese teachers. While native teachers create authentic communicative environments, Vietnamese teachers remain essential for explaining grammar, learning strategies, and addressing students' specific learning difficulties.

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings suggest several practical implications for Hai Phong University. First, increasing students' opportunities to communicate with native English-speaking teachers may significantly enhance speaking confidence and communicative competence. Second, collaborative teaching models involving both native and Vietnamese teachers should be expanded to maximize the strengths of each group. Finally, extracurricular communication activities, English clubs, international exchange programs, and technology-supported speaking practice should be strengthened to provide students with more authentic communicative experiences.

Overall, the findings indicate that integrating native English-speaking teachers into English language education represents an effective strategy for improving students' communicative competence, provided that such integration is supported by appropriate curriculum design and continuous collaboration between native and Vietnamese instructors.

6. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the role of Native English-Speaking Teachers (NESTs) in enhancing the English communication skills of second-year English-major students at Hai Phong University. The findings indicate that although most students possess intermediate English proficiency, many continue to experience difficulties in oral communication due to limited speaking opportunities, communication anxiety, inadequate pronunciation, and lack of confidence. These challenges reduce students' ability to communicate effectively in authentic situations despite having sufficient grammatical knowledge.

The study further demonstrates that native English-speaking teachers play an important role in facilitating communicative language learning. Students perceived that learning with native teachers improved their pronunciation, listening comprehension, speaking fluency, confidence, and intercultural awareness. Authentic classroom interaction encouraged learners to participate more actively and use English more naturally during communication activities. However, the study also confirms that native teachers should complement rather than replace Vietnamese teachers. The collaboration between native and non-native teachers provides students with both authentic communicative experiences and systematic linguistic support, leading to more effective English language learning.

Overall, integrating native English-speaking teachers into English language programs can significantly contribute to the development of students' communicative competence when accompanied by appropriate curriculum design, supportive learning environments, and continuous opportunities for authentic communication.

7. Pedagogical Implications

Based on the findings, several practical implications are proposed.

First, Hai Phong University should increase opportunities for students to interact with native English-speaking teachers through regular communication classes, workshops, seminars, conversation clubs, and cultural exchange activities. Frequent exposure to authentic English will help students develop communicative confidence and improve spontaneous language use.

Second, English language programs should adopt collaborative teaching models that combine the strengths of native and Vietnamese teachers. Native teachers can provide authentic pronunciation models, cultural knowledge, and communicative practice, while Vietnamese teachers can effectively explain grammar, vocabulary, and learning strategies that meet students' educational needs.

Third, classroom instruction should emphasize communicative language teaching by encouraging pair work, group discussions, role plays, presentations, and problem-solving activities. These learner-centered approaches create more opportunities for meaningful interaction and reduce students' fear of making mistakes.

Finally, universities should encourage students to utilize technology-enhanced learning resources, including AI-supported applications, online conversation platforms, podcasts, and virtual exchanges with international speakers, to supplement classroom instruction and promote autonomous learning.

8. Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

Several limitations should be acknowledged.

First, the study was conducted at only one university; therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all Vietnamese higher education institutions.

Second, the sample consisted exclusively of second-year English-major students. Future research may include students from different academic years or non-English majors to provide broader perspectives.

Third, the present study mainly examined students' perceptions and self-reported communication abilities. Future studies should employ experimental or longitudinal research designs to measure actual improvements in communication performance over extended periods.

Finally, additional research should investigate the effectiveness of co-teaching models involving native and Vietnamese teachers as well as the integration of digital technologies into communicative language teaching.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Hai Phong University, for supporting this research. Special thanks are extended to the participating students and lecturers whose cooperation made this study possible. The authors are also deeply grateful to the research supervisor for valuable guidance and constructive feedback throughout the research process.

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