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THE EFFECT OF USING SPEAKING ACTIVITIES IN DEVELOPING SPEAKING SKILL AMONG
SUDANESE SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the effect of using speaking activities on developing speaking skill for Sudanese secondary school students. The problem of the study emerged from that speaking teaching doesn't find proper concern in the most of schools; this affects negatively on students' competence in English language. The aim of the study was to reveal the significant role of using speaking activities in developing speaking skill of the students. An experimental analytical approach was followed in conducting this study. The population of the study was the students of Al-quds private secondary school – Bahri, Kafori (December 2016). The program used for statistical analysis to reach the results is SPSS. The main findings of the study are: using of speaking activities leads to development of speaking skill. Repeated practice of reading aloud improves pronunciation and fluency. Students are more interested to English language when they find proper support and encouragement. The study recommended some suggestions such as, more time and concern should be devoted to teaching speaking skill. The syllabus should be enriched with speaking activities. The home work should include some activities as presentation, discussion, and dialogue; this enables students to practice English language outside the classroom.

Key-words: interaction - extensive - instructions

Introduction

As a productive skill, speaking is a very important process that helps to evaluate learners' proficiency in the target language. It should be one of the basic curriculum designs of second or foreign language teaching, in addition to other skills. Learning to speak entails learner's engagement in communicative situations so that they will activate their speaking capacity. So, the development of oral skill requires students to make active use of the language that is correct in its grammar and pronunciation. That is to say fluency and accuracy are two essential aspects to be developed in classroom interaction.

If English teaching is to be successful, it must become more student – centered. Another way of saying the same idea is that English teaching must become less than teacher – teacher – centered. If the teacher feels that learning takes place only because of the amount of talking he does, then he is probably deceiving himself about his own oral abilities. Students can learn from talking with and listening to their peers and can benefit socially from these activities. They should be given a lot of class opportunities to speak and listen. A wide variety of oral activities can be used in the classroom.

The communicative process involves interaction between at least two people who share a list of signs and semiotic rules. The concept of interaction is defined as “reciprocal events that require at least two objects and two actions. Interaction occurs when these objects naturally influence one another” (Wagner, 1994: 8). Therefore, interactions don’t occur only from one side, there must be mutual influence through giving and receiving messages in order to achieve communication. The concept of interaction has a significant importance in the classroom too; it is an essential part in learning and teaching processes.

Allwright and Baily (1991) hold that interaction is something that people can do together i.e. collectively. Obviously, in the classroom it is considered as important for teacher to manage, who should talk, to whom, on what topic, in what language and so on. However, none of this can change the fact that classroom interaction focuses on the learners’ cooperation.

Statement of the Problem

The problem of study came out from the notice that most secondary schools don’t use communicative activities in teaching speaking skill. Speaking skill doesn’t find sufficient time and effort from English teachers and this affects negatively on students. They don’t have perfect ability to speak. When they find themselves in such situation which requires speaking they usually show type of hesitation and disability.

Significance of the Study

It is observed that teaching speaking skill doesn’t find the proper concern in the process of teaching. Insufficient using of communicative activities prevents the potential gifts of student to come out. The results of this study are expected to be useful to Sudanese secondary schools students, teachers as well as syllabus designers.

Moreover, the results of the study may open new horizons and encourages other researchers to make their contribution in this important and sensitive issue.

Objective of the Study

The aims of this study are:

- 1- To measure the progression that can occur in secondary school students’ performance when the speaking activities were used in the process of teaching.
- 2- To recommend suggestions that can support students to develop their speaking skill and be more interested in English language.
- 3- The study is considered as contribution to encourage other researchers as well as syllabus designers to give more concern for developing speaking skill.

Questions of the Study

- 1- To what extent the using of speaking activities can stimulate students’ performance?
- 2- What a positive progression that can happen to students when they find proper instructions and practice?
- 3- What is the effect of reading aloud on students’ pronunciation and fluency?
- 4- How the presentation, dialogue and discussion can help students to express their ideas in coherent and cohesion way?

Hypotheses of the Study

The following are the hypotheses that related to study:

- 1- Using communicative activities in the process of teaching can improve students’ performance.
- 2- Dividing students into pairs and groups can make the process of teaching speaking more easy and useful.
- 3- Prepare students to create presentation can help them to express their ideas in understandable, fluent method.
- 4- Intensive practice of reading aloud can develop students’ pronunciation and fluency.

Limits of the Study

This study examines the effect of speaking activities on the performance of secondary schools students. The study concerns to grant more care for the speaking skill in the process of teaching.

Scientific Terms

- NNS: non-native speaker.

- Facilitation: to make something understandable and easy.
- Simulation: imitation and take place of other character.
- Spontaneous: to do something interestingly without hard arrangement.

Literature review

Speaking skill is an essential issue in language acquisition. Teaching speaking recently took a significant concern from writers and experts as they aim to make continuous progression in speaking skill. The study presents some of previous writings that related and support the significance of the topic.

Definition of Communication

Communication, very simply defined as the exchange of information. Communication is a vital part of everyday life, beginning at birth. Speaking, listening, reading, writing, and even observing are part of the communication process. Nunan (1989:23) defines oral communication as “spoken interaction between two or more people”. This indicates that there should be at least processes to have oral communication i.e. speaking and listening.

Widdowson (1978:87) claims that “communication is a process that allows people to exchange information by several methods and that exchange requires feedback which may be missed as the speakers or listeners might face problems”. Hymes (1972:55) believes that “oral communication can be seen as a process of information transmission governed by three levels of rules; syntactic (structure of the sentence), pragmatic (the intended meaning of the utterances), and semantic (direct meaning of the words)”. Today, in addition to traditional methods of communication such as letters and telephone conversations, using electronic media to communicate becomes increasingly common. Each of these media allows people in different locations to exchange messages quickly and conveniently. This increased use of electronic media is changing communication practices, especially with regard to ethics and confidentiality (Saterwhite, 2007: 7). Communication can be debate, videodisc, cable television, a sermon, at the theatre, the effect of a child striving to conquer stuttering, and a field of a study. Or it may be used to refer to a sign, a signal flag, a uniform,. Communication can be a thoughtfully walk on a beach at sunset, a tear, a knowing smile, a kiss, a four-letter word scrawled on a restroom wall, even silence (Ruben, 1984).

The most efficient communicator in a foreign language is not always the person who is the best at manipulating its structures. It is often the person who is most skilled at processing the complete situation involving himself and his hearer, taking account of what knowledge is already shared between them and selecting items which will communicate his message effectively. (Littlewood, 1981:3) Communication only takes place when we make use of sentences to perform a variety of different acts essentially social nature. Thus, we don't communicate by composing sentences, but by using sentences to make statements of different kinds to describe, to record, to classify and so on, or to ask questions, make requests, give orders. (Brumfit and Johnson, 1979:118)

Confidence in Second Language

The psychological side is essential in each activity in our lives. It is difficult to make someone do something he dislikes it. You can take the horse to the river but you can't force it to drink. Confidence, motivation, and language ability are often treated as distinct but related learning dimensions in the field of second language acquisition (Clement and Kruidenier, 1985).

Yashima et al. (2004) cites a study of high school students who traveled abroad to study English. Some students were not ready to communicate due to some factors, including lack of L2 confidence, and found themselves in an endless cycle: needing to communicate with native speakers to gain L2 confidence, but due to a lack of confidence, unable to initiate interactions. Due to its negative effects, some researchers in their studies attempted to propose solutions for students' lack of confidence in L2 classrooms. A study conducted by Burden (2004) reveals that almost 70% of 289 university freshman surveyed felt unconfident speaking English.

Conversation

Rebecca et al, (2001: p, 6-7) write that the word 'conversation' comes from the Old French word 'converser' ('con' means 'together'), which means 'to keep company with', and this implicit meaning is important – conversation is keeping company through words. It is at the heart of social interaction. It is always done with others, even if those others are imaginary people inside your own head. Another word we use to describe conversation is 'dialogue', which comes from Greek word 'dialogos', a word made up of two parts:

'dia', which means 'between two', and 'logos', which means 'word'. Dialogue then means the speaking that passes backwards and forwards between two or more people.

Conversation is vital to our development and fulfillment as human beings. Relationships are formed and developed through talk, in groups of two or more. Conversations are not necessarily about anything very important. Sometimes the act of talking and communicating is what matters, rather than the content of the speech. Think of the number of conversations that you have in any given day. They are all different, serve different purposes and occur in different contexts. Some may be telephone or e-mail conversations; others may be face – to – face.

Oral Fluency

The main goal teachers wish in teaching the productive skill of speaking is oral fluency; it is the main characteristics of the speaker performance. Hughes (2002) defines fluency as the ability to express oneself in an intelligible, reasonable and accurate way without too much hesitation, otherwise the communication will breakdown because learners will lose their interest. To achieve this goal, the teachers then should train learners to use their personal language freely to express their own ideas and then avoid imitations of a model of some kind.

Hedge Tricia (2000:54) also adds that "The fluency relates to the production and it is normally reserved for speech. It is the ability to link units of speech together with facility and without strain or inappropriate showiness, or undue hesitation". One can say, it is the ability to respond in a coherent way through linking the words and phrases effectively, pronounce the sounds clearly, using stress and intonation, i.e. doing all of these quickly. Hughes (2002) also supports that fluency and coherence refer to the ability to speak in a normal level of continuity, rate and effort in addition to link the ideas together in a coherent way. Speech rate and speech continuity are the key indicator of coherence. Many of second language speakers think of fluency as the ability to speak fast, that is why they start speaking rapidly without pauses.

Thornbury, (2005) argues that speed is an important factor in fluency and pausing too, because speakers need to take breath. Native speakers also need to pause from time to time in order to let the interlocutors catch what they said. However, a frequent pausing is an indication that the speaker has problems of speaking. In such cases Thornbury suggests what is called "tricks" or production strategies, i.e. the ability to fill the pauses. The most common pause fillers are 'uh' and 'um' vagueness expressions such as 'sort of' and 'I mean'. Another device for filling the pauses is the repetition of one word when there is a pause.

Fluency is natural language use occurring when a speaker engages in meaningful interaction and maintains comprehensible and ongoing communication despite limitations in his or her communicative competence. Accuracy means that the speakers are required to use the correct vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Fluency is developed by creating classroom activities in which students must negotiate meaning, use communication strategies, correct misunderstandings, and work to avoid communication breakdowns. (Richards, 2006:14).

In addition, Nunan (1999) states that fluency means that the speakers are required to be able to keep going when speaking spontaneously. However, it doesn't mean that the speakers speak so fast because sometime pausing is important. That pause is an aspect of fluency which may be long but not frequent. Moreover, when speaking fluently, speakers should be able to get the message across with whatever resources and abilities they have got and regardless of any grammatical and other mistakes.

Influence of Reading on Speaking Skill

The reading skill is very important in the process of learning English language. It is defined differently by some writers. Heldreth (1988:2) claims "Reading is a mental process involving the interpretation of signs through the sense organs. Interpreting print is specific form through associations which have been formed between oral experience and the printed sentence concentrations like a phonograph records"

Reading aloud is for checking the students' pronunciation, word stress, pause, intonation and understanding. The passage for these activities should be short, complete and clear. Byrne (1971:97) states that "reading used to be one of the normal methods for giving students practice regardless of its value". Reading aloud comes only after silent reading and after presenting new words, structures and expressions.

Reading aloud must be oral first so as to establish good habits of pronunciation and to train the students to develop their knowledge of the foreign language of their own.

Some educators and researchers are in favor of silent reading v.s reading aloud, but reading aloud can be used during the course to check pronunciation to improve the students' intonation and fluency. Reading a text aloud can help students to focus mentally raise questions and stimulate discussion.

The pedagogical value attributed to extensive reading is based on the assumption that exposing learners to large quantities of meaningful and interesting foreign or second language material within the long run produces a beneficial influence on the learners' command of the language. It is believed that extensive reading will improve learners' command of second language on at least certain levels. Natal (1972:45) for example, claims that next to going to live among native speakers, the best way of acquiring proficiency in a language is to read extensively in this language. More correctly, William (1972:89) maintains that throughout reading, the learner is exposed to the lexical items embedded in natural linguistic contexts and as a result, they begin slowly to have the meaningfulness for him that they have for the native speaker.

Significant of Interaction in Teaching of Speaking

The aim of this study is to promote interaction among students. Interaction is an elicitation of willing student participation and initiate which requires a high degree of interpersonal communication skills (Rivers, 1987,p. 10). It refers to the exchange of information between the teacher and the students or among the students. It has long been considered important in language learning. "It may be quite, it may be noisy; it may be alert and dynamic; it may take place in large groups, small groups or pairs" (Kramsch, 1987, p. 18) It will make students deeply involved in activities that drown on their creativity. Teachers should demonstrate these qualities to students to help overcome their inhibitions and fear of embarrassment.

According to Swain (1985), "Interaction allows the learner to practice the target language, thus enhancing fluency; to notice or trigger a particular structural form that needs modifying; to test hypotheses about structural points and to reflect met linguistically" (p. 223). Similar to Swain, Brown (1991) and Mc Laughlin (1987) point out that interaction provides opportunity for the non- native speaker (NNS) to practice structural components, increasing the likelihood of atomicity of such components.

Practicing the Speaking Skill in Classroom

Practicing the speaking skill outside the classroom is related to what you listen spoken around you. In a foreign country, the students will hear the spoken regularly and the without any conscious efforts they imitate and perform their own utterances on the basis of what they have heard. Progressively, they will come at stage where they can speak like people around them. In the mother country, SL students need to practice the language regularly inside the classroom through performing different activities. O'Mlley and Pierce (1996: 59) assert the American Council of Teaching of Foreign Language (ACTFL) suggests that "different kinds of speaking activities (and consequently assessment task) are appropriate at different levels of proficiency" So, learners should be given ample practice in classroom at all levels to express themselves in situations where they can use spontaneous language. Practice activities may serve the learning / teaching goal of speaking proficiency. Richards and Lockhart (1996) define practice activities as tasks used to perform or learn a particular item or involve the use of a given model. For example, dialogues may be used to perform sentence patterns. Richards, Platt, and Weber (1985: 289) add that "the use of variety of different tasks in language teaching is said to make language more communicative {...} since it provides a purpose for classroom activity" (cited in Lee, 2000: 31). Tasks, then, are also used to achieve communication beyond that of practicing the language itself.

Ways of Promoting Interactive Activities

Lee (2004) says that promoting interactive activities seems to be alternative means to help the second language learners to acquire the target language in meaningful way. It is believed that by means of interaction, second language learners can stretch their linguistic competence and use appropriate strategies to modify and negotiate meaning in spite of their inaccurate and incomplete utterance.

In promoting interactive activities, comprehension and production retrieve their natural relationship as an interactive duo. To achieve this:

- Teachers must promote the desirable ambience and good relations among students for them to know one another.
- Individuals must appreciate the uniqueness of others by encouraging and educating one another.
- Both students and teachers must build up their confidence and enjoyment in what they are doing.
- Classrooms should not be teacher – directed and dominated.
- Classrooms should be interactive by nature and never one – way.(Lee, 2004)

Activities to Promote Speaking

Speaking is an active and productive skill. So the teacher should work attentively to promote it by using good methodology. Here are some activities that are going to improve speaking skill of students.

- **Discussions**

After a content – based lesson, a discussion can be hold for various reasons. The students may aim to arrive at a conclusion, share ideas about an event, or find solutions in their discussion groups.

Before the discussion, it is essential that the purpose of the discussion activity is set by the teacher. In this way, the discussion points are relevant to this purpose, so that students don't spend their time chatting with each other about irrelevant things.

Discussion and debate tend to be difficult speaking activities and therefore they are commonly suitable for higher level students (intermediate/advance). Many teachers would agree that discussion at class which arise students to talk spontaneously is a good activity since it provokes the students to exchange information. Meanwhile, Brown (2004: 175) states that discussion can promote some skills such as topic nomination, maintenance, and termination; attention getting, interrupting, floor holding, control, clarifying, questioning, paraphrasing, comprehension signals; negotiating meaning; intonation patterns for pragmatic effect; kinesics, eye contact, proteomics, body language; and politeness, formality, and other sociolinguistic factors.

- **Role play**

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

- **Simulations**

Simulations are very similar to role – plays but what make simulations different than role plays is that they are more elaborate. In simulations, students can bring items to the class to create realistic environment. For instance, if student is acting as a singer, he/she brings microphone to sing and so on. Role plays and stimulations have many advantages. First, since they are entertaining, they motivate the students. Second, as Harmer (1984) suggests, they increase the self – confidence of hesitant students, because in role play and stimulation activities, they will have a different role and don't have to speak for themselves, which means they don't have to take the same responsibility.

These types of oral activities are very important according to Bygate (1987). They are not performed for audience, the participants work together within an imaginary setting. O' Malley and Pierce (1996) say that such activities are more authentic because they provide a format for using the real life conversation such as repetitions, interruptions, recitations, facial expressions and gestures. Students often engage in another identity in role – plays, drama and stimulations activities, where their anxiety is reduced, motivation is increased and their language acquisition enhanced.

- **Description activities**

These activities are often employed for advanced language learners; they can serve as the basis of spontaneous interaction. Lindsay and Knight (2006) point out that in such activities, students are supposed to give their opinions or receive others' opinions, they can speak freely without being told what to say or not by the teacher, the students should be only informed what to talk about and given the enough time to structure what they wish to say. However, Thornbury (2005) says that many teachers agree that arise spontaneously either because one learner reports something personal or because the topic of the course book raises discussion.

- **Presentation**

Presentation is a planned talk that is arranged systematically. It can be done individually or in group. It is usually followed by a question session which is the most challenging stage of presentation.

The best way to make students gain their self – confidence is through making them present oral works in front of their classmates. Thornbury (2005) asserts that the students act of standing up in front of their colleagues and speaking is an excellent preparation for authentic speaking. A prepared talk is when students make the presentation on a given topic of their choice, and this talk is not planned for an informal spontaneous conversations; it is more writing – like.

Methodology

An experimental approach was used in this study. For collecting the data of the study an oral experiment was conducted for 12 secondary school students. The duration of experiment was two weeks on (December, 2016). The program (SPSS) was used to analyze data to reach to the result of study.

Subjects

The population of this study consists of 12 secondary school students. They were study at second level at Al-quds private secondary school (Bahri – Kafori. on December, 2016). They were selected randomly from their classroom. They all are males, and their ages range is 15 – 17 years. Their level in English language is differentiated.

Tools

An oral experiment was designed for data collecting. It was conducted for 12 secondary school students as a sample of the study on December 2016.

Procedures of Data Collection

The researcher took permission letter from Education ministry and met school manager who arranged to make him meet English teacher. Then he granted a class to work with students. First he made initial assessment and then made training and practice for two weeks. Finally, there is the last assessment.

An experiment for 12 secondary school students was conducted. The duration of experiment was two weeks. The experiment conducted at Al-quds private secondary school, December 2016.

The first step there was initial assessment for students the marking was from 10. Then communicative activities reading aloud, dialogue, presentation, and discussion were used with practice and instruction for two weeks. The criteria of assessment are:

- 1- Pronunciation
- 2- Fluency
- 3- Confidence
- 4- Using of body – language.

The speaking activities of experiment are:

- 1- **Presentation**

The subjects were given the topic of presentation “time management” and the main points such as worship, sleeping, study, meals, entertainment, and visit relatives. They also given proper instructions about how to present and order ideas.

- 2- **Discussion**

Its topic is the same with presentation. The subjects were given instruction that depend on listening to your mate carefully. Then if you agree with him in some points praise him. If you disagree with him try to conceive him with your point of view politely support your view with logical reasons.

- 3- **Dialogue**

In this activity, subjects were divided into pairs. The topic of dialogue is to get acquainted with someone that you him at first time. The instructions of activity are firstly you introduce yourself and ask him some general questions. Then answer his questions, express you happiness for meeting him, and welcome him as to be your friend in future.

- 4- **Reading aloud**

In this activity, a text from their course was choosed. They were trained to read it loudly at least six times per – day in order to improve their pronunciation and fluency

At the end of experiment by the final assessment, all subjects gained significant progression in their performance of speaking skill and they noticed and commented about the positive change that occurred in their performance.

Validity of the experiment

To achieve the validity of the experiment the researcher after designed it showed it to group of English teachers at University of Khartoum and some English teachers from secondary schools. Their points of view were taken and the formulation of experiment was revised in order to be adequate for students and to reach reliable results.

Reliability of the experiment:

Table (1)

Pre	Post	T-test	P-value
4.2	5.5	7.29	0.000

P-value (0.000), which is lower than the level of significant value (0.05). This refers to the existence of differences statistically significant between the assessments pre – using speaking activities and post – use of them.

Table (2): The results of oral experiment final assessment:

Activity	Pre	Post	Progression
Reading aloud	4.1	5.8	1.7
Presentation	4.2	5.6	1.4
Dialogue	4.3	5.5	1.2
Discussion	4.2	5.5	1.3

Table (3): The effect of reading aloud on pronunciation and fluency:

Reading aloud	Pre	Post	Progression
Pronunciation	4.6	5.9	1.3
Fluency	3.5	5.6	2.1

Findings

Based on the results of statistical analysis, this study concludes with the following findings:

- 1- Students are good accepters of new creative ideas
- 2- Using speaking activities improves students' performance and makes them more interested in English language.
- 3- Dividing students into pairs and groups organizes the process of teaching and makes students feel more responsible and cooperative.
- 4- Practice reading aloud repeatedly improves pronunciation and fluency.
- 5- When students find proper instructions about an activity, they work hard to perform it in the best way
- 6- The activities like presentation and discussion stimulate students to refresh their information and help them to express their ideas in coherent and cohesion method.
- 7- To give students speaking activities as home work makes them practice English language outside the classroom; while they prepare themselves to perform them later in the class.

Conclusion

The ultimate aim of learning a second language in classrooms should be the acquisition of oral communication. The study came out that teaching speaking can be developed. The study presents some recommendations for developing speaking skill by using speaking activities that stimulate students and lead them to be more interested in English language. Reading aloud should be practiced intensively to improve pronunciation and fluency. Curriculum should be enriched with activities that encourage students to speak. Schools should arrange oral exams and competitions to make students deal with speaking skill more seriously.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the researcher recommends the following:

- 1- More time and concern should be devoted for speaking teaching.
- 2- Speaking activities should be used regularly in the process of speaking teaching.

- 3- Syllabus should be enriched with activities that activate students to interact in practice speaking.
- 4- The home work should include speaking activities associated with proper support and instructions.
- 5- Students should be divided into pairs and groups to raise their cooperation spirit and competition.

Suggestions for Further Studies

The researcher suggests the following topics should be investigated for further studies in the future.

- 1- The role of private English language institutes in developing speaking skill among Sudanese secondary school students.
- 2- The factors and obstacles that hinder Sudanese secondary school students to develop their speaking skill.
- 3- Investigating the effective role of technology in improving oral communication at Sudanese secondary schools.

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