USING "LANGUAGE CAFÉ" TO IMPROVE ENGLISH COMPETENCE FOR VIETNAMESE MAJORED-ENGLISH STUDENTS AT DONG THAP UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

The article is about how the extra curriculum activity Language Cafe is used for improving English competence of English students at Dong Thap University. The practical benefits of this activity are related to both students (language tutors) and participants. To language tutors, they can improve not only their English competence but also their profession and social skills, such as teaching skills, designing a program of extra curriculum activity, and serving a tea break in a meeting/workshop/conference. For participants, the activity can help them overcome their shyness and diffidence, practice and develop their English competence, especially their public speaking. Moreover, Language Café helps outspread the English learning community in friendly ways.

Keywords: Language Café, improve, English competence, majored English students.

INTRODUCTION

In Vietnam, recently, many institutions have changed methods of evaluation in terms of English competence evaluation instead of English knowledge evaluation. This kind of evaluation measures the learning process through how learners can use the language they have learned in life and work which meet the needs of learners and society. However, time in classrooms are limited – 2 credits/semester for each subject, together with the large numbers of students in classes and limited language social environment since not many foreigners welcomed in some regions, makes students so shy and diffident. As a result, they cannot communicate with other students and their teachers in English because they are not concerned individually. One of the methods applied in many universities is to organize language classes outside classrooms and to bring the classes into daily society by extra-curriculum activities. The aims of extracurricular activities are to help students 1) use the language they have learned in life, 2) overcome their shyness and diffidence, 3) practice their speaking and communication skills since the time in speaking classes is limited, 4) learn from other students and teachers, and 4) contribute their help to the community. Among these activities, Language *Café* has been applied in some universities in big cities and it brings many benefits to teachers and learners.

In Dong Thap University, although *Language Café* is new in Mekong Delta and is piloted within one semester, *Language Café* brings many benefits to students; for example, students become more self-confident when they speak in public; students are more creative and active when they design an extracurricular program, and they have an idea of contribution to the community.

HOW *LANGUAGE CAFÉ* IS USED AT DONG THAP UNIVERSITY
Brief Description of *Language Café*

− *Language Café* is a bi-weekly extracurricular activity which English – majored students can review and practice English they have learned in their core study programs in social environments. Also, students can improve speaking, communication and cooperation skills and learn cultures in some English-speaking countries and in Vietnam through group works, language games, singing and dancing, and telling stories.

− Basing on weather condition, scale of organization, and students' needs, *Language Café* is organized in various forms and at different public places, such as school canteen, library, and cafeteria.

− In the light of *Language Café* in many regions in Europe and the Philippines as well as basing on the weather and geography difference, *Language Café* at Dong Thap University adjusts the contents and procedures so that *Language Café* can meet students' needs and lack as well as learning outcomes of the core study programs.

Aims and Objectives
Aims

Language Café aims to:

− build a friendly learning environment in order to improve language competence and English communication skills as well as self-confidence in daily communication;

− build an exciting and effective playground for participants to learn, share and exchange teaching and learning English methods;

− improve pedagogical competence and extracurricular-activities organization skills for English-majored students;

− educate English-majored students the responsibilities for the community contribution;

− develop the love of learning English and outspread the community of English learners.

Objectives

After *Language Café,* participants will be able to:

− review and improve the language knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, structures, and pronunciation, knowledge of culture and society of some English-speaking countries and Vietnam as well as the fields relating to the topic of every time of *Language Café ;* and knowledge of how to organize and serve a buffet and/or tea break at a meeting, workshop, and conference;

− improve Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing skills, especially Listening, Speaking and communication skills;

− improve cooperation skills, event organization skills, convincing skills, public presentation skills, and problem-solving skills;

− improve classroom – management skills and time – management skills;

− overcome their shyness and diffidence when using English.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY
Participants

Language tutors: English students who are good at English and social work, foreign volunteers and teachers of English. The number of tutors depends on the number of participants in the proportion 1:8.

   − Participants: English –majored students

Time and Place

   − Time: every two weekend in one semester
   − Duration: 120-150 minutes per time
   − Place: at the university gym

Contents and Procedures

   − *Language Café* focuses on "learning through playing" activities which help participants be more active and self-confident so that they can enhance their English communication skills, group work skills, and cooperation skills. Also, participants can enjoy cakes and drink and practice English at the same time in a friendly and relaxing environment.
   − Contents, programs and topics link and support the core study programs and university curriculum. Also, they help students with the English speaking contests, culture exchange programs, and Gala Night.
   − The plan for each time of *Language Café* includes Warmer, Language games, Culture exchange, and Presentation.
   − Procedures for each time of *Language Café*:
      + Make a needs survey to analyze the needs of potential participants;
      + Consider and analyze the survey;
      + Make an action plan;
      + The plan will be criticized and received comments and suggestions;
      + The plan will be changed basing on the comments and suggestions;
      + Advertise *Language Café* on Noticeboard and Facebook;
      + Design activities and prepare materials and visual aids;
      + These activities, materials and visual aids will be criticized;
      + Build observation forms and survey;
      + Train the board of tutors and the tutors do rehearsal;
      + Rent the facilities;
      + Tutors prepare cakes and drink for the tea break;
      + Implement the action plan;
      + Participants conduct the evaluation form;
      + Organize a meeting to consider the results of the survey and pictures to evaluate the comfort, idea, and learning progress of participants.

Method of Data Analysis

The following forms are used to evaluate how good the *Language Café* is
   − Evaluation form (for participants) (See Appendix 2): is used to evaluate how good the *Language Café* is and how much they satisfy with the *Language Café* directly at the ending time of each *Language Café* . The form includes 10 questions about 1) general information about the participants, 2) how much they rate the contents of the *Language Café* , 3) how much *Language Café* meets their expectations, 4) how much they rate the facilities and other service, and 5) their recommendation and suggestions.
   − Observation form (for teachers in-charge and foreign volunteers) (See Appendix 3): is used to observe and measure how much the participants and tutors enjoy and complete the jobs and how well they improve their behavior, recognition, attitude, and language

competence during the time of *Language Café* . The form consists of 16 questions about the participants, the activities and the action plans, and the tutors.

   – Observation form (for tutors) (See Appendix 4): is used to observe the improvement of behavior, recognition, attitude, and language competence of participants. Moreover, the form is used to train tutors for how to criticize the activities and the action plans.

   – Recordings, video clips, and photographs (See Appendix 8): are used to observe and measure how many participants and tutors attend the *Language Café* each time and how many of them in favour of the activities and the action plans. Moreover, they are used to measure the improvement of behavior, recognition, attitude, and language competence of participants and tutors in an authentic way.

Meetings: are for evaluating how good each time of the *Language Café* is basing on the Evaluation form and Observation forms. All teachers, foreign volunteers and tutors attend the meetings. At the meetings, they consider and discuss which activity and topic they should change for the following time of *Language Café*.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To judge the evaluation forms, observation forms, pictures, and direct observation, *Language Café* brings many positive results as follows:

Development and Outspread of *Language Café*

Language Café receives the support from many teachers, foreign volunteers, and students. In 6 times of *Language Café*, there are 403 students, 57 teachers, and 70 tutors attending. The main reason is that *Language Café* is not only practical but also meets the needs and lack of teachers and students (Section 3.1). Although *Language Café* is for English-majored students, non-majored students attend. Table 1 shows the total number of teachers and students participating 6 times of *Language Café*.

Number of students								Number of teachers
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Students of Chinese	Graduated students	Non-majored English students	Total	Total
Number	105	100	109	67	10	6	6	403	57
Percentage (%)	26	24.8	27.1	16.6	2.5	1.5	1.5	100	

Table 1: The total number of participants in 6 times of *Language Café*

Graph 1 shows the increasing number of participants in 6 times of *Language Café*. Out of six times, the third and the fifth time are the most amazing. The third time with the topic "Ladies Nights" – to celebrate Vietnamese Women Day - welcomes 115 (28.3%) participants. In addition, the fifth time with the topic "Teachers' Day" – to celebrate Vietnamese Teachers' Day - welcomes 98 (24.3%) participants. The number of participants decreases in the sixth time compared with the fifth one since students need to prepare for their upcoming examination.
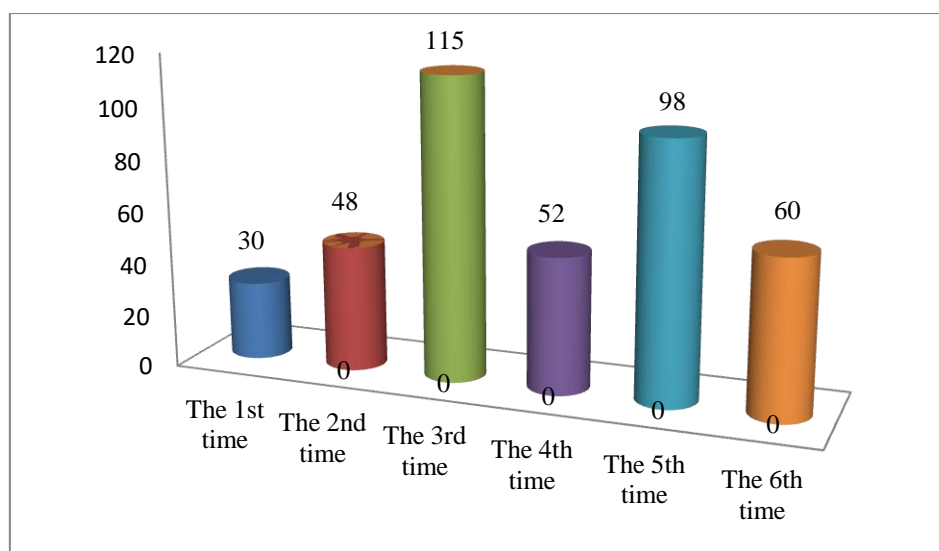
Graph 1: The total number of participants in each time of *Language Café*

Language Café enhances the outspread of English learners and brings many benefits to teachers and students. As a result, 373 out of 403 (95.6%) participants want to recommend *Language Café* to their friends so that they can improve their English and profession competence (Table 2).

Question 10. Would you recommend the *Language Café* to your friends?			Total
	Yes	**No answer**	
Number	373	30	403
Percentage (%)	92.6	7.4	100

Table 2: The potential outspread of English learnerS

Contents

After 6 times of *Language Café*, students learn, consolidate, and improve the language knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, structures, and pronunciation through conversations among participants and foreign volunteers. Also, participants can apply what they have learned about the knowledge of culture and society into organizing and serving a buffet and/or tea break at a meeting, a workshop, and a conference (Chart 2). Thanks to the benefits of each time of *Language Café* , 328 out of 403 (81.4%) participants rate that "*Language Café* is interesting" whereas 10 out of 403 (2.5%) participants disagree (Table 3).

Question 3. What do you think about the topics/ contents of *Language Café*?		
Opinion	**Number**	**Percentage (%)**
Not interesting, pretty boring	10	2.5
Normal	25	6.2
Interesting	328	81.4
Very interesting	40	9.9
Total	**403**	**100**

Table 3: What participants think about the topics/contents of *Language Café*

Graph 2 is built up from 57 teachers and 70 tutors' observation forms. 55 out of 57 teachers and 57 out of 70 tutors agree that activities in the action plans support and help improve the

core study program. In adition, 40 out of 57 teachers and 25 out of 70 tutors state that tutors can give simple and clear instructions, especially in public places, which help English – majored students improve their teaching skills and be more self-confident in public.

In addition, students can practice speaking and communication skills in English, group work skills, cooperation skills, event organization skills, convincing skills, public presentation skills, and problem-solving skills. Profession skills, such as teaching skills, classroom – management skills, and time – management skills are also enhanced. All these skills are helpful for students' learning and profession.
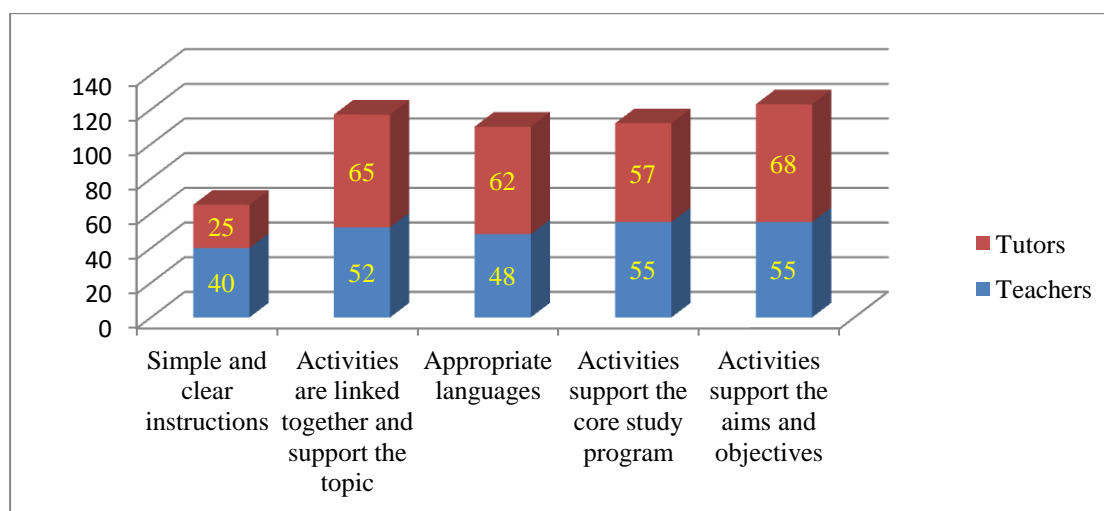
Graph 2: The opinions of teachers and tutors about the topics/contents of *Language Café*

Moreover, at *Language Café*, participants not only enjoy food and drink but also learn the knowledge of eating customs including ways of organizing and serving a buffet and/or tea break at a meeting/workshop/conference which they may have never experienced before. Topics, activities, and action plans in each time are always changed to meet the needs, the comfort and learning of participants which are shown in the Evaluation forms. In one of the topics of *Language Café* called "Foods and Drinks", teachers and tutors bring "kitchen" and ingredients to the *Language Café* so that participants can learn how to make the fruit smoothie *Banana Milkshake*, practice and enjoy it. Therefore, 196 out of 403 (48.6%) participants rate that the place and the service of *Language Café* are good while 102 out of 403 (25.3%) participants say that they are very good.

Question 8. How would you rate the place and the service of the place where the *Language Café* is held?		
Opinion	**Number**	**Percentage (%)**
Very good	102	25.3
Good	196	48.6
OK	70	17.4
Very poor	00	00
No answer	35	8.7
Total	**403**	**100**

Table 4: Opinions of participants about place and service of *Language Café*

 – Thanks to *Language Café*, students have a chance to practice 4 language skills, Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. Among the 4 skills, Listening and Speaking are

improved the most. When being interviewed, 363 out of 403 (90%) participants agree that the contents and activities of *Language Café* meet their expectations (Table 5).

Question 5. Do you think that the Language Café has met your expectations so far?		
Opinion	**Number**	**Percentage (%)**
Yes	363	90
No	18	4.5
No answer	22	5.5
Total	**403**	**100**

Table 5: How much *Language Café* meets the participants' expectations

Attitude

Tutors and participants meet the expected aims and objectives as follows:
- Participating pair work and group work actively and eagerly;
- Cooperating and helping one another to complete tasks during *Language Café* time;
- High responsibilities for jobs, community;
- Willing to volunteer doing social works and charity work;
- Being self-confident in public presentation.

Graph 3 and some pictures (Appendix 3) displays the participants' attitude when they join *Language Café*. 48 out of 57 teachers and 68 out of 70 tutors agree that participants enjoy the activities. It is concluded that the activities and action plans meet participants' expectations.
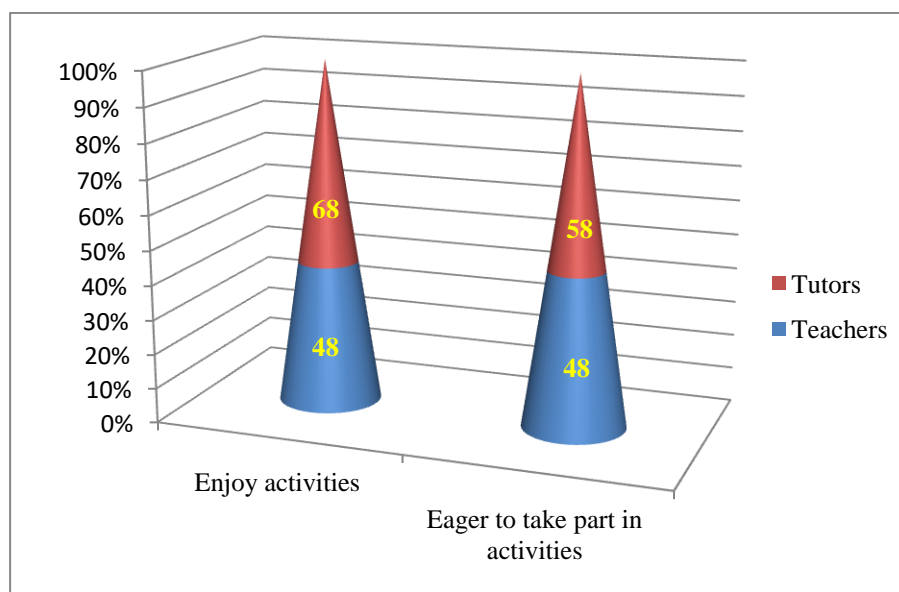
Graph 3: Opinions of teachers and tutors about participants' attitude

CONCLUSIONS

To summarize, *Language Café* can be helpful at university since both participants and tutors can 1) use the language they have learned in life, 2) overcome their shyness and diffidence, 3) practice and improve not only English skills but also social skills, such as group work skills, cooperation skills, event organization skills, convincing skills, public presentation skills, and problem-solving skills, 4) enhance profession skills, such as teaching skills, classroom –

management skills, and time – management skills, 5) learn from other students and teachers, 6) outspread English learning, and 7) contribute their help to the community. Thanks to its benefits, *Language Café* will be used to improve Chinese and French at Dong Thap University and will be transferred to other schools including primary, secondary, high schools and universities in Mekong Delta.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR NEEDS ANALYSIS

We are investigating needs of taking part in Language Café; therefore, we need your help to complete the questionnaires below. We promise your information to use for research only and will be kept confidential. Thank you very much for your cooperation!

1. Which year are you in?
   A. 1st   B. 2nd   C. 3rd   D. 4th
2. Why are you interested in English? (You may choose more than one option)
   A. Getting a well-paid job
   B. Making social contact with English speakers
   C. Being competent in English (reading materials, listening to songs or watching movies)
   D. Others: (please specify) ………………………………………………………
3. Please tell us about your English level at the moment.
   A. A. Not good   B. OK   C. Good   D. Excellent
4. What are your goals of learning English? (You may choose more than one option)
   A. Communicating with other people in English

    B. Improving your range of vocabulary
    C. Being confident and fluent in speaking English
    D. Comprehending some reading texts
    E. Using English at your workplace in the future
    F. Improving your speaking skills
    G. Others: (please specify) …………………………………………………………..

5. Have you ever joined any English clubs? (please write Yes or No)
    ……..…………………………………………….…………………………………

6. If yes, please tell us your comments on the English clubs you joined.
    …………………………………………………………………………………………..

7. We are organizing *Language Café*, a kind of English club. What are your expectations for *Language Café*?
    …………………………………………………………………………………………

8. Do you think when you can join *Language Café*?
    A. In the evenings of weekdays
    B. In the evenings of weekends
    C. At weekends

    REGISTRATION FORM
    1. Full name:
    2. Class:
    3. Email address:
    4. Time I can join: (You may choose more than one option)
        o   In the evenings of weekdays
        o   In the evenings of weekends
        o   At weekends

I would like to join the *Language Café* held by the Foreign Language and Informatics Centre at Dong Thap University.

APPENDIX 2: EVALUATION FORM

It is great to have you on the Language Café. We are very keen update and improve the Language Café. So, your comments on your experience of the Café are valuable. Please take a few minutes to fill in this form. Thank you very much for your cooperation!

1. Which year are you in?   …………………………………………………
2. How many times have you participated the *Language Café* so far? …………………
3. What do you think about the topics/ contents of Language Cafe?
    A. Not interesting, pretty boring
    B. Normal
    C. Interesting
    D. Very interesting
4. What topic/ content do you like best in the Language Cafe?
    …………………………………………………………………………………………
5. Do you think that the *Language Café* has met your expectations so far?
    …………………………………………………………………………………………
6. Do you have any difficulties when participating in Language Cafe?
    A. Limited use of language
    B. The contents/ topics of Language Cafe are difficult
    C. The instructions of lecturers are difficult to follow
    D. Students do not have enough time to prepare for activities

7. How would you rate the speed of the *Language Café*
   A. Very slow
   B. Slow
   C. Average
   D. Fast
   E. Very fast
8. How would you rate the place and the service of the place where the *Language Café* is held?
   A. Very good
   B. Good
   C. OK
   D. Very poor
9. Your comments and suggestions
   …………………………………………………………………………………………
10. Would you recommend the *Language Café* to your friends? …………………

APPENDIX 3: OBSERVATION FORM
(For teachers and foreign volunteers)
   – Name ……………………………………………………………………
   – Time and place: …………………………………………………………
   – Topic ………………………………………………………………..

① Strongly disagree   ② Disagree   ③ No answer
④ Agree   ⑤ Strongly agree

No		1	2	3	4	5
	PARTICIPANTS					
1	Enjoy activities					
2	Eager to take part in activities					
3	Attempt to use English as much as they can					
	ACTIVITIES					
4	Simple and clear instructions					
5	Activities are linked together and support the topic					
6	Appropriate languages					
7	Good techniques for activity management					
8	Simple and clear models					
9	Handouts are appropriate with the topics and the contents					
10	Activities support the core study program					
11	Activities support the aims and objectives					
	TUTORS					
12	Good English					
13	Good event organization skills					
14	Self – confident in activity management					
15	Good cooperation skills					
16	Active and creative in action plan design					

APPENDIX 4: OBSERVATION FORM
(For tutors)

- Name ……………………………………………………………………
- Time and place: ……………………………………………………………
- Topic …………………………………………………………………..

① Strongly disagree ② Disagree ③ No answer
④ Agree ⑤ Strongly agree

No		1	2	3	4	5
	PARTICIPANTS					
1	Enjoy activities					
2	Eager to take part in activities					
3	Attempt to use English as much as they can					
	ACTIVITIES					
4	Simple and clear instructions					
5	Activities are linked together and support the topic					
6	Appropriate languages					
7	Good techniques for activity management					
8	Simple and clear models					
9	Handouts are appropriate with the topics and the contents					
10	Activities support the core study program					
11	Activities support the aims and objectives					

APPENDIX 5: RESULTS OF OBSERVATION FORM
(For teachers and foreign volunteers)

No		Agreement		Disagreement	
		Number	**Percentage (%)**	**Number**	**Percentage (%)**
	PARTICIPANTS				
1	Enjoy activities	57	100	0	0
2	Eager to take part in activities	57	100	0	0
3	Attempt to use English as much as they can	42	74	15	26
	ACTIVITIES				
4	Simple and clear instructions	40	70.2	12	29.8
5	Activities are linked together and support the topic	52	91.3	5	8.7
6	Appropriate languages	48	84.3	4	15.7
7	Good techniques for activity management	55	96.5	2	3.5
8	Simple and clear models	55	96.5	2	3.5
9	Handouts are appropriate with the topics and the contents	55	96.5	2	3.5
10	Activities support the core study program	55	96.5	2	3.5
11	Activities support the aims and objectives	55	96.5	2	3.5
	TUTORS				
12	Good English	45	79	12	21
13	Good event organization skills	45	79	12	21
14	Self – confident in activity management	50	87.8	7	12.2
15	Good cooperation skills	57	100	0	0
16	Active and creative in action plan design	52	91.3	5	8.7

APPENDIX 6: RESULTS OF OBSERVATION FORM
(For tutors)

No		Agreement		Disagreement	
		Number	Percentage (%)	Number	Percentage (%)
PARTICIPANTS					
1	Enjoy activities	68	97.1	2	2.9
2	Eager to take part in activities	58	82.9	12	17
3	Attempt to use English as much as they can	42	60	28	40
ACTIVITIES					
4	Simple and clear instructions	25	35.7	45	64
5	Activities are linked together and support the topic	65	92.9	5	7.1
6	Appropriate languages	62	88.6	8	11
7	Good techniques for activity management	57	81.4	13	19
8	Simple and clear models	55	78.6	15	21
9	Handouts are appropriate with the topics and the contents	68	97.1	2	2.9
10	Activities support the core study program	57	81.4	13	19
11	Activities support the aims and objectives	68	97.1	2	2.9

APPENDIX 7: SAMPLE ACTION PLAN

Date: 25/10/2015
Grade level: Intermediate
Topic: Ladies' Night
Skills: Listening and Speaking
Duration: 100 - 120 minutes
Participants: English-majored students
Preparation: Power point Presentation, Hand-outs of the activities, photos of famous ladies, papers and pens for drawing.
Objectives:
By the end of these activities, participants will be able to:

‒ Improve their communication skills through speaking activities in pairs and in groups outside the classroom, and public speaking.

‒ Use vocabulary and structures to communicate with the topic: describing people

Activity	Materials	Procedures	Doers
Warmer (15 minutes) -Singing -Guessing games	-Music -Photos of several famous women both international and Vietnamese	-Singing a song -Playing the guessing game called "Who am I" + One tutor gives instructions for the game, then invites 2 volunteers for demo. +Audience guess the person in the pictures by asking Yes-No questions. Maximum questions	-A group of boys -Language tutors -Participants

		are 20.	
Coffee break (20 minutes) -Having coffee -Interviewing people -Voting for the most beautiful lady	Hand-outs for -"Find someone who…" -Voting papers	In the coffee break, -participants move around for coffee. -ask some people some questions to fulfill the list of questions in the hand-outs. -write the name of a woman that they think the most beautiful and put the paper in a box. -Several members check the voting papers and announce the result by the end of the party.	Tutors and participants
Singing contest (15 minutes)	Hand-outs of the song "Roar"	-A tutor asks audiences to guess the name of the song writer (Katy Perry), and the name of the song (Roar) -The lyrics of the song was cut into pieces and delivered to audience. (each group has a set of the song) -In groups, audiences discuss and order the song. -Practice singing -Performing the song (competition)	Tutors and participants
Presentation (20 minutes) -Picture jigsaw -Presenting a woman	Picture of Miss Đặng Thu Thảo, and it was cut into pieces	-Participants are put in 10 groups -Each group has a set of picture pieces. -In groups, participants discuss and match the pieces to make a complete picture. -Each group present some information about the person in the picture (Đặng Thu Thảo) -The best presenter is voted and awarded.	Tutors and participants
Discussion (15 – 20 minutes) Describe an ideal partner	Papers, pens, markers	-There are 2 groups (male and female -Each group describes his/her partner, then put the papers with description into the box. -A piece of description will be taken out randomly - The person who is the owner of this paper describes her partner loudly for the others to draw. -After drawing, all the pictures will be shown, and the describer will look at the pictures and	

		decide which he/she likes best.	
Announcing "The Lady of the Night"		-The result of the vote "Lady of the Night" is delivered. -The winner will be awarded	A tutor
Free Singing		-Chorally, all the participants sing together. -Finish.	Tutors and participants

APPENDIX 8: SOME PICTURES OF *LANGUAGE CAFÉ*

Picture 1: Public presentation

Picture 2: A Group work activity

Picture 3: Singing to celebrate Vietnamese Teachers' Day

Picture 4: Practicing how to make "Banana milkshake"

Picture 5: Practicing singing

Picture 6: Tutors guide and help participants at the *Language Café*

Picture 7: Listening and drawing

Picture 8: Rehearsal

Picture 9: Rehearsal

Picture 10: A listening activity