

***SPEAKING CHALLENGES THAT ENCOUNTER 2ND AND 3RD
YEAR EFL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS***

by

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Abstract:

This research investigated the common problems and difficulties that face 2nd and 3rd year undergraduate students in developing their speaking skills. The qualitative approaches (interview and observation) were used as methods of collecting data of this study. Four classes were involved in the classroom observation, twenty students from this cohort and four teachers were interviewed. Some of the difficulties which were introduced in this study were related to the poor classroom conditions and methods that teachers employ in teaching speaking skills. Some other difficulties were related to pronunciation, including adding extra vowels and intonation and stress. Furthermore, there were other difficulties regarding the lack of vocabulary, which lead the students to avoid practicing their problems, have been provided in this study. The findings of this study are important as they represent the most influential factors which appear to be responsible for the problems of developing 2nd and 3rd year under-graduate students speaking skills. Recognition of the problems outlined in the first step of this study in order to supply appropriate solutions for overcoming these difficulties. In addition, these findings draw attention towards the importance of helping both the foreign language teachers and students to change their perspective about teaching and learning English speaking skills.

Keywords: EFL Learners, Speaking Challenges, and Speaking Performance.

INTRODUCTION

Learning how to speak a foreign language is an aim shared by many language learners. Speaking is an exclusive skill for the human species. The Child starts acquiring the skills during infancy. Then, this skill continues to develop through the child's expanding of his or her lexicon with new words needed for expressing messages and

through improving his or her rhetorical and narrative abilities. Speaking in this sense refers to using language for the purpose of communication which involves sending and receiving messages. Therefore, the acquisition process of this skill is a complex one (Levelt, 1989). (Brown and Yule, 1983) believed that many language learners regard speaking skills as the criteria for knowing a language. They defined fluency as the ability to communicate with others much more than the ability to read, write, or comprehend oral language. They regarded speaking as the most important skill learners acquire and assess their progress in terms of their accomplishments in spoken communication.

Speaking is the oral communication skill which is composed by creating verbal and non-verbal systematic utterance spoken to transfer the meaning as (Florez), has defined speaking as “ an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing; receiving and processing information.” (Florez, 1999).

Therefore, the challenge to learn English without much oral practice is hopeless because, through speaking, people are able to articulate their thoughts, opinion and ideas impulsively and unreservedly. For many learners, the ability to speak is the most essential and important feature of studying a foreign language and the success is measured by the capacity of carrying out a conversation and exchange of information in that language, (Brown and Yule, 2001).

Consequently, it is noticeable that speaking is considered an important skill which needs extra attention when learning both L1 and L2 because it expresses people's opinions and personalities. It is an interactive process of creating meaning that engages in both generating and gaining information (Brown, 1994; Burns, A & Joyce, H. 1997). Accordingly, speaking is an essential skill which has to be mastered in every language because it plays an important role in helping people to send and receive messages, and to express their thoughts and opinions. Hence, the learning of speaking skills is the most important challenge for 2nd and 3rd under-graduated students and therefore it is important to identify the main problems and difficulties that students face in learning this skill which signifies as the main aim of this study.

This study aims to:

1. discover the major problems and difficulties faced by 2nd and 3rd year under-graduate students in learning speaking skills.

2. draw attention to the importance of classroom condition and employing technology in teaching and learning skills.
3. explain the possibility of improving the current methodology that foreign language teachers use in speaking classroom in order to encourage them to implement more student talking time, teaching techniques and learning activities.

Research Questions

The process of data collection of this study was guided by the following research questions.

- 1- What are the major problems faced by 2nd and 3rd year under-graduate students in developing their speaking skills?
- 2- What strategies can foreign language teachers employ in developing speaking skills for the students?

METHODOLOGY

After reviewing a number of theories related to this study, the next step was to discuss the research methods used in the study. It provides a description about the way the study was carried out and how the data were collected and analyzed. It covers the research design, the population, as well as the instruments.

Research Design

Based on the two research questions above, the study employed qualitative (observation) and, (interview) approaches used in this study. These approaches provided data satisfactory for the purposes of answering the following research questions, outlined above.

In this study, the population consists of university students, who study at Elmergib university in Al-KHOMS city. Twenty students were selected randomly from the third and the second year of under-graduate students. There are many English language teachers at Elmergib University. However, four English teachers were chosen at random to contribute to the study.

Research Instruments

Two instruments were used in the present study. They were classroom observations, and interviews. Class observations were conducted in order to figure out the difficulties that face the students while they express their ideas. Moreover, some notes were taken about the speaking difficulties that are encountered by the second and the third year of undergraduate students.

The interview is an important method in order to get the exact information about the participant issues. The interview was selected in this study as it provides greater flexibility and allows the interview to shape the flow of information, to guide the interview, and to add a considerable amount of additional relevant topics to those discussed. In other words, semi-structured interviews have the advantage of combining a certain degree of control with a certain amount of freedom to develop the interview (Wiersma 1986; Bell,2005).

The interviews were conducted by the researcher at the faculty of arts of Elmergib University with twenty under-graduate students of 2nd and 3rd years and four lecturers who are teaching English for this cohort. The researcher contacted the volunteers in order to arrange the time and the place to carry out the interviews.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data collected from classroom observations, and interviews, were analyzed qualitatively. The data obtained on this issue revealed that there are three major speaking difficulties which are mother tongue influence and linguistic difficulties (lack of vocabularies, sentence structure). The difficulties encountered by the second and third year students which were observed in classroom and also some hurdles which teachers realized as that their students face as they mentioned in the interviews are as follow:

Mother Tongue Influence

Data collected through observation showed that students struggle to find the appropriate vocabulary item when trying to speak in English, which reflects their insufficient vocabulary repertoire. This problem is strongly related to the linguistic difficulties which is mentioned hereafter. During the class observation, it was noticed

that students are used to speak in Arabic or use Arabic words when they discuss or express their ideas of different tasks, and when they were asked in the interview about the reason of doing that; they answered (We do not know how to say it in) which means that they do not know how to discuss their ideas in English, consequently, they used their mother tongue (Arabic). Therefore, the inadequate vocabulary repertoire and weak sentence building skills are the reasons for using the mother tongue.

Linguistic Difficulties

Data collected from the students' interview provided that students do not have sufficient vocabulary to talk about different aspects in English. This difficulty was involved because one of the students reported (I like to speak in English, but I don't know the exact word to express my idea). The interviewed students also pointed out that they find it difficult to build sentences when they try to express their ideas. One of them said (We do not know how to say it). Although teachers spend a lot of time teaching grammar rules, students still cannot form short sentences when they try to speak in English.

Teaching Strategies

According to the observation and the interview most teachers use grammar translation method in teaching speaking classes which is an inappropriate method for teaching communicative skills. Speaking skill teachers said that the reason why they use this method is the low level of the students and also it is the easiest way to convey the message or to be understood by his/her students. On the other hand, students find it easier when the teacher uses the mother tongue, however, they prefer if the teacher explains in English which may help them in getting used to listen to English. As students were asked about the teaching strategies that their teachers use, most of them replied that the teachers mostly translate into the mother tongue which help them in understanding while it may not help them in practicing the language.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

This paper investigated the major problems and difficulties encountered by 2nd and 3rd year under-graduate students in developing their speaking skills, and explained the possibilities for improving the current classroom conditions to create an appropriate atmosphere for developing students' speaking skills. Moreover, this study worked to draw the teachers' attention towards the importance of changing their perspectives about ELT methodologies and encourage them to implement more "STT", teaching techniques and learning activities . the study found out that most students at this level encounter linguistic hurdles to master the speaking sill such as the sentence structure, and also the usage of the mother tongue in the classroom which does not help the students to overcome their difficulties.

Recommendations

According to the result of this study, the following are some practical suggestions that could be made in order to alleviate the difficulties encountered by 2nd and 3rd year under-graduate students to develop their speaking skills.

1- English language departments should offer solid English Language training (Policy of speak English).

2- Teachers should use new technologies like films, videos, skype, power point etc..

that may help students to learn English language. To improve the quality of teaching and learning English speaking skills, an adequate attention should be paid to the aspect of classroom facilities. Teachers should be aware of the fast development of technology and discover the latest application of CALL in their teaching contexts.

3- For speaking and phonetics classes, teachers should provide more exercises related to pronunciation of words with difficult sounds or similar sounds. Phonetic chart records and compact discs on English pronunciation may help students to adsorb distract sounds, intonation and stress so they can practice well.

4- Language should be practiced in real life situations by trying to speak English with classmates, friends and the family if possible. Practicing 2nd language in real life

situations could improve student's language skills in general and pronunciation in particular.

BIO-PROFILE

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