

DIFFICULTIES FACING COLLEGE STUDENTS IN SPEAKING ENGLISH 'CONVERSATION'

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ABSTRACT

This study entitles "Difficulties Facing College Students in Speaking English 'Conversation'. The study analyzed the causes that make the students difficult to communicate in English and suggest some solutions that can overcome the difficulties. Descriptive nature of this present paper highlights the difficulties faced by college student in speaking English – particularly in conversation. Result revealed that students use English more frequent only inside the class and less frequent outside the class. Whereas, outside the class in order to get familiar with spoken English. Next, the Environment was the leading cause for the problems in learning English. Another major finding was that rural students perceived more problems than urban students. Lack of reading habit and listening tends to challenge several problems in learning English. Recommendations in the light of findings are also discussed in this article.

KEYWORDS: *Spoken English, Communication, Conversation*

Article History

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INTRODUCTION

Language is the most significant part in communication. It is very challenging to consider of a society without language. It sharpens people's thoughts, guides and controls their entire activity. It is a carrier of civilization and culture (Bolinger, 1968). In the case of the mother tongue, the child learns it easily, due to the favorable environment and by the great amount of exposure to the language. But, learning a second language requires conscious efforts to learn it and the exposure to the second language acquisition (James, 1996). There are so many factors affect the process of learning a second language, including attitude, self-confidence, motivation, duration of exposure to the language, classroom conditions, environment, family background, competent of student and availability of competent teachers (Verghese, 2009).

Second language learners find it difficult to express themselves in spoken language in the target language. Each student has his own problems. One of the greatest widespread problems among learners of foreign languages is their considerably lower speaking performance when compared to their passive knowledge. Those Learners are not able to express their thoughts and opinions satisfactorily, generally use a more simplified language which does not match their overall acquired level, often make mistakes and slips speak slowly and less fluently, making frequent pauses and thinking of suitable or correct words and are usually very shy and hesitant when it comes to speaking. They try to avoid such situations if possible and do not cooperate with the teacher or with their peers, respond briefly, often using only one word answers, e.g. "Yes" or "No" and sometimes have nothing to say at all. For such learners, the poor speaking performance is a

big handicap, as it makes their ability to use the language for its most important purpose - the exchange of information becomes limited. This leads to a frustration and anxiety; seldom such people lose all love for the language and get discouraged from further studies.

Statement of the Problem

The researcher noticed that most of the college students at Jazan University avoid to express themselves through speaking, particularly conversation for several reasons. Therefore, the researcher intends to carry out this study to investigate the reasons behind this problem through the analysis and investigation of the prepared questionnaire in order to give logical solutions, suggestions and recommendations.

Significance of the Study

Language is a tool for communication. People communicate with others, to express their ideas, and to know others' ideas as well. Communication takes place, where there is speech. Without speech, people cannot communicate with one another. The importance of speaking skills hence is paramount importance for the learners of any language. Without speech, a language is reduced to a mere script.

Most college students will feel some level of foreign language anxiety, especially when starting out. But the good news is that after a few conversations, the idea of trying to be perfect often goes away. Even if they take some time to find their words, they eventually understand that there's no need for any anxiety. Speaking in a different language is a wonderful experience and it's likely what they are aiming for. The sense of accomplishment after completing a conversation in a different language is greater than they can imagine.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To recognize the problems of speaking English for college students and suggest logical solutions.
- To enable college students master the appropriate techniques to communicate successfully.
- To help college students to use effective strategies to overcome the difficulty of speaking

Hypotheses of the Study

- 1. College students face difficulty in speaking English, particularly "conversation", which is a result from the lack of confidence.
- 2. The appropriate use of speaking strategies lead to good communication through spoken language.
- 3. The continuous practice for the speaking skill helps college students overcome the difficulty of speaking in English.

Questions of the Study

- 1. To what extent college students face difficulties when they are asked to express themselves verbally?
- 2. Does the appropriate master for speaking strategies lead college students to improve their speaking skill?
- 3. How can college students deal with the different techniques and strategies of speaking skill to overcome the problem?

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This study should be applied at Jazan University, Faculty of Science and Art 'Department of English' - 2018-2019. The study used a questionnaire as a tool of data collection. The study deals with descriptive analytic method to investigate the students' problem in speaking activities.

Limits of the Study

The study sample is chosen from a group of English language lecturers whom are teaching at Jazan University in different colleges in the academic year 2018-2019.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Speaking Skill

It was noticed that two main approaches are adopted to define speaking, the bottom-up and the top down approach. Explaining the bottom up view, Bygate (1987: 5-6) points out that traditionally the focus in speaking was on motor perceptive skills. Within this context, speaking is defined as the production of auditory signals designed to produce differential verbal responses in a listener. It is considered as combining sounds in a systematic way, according to language specific principles to form meaningful utterances. This approach is adopted by audio-lingualism. Eventually, in terms of teaching speaking, the bottom-up approach suggests that we should start with teaching the smallest units- sounds and move through mastery of words and sentences to discourse (Cornbleet&Carter, 2001: 18).

Speaking is one of English skills used to express ideas and to communicate with other people in the entire world with a variety of reason such as: relationship, business, networking, overseas travelling, etc. Speaking is a skill which means not only to be known or learnt, but also to be practiced. Speaking is not about what should be said only but what people should listen from you to know and to understand each other. It determines how long it is listened, how well it is understood, and applied between two people or among people. To know and understand what speaking is, there are some definitions of Speaking as the following: According to Walter and Woodford (in Cambridge School Dictionary, 2008), 'Speaking is to say something using your voice or to make a speech to a large group of people'.

Components in the Development of Speaking Skill

English language teachers should train students to develop their oral communication. According to Brown (2007), oral communication can be maintained by having three components.

The First Component: is fluency which is the ability to speak spontaneously and eloquently with no pausing and with absence of disturbing hesitation markers. It also refers to some aspects like responding coherently within the turns of the conversation, using linking words and phrases, keeping in mind a comprehensible pronunciation and adequate intonation without too much hesitation (Richards, 2006).

The Second Component: is accuracy. It refers to the mastery of phonology elements, grammar and discourse. It also refers to the linguistic competence that deals with the correction of the utterances to get a correct communication. According to Thornbury (2005), speaking English accurately means doing without or with few errors on not only grammar but vocabulary and pronunciation.

The Third Component: is pronunciation. It is "the production and perception of the significant sounds of a particular language in order to achieve meaning in context of language use. This comprises the production and perception of

segmental sounds of stressed and unstressed syllables and of the speech melody or intonation” (Carter & Nunan, 2004:56). Without a good pronunciation, listeners cannot understand what another person says and this will make the communication process more difficult. Therefore, pronunciation has a central role in both academic and social fields in the way that students can be able to participate and integrate successfully in their community. Generally, fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation are three important and complementary components in the development of students’ speaking skill.

Conditions Affecting Speech

Spontaneous Speech

Speech takes place under two conditions:

Processing Conditions: Speech takes place under the pressure of time. Time constraints have observable effects on spoken interaction. They affect planning, memory and production. The ability to master processing conditions of speech enables speakers to deal fluently with a given topic while being listened to.

Reciprocity Conditions: Refer to the relation between the speaker and the listener in the process of speech. Because the listener is in front of us, we have to take into account the listener and constantly monitor the listener’s reactions to check that the assumptions we are making are shared and that the listener understands what we are saying.

Difficulties to Speak English Fluently

Now, English is an international language. Even technology and working world use English. It is believed that the students want to be the winner in working world competition that is getting tight day by day. One of the conditions that the students must require is having ability to speak English fluently. This skill will be their plus point in facing the working world.

Language Interference of Students and Teachers

Some teachers have a barrier in using English as the only language of instruction. That is, by many teachers choose local language for teaching. Observation shows that classes are held in both Arabic and English so that the areas and the socioeconomic status of the students in some educational institutions appeared to be a major reason for the low proficiency of the students. Many teachers in these educational institutions said that since students in some universities are accustomed to learn English by translating into Arabic language and they did this in any course relate to their studies. In addition to this, they did not find anyone at home to them learn English and they received little exposure to English language outside.

Difficulties in Speaking English

Fear of Mistake

As argued by many theorists, fear of mistake becomes one of the main factors of students’ reluctance to speak in English in the classroom (Tsui in Nunan, 1999; Yi Htwe, 2007; Robby, 2010). With respect to the fear of making mistake issue, Aftat, (2008) adds that this fear is linked to the issue of correction and negative evaluation. In addition, this is also much influenced by the students’ fear of being laughed at by other students or being criticized by the teacher. As a result, students commonly stop participating in the speaking activity (Hieu, 2011). Therefore, it is important for teachers to convince their students that making mistakes is not a wrong or bad thing because students can learn from their mistakes. The primary reason of fear of mistake is that students are afraid of looking foolish in front of other people and they are concerned about how other will see them (Kurtus, 2001). In addition, Hieu (2011) and Zang (2006) cited in He and Chen (2010) explain that students feel afraid of the idea of making mistakes as they are worried that their friends will laugh at

them and receive negative evaluations from their peers, if they make mistake in speaking English.

Shyness

Shyness is an emotional thing that many students suffer from at some time when they are required to speak in English class. This indicates that shyness could be a source of problem in students' learning activities in the classroom especially in the class of speaking. Therefore, paying attention on this aspect is also quite important in order to help the students do their best in their speaking performance in the classroom (Gebhard, 2000). In line with this, Baldwin (2011) further explains that speaking in front of people is one of the more common phobias that students encounter and feeling of shyness makes their mind go blank or that they will forget what to say. This theory is also supported by the result of this research in which most students fail to perform the speaking performance at their best. As they say, their inability to show their ability in speaking is also influenced much by their feeling of shyness. In other words, it can be said that shyness plays an important role in speaking performance done by the students. The cause of shyness, Bowen (2005) and Robby (2010) argue that some shy learners are caused by their nature that they are very quiet. In this case, the students are not very confident and tend to be shy because most of them find it very intimidating when speaking English in front of their friends and teacher.

Anxiety

Anxiety is a feeling of tension, apprehension and nervousness associated with the situation of learning a foreign language (Hurwitz et al. cited in Nascente, 2001). Further Nascente writes that, among other affective variables, anxiety stands out as one of the main blocking factors for effective language learning. In other words, anxiety influences students in learning language. Therefore, paying attention to this factor of learning should also be taken into consideration. The fact that anxiety plays an important role in students' learning is also shared by other researchers like Hurwitz (1991) as cited in Sylvia and Tiono (2004). He believes that anxiety about speaking a certain language can affect students' performance. It can influence the quality of oral language production and make individuals appear less fluent than they really are. This explanation suggests that teachers should make an attempt to create a learning atmosphere which gives students more comfortable situations in their learning activity. The causes of anxiety, Horwitz and Cope (1986, in Zhao Na, 2007) based on the findings of their study, found out three main causes of students' anxiety are i.e communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. The communication apprehension refers to the students' ability to communicate in the target language. Their low ability in this aspect, in many cases, causes anxious feeling among many students.

Lack of Confidence

It is commonly understood that students' lack of confidence usually occurs when students realize that their conversation partners have not understood them or when they do not understand other speakers. In this situation, they would rather keep silent while others do talking showing that the students are lack of confidence to communicate. In response to this, Tsui cited Nunan (1999) says that student who lack of confidence about themselves and their English necessarily suffer from communication apprehension. This shows that building students' confidence is an important part of teacher's focus of attention. This means that the teacher should also learn from both theories and practical experience on how to build the students' confidence. The main cause of students' confidence is their low ability in speaking English. In this case, as they add, many students think that their English is bad and feel that they cannot speak English well. The other cause of students' lack of confidence also deals with the lack of encouragement from the teacher (Brown, 2001).

Lack of Motivation

Motivation is a key to students' learning success Songsiri,(2007). With regard to the issue of motivation in learning, Nun an (1999) stresses that motivation is important to notice in that it can affect students' reluctance to speak in English. In this sense, motivation is a key consideration in determining the preparedness of learners to communicate. Zua (2008) further adds that motivation is an inner energy. She says that no matter what kinds of motivation the learners possess, it will enhance their study interest. It has been proven in many studies that students with a strong motivation to succeed can persist in learning and gain better scores than those who have weaker motivation of success showing that building students' motivation to learn is urgent for every teacher. Gardner in Nun an(1999) elaborates the causes of the students 'lack of motivation e.g. uninspired teaching, boredom, lack of perceived relevance of materials and lack of knowledge about the goals of the instructional program. These four, as he further says, very often become source of students' motivation.

Aspects of Speaking

Eventually, aspects of the speaking skill need to be closely scrutinized and put into consideration. These aspects pose some challenges and identify some guidelines for understanding this skill and hence design instructional activities to prepare learners to communicate effectively in real life situations.

Speaking is Face to Face

Most conversations take place face to face which allows speakers to get immediate feedback, i.e. "Do listeners understand? Are they in agreement? Do they sympathize (Cornbleet & Carter, 2001: 16). Thus, communication through speaking has many assets, such as facial expressions, gestures and even body movements. Speaking also occurs, most of the time, in situations where participants or interlocutors are present. Such factors facilitate communication (El Fayoumy, 1997: 10, Widdowson, 1998 & Burns, 1998).

Speaking is Interactive

Whether we are speaking face-to –face or over the telephone, to one person or a small group, the wheels of conversation usually turn smoothly, with participants offering contributions at appropriate moments, with no undue gaps 35 or everyone talking over each other (Bygate, 1998: 30 and Cornbleet & Carter, 2001: 27)

Turn taking, a main feature in interaction, is an unconscious part of normal conversation. Turn takings are handled and signaled differently across different cultures, thus causing possible communication difficulties in conversation between people of different cultures and languages (McDonough& Mackey, 2000: 84).

Speaking Happens in Real Time

During conversations, responses are unplanned and spontaneous and the speakers think on their feet, producing language which reflects this (Foster, 2000: 368). These time constraints affect the speaker's ability to plan, to organize the message, and to control the language being used. Speakers often start to say something and change their mind midway; which is termed a false start. The speaker's sentences also cannot be as long or as complex as in writing. Similarly, speakers occasionally forget things they intended to say; or they mayeven forget what they have already said, and so they repeat themselves (Miller,2001: 27). This implies that the production of speech in real time imposes pressures, but also allows freedoms in terms of compensating for these difficulties. The use of formulaic expressions, hesitation devices, self-correction, rephrasing and repetition can help speakers become more fluent andcope with real time demands (Bygate,

1987: 21; Foster, 2000 and Hughes, 2002: 76).

METHODOLOGY

This current study entitled “Difficulties Facing College Students in Speaking English ‘Conversation’”. This chapter will be devoted to the methodology that followed by the researcher to investigate the collected data; the researcher has adopted the descriptive method, because it has great value in providing facts on which professional judgment can be based. The researcher identified the hypothesis of the study and selected the data instrument which is represented in a questionnaire; first the data has been collected, second analyzed and discussed.

Population of the Study

The researcher attempts to generalize the results of the study through a group of English lecturers at Jazan University. The population number is [25] lecturers, males and females. All of them are teaching English language at Jazan University in different colleges in the academic year 2019 - 2020.

Sample

The sample of this study is represented by [25] English language lecturers, who teach in different colleges and their experience ranges from (1–20+) years, however, some of them are High Diploma, Ma holders and others have PhD in ELT.

Tools of Data Collection

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of [15] items with five options [agree – disagree – strongly agree - strongly disagree and neither], it is designed to cover three dimensions. The items from 1-5 were designed to investigate the problems that stand behind students' weak performance in speaking namely ‘lack of confidence’. The items from 6-10 were designed to provide the students with appropriate strategies to improve their speaking skill. The final items 11-15 were devoted to deal with different techniques of practicing speaking skill to overcome students' difficulty in speaking. Moreover, the prepared questionnaire requested lecturers to determine their [gender – qualifications – graduating college – experience years – English lectures per a week] to enrich the analytical process.

The Questionnaire Validity

Bachman (1990) reports that, “validity is the most important quality to consider in the development, interpretations and the use of the language test”. Therefore, to ensure the face validity of the questionnaire, certain procedures were followed and the prepared version of the questionnaire presented to specialize people, second the questionnaire modified in regard of wording, the number of items and restatement of certain items. Finally the questionnaire collected, analyzed, scored and tabulated.

The Questionnaire Reliability

Individuals' performance may be affected by different factors in testing conditions such as fatigue, anxiety and carelessness, thus, they may obtain scores, which are inconsistent from one occasion to the next. Reliable questionnaire should have the same scores if it is given in a future time to the same group of subjects.

Procedures

The researcher followed certain procedures to prepare the questionnaire. First, the designed version of the questionnaire was presented to expert people who have long experience in the field of English language teaching and syllabus designing. Second, this questionnaire which consists fifteen items was designed and used according to the syllabus nature and contents. Then, it was distributed among English language lecturers at Jazan University who teach English language at different colleges, and it was constructed through the following steps: The proposed questionnaire was design first.

- The questionnaire is presented to expert people to check face validity.
- The corrections were made according to the recommendations for the final version of the questionnaire.
- The questionnaire consists of five options for each item, so a respondent has to tick the suitable one.
- The questionnaire was distributed among [25] lecturers of English at Jazan University.
- Finally, the questionnaire was collected.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

The practical part comprises of the research, is to examine that the students at Jazan University are aware with the speaking English and their difficulties in practicing it. This research connects to the theoretical part of this thesis, as it brings new insights and further examines the importance and position of speaking in today's society particularly in the university students' community.

Data Analysis

Total number of [25] questionnaires were distributed to the lecturers at different campuses teaching English at Jazan University. The questionnaire consists of 15 items in total, including various measurements about difficulties in speaking English especially conversation, where the subjects must respond by ticking one option from the given options.

The researcher used the statistical package of the social sciences (SPSS) to analyze the questionnaire; a set of statistical tools was used with following measurements to achieve the hypotheses of the study such as "Cornbrash's Alpha, ratios, means, one sample-test, Mann-Whitney u, Kruskal-Wallis H and Chi-square test".

Questionnaire Validity and Reliability

Table 1

Statement	Statement No	Items No	Alpha Value	Conclusion
Reliability	25	15	.84	It has a high degree of reliability, greater than the standard reliability of 60.

The degree of validity is equal to 92. This means that the questionnaire statements are coherent, clear and can be applied in the study community

Gender

Table 2

Gender	Number	Percentage %
Male	22	88 %
Female	3	1 2%

College**Table 3**

College	Number	Percentage %
Education	18	72 %
Arts	5	20 %
Other	2	8 %

Years of Experience**Table 4**

Years	Number	Percentage %
5-1	5	20 %
10-6	3	12 %
15-11	6	24 %
20-16	6	24 %
+20	5	20 %

Academic Qualification**Table 5**

Qualification	Number	Percentage %
High Diploma	1	4 %
MA	14	56 %
PhD	10	40 %

Lectures per Week**Table 6**

Qualification	Number	Percentage %
8-4	5	20 %
12-9	1	4 %
18-12	16	64 %
18+	3	12 %

Questionnaire Reliability

The researcher used 'One sample – test' to recognize the reliability of the questionnaire. It was found that there is a statistical significance because the level.000 of the calculated subject is less than the standard level of.05. This means that the students face difficulties in speaking skill.

Table 7

No	Mean Medium	Mean	Std. D	T	df	Sig.	Conclusion
25	45	27.48	7.21	12.16	24	.000	Students face difficulties

The researcher used 'Mann-Whitney U' to recognize if there are differences among the gender. It was found that there is no statistical significance because the level of calculated morale is greater than the standard level of.05. This means that there are no differences between the genders in their assessment of those difficulties.

Table 8

Gender	No	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Sig.	Conclusion
Male	22	13.52	297.50	.34	No differences
Female	3	9.17	27.50		

The researcher used 'Kruskal-Wallis H' to recognize if there are differences in the academic qualification. It was found that there are no differences because the level of the calculated.50 is higher than the standard level of 05. This means that there are no differences to support for the academic qualification in their assessment of difficulties.

Table 9

Qualification	No.	Mean Rank	Chi-square	df	Sig.	Conclusion
H. Diploma	1	6.50	1.37	2	.50	No differences
MA	14	14.21				
PhD	10	11.95				
Total	25					

The researcher used 'Kruskal-Wallis H' to recognize if there are differences in the years of experience. It was found that there is a statistical significance because the level of the calculated morale is.03 less than the standard moral level.05. This means that there are differences in the category of experience 11-15 years.

Table 10

Qualification	No.	Mean rank	Chi-square	df	Sig.	Conclusion
1-5	5	15.50	11.22	4	.03	There are differences for the experience 11 – 15 years
6-10	3	5.50				
11-15	6	18.75				
16-20	6	14.17				
< 20	5	6.70				
Total	25					

The researcher used 'Kruskal-Wallis H' to recognize if there are differences in the university colleges. It was found that there are no differences because the level of calculation is.22 greater than the standard level of significance.05 this means that there are no differences between colleges in their assessment of difficulties.

Table 11

College	No.	Mean Rank	Chi-Square	df	Sig.	Conclusion
Education	18	11.42	3.08	2	.22	No differences
Arts	5	17.60				
Others	2	15.75				
Total	25					

The researcher used 'Kruskal-Wallis H' to recognize if there are differences in the lectures per week. It was found that there is no difference because, the level of calculation is.99 is greater than the standard level of.05. This means that there are no differences in terms of weekly lectures in their assessment of difficulties.

Table 12

Lectures per Week	No.	Mean Rank	Chi-Square	df	Sig.	Conclusion
4-8	5	12.20	.15	3	.99	No differences
9-12	1	13.00				
13-18	16	13.41				
18+	3					

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following chapter concerns with the overall summary of the research study which has findings, suggestion and recommendations.

SUMMARY

In brief, the research is well depicted using some techniques and useful recommendations in improving speaking skill and conversation practices. Skills takes a lot of classroom practice, motivation to speak, and skill and adding creative.

FINDINGS

The main findings focused on the different dimensions of developing speaking skills at the university level.

- Students in the communicative classroom should get as many speaking opportunities as possible and their speaking time should slowly but steadily rise so as to prepare them for various communicative situations.
- Each classroom should offer a wide range of learners differing in their abilities, knowledge, confidence, motivation and learning styles.
- Teachers should provide their students with a proper environment that would help them develop their skills, independent of their main characteristics and diversity.
- Providing the students with various methods and tools to solve the speaking and conversational problem by supporting the students to speak English frequently in the environment inside or outside the class.
- Communication between Lecturers and teachers with their students inside classrooms in meaningful situations is necessary to improve speaking.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Appropriate English environment is needed to let the students practice speaking English frequently.
- English teachers and lecturers should create a comfortable environment by strengthening the confidence of English language learners.
- Teachers and lecturers should try to minimize using of Arabic during English practicing by encouraging students to get their meanings across.
- Teachers and lecturers can also speak to the students privately to eliminate any embarrassment, shyness, anxiety, lack of confidence during the English speaking class.
- Students can have an English conversation club that consists of their own classmates. They can share and talk about anything in English during that time, they can correct each other without feeling embarrassed.
- Classroom discussion and students participation is not dominated by a minority of talkative participants; all students should get a chance to speak fairly.

SUGGESTIONS

- Lecturers have to make a good planning for carrying out a good speaking class. It is suggested to the students to take every chance to practice speaking skills because practice makes perfect performance.
- Further research is needed to compare the relative efficacy of using task based instruction to address different speaking genres.

- Further research is needed to explore the effectiveness of other task based instruction programs in the preparatory and university stages.
- Other studies are needed to investigate the effectiveness of applying a similar program over a longer period of time on students' skills especially on pronunciation and fluency.
- Additional studies are needed to investigate the effectiveness deeply for applying a similar program on different speaking genres (descriptive, narrative, expository and so on).
- Further research is needed to compare different cognitive approach strategies in terms of their effectiveness in developing EFL students' speaking skills.
- Further research is needed to explore how task based instruction can be adaptable to take account of individual differences so different pedagogical alternatives are available which reflect such differences.

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