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MEASURES TO DEVELOP FOURTH-GRADE STUDENTS' SPEAKING AND LISTENING COMPETENCE IN VIETNAMESE LANGUAGE TEACHING THROUGH A COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to propose measures for developing fourth-grade students' speaking and listening competence in Vietnamese language teaching through a communicative approach. The study employed document analysis and synthesis, combined with a survey of 24 teachers and 115 fourth-grade students at Trung Thanh 1 Primary School, Thai Nguyen Province. The findings showed that teachers were well aware of the importance of developing students' speaking and listening competence; however, classroom activities were not sufficiently diverse, and some students experienced difficulties in expressing their ideas, listening, responding, and communicating confidently. Based on the theoretical framework and the survey findings, four measures are proposed: designing speaking and listening tasks situated in communicative contexts; diversifying practice activities; providing appropriate scaffolding to enhance students' ability to express themselves and their confidence; and incorporating teacher feedback, self-assessment, and peer assessment. These measures are intended to increase opportunities for practice, interaction, and self-regulation, thereby contributing to the development of fourth-grade students' speaking and listening competence in Vietnamese language teaching.

KEYWORDS: speaking and listening competence; fourth-grade students; Vietnamese language teaching; communicative approach; primary education

1. INTRODUCTION

Under Vietnam's 2018 General Education Curriculum, Vietnamese language teaching at the primary level is oriented toward developing students' qualities and competencies. Speaking and listening are two fundamental language activities that play an important role in developing students' linguistic competence as well as their communication and collaboration competencies. For fourth-grade students, speaking and listening requirements extend beyond presenting and receiving information to include

exchanging ideas, asking questions, taking turns, and responding appropriately in communicative situations.

Classroom practice indicates that greater attention has been given to speaking and listening activities; however, several limitations remain. The range of instructional activities is not sufficiently diverse, and some students lack confidence, have difficulty expressing themselves coherently, and demonstrate limited listening comprehension and responsiveness. Teachers also encounter challenges in designing communicative tasks and organizing appropriate learning activities. It is therefore necessary to develop instructional measures grounded in a communicative approach that provide students with more opportunities to practice speaking, listening, and interaction. Accordingly, this study examines relevant theoretical foundations, investigates the current state of speaking and listening instruction, and proposes measures for developing fourth-grade students' speaking and listening competence in Vietnamese language teaching through a communicative approach.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on the development of speaking and listening competence has addressed both theoretical perspectives on language comprehension and production and instructional approaches grounded in communicative principles. Theoretical studies emphasize the importance of comprehensible input and opportunities for language production, suggesting that students need not only to receive information but also to actively use language and interact with others throughout the learning process (Krashen, 1985; Swain, 1985).

In Vietnam, early research focused primarily on developing students' spoken language through composition instruction before expanding to dialogue, communicative situations, and task systems designed to foster communicative competence among primary school students. A common trend has been to promote students' active participation by situating speaking activities in specific communicative contexts rather than relying predominantly on model-based practice (Le Phuong Nga, 2001; Ngo Quynh Nga, 2017; Dang Thi Le Tam et al, 2020).

More recent studies have placed greater emphasis on storytelling, discussion, and interactive speaking and listening tasks. Students are expected not only to present ideas but also to listen attentively, take turns, ask questions, exchange ideas, and respond appropriately. From this perspective, speaking and listening are viewed as closely interconnected components of communication rather than as separate skills (Dao Thi My Dung & Nguyen Van Ban, 2023; Dang Thi Le Tam et al, 2020; Phan Thi Lai, 2024).

In the context of implementing Vietnam's 2018 General Education Curriculum, Vietnamese language teaching has increasingly adopted a competency-based orientation, requiring students to mobilize their knowledge, skills, and experience in reading, writing, speaking, and listening activities. Accordingly, communicative tasks and increased opportunities for practice and interaction have become important

components in the development of students' linguistic competence (Do Ngoc Thong et al., 2020; Ha et al., 2022; Pham Thi Kim Anh, 2021).

Overall, previous studies have established an important theoretical and practical foundation for developing speaking and listening competence through a communicative approach. However, relatively few studies have focused specifically on fourth-grade students in Vietnamese language classes, and existing research has tended to examine individual forms of practice, such as dialogue, storytelling, or interactive tasks. There is therefore a need for an integrated system of measures that combines communicative situations, opportunities for practice, student scaffolding, and feedback and assessment to foster the simultaneous development of speaking, listening, and interactive speaking and listening competence.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a combination of theoretical research and survey methods. The theoretical research involved the analysis and synthesis of literature on speaking and listening competence, Vietnamese language teaching through a communicative approach, and the expected learning outcomes specified in Vietnam's 2018 General Education Curriculum. This analysis provided the theoretical foundation for the development of the proposed measures.

The survey was conducted at Trung Thanh 1 Primary School, Trung Thanh Ward, Thai Nguyen Province, with 24 teachers and 115 fourth-grade students. It focused on teachers' perceptions and instructional practices, students' manifestations of speaking, listening, and interactive speaking and listening competence, and difficulties encountered in the teaching process. Questionnaires were supplemented by classroom observations and discussions to provide additional information and allow for cross-checking of the data. The survey findings were synthesized and analyzed to provide an empirical basis for proposing measures to develop fourth-grade students' speaking and listening competence through a communicative approach.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Theoretical perspectives on the development of speaking and listening competence and communicative competence

Speaking and listening are two fundamental modes of verbal communication that are closely interrelated and often occur simultaneously during interaction. In Vietnamese language teaching at the primary level, speaking enables students to convey information, thoughts, and feelings and to achieve communicative purposes, while listening enables them to receive, comprehend, select, and process information from speakers. Therefore, speaking and listening competence involves not only the ability to present or receive information but also the ability to exchange ideas, take turns, and respond appropriately in specific communicative situations (Ha et al., 2022).

In this study, speaking and listening competence is defined as the ability to mobilize knowledge, skills, experience, and personal attributes to produce, receive, and exchange spoken information appropriately and effectively in specific communicative situations. This competence comprises three closely interrelated dimensions: speaking, listening, and interactive speaking and listening. Speaking involves the ability to express ideas clearly and coherently; listening involves attending to, receiving, and processing information; and interactive speaking and listening involves turn-taking, asking and answering questions, exchanging ideas, and responding appropriately.

Speaking and listening competence is also an important component of communicative competence. For primary school students, communicative competence is developed primarily through the direct use of language in contexts involving specific communicative purposes, interlocutors, and content. Accordingly, developing speaking and listening competence through a communicative approach requires a shift from asking students to reproduce model responses “correctly” toward providing opportunities to speak for a purpose, listen for understanding, and interact through speaking and listening. Classroom activities should enable students to alternate between the roles of speaker and listener and engage in presentations, question-and-answer exchanges, discussions, and responses. Through such activities, students can gradually develop the ability to use Vietnamese appropriately and effectively in both learning and everyday communication (Ngo Quynh Nga, 2017; Phan Thi Lai, 2024).

4.2. Survey findings on the current state of developing fourth-grade students’ speaking and listening competence in Vietnamese language teaching

4.2.1. Teacher survey

The survey of 24 teachers revealed generally positive perceptions of the importance of developing students’ speaking and listening competence. Specifically, 87.5% of the teachers considered this area very important, while 12.5% considered it important. Regarding implementation, 25.0% reported that they very frequently employed methods and activities aimed at developing speaking and listening competence in fourth-grade Vietnamese language teaching, while 70.8% reported doing so frequently.

Table 1. Selected teacher survey results on the organization of activities for developing speaking and listening competence

No	Survey item	Teachers selecting Frequently/Very frequently (%)
1	Pair/group discussion and exchange	95.8
2	Storytelling and recounting events	91.7
3	Listening to, commenting on, and responding to peers' ideas	91.7
4	Guiding students in self-assessment and peer assessment	91.7
5	Question-and-answer activities related to lesson content	87.5
6	Presenting and sharing ideas with the whole class	83.4
7	Role-play and handling communicative situations	6

Source: Authors' survey results.

The data indicate that teachers employed a relatively diverse range of speaking and listening activities, particularly pair/group discussions, storytelling, and peer-response activities. However, role-play and the handling of communicative situations were the least frequently used activities, suggesting that tasks requiring students to integrate speaking, listening, and responding within specific communicative contexts were not yet regularly incorporated into classroom practice.

The most frequently reported challenges were limited instructional time and difficulties in developing and applying assessment criteria for speaking and listening competence, each reported by 66.7% of the teachers. In addition, 50.0% indicated that some students remained passive and lacked confidence. Other challenges included insufficient supporting materials (37.5%), disparities in students' competence levels (33.3%), and difficulties in providing all students with opportunities to participate (29.2%).

4.2.2. Student survey

The survey of 115 students showed that they had developed basic aspects of speaking and listening competence; however, the levels of development across its components were uneven. In particular, students demonstrated limitations in confidence when presenting, the ability to identify key information while listening, and interactive speaking and listening competence.

Table 2. Assessment results for selected indicators of fourth-grade students' speaking and listening competence

No	Component	Criterion	Good and very good (%)	Satisfactory (%)	Needs improvement/ experiencing difficulties (%)
1	Speaking	Presenting relevant content and organizing ideas logically	62.7	27.8	9.6
2	Speaking	Expressing ideas clearly and coherently, with appropriate word choice and tone of voice	47.0	53.0	0
3	Listening	Identifying the main content and key information	42.6	44.3	13.0
4	Listening	Listening attentively and completing post-listening tasks appropriately	46.9	40.9	12.1
5	Interactive speaking and listening	Asking and answering questions appropriately	36.6	43.5	20.0
6	Interactive speaking and listening	Listening to, commenting on, and responding to others appropriately	40.0	42.6	17.4

Source: Authors' survey results.

Table 2 shows that students performed better in speaking than in listening and, particularly, in interactive speaking and listening. Only 36.6% of the students were rated Good or Very Good in asking and answering questions appropriately, while 40.0% reached these levels in listening to, commenting on, and responding to others appropriately. These aspects should therefore be prioritized when organizing instruction through a communicative approach.

4.2.3. Overall assessment of the current situation

Regarding favorable conditions, teachers demonstrated positive perceptions of the importance of developing speaking and listening competence, with 100% of the surveyed teachers rating it as either important or very important. Activities such as pair/group discussions, storytelling, question-and-

answer exchanges, presentations, and feedback were organized relatively frequently. Students also showed positive attitudes toward speaking and listening activities, with 96.5% reporting that these activities helped them improve their speaking, listening, and interaction. These findings provide a favorable foundation for strengthening communicative activities in fourth-grade Vietnamese language teaching.

Regarding difficulties, speaking and listening activities were not sufficiently diverse, while highly interactive and situational forms of practice, such as role-play and handling communicative situations, were used less frequently. Some students experienced difficulties in expressing ideas coherently, identifying key information while listening, asking questions, commenting, and responding appropriately, and they lacked confidence when presenting in front of the class. Teachers also encountered difficulties related to limited instructional time, providing opportunities for all students to participate, and developing assessment criteria for speaking and listening competence.

Several factors may account for these difficulties. First, instructional time is limited, whereas speaking and listening activities require sufficient time for students to engage directly in practice and receive feedback. Students also differ in their language competence, communicative experience, and levels of confidence, making it challenging to organize activities that effectively engage the whole class. In addition, designing communicative situations, providing appropriate learning materials and scaffolding, and developing assessment tools for speaking and listening remain challenges for teachers.

4.3. Measures for developing fourth-grade students' speaking and listening competence in vietnamese language teaching through a communicative approach

4.3.1. Designing speaking and listening tasks based on familiar communicative situations appropriate for fourth-grade students

This measure aims to provide students with opportunities to practice speaking and listening in specific communicative situations that are relevant to their learning and everyday lives. Through such tasks, students develop not only their ability to express ideas but also their ability to listen, ask questions, exchange ideas, and respond appropriately, thereby fostering speaking, listening, and interactive speaking and listening competence.

From a communicative perspective, speaking and listening tasks should go beyond simple prompts such as “tell,” “say,” or “present” and instead engage students in purposeful communicative situations. When designing these tasks, teachers should identify key elements, including the communicative purpose, content, participants, context, and expected product. Priority should be given to familiar topics such as family, friends, school, the local community, and the environment.

The design and implementation of speaking and listening tasks can follow five steps: (1) identifying the expected learning outcomes; (2) constructing a communicative situation; (3) assigning specific tasks to speakers and listeners; (4) organizing communicative practice; and (5) providing feedback and

opportunities for adjustment. Speakers may be asked to tell a story, introduce or explain something, or express a viewpoint, while listeners are expected to identify key information, ask questions, make comments, and provide appropriate responses. Activities should progress from **individual work** → **pair work** → **group work** → **whole-class interaction** to maximize participation and provide additional support for students who lack confidence.



Figure 1. Procedure for Organizing Speaking and Listening Tasks through a Communicative Approach

Illustrative example: In the lesson *Storytelling: The Renowned General Ly Thuong Kiet*, instead of simply asking students to retell the story, the teacher can create the following communicative situation: “Your class is organizing an activity entitled ‘Stories of Famous Historical Figures.’ Introduce your classmates to the story of the renowned general Ly Thuong Kiet so that they can understand and remember its main events. After listening, your classmates will ask questions and discuss the story with you.”

The storyteller selects the main events, organizes them in a logical sequence, and uses an appropriate storytelling voice. The listeners identify the main content, ask questions, make comments, or provide additional information. The teacher may provide scaffolding through sentence starters such as: “*What I remember most from your story is...*”; “*I would like to ask you about...*”; “*I would like to add...*”. Students first prepare individually, then tell the story in pairs, practice in groups, and finally present it to the whole class. After the presentation, listeners ask questions, while the storyteller responds and uses the feedback received to make improvements.

In this way, a conventional storytelling task is transformed into a sequence of preparation – storytelling – listening – question-and-answer exchange – feedback – adjustment, enabling students to use Vietnamese for a meaningful communicative purpose while strengthening interaction between speakers and listeners.

4.3.2. *Diversifying practice activities to increase opportunities for speaking, listening, and interaction*

This measure aims to increase opportunities for students to use language directly in communication. Rather than relying primarily on a teacher-question–student-answer pattern involving only a limited number of students, teachers should flexibly combine individual, pair, small-group, and whole-class activities and incorporate storytelling, question-and-answer exchanges, short presentations, discussions, role-play, and situational tasks. The choice of activity should depend on the lesson objectives. Storytelling and short presentations may be used when the focus is on oral expression, whereas question-and-answer exchanges, discussions, and role-play should be emphasized when the objective is to develop interactive speaking and listening.

During these activities, listeners should also be assigned specific tasks, such as identifying key ideas, preparing questions, making comments, or providing additional information. Activities may follow the sequence individual preparation → pair/group interaction → whole-class presentation → feedback and adjustment. Within groups, teachers can assign and rotate roles such as presenter, questioner, responder, and summarizer. This helps ensure broader participation rather than allowing only a small number of active students to dominate the activity.

Illustrative example: In the lesson *Discussion – Love for One’s Homeland and Country*, the teacher may pose the following task: “*What can fourth-grade students do to show their love for their homeland and country?*” Each student first prepares one idea and then works with a partner to complete three tasks: expressing an idea – listening to a partner – asking a question or responding. For example:

Student A: *I think we should keep public places clean to make our local community cleaner and more beautiful.*

Student B: *I agree. What have you done to help protect the environment where you live?*

Two pairs then form a group of four, with students rotating the roles of presenter – questioner – responder – summarizer. Each group selects three appropriate actions to present to the whole class, while the other groups listen, ask questions, or contribute additional ideas. This organization enables more students to practice speaking, listening, and interaction rather than limiting participation to only a few students.

In addition to discussion, teachers can incorporate role-play. In the story *The Renowned General Ly Thuong Kiet*, for example, students may take the roles of Ly Thuong Kiet and his soldiers in selected situations from the story. They need to choose appropriate words, tone of voice, and attitudes while listening and responding in ways appropriate to their communicative roles. After the activity, groups provide feedback on content, expression, listening, and responsiveness. In this way, students are given opportunities to practice communicative behaviors through diverse and highly interactive activities.

4.3.3. Providing scaffolding to develop students' expressive ability and confidence in speaking and listening activities

The survey findings indicate that some students experience difficulties in organizing ideas, selecting appropriate words, expressing themselves coherently, and speaking with confidence. Therefore, in addition to increasing opportunities for communication, teachers should provide appropriate scaffolding tailored to students' individual needs and levels of competence.

Scaffolding may include pictures, keywords, guiding questions, idea maps, and worksheets to help students identify relevant content and organize their ideas before speaking. For students who have difficulty expressing themselves, teachers may provide sentence starters such as *"In my opinion..."*; *"I think... because..."*; *"I agree with you that..."*; *"I would like to ask you..."*; and *"I would like to add..."*. These forms of support should serve only as initial scaffolds and be gradually withdrawn as students become more capable of expressing themselves independently.

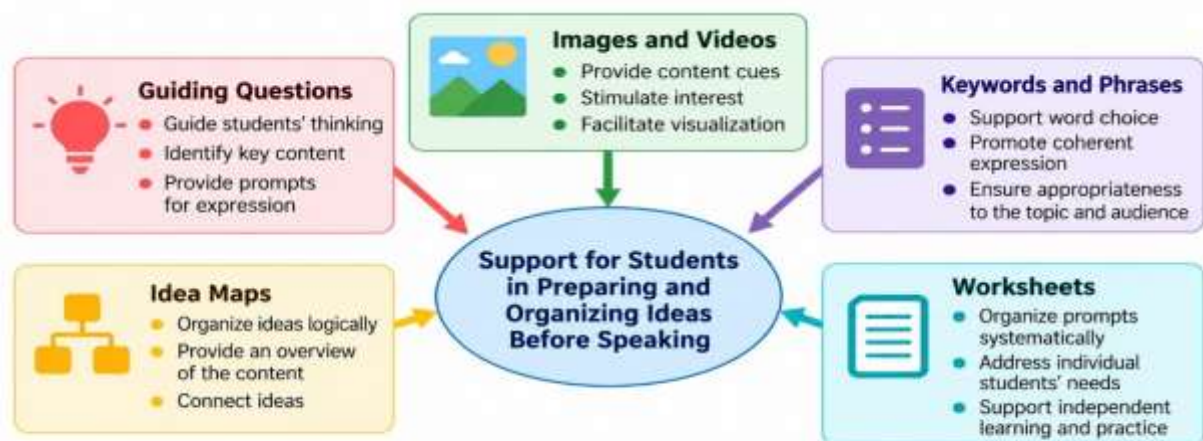


Figure 2. Model of Scaffolding for Students in Preparing and Organizing Ideas Before Speaking

Scaffolding should be differentiated and gradually withdrawn. Teachers should identify the specific difficulties experienced by individual students and select appropriate forms of support. At the same time, they should create a low-pressure learning environment by allowing students to practice speaking in pairs or small groups before presenting to the whole class. As students make progress, teachers can gradually move from detailed idea maps to keywords, from sentence frames to brief prompts, and ultimately enable students to organize their ideas independently.

Illustrative example: In the lesson *Discussion – What I Read*, teachers can apply the Think–Pair–Share technique. During the *Think* stage, students prepare to introduce a story, poem, prose text, or newspaper article they have read. Students who experience difficulties may be supported with guiding questions such as: *"What text would you like to introduce? What is it about? Which character or detail impressed you most? Why? What did you learn from reading it?"*

During the *Pair* stage, students exchange ideas with a partner. The listener is asked to identify one aspect that they find particularly interesting and to ask at least one question, such as: “*Could you explain your idea more clearly?*” After practicing in pairs, students proceed to the *Share* stage and present their ideas to the whole class. This approach gives students time to prepare and rehearse their oral expression in a low-pressure environment while simultaneously developing their listening and responding abilities.

Thus, scaffolding does not mean speaking on behalf of students; rather, it involves providing sufficient and temporary support that enables them to gradually organize their ideas independently, express themselves more clearly, and communicate with greater confidence.

4.3.4. Integrating feedback, self-assessment, and peer assessment to develop speaking and listening competence

This measure aims to help students identify what they have done well and what they need to improve through teacher feedback, self-assessment, and peer assessment. Assessment is intended not only to determine the extent to which students have completed a task but also to support them in gradually improving the way they speak, listen, and interact.

Feedback should be concise, specific, and based on observable performance. Instead of making a general comment such as “*Your speaking needs improvement,*” the teacher can provide more specific feedback, for example: “*You identified the main content correctly, but you need to organize your ideas more clearly and speak more slowly.*” For self-assessment, students may consider questions such as: “*Did I stay focused on the main point? Did I listen attentively? Did I ask an appropriate question or provide an appropriate response? What should I improve next time?*” Peer assessment can employ similar criteria, enabling students not only to evaluate their peers but also to develop their own listening and responding abilities.

The process can follow six steps: *establishing criteria → performing the task → self-assessment → peer assessment → teacher feedback → student adjustment*. Depending on the task, teachers may select three or four key criteria related to content, expression, listening, and interaction. After the activity, students can complete three statements: “*I did well in...*” – “*I need to improve...*” – “*Next time, I will...*”. Importantly, students should be given opportunities to revise or repeat the task after receiving feedback so that assessment becomes an integral part of the learning process.

Illustrative example: In the lesson *Discussion – Love for One’s Homeland and Country*, the teacher presents four criteria before the discussion: relevant content; clear expression; attentive listening; and appropriate questioning and responding. While one group presents, the other groups record one strength and one question or suggestion. For example: “*Your group suggested appropriate actions. However, I would like to ask why keeping public places clean is a way of showing love for one’s*

homeland.” The presenting group listens, responds, and then revises or elaborates on its ideas as necessary.

In the role-play activity based on *The Renowned General Ly Thuong Kiet*, students may provide feedback such as: “*You retold the events accurately and spoke clearly. The role-play would be more engaging if you used a stronger, more forceful voice when Ly Thuong Kiet recites the ‘Divine Poem’.*” This is evidence-based feedback that both acknowledges strengths and identifies a specific way to improve performance.

Thus, feedback, self-assessment, and peer assessment are integrated into the communicative process, helping students develop the ability to listen in order to evaluate, speak in order to respond, and self-regulate their communicative performance.

The four proposed measures are closely interconnected: communicative situations establish a purpose for speaking and listening; diverse activities provide opportunities for practice; scaffolding provides students with appropriate support; and feedback and assessment enable them to make adjustments and progress. The flexible integration of these measures can help transform speaking and listening from isolated practice into purposeful and interactive communication, thereby supporting the development of fourth-grade students’ speaking and listening competence.

5. CONCLUSION

Developing fourth-grade students’ speaking and listening competence is an important requirement of competency-based Vietnamese language teaching. The findings indicate that teachers recognize the importance of speaking and listening and have begun to employ a range of instructional activities. However, limitations remain in terms of opportunities for practice, as well as some students’ ability to express themselves, listen, respond, and communicate with confidence.

Based on the theoretical framework and the survey findings, this study proposes four measures: designing speaking and listening tasks situated in communicative contexts; diversifying practice activities; providing appropriate scaffolding; and integrating feedback, self-assessment, and peer assessment. These measures are complementary and are intended to create a learning environment in which students have opportunities to speak, listen, interact, and gradually self-regulate their communicative performance. The flexible implementation of these measures according to lesson objectives and students’ characteristics may contribute to more effective development of speaking and listening competence in fourth-grade Vietnamese language teaching.

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