Difficulties and Challenges in Teaching and Learning Speaking   at Advanced Level.

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Abstract

This paper intends to find the difficulties and challenges that face the students in English speaking in the classroom and the solutions. It explores the problems faced by the speaking teachers when they try to select the adequate methods for each lesson to help their students in developing their speaking skills.   The instrument of investigation includes a questionnaire. This technique is employed to get the required data for this study. The questionnaire was distributed to teachers who are/were teaching speaking at faculties of education and Arts in Peace University. The subjects of the study are twenty English teachers. The analysis of the questionnaire has revealed a difference between what the teachers think and what they actually do inside the classroom when they teach the speaking skill. The results show that the methods used in teaching speaking skill are not all adequate, they need to be modified or changed to be apt to the students' needs. On the basis of the findings, the researcher has suggested some activities and presented some further recommendations that can be used to improve the teaching of speaking skill in all the faculties of education in Sudanese universities.

Keywords: Speaking, teaching speaking, learning speaking, speaking activities, problems, solutions.

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المستخلص

تسعى هذه الورقة للوقوف على الصعاب والتحديات التي تواجه الطلاب في تحدث اللغة الانجليزية والحلول الناجعة. وقد عرضت الدراسة المشكلات التي يواجهها محاضرو المحادثة عند محاولتهم اختيار الطريقة أو الطرائق الملائمة لكل درس وذلك لمساعدة طلابهم في تطوير مهاراتهم في المحادثة. وسيلة البحث هي الإستبانة، وقد أُستخدمت هذه الوسيلة للحصول على المعلومات اللازمة لهذه الدراسة. وقد تم توزيع الإستبانة على عدد من المحاضرين. وأجريت الدراسة على عشرين منهم. بيَّن تحليل الإستبانة أن هنالك اختلافا بين ما يعتقده المحاضرون وبين ما يطبقونه داخل غرفة الدراسة. اتضح من النتائج بأن الطرق المستخدمة في تدريس هذه المهارة ليست جميعها ملائمة،حيث إنها تحتاج إلى إعادة تنسيق كي تلائم الطلاب. وبناءً على ما توصلت إليه الدراسة ، اقترح الباحث القيام ببعض النشاطات الصفية، ووضع مقترحات حول بعض الوسائل المستعملة في تدريس مهارة المحادثة. كما وضعت ايضاً بعض المقترحات التي يمكن استخدامها لتطوير تدريس هذه المهارة في كليات التربية بالجامعات السودانية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المحادثة ،تدريس المحادثة، تعلم المحادثة ، نشاطات المصاحبة لتعلم المحادثة، الصعاب والحلول.

Introduction

Speaking is one of the most important and essential skills that must be practiced to communicate orally. Students who have the ability in speaking will be better in sending and receiving information or message to another. Speaking is the process of building and sharing meaning through the usage of verbal and non verbal symbol in various contexts.

The mastery of speaking skill is a priority for many foreign language students. Students often evaluate their success in English language learning on the basis how well their improvement of speaking the English language. In genuine communication, to communicate is to achieve a particular end, expressing a desire to do something, solve a particular problem; or maintaining social relationships, etc. Therefore, speaking as a skill must play significant role for the students who studied English. It is one of the language skills that is very essential to support further oral communication, but it is the most difficult skill to develop.

According to Kayi(2006) speaking refers to the gap between linguistic expertise and teaching methodology. Linguistic expertise concerns with language structure and language content. Teaching speaking is not like teaching listening, reading, or writing. It needs habit formation because it is a real communication and it is a productive skill. So, it needs practicing as often as possible.

Traditional classroom speaking practice often takes the forms of drills in which one student asks a question and another gives an answer. The purpose of asking and answering the question is to demonstrate the ability to ask and answer the question.

The Objectives of the Study:

1- To clarify what teaching speaking is and the difficulties faced by teachers and students of English as a foreign language.

2- To find suitable solutions to those difficulties.

Justifications of the study (significances)

The significance of this study lies in finding the real difficulties and challenges that face the students in their classroom in speaking English

The Statement of the Problem:

When he was teaching English to the students of the faculties of education and Arts, the researcher came out with the problem that students of these two faculties do not speak English as a Second Language; neither in the faculties nor in their everyday life.

The Hypotheses of the Study:

Most of students in faculties of education and Arts faced by many difficulties and challenges which create problems in speaking English as a second language, beside a suggested solutions to those problems.

The Questions of the Study:

1- What are the difficulties and challenges which create the hurdles in speaking English as a second language?

2- What are the solutions?

Delimitations of the Study:

The study is limited in faculties of education and Arts in Peace University. Academic year 2016-2017

Methodology:

This paper is undertaken for the purpose of examining the difficulties and   challenges that face the students in speaking English language.

The study includes the quantitative data which were collected through questionnaire focused on EFL teachers.

The sample:

The sample were twenty teachers from the faculties of education and Arts were used as a sample of the study.

Instrument:

The instrument employed in this study was a questionnaire which has been used to support the data.

The literature Review:

The Importance of the Study:

Speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that   involves producing, receiving   and processing information. Its form and meaning depending on the context in which it occurs. Nunan (1999:216) states that speaking requires that learners not only know how to produce specific   points of language such as grammar, pronunciation, or vocabulary("linguistic competence"), but also they understand when, why , and in what ways to produce language("sociolinguistic competence").

 Widdowson, (1978:2) states that the learning of language involves acquiring the ability to compose correct sentences and it involves an understanding of which sentences are appropriate for a particular context.

People do speaking in order to communicate with each other. Better communication means better understanding of others and   ourselves. It is   a continuous   process   of expression, interpretation, and negotiation. It   requires   a sender, a receiver and a medium. It can be said that both hearers and speakers do interactions by giving responds   to what they have   heard and listened to. Generally, people who   encounter   others   through   this   oral communication have a certain goal that they want to achieve. The goal that underlies people to do the communication.

What is Teaching Speaking?

Chaney, (1998:13) defines speaking as " the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, in a variety of contexts". Speaking is a crucial part of second language learning and teaching. Despite of its importance, for many years, teaching speaking has been   undervalued and English language   teachers have continued to teach speaking just as a repetition of drills and   memorization of   dialogues. However, today's world requires that the goal of teaching speaking should improve students' communicative skills, because, only in that way, students can express themselves.

What is meant by "teaching speaking" is to teach EFL learners to:

1- produce the English speech sounds and sounds patterns.

2- use language as a means of expressing values and judgments.

3-use word and sentence stress, intonation patterns and the rhythm of the second language.

4- use the language quickly and confidently with few unnatural pause.

5- select appropriate words and sentences according to the proper social setting, audience, situation and subject matter.

6- organize their thoughts in meaningful and logical sequence.

How to Teach Speaking:

Nowadays, many linguists and EFL teachers agree that students learn to speak in the foreign language by "interacting". In brief, EFL teachers should create a classroom environment where students have real-life communication, authentic activities, and meaningful tasks that promote oral language. This can occur when students collaborate in groups to achieve a goal or to complete a task.

Harmer,(1998:52) mentions four things that students need to do with 'new' language: be exposed to it, understand its meaning, understand its form(how it is constructed) and practice it. English in Sudan is still taught as foreign language, that's why EFL students need lots of exposures to know the target language, target culture and target people who speak the foreign language.

In the classroom, a major part of the teacher's job is to expose students to language so that they can use it later. Foreign language learners need opportunities to develop the skills especially speaking skill. Learning language can take place only through natural process, which operates when a person involved in using the language for communication. Therefore, communicative ability is an important part of the total learning process.

What Makes Speaking Difficult?

What makes speaking English difficult is that it is a foreign language and its use is very seldom. Using English in a written form is easy in our life because it doesn't need to be read aloud, so, the student doesn't need to be embarrassed.

Problems Found in the Speaking Class

1- Students keep using their own language

A problem which may face a teacher is that students use their native language (Arabic) rather than English to perform classroom tasks. This might happen because they want to communicate something important, and so they use the language in the best way they know. This problem is also connected with students who do not want to talk in a foreign language but they keep using their own language. In this case, the teacher can create an English environment and keep reminding them always to use English.

2- Students do not want to talk

One of the problems is that students feel really shy about talking in front of other students, they suffer from fear of making mistakes. Another reason for students' silence may simply be that the classroom activities are boring or pitched at the wrong level. Speaking in front of other people needs courage, motivation from inside, and outside such as joyful atmosphere in the conversation and interesting topic. Kanan(2009 :5)

3- It is difficult to handle students in a large classroom

If the classroom is crowded, it is clearly that students hardly got a chance to practice the language, and difficult for them to ask and receive individual attention they need. It is

hard for the teacher to make contact with students to keep good discipline, also to organize dynamic and creative teaching and learning sessions.(Ibid).

4- Students have low motivation to learn English

Students do not learn how to speak English in the classroom, they may soon get de-motivated and lose interest in learning. Nevertheless, if the right activities are taught in the correct way, speaking classroom can be a lot of fun, raise the students' motivation and make the classroom a dynamic place to study English. Their motivation is more likely to increase if the students can see how their process of classroom learning achieves the objective, and helps them to accomplish the success. (Littlewood, 1981 : 93) states that, "the development of communicative skills can only take place if learners have motivation and opportunity to express their own identity and to relate with the people around them". One key to increase motivation is to use activities matched to the personalities.

How to encourage Students to Speak English

It is very important for the teacher to encourage students to speak in classroom. If s/he doesn't encourage them to use the language, students' speaking ability will never improve. Students usually do not use the target language beyond the classroom, if they use it and make any mistake, the teacher can help to correct their mistakes. The teacher can do the followings to help his/her students to speak:

a- Encourage students' interaction:

Most students feel shy to speak English because they have not acquired it, and they are not used to take part in classroom discussion. Students do not even interact with other students. Therefore, it is important to create a comfortable

atmosphere in the classroom where students are not afraid to speak and enjoy communicating with teacher and peers without any pressure.(ibid).

b- Make speaking activities communicative

Speaking activities need to be very interesting to encourage meaningful interaction between students. If the speaking activities are not interesting enough and do not provide opportunities for students to speak then there is no use of giving speaking activity. Therefore, the teacher should give such activities so that students can share their thoughts , express their feelings , find out the real information , discuss and argue.(ibid).

c- Plan speaking activities carefully:

At the beginning of stage, activities should be easy but sufficient for students to use the target language. Students might not be fluent and accurate in speaking but they should not remain quiet. When they get use to communicate then the teacher can introduce more difficult activities such as role-play, discussions, debate and problem-solving tasks.(ibid).

Choosing an Approach

Designing a speaking syllabus depends on several factors, the most obvious being the age and the level of the students, the learning context and the aim of the teaching. Firstly, it must be define how much emphasis can be given to speaking within a particular course and whether speaking is to be taught separately or integrated with the teaching of other skills and areas of the language. Secondly, it is essential to choose an approach which defines the teaching procedure. The selection between a task-based approach, a genre-based one or the combination of the both types is the most crucial step in

designing the course as it influences all the elements of the learning process in progress. Nevertheless, (Thoronbury 2007: 121) says, a modern multi- layered syllabus should specify the target aspects of the speaking skill to be taught, as well as the grammar and vocabulary components.

A genre-based approach:

Focuses on the notion of the communicative situation which centres around a particular spoken genres. Needless to say, the variety of types of communicative situations is virtually unlimited. As a sequence, the teacher faces the necessity of deciding which situations should be included in the language course s/he coordinates. This selection, whoever well- thought-out it may be, always connected with eliminating or ignoring a number of significant situations and contrasting on those which seem the most relevant to the particular learning context. The next step is defining the most important parameters of the selected situations, such as the topics, goals, discourse genres.

A task-based approach:

In contrast, it stems from the general idea that, (ibid : 119) mentions, " a language is best learning through using it, rather than learned and then used". Consequently, it is believe that accuracy results from fluency, in other words, the needs to communicate effectively leads to the refinement of learning and language. A task-based syllabus, then takes the form of a sequence of integrated tasks which involve speaking, and which reflect the situations that students are likely to meet in real circumstances.

Both approaches have their advantages and drawbacks. The task based approach has been criticized for giving priority to the process of using language rather than focusing on the

language that students   actually produce. The genre-based approach has been considered inadequate as it relies too heavily on imitating models, and this is not necessarily the way in which people communicate in real life. It seems, however, that more advanced students may benefit more from a genre-based approach. It must be stressed that all oral discourse stems from a communicative intention , that is the speaker has a defined aim which s/he wants to achieve in a particular communicative situation.

In the light of the above assumptions, it may be claimed that , ongoing language performance is an extremely significant element in the process of developing speaking skills. On the other hand, it seems obvious that in order to learn to speak or develop this ability, students have to speak. As Shehan (1998: 16-19) claims, " a comprehension-based approach is not sufficient on its own, and relying on listening tasks as the only source of language input does not guarantee success in language learning.(ibid) underlines, the importance of output, that is the actual practice of interactive speaking. And identifies the roles   it may play in interlangauge development."

Principles for Designing Speaking Techniques

Below are some principles for designing speaking techniques according to Nunan,(2003 :275):

1- Encourage the development of speaking strategies.

The concept of strategic competence is one that few beginning language students are aware of, and have a chance to practice, such strategies as : asking for clarification, asking someone to repeat something, using fillers in order to gain time to process, getting someone attention, and etc.

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2- Give students opportunities to initiate oral communication.

Students must be given opportunities to initiate language since part of oral communication competence is the ability to initiate conversations, to nominate topics, to ask questions, to control conversations, and to change the subject.

3- Use techniques that cover the spectrum of learner's needs, from language- based focus on accuracy to message-based focus on interaction, meaning and fluency.

4- Provide appropriate feedback and correction.

It is important for teachers of English as a foreign language to take advantage of their knowledge of English to inject the kinds of corrective feedback that are appropriate for the moment because the students are totally dependent on the teacher for useful linguistic feedback. This is because "outside" the classroom will not give the students feedback since English is not spoken in the community.

5 -Capitalize on the natural link between speaking and listening.

Many interactive techniques that involve speaking will also of course include listening. The teachers must integrate these two skills since they can reinforce each other. Skills in producing language are often initiated through comprehension.

Some Activities to Promote Speaking:

Traditional classroom speaking practice often takes the form of drills in which one student asks a question and the other gives an answer. The purpose of asking and answering the question is to demonstrate the ability to ask and answer the question.

In contrast, the purpose of real communication is to accomplish   a task, such as conveying a telephone message, obtaining information, or expressing an opinion. In real communication, students must manage uncertainty about what other students will say. Authentic communication involves an information gap ; each person has information that the other doesn't have. In addition, to achieve their purpose, students may have to clarify their meaning or ask for confirmation of their own understanding.

To create classroom speaking activities that will develop communicative competence, teachers need to incorporate a purpose and an information gap and allow for multiple forms of expression.

Here are some activities that can be done in the speaking class to promote speaking according to Kayi,(2006:111):

1- Role-play:

One way of getting students to speak is role-play. Students pretend they are in various social contexts and have a variety of social roles. In role-play activities, the teacher gives information to the students such as who they are and what they feel. Thus, the teacher can tell the student that " You are David, you go to the doctor and tell him what happened last night, and….."(Harmer, 1984:52).

2- Simulations:

Simulations are very similar to role-plays but what makes simulations different from role-plays is that they are more elaborate. In simulations, students can bring items to the class to create a realistic environment. For instance, if a student is acting as a singer, he brings a microphone to sing and so on. Role-plays and simulations have many advantages.

First, since they are entertaining, they motivate the students. Second, as (ibid) suggests," they increase the self-confidence of hesitant students, because in role-play and simulation activities, they will have a different role and do not have to speak for themselves, which means they do not have to take the same responsibility".

3- Discussions:

For efficient group discussions, it is always better not to form large groups, because quiet students may avoid contributing in large groups. The group members either assigned by the teacher or the students may determine it by themselves, but groups should be rearranged in every discussion activity, so that students can work with various people and learn to be open to different ideas. Lastly, in group discussions, whatever the aim is, the students should always be encouraged to ask questions, paraphrase ideas, express, support, check for clarification, and so on. Kayi,(2006:111).

4- Story Completion:

It is a very enjoyable, whole-class, free speaking activity for which students sit in a circle. For this activity, the teacher starts to tell a story, but after a few sentences s/he stops narrating. Then, each student starts to narrate from the point where the previous one stopped. Each student is supposed to add from five to ten sentences. Students can add new characters, events, descriptions and so on.(ibid).

5- Interviews:

Students can conduct interviews on selected topics with various people. It is a good idea that the teacher provides a rubric to students so that they know what type of questions they can ask or what path to follow, but students should

prepare their own interview questions. Conducting interviews with people gives students a chance to practice their speaking ability not only in class but also outside and helps them become socialized. After interviews, each student can present his or her study to the class. Moreover, students can interview each other and introduce his or her partner to the class.(ibid)

6- Information Gap:

In this activity, students are supposed to be working in pairs. One student will have the information that other partner doesn't have and the partners will share information. Information gap activities serve many purposes such as solving problem or collecting information. These activities are effective because everybody has the opportunity to talk extensively in the target language.(ibid).

7- Reporting:

Before coming to class, students are asked to read a newspaper or magazine and in class, they report to their friends what they find as the most interesting news. Students can also talk about whether they have experienced anything worth telling their friends in their daily lives before class.(ibid).

8- Find the differences:

For this activity, students can work in pairs and each couple is given two different pictures, such as a picture of boys playing football and other picture of girls playing tennis. Students in pairs discuss the similarities or/and differences in the pictures.(ibid).

9- Picture Narrating

This activity is based on several sequential pictures. Students are asked to tell the story taking place in the sequential pictures by paying attention to the criteria provided by the teacher as a rubric. Rubrics can include the vocabulary or structures they need to use while narrating.(ibid).

10- Storytelling

Students can briefly summarize a story they heard from somebody beforehand. Or they may create their own stories to tell their classmates. Story telling fosters creative thinking. It also helps students express ideas in the format of beginning, development, and ending, including the characters and setting a story has to have. Students also can tell jokes. For instance, at the very beginning of each class session, the teacher may call a few students to tell short jokes as an opening. In this case, not only will the teacher address students' speaking ability, but also get the attention of the class.

However, the teacher should state at the very beginning of the activity that students are not allowed to prepare yes-no questions, because by saying yes or no, students get little practice in spoken language production. Rather, students ask open-ended questions to each other so that they reply in complete sentences.(ibid).

Speaking Activities at Advanced level:

According to Thornbury(2007:40) says," the process of developing speaking skills consists of three stages:

- Awareness – students are made aware of features the target language knowledge,

- Appropriation- these features are integrated into their existing knowledge-base,

Autonomy- students develop the capacity to mobilize these features under real-time conditions without assistance.

Data Analysis:

Data analysis is based on the data gathered through the teachers' questionnaire. It has been found that most of the teachers have positive attitudes towards learning strategies and activities for speaking skill.

The table below shows the classified responses to the questionnaire:

Q.No	Agree %	Strongly agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Not sure%	Percentage
1	75	5	5	------	15	100%
2	5	10	10	------	75	100%
3	50	5	------	------	45	100%
4	55	15	15	5	10	100%
5	50	25	15	5	5	100%
6	71	5	7	9	8	100%
7	58	20	18	------	4	100%
8	45	10	5	-------	40	100%
9	25	40	10	------	25	100%
10	45	35	5	------	15	100%

Results:

The paper produced several important results classified as follows: the weakness of English language department majors has been attributed to various factors: lack of pertinent information on the part of school graduates when they join the university, lack of the target language environment, and the students' lack of motivation , lack of knowledge on the part of incoming English majors could be another reason for this phenomenon.

Conclusions:

Finally, it is essential that foreign language teachers pay great attention to teaching speaking by providing students with adequate exposure with the language and with adequate motivation to communicate through it. Rather than leading students to pure memorization, providing a rich environment where meaningful communication takes place is desired. With this purpose, the teacher should be aware of the problems that s/he may face in conducting the English speaking class; starting from the problem faced by the students and the teachers as well as the problem of the language itself that is not spoken in the society. Therefore, this article proposes some things that should be taken in   a consideration and guidelines for teachers before they come into the class. For instance; they should think of what kind of speaking class that they want to have, some activities to encourage their students to speak, some principles that they must consider in designing speaking techniques, and some suggestions that they should do in teaching speaking. The last but not the least, various speaking activities such as those listed above can contribute a great deal to students in developing basic interactive skills necessary for life. Hopefully, these activities make students more active to speak in the target language in the learning process.

Recommendations

Below are some recommendations for English language teachers while teaching oral language according to Ryan (2001:54)

1- Provide maximum opportunity to students to speak the target language by providing a rich environment that contains collaborative work, authentic materials, tasks and shared knowledge.

2- Don't correct students' pronunciation mistakes very often while they are speaking. Correction should not distract student from his/her speech.

3- Involve speaking activities not only in the class but also out of the class; contact parents and other people who can help.

4- Try to involve each student in every speaking activity; for this purpose, practice different ways of student participation.

5- Circulate around classroom to ensure that students are on the right track and see whether they need your help while they work in group or pairs.

6- Provide the vocabulary beforehand that students need in speaking activities.

7- Provide written feedback like "Your presentation was really great. It was a good job. I really appreciate your efforts in preparing the materials and efficient use of your voice…..".

8- Reduce teacher talking time(TTT) in class and increase students talking time (STT). Step back and observe students.

9- Diagnose problems faced by students who have difficulty in expressing themselves in the target language and provide more opportunities to practice the spoken language.

10- Ask eliciting questions such as "what do you mean? How did you reach that conclusion?" and so on,   in order to prompt students to speak more.

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Appendix

Questionnaire

Dear respondent:

This questionnaire is submitted to collect data that will help to find out a solution to the difficulties and challenges that face the students in speaking English. You are kindly requested   to answer the items   of this questionnaire accurately. The   information   obtained   will be kept confidential and used only for the academic purpose.

Tick where appropriate:

1 – Shying and fear of committing errors lessen the students' participation in speaking:

a -agree b-strongly agree c- disagree d-strongly disagree e- not sure

2 – Limited stocks of vocabulary obstruct speaking:

a-agree b-strongly agree c-disagree d- strongly disagree e- not sure

3 – When teachers carry out speaking activity they should not talk a lot:

a- agree b- strongly agree c-disagree d-strongly disagree e- not sure

4 – The use of listening materials such as CDs; and tape cassettes give a clue to how language is naturally spoken:

a- agree b-strongly agree c- disagree d- strongly disagree   e- not sure

5- The amount of meaningful practice will help students to develop speaking skills:

a-agree b-strongly agree   c- disagree   d-strongly disagree
e- not sure

6- Materials with close interest and concern to the class in helpful:

a-agree b- strongly agree   c- disagree d- strongly disagree
e- not sure

7- Choosing the right and creating appropriate materials help in speaking:

a-agree b- strongly agree c- disagree   d- strongly disagree
e- not sure

8- Disability of mastering the English sounds is a real problem:

a-agree b- strongly agree c- disagree d- strongly disagree
e- not sure

9- The development of reading habit contributes directly to speaking:

a-agree b- strongly agree c- disagree d- strongly disagree
e- not sure

10- Sufficient amount of practice helps students to speak language:

a – agree b- strongly agree   c- disagree d- strongly disagree
e- not sure