"Techniques for Effective Oral Skills in English as a Foreign Language Classes"

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Abstract:

English oral skill is one of the most important and essential skills that is practiced to communicate orally, it means the practice or study of spoken English in EFL classes. Speaking is not merely uttering words through the mouth. The study's goal is to emphasize the importance of being familiar with English oral skills, specifically to enable students at Gezira University's Faculty of Education to use the English language creatively and effectively through effective techniques to improve oral skills in EFL classes. To enable students to use the language confidently, provide ample time for students to practice oral skills both inside and outside of the classroom, and encourage students to practice oral skills. Our study will find out the problems that encounter students in speaking, develop students' abilities to actively take part in discussions and express personal thoughts in English, as well as understand the views and experiences of others. The descriptive-analytical method of research will be adopted to carry out this study. The data for this study will be collected by means of a questionnaire of 20 items administered to 30 teachers, and a questionnaire of 10 items will be distributed to 50 students from the Faculty of Education, Gezira University. The data will be analyzed by the SPSS program. We notice that English-speaking barriers are attributed to the lack of effective learning of the English language. Another important point is that understanding English-speaking contexts encourages learners to realize the use of oral conversation in situations and discourses.

Keywords: Speaking skills, Oral presentation in the classroom, ELT. Higher education and institutions.

Introduction

Language is a means of communication. People communicate with others using language spoken and written in order to express ideas, as well as to know others' ideas. Speaking is considered the heart of any foreign language learning. Therefore, the role of the teacher here is to be present in order to support students to be effective communicators as well as, to improve their competence to practice the language successfully. Harmer. (2007:284) states "Speaking is the ability to speak fluently and. presupposes not only knowledge of language features but also the ability. to process information and language".

This study aims at developing EFL oral skills at the university level and attempts to overcome the problems that face students when they speak. Besides, it emphasizes the importance of providing EFL university students with activities and opportunities to raise their awareness of speaking skills. In addition, some effective techniques are suggested to help the teachers teach oral skills.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The ability to speak English is a very complex task considering the nature of what is involved in speaking and not all of the students in an EFL speaking class have the courage to speak. Therefore, many of the students feel anxious in a speaking class, and some are likely to keep silent. Most of students have little opportunity to practice speaking English outside the classroom and so need a lot of practice when in the class. Padmadewi (1998:12) asserts that students attending a speaking class often feel anxious due to pressure from the speaking tasks, which require them to present individually and spontaneously within limited time. Moreover, large classes of students impede using effective oral techniques.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

This study is aimed to

a.   enable students to use the English language creatively and effectively.

b.   find effective techniques to improve oral skills in EFL classes.

c.   give students sufficient time to practice oral skills inside and outside classrooms.

d.   motivate and encourage students to practice oral skills.

e.   find out the problems that encounter students to speak.

f.   develop students' abilities to actively take part in discussions and express personal thoughts in English, as well as understand the views and experiences of others.

1.3 Questions of the Study

This study is intended to answer these questions.

a. Does the teacher use effective oral techniques in EFL class?
b. Have students been given enough time to practice oral skills in the class?
c. To what extent do the teachers motivate students to speak effectively?
d. How far the syllabus design support university students to develop oral skills?
e. What factors contribute to orally active students in EFL classes?
f. What do teachers of English think of the assessment of student's ability to express themselves orally in English?

1.4 Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to students at Gezira University Department of English Language. (2023).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Definition of Speaking Skill

The term "speaking" has been defined differently in many English dictionaries, like Webster's and Oxford's dictionaries. Therefore, Webster's Online Dictionary, (1828) defines the verb "to speak" as "to say words in order to express thoughts, feelings, and opinions to someone" and "to talk to someone". In other words, to speak means to express your point of view, and your own personal thoughts. Whereas, the new Oxford Dictionary of English, (2010: 756) defines speaking as "to know and to be able to use a language" and "to express the thoughts or opinions of anyone else". Speaking is an important skill that enables people to communicate and interact in the language in which to express and share thoughts with other persons.

2.1 The Nature of Speaking / Oral Skill

Speaking is an interactive process of communication, which is the basis of all human relationships within language learning. It is one of the four language skills (listening speaking, reading, and writing,). The skill of speaking constitutes, without doubt, as one of the major concepts; it seems to be the most interesting skill, especially for EFL learners. In addition, people who know a language are denoted as speakers of that language. As Rivers (1981) claims, speaking is used twice as much as reading and writing in our communication. Many experts define speaking in different ways. Brown and Yule (1983) stated that

> "Speaking is to express the needs request, information, service, etc." Another definition of speaking skill is " the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non–verbal symbols in a variety of contexts Chaney, (1998: 13). "Therefore, speaking is not an easy task; its mastery claims a lot of experience and practice". Luoma (2004: 1) argues, "Speaking in a foreign language is very difficult and competence in speaking takes a long time to develop".

2.2 Elements of Speaking Skills

Developing and improving the speaking skill is not an easy activity, one should be aware of some elements, which are very important. Harmer (2001) mentions the elements of speaking which refer to the language features that learners should have knowledge. In addition to the processes of language and information at the same time when an interlocutor interacts with them. (As cited in Kouicem, 2010:27-28). According to some authors, there are four elements of speaking skills

a. Vocabulary.

b. Grammar.

c. Pronunciation.

d. Fluency.

2.3 Language Features

For speaking effectively, there are some features, which are very necessary to both learners and teachers in order to speak fluently. From that language feature, the students could connect other speech by recognizing phonemes, in addition, to understanding the nature of native speakers and their phonological rules. The following features are necessary for effective speaking (Kouicem, 2010: 27-28):

1. Connected speech This ability needs the speaker of English to produce more connected sounds not only separated phonemes. These sounds may be modified, omitted, added or weakened in the connected speech.

2. Expressive devices English native speakers use effectively the phonological rules, which refer to pitch, stress, volume, and speed with the use of non-verbal means. These devices help them to convey their intended meaning. Students, then need to have the ability to employ such devices if they want to be effective communicators.

3. Lexis and grammar When learners produce the same language function, they often use the same lexical structure. The teacher's role then is to provide them with different phrases, which carry different functions so that they can use them in the different stages of communication with others.

4. Negotiation language learners benefit a lot from the use of negotiation language; they often ask for clarification when they are listening to others talk. Therefore, the teachers have to provide them with the necessary expressions they need when they ask for clarification from other speakers. Learners also need to well perform their utterances if they seek to be understood and clear especially when they can see the other interlocutors did not understand them.

2.5 The Importance of Speaking Skills

The major reason for learning the English language is to be able to speak. Thornbury (2005:1) claims, "Speaking as a part of daily life that we take it for granted." Therefore, speaking is one of the main aspects of communication". Speaking skill is the most important and essential skill in EFL classes the other skills according to Richards (2008), "Many EFL students consider the mastery of the speaking skill a priority". Besides, they evaluate their success according to their spoken language proficiency. Thus, the students in EFL classes expect to do the speaking skill more than do the other skills, because speaking is language in use. Speaking skill is considered the key element in language learning, as Renandy and Richards (2002: 201) state that "a large percentage of the world's language learners study English in order develop proficiency in speaking." Therefore, it is considered a helpful skill to build up other language skills. Hedge (2000: 261) declares

"For many students, learning to speak competently in English is a priority, they may need this skill for a variety of reasons, for example, to keep up a report in relationships, influence people, and win or lose negotiations. So speaking is a fundamental medium used to convey messages, knowledge, emotions, feelings, ideas directly in an interaction with the other".

2.6 The purpose of teaching speaking

1. To enable communication
2. To train students' ability to interact
3. To foster students' talent in the English language and culture
4. To foster students' ability to think in English
5. To accelerate the learning of listening, reading, and writing in English

2.7 Teaching Speaking Skills

Teachers should design some speaking activities and exercises for students to practice and develop their speaking ability. For instance, discussions after each class or selected speaking discussions periodically, a discussion can be prepared for various objectives. Preparing some speaking models and storytelling. Role-play is considered an effective way of getting students to speak. Besides, other speaking activities such as Interviews, information gaps, brainstorming, etc...

University students need to improve their capability of knowing sound patterns and word formation together. They also need to interact positively with other peer students. The students need to develop the skills of producing connected speech. Lindsay (2006: 60) states:

a. The ability to interact

b. Talking around gaps in their knowledge

c. Speaking in a range of contexts

d. Balancing accuracy and fluency. Lindsay (2006: 60).

     The learners also need to practice speaking in a wide range of contexts-with people; they know, strangers, at work or school, in a shop or restaurant, and so on.

2.8 The Aspects of Speaking Skill

     According to some scholars, there are two factors, which could determine the success of English language learners according to BBC British Council, are accuracy and fluency.

2.8.1 Accuracy

     (Richards et.al, 1992: 204) states that "In second and foreign language teaching, accuracy refers to the "ability to produce grammatically correct sentences". However, Harmer (2001: 104) points out that accuracy involves the correct use of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation, which have been considered by Thornburg (2000:3) as three criteria that most teachers have reliance on concerning the assessment of "learner's command of the linguistic systems." Therefore, to be accurate in oral production, to be understood, and to gain the interest of their interlocutors; learners should pay attention to the correctness and completeness of the language form; they should be knowledgeable and master the use of:

1. Vocabulary means that learners should study words and know their meanings, and use, and they should be able to distinguish between word classes that are lexical as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, or otherwise function as determiners, particles, and prepositions. Mastering vocabulary helps learners to be able to select and use the appropriate words, utterances, and expressions with the context when speaking.
2. Grammatical structures Rules of words order, tenses. This means that learners should know how elements of a sentence are put and work together such as morphemes, phonemes, words, phrases, clauses…etc.

3. (Florez, 1999: 2) states that Correct Pronunciation is the "Production of sounds, stress patterns, rhythmic structures and intonation of the language".

2.8.2 Fluency

     According to Skhan quoted in Thornberry (2000: 3), fluency is the "capability to produce language in real time without undue pausing or hesitation." In other words, speaking fluently is the faculty of using the language spontaneously and confidently while communicating one has thought ideas or opinions in several contexts. It implies talking without making many stops to think too much, about what one is saying and without worrying too much about errors (accuracy) until it becomes unnatural speech. As pointed out by Richards et al (1992:204) fluency is "the features which give a speech the qualities of being natural and normal, including native-like use of pausing, rhythm, intonation, stress, the rate of speaking, and use of interjections and interruptions." Therefore, teachers should rehearse learners to speak in a coherent manner by paying more attention to the meaning and context than to the form in order to achieve oral fluency. This latter "describes a level of proficiency in communication", which includes:

i. the ability to produce spoken language with ease.

ii. the ability to speak with a good but not necessarily perfect command of intonation, vocabulary, and grammar.

iii. the ability to communicate ideas effectively.

iv. the ability to produce continuous speech without causing comprehension difficulties or a breakdown of communication." (Richards et al, 1992: 204).

2.9 Factors that Cause Speaking Difficulties to EFL Learners

     According to the International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature (IJSELL), Zhang (2009) argues that speaking remains the most difficult skill to master for the majority of English learners, and they are still incompetent in communicating orally in English. According to Ur (1996), there are many factors that cause difficulty in speaking and they are as follows:

1. Inhibition. Students are worried about making mistakes, fearful of criticism, or simply shy.
2. Nothing to say. Students have no motive to express themselves.

3. Low or uneven participation. Only one participant can talk at a time because of large classes and the tendency of some learners to dominate, while others speak very little or not at all.

4. Mother-tongue use. Learners who share the same mother tongue tend to use it because it is easier and because learners feel less exposed if they are speaking their mother tongue.

2.10 Methods of Teaching Speaking

Speaking English is the main goal of communicative language teaching and learning. Methods of teaching speaking can be categorized into two distinct categories. The traditional way of teaching mainly focuses on transferring knowledge from the teacher to the students. In classroom activities, teachers talk and learners only listen (Christopher 1999: Ruben 1999). On the contrary, the current method of teaching speaking focuses on communication. This method of teaching gives due emphasis to developing students' motivation for learning to speak. Scholars and researchers have analyzed the idea of this method and found that it is good for students to speak actively.

3. Methodology

3.1 Sample of the Study

The study was conducted at the University of Gezira, Sudan. Eighty subjects participated in this study. Thirty of them are English teachers from Gezira University and fifty are students at the faculty of education, at Gezira University.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

Data collection was conducted in the university setting (advanced level), and on a regular university day during the eighth semester of 2019. Some specialists in education participated in this study when they distributed the questionnaire to the students. Data analysis was conducted in accordance with the research questions. Frequency, descriptive analysis questionnaire, and mean scores were used to provide a particular of the population under study. The method adopted in this study is the descriptive analytical method of research.

An analytical method of research is adopted to analyze the data collected (30) teachers who were chosen randomly from the English language Departments, and faculty of education from Gezira University in Sudan. A questionnaire was designed as a data-gathering device for the data required to carry out the study. The data collected were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences).

3.3 Procedures

The questionnaire is designed and used as a tool to collect data for investigating Techniques for Effective Oral Skills in English as a Foreign Language Classes, at the University level this questionnaire is distributed to the students at Gezira University, Faculty of Education.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

1.1 Data Analysis and Discussion
Statement (1): Speaking skills help learners be good users of the English language in comparison to the other skills.

Table(4.1)

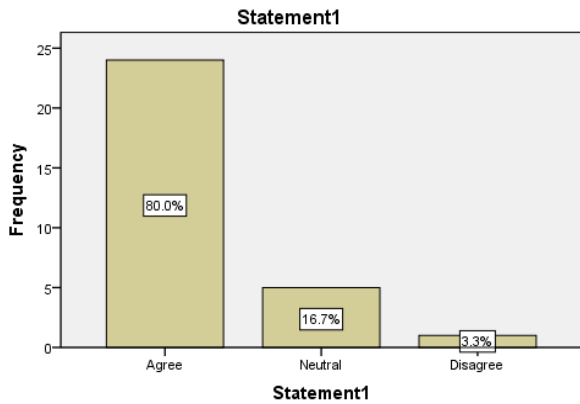| Options	Frequency	Percent
Agree	24	80.0
Neutral	5	16.7
Disagree	1	3.3
Total	30	100.0

Table (4.1) shows that speaking skills help learners to be good users of the English language in comparison to the other skills. According to the statistical analysis of the statement, most respondents (80%) agreed that Speaking skills help learners be good users of the English language in comparison to the other skills. Only (16.7%) were neutral and (3.3%) disagreed with the statement. Therefore, this statement is accepted.

Statement (2): EFL learners are influenced by their mother tongue, which affects speaking in the learning process.

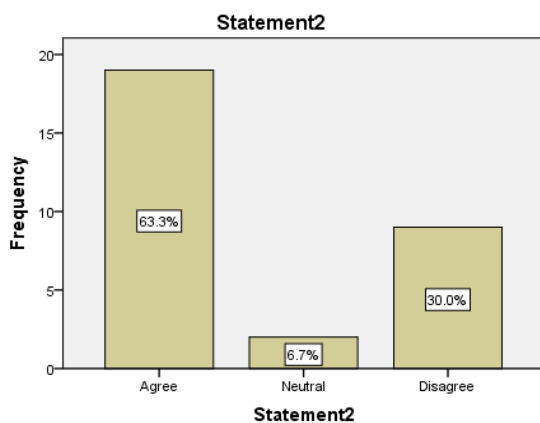| Options	Frequency	Percent
Agree	19	63.3
Neutral	2	6.7
Disagree	9	30.0
Total	30	100.0

Table and diagram (4.2) show that EFL learners are influenced by their mother tongue, which affects speaking in a learning process most respondents (63.3%) agreed, (6.7%) were neutral, and (30%) disagreed that, EFL learners are influenced by their mother tongue, which affects speaking in a learning process. Therefore, this statement is accepted.

Statement (3): Understanding English-speaking contexts encourages learners to realise the use of oral conversation in situations and discourses.

Table(4.3)

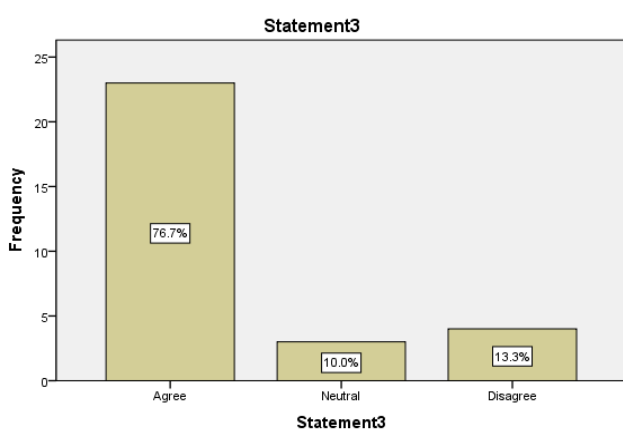| Options	Frequency	Percent
Agree	23	76.7
Neutral	3	10.0
Disagree	4	13.3
Total	30	100.0

Table and diagram (4.3) show that understanding English-speaking contexts encourages learners to realize the use of oral conversation in situations and discourses most respondents (76.7%) agreed, (10%) were neutral, and (13.3%) disagreed that, understanding English-speaking contexts encourage learners to realize the use of oral conversation in situations and discourses. Therefore, this statement is accepted.

5. 1 Conclusion, Findings, and 3 Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

This study investigated techniques for effective oral skills in EFL classes. It was hypothesized that oral skills are a facilitating factor for EFL learners to improve their speaking skills.

It is useful for people in facing their lives. Speaking is the process of giving and receiving messages or information. People use speaking to give some information to others. Speaking is also a tool of human communication to share every moment or to share important information with others.

5.2 Findings

1. Teachers use English as a medium of instruction for teaching English in classes.
2. English speaking barriers attributed to the lack of effective learning of the English Language.
3. Speaking skills help learners be good users of the English language in comparison to the other skills.
4. Understanding English-speaking contexts encourages learners to realize the use of oral conversation in situations and discourses.
5. EFL learners are influenced by their mother tongue, which affects speaking in the learning process.
6. Teachers promote participatory techniques of teaching in English speaking skills.

5.3 Recommendations

1. Teachers should use songs to enhance students' speaking skills.
2. Teachers should use teaching aids to motivate learners to the lesson.
3. Teachers should encourage students to be involved in speaking outside the classroom.
4. Teachers should use different effective techniques to enhance speaking skills.
5. Teachers should use ICT to motivate students during speaking skill.
6. Teachers should provide their students with opportunities for interacting through technical aids.

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