

The Reasons for Poor Speaking Skills among Jordanian EFL Learners

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6598124>

Published Date: 31-May-2022

Abstract: This paper aims at investigating the reasons for poor speaking skills of Arabic EFL students and identifies the efficient methods for improving their speaking abilities. The major interest of such paper lied in discovering the embedded reasons regarding their inability to communicate in English as well as to cope with factors influencing learners' English speaking skill. For this objective, a questionnaire addressing students' attitudes of English language was distributed to the students. The sample consisted of 20 Jordanian EFL bachelor male and female students, who have passed their national and international tests. They were chosen purposefully from English department at Yarmouk University. The findings showed that the lack of participation in English classroom, their shy of attention when speak English, their poor vocabulary knowledge, ineffective group working, and the traditional teaching methods in the classroom constitute a challenge among Jordanian EFL learners. As a result, using various teaching methods, designing effective lesson plans, giving the students clear-cut instructions, and giving the students enough room to speak English in the classroom can be used to solve such problems that hinder EFL students from speaking English in the classroom.

Keywords: Speaking challenges, Arab EFL learners, reasons for challenges, student attitudes.

1. INTRODUCTION

Language is considered as a means of communication and understanding among people. The acquisition of language entails the process that enables the people to control their own language completely (Campbell and Wales, 1970).

It is commonly known that the acquisition of the first language is an instinct that emerges among people since childhood in which the children acquire the language from the environment. According to Ambridge and Lieven (2011) learning the language is developed because of environmental influence.

There is no doubt that speaking is highly significant skill to be learned by English foreign language (EFL) students. According to Rahayu (2015) speaking is considered the most important skill that should be mastered in English.

It should be mentioned that Arab learners who learn English language confront two problems that are summarized into making some primary mistakes in spelling, syntax, morphology, and pronunciation as well as their inability to use English effectively whether in academic topics or in daily topics (Mukattash, 1983).

Based on the above, studying English is a daunting task because it requires the students to master English language in order to excel in their studies. In this respect, several studies (Alrabai, 2014; Mahboob et al., 2014; Rababah, 2002) deduced that the low level of English among Arab learners plays a pivotal role in their lack of target language exposure, thus, they become demotivated in learning English.

It is widely acknowledged that speaking plays a pivotal role in communication between people. In other words, people render their feelings, thoughts, ideas, and their intentions by speaking. Therefore, it is important to improve speaking skill, particularly for second language learners who are studying English language. Owing to the fact that English language is cosmopolitan language improving the ability of speaking in English is of a paramount condition that is considered important for all life aspects (Aye and Phyu, 2015).

1.1. Significance of the problem

It is commonly known that communication plays a pivotal role in humans' life this could be due to the fact that the nature of people to socialize and to communicate with each other. According to Rahman (2010) communication entails transferring ideas, thoughts, values, feelings, and facts, moreover, communication is significant in developing information and understanding among people. Owing to the fact that Arab EFL learners struggle in developing effective verbal communication, therefore, this paper was carried out to examine the reasons and the factors associated with the poor speaking ability among Arab EFL learners to engage them and improve their speaking skill.

For this objective, the paper raises the following questions:

- 1-What are the reasons influencing learners' speaking ability?
- 2-What are the perspectives of learners towards their poor speaking ability?
- 3- What are the perspectives of teachers towards learners' poor speaking ability?
- 5- What are the situations preventing learners from speaking English as a second language?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 An Overview of Speaking

There are several beliefs about developing speaking skill. To clarify, the teacher provides the language in the classroom in which the learners have to contextualize it, more importantly, speaking is considered as the best introduction to other skills, such as listening, writing, and reading. For the purpose of acquiring the second language, speaking skill is required because it gives the chance to use the SL practically. Speaking improves the fluency of English foreign language learners. Within this context, the students will be accurate in using the target language (Rao, 2012).

For the purpose of improving speaking skill, Jyothsna and Rao (2009) mentions several practices that can be employed by EFLs in the classroom, such as oral composition, read aloud, narration, oral composition, and repetition of rhymes. There are various tasks and function based activities that could be used to improve speaking skill, such as dialogue, role play, opinions and ideas, cooperative work, interviews and surveys, visual comprehensions, song among others (Kumari, 2014).

2.2 Previous Studies in the Field

Yaseen (2018) conducted a study on the factors that negatively influence EFL students from speaking at Jordanian private school. To this end, one hundred and fifty grade ten male and female students from two private schools in Jordan, along with 6 grade-ten English teachers and 6 English language supervisors were chosen. The study was qualitative and quantitative in nature. To elicit data from the participants, a questionnaire and a semi-structured interviews were carried out with 6 grades 10 English language teachers and 6 English language supervisors. The results showed several reasons that constitute a challenge among EFL students, such as lack of motivation and encouragement, anxiety, the intensive use of Arabic language in the class, the fear of criticism by peers. With regard to teachers, the findings revealed that some of them do not have adequate number of English to involve in speaking task, they are trained adequately, and the lack of techniques and strategies to manage the speaking class.

Nkome (2015) carried out a qualitative and quantitative study on the reasons for learners' poor communication skills in English in some primary schools in Lesotho. The study took place in Berea District. The sample consisted of 6 grade

learners and 6 grade educators who were purposively chosen to serve the purpose of the study. For this objective, a mixed method consisted of a questionnaire for students and interviews for educators were conducted. The results showed that non-inclusion of English as a medium of instruction, the lack of using various methods and materials, the lack of practicing English for teachers, and the inadequate use of methods and techniques for motivating students, along with insufficient interaction between parents and the school played a pivotal role in the poor speaking skills among students.

Elttayef and Hussein (2017) investigated the reasons behind Arab learners' problems in learning English language, who learn English as a medium of instruction. The sample consisted of Iraqi students. The study found that the lack of English knowledge constitutes a challenge for Arab learners because the teachers do not give adequate attention to English language. Surprisingly, the study found that teachers confront various challenges in teaching the students the prescribed books in higher classes. Another intersecting finding is that Iraqi students are weak in all English skills, particularly in speaking, thus, they are unable to speak a single sentence without making grammatical mistakes. Within this context, they are unable to communicate properly because they lack the necessary vocabulary they need to get their meaning across. Additionally, the curricula were not designed properly. The study recommended teachers to be patient, competent, and intelligent in order to avoid such problem from occurrence and to achieve the desired learning objective.

Ali et al. (2019) conducted a study on the attitudes of Saudi EFL learners towards speaking skills. The sample consisted of 100 students, 50 male and 50 female, whose major is Business and Community. To this end, a questionnaire was distributed to the respondents. The data was analyzed quantitatively by using SPSS. The findings revealed that the participants are completely aware of the importance of learning English. Moreover, the female students had a positive attitude towards learning English than their males' counterparts. Another interesting finding is that the participants are demotivated and uninterested in learning English, which constitute the primary reason behind their poor speaking skill. The study recommended teachers to improve students' speaking skills.

The above-mentioned review addresses a variety of studies that were conducted in the previous years. Thus, such paper sought to address related studies and detect the method of addressing the problem.

3. METHOD

3.1 Research Design

This paper was conducted at Yarmouk university in Jordan. It enables the researcher to articulate the problem as well as to improve a research plan in order to achieve satisfactory findings. The paper adopted a reflective cycle pattern, which is considered as an ideal approach to develop teaching.

3.2 Participants

The subjects of the study consisted of 20 EFL students who have passed either national or international tests to pursue English degree in English literature; whose ages range between 18-25 participated in this study as they are supposed to be qualified enough in listening, reading, and writing English skill in general, however, they are assumed to be unable to speak in English.

3.3 Instruments and Data

Collection Procedure

The data for this present paper was elicited by a questionnaire with only students. 20 bachelor students were required to express their attitudes towards using English in the classroom. The purpose behind used it lies in facilitating the collection of data over a short period of time. The study sought to unravel the students' perspectives of using the first language in English classroom to avoid speaking in English. The questionnaire consisted of 3 categories, namely, participation, group work, and teaching style. Each category consists of 5 items regarding students' attitudes towards these categories. A dichotomous scale that consists of a two-point scale yes-no was used to elicit data from the participants. The students were requested to rate their statements towards such categories.

After collecting the questionnaire and assuring its validity, the researcher encoded them by labelling them with specific numbers for entering the data into computer to perform the appropriate statistical treatments, and to analyze the data in respect of the items of the questionnaire.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Findings of the Questionnaire

The findings of this paper show the students' attitudes towards their use and their exposure to English in EFL classroom at Yarmouk University in Jordan. As illustrated in Table 1 below:

No.	Category	Students' Attitudes	
		Positive	Negative
1-	Students' attitudes regarding their participation in English classroom.	10%	90%
2-	Students' attitudes towards group work	80%	20%
3-	Students' attitudes towards teaching style	40%	60%

As shown in Table (1) the majority of 20 bachelor students who answered the questionnaire had a negative attitude towards using English in EFL classroom, thus, they expressed their avoidance to either participate or speak in English classroom. As 90% students had a negative attitude towards their participation in English classroom. However, 10% argued that they participate in English classroom in order to acquire the second language. Additionally, 80% learners had positive attitudes towards a group work as it enables them to speak in English with their classmates without feeling embarrassed. On the contrary, 20% showed no interest in group work suggesting that there is no benefit in placing the students into groups because they still use their first language even when they are working and communicating with each other. Another interesting finding is that 60% had negative attitudes towards the teaching style because of their belief that the doctor employs traditional teaching methods. On the other hand, 40% of students have positive attitudes towards the teaching style in their university claiming that EFL doctors at Yarmouk university are concerned with improving students' comprehension and speaking. The findings revealed that are no statistically significant different attributed to either age or gender variables.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

For the purpose of taking action and implementing the study by the lessons, the study asked the same students who involved in the questionnaire to involve in a task-based lesson during a week duration. The lessons that are prepared and designed to the students tackle the particular challenges and the grounds behind their difficulties in speaking English.

The study focused on the whole language skills. Besides, giving the students various activities to motivate and encourage them to use the target language. Before the execution of the lesson plan, the teachers were requested to use only English language in the classroom to practice and strengthen their speaking skills and to enforce the students to use the second language. The teachers, moreover, were requested to establish a good relationship with their students in order to foster a positive atmosphere in the classroom, thus, maintaining them to remain silent throughout the classes. Accordingly, the researcher sought to reduce any attempt of speaking in their first language when learning English language.

The students were presented with a warm-up activity in order to engage the students, getting their attention, revising vocabulary, creating rapport and nice atmosphere. The researcher aimed to unravel the meaning of vocabulary items that are included in either speaking or listening in an implicit manner. The researcher sought to reduce the anxiety of the students above all.

After that, the teacher places the students into pairs, followed by a group discussion in order to use various teaching methods and activities in the classroom. Moreover, the teacher gave the students the opportunity to use the target language. The researcher divided the class into three groups. Each of which was provided structures as well as a list of vocabulary items existed in the listening or reading text that was given to the students. The students were requested to pick some of the structures and vocabulary items, and then to employ them in their argument and discussion.

The teacher gave the students in the post-stage a freer speaking activating by placing the students into pairs, nominating some of them, writing the answers on the board, and then giving them a feedback on their use of the target language. Then, the students were provided with the essential language items to enable them to do the task completely in the second language. To this end, a number of open-ended questions were given to the students, along with giving them some time to think about the answers. Dictionaries and glossaries were allowed in the classroom. During the task, the teacher wrote the

errors caused by learners who are using the second language. By the end of the lesson, the students' errors were corrected by writing them on the board, asking them to work in pairs and to think about how to improve the sentences, giving the students positive feedback regarding their errors, and then correcting and writing them on the board. As a result, the students felt comfortable and participated more in the lesson, particularly in such stage.

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